Interactive Media and the Web

About this handout

This handout is for students interested in gaining work experience and employment in interactive media and also in animation. It is important to note that many professionals find work through informal means rather than applying for an advertised vacancy. The guide therefore gives some ideas about how you can start to network and build your contacts in the industry (which is described in section 2) as well as listing the main places in which vacancies are advertised (as described in section 1).

What is Interactive Media?

The interactive media is a rapidly evolving industry which significantly overlaps with other sectors such as online advertising, broadcasting and IT. Skillset, the sector skills council for creative media defines interactive media as ‘digital media with which the user actively interacts in order to change or affect their experience, and which can only be experienced through interaction.’ Broadly speaking, interactive media therefore refers to:

- Web sites and intranets
- Multimedia CD-ROMs and DVDs
- Computer games
- Interactive elements to accompany television programmes (‘enhanced TV’)
- Fully-interactive television programmes
- Interactive content for mobile devices

Organisations may use interactive media for the following activities:

- Business communication (e-procurement, supply-chain integration, customer relationship management, e-commerce)
- The press (Information and online publishing)
- Web2 technology and virtual communities
- E-Learning
- Entertainment (games, TV and leisure activities)
- Government communications (public information, on-line services and citizen-government communications)
- Heritage and Tourism (museums, galleries or city walking tours)

For a more detailed overview of the industry, visit www.skillset.org.

Typical Employers

Animators and interactive media professionals may work for specialist companies whose primary business is animation or interactive media. These tend to be smaller, start up companies providing a consultancy service to other companies where they design, develop and/ or maintain interactive products.

Alternatively, work may be found within specialist departments of larger companies whose primary focus is outside of interactive media and animation. Whilst most large organisations have a web development team, usually within their marketing department, some companies also employ interactive media specialists to produce and maintain niche products, such as content for mobile devices.

These employers could include:

- Broadcasting companies
- Mobile telecoms companies
- Advertising companies
- Large games companies
- IT software companies
- The Government

A large proportion of people working within the interactive media also work as freelancers and contractors.

Specialist job hunt sites

The following job hunt sites specialise in advertising vacancies in animation and interactive media.
www.develop-online.net
www.gamecontractor.com/ agency which finds contracts for freelance games developers
www.gamesrecruit.co.uk/ games industry jobs board and recruitment agency
www.edge-online.com/jobs global industry games network which advertises jobs in gaming
www.gamesindustry.biz/ jobs in the games industry
www.gamasutra.com/jobs/ jobs in games. Also provides a list of games companies which actively recruit.
www.data scope.co.uk/ jobs in games and the internet
www.gamesjobboard.com/ jobs in games and animation
www.creativepool.co.uk agency operating a jobs board for animators, games designers and other digital media specialists
www.animationbase.com website for the animation community promoting networking between job seekers, freelancers and employers. Runs networking events and a jobs board. Also has a space on Facebook where job seekers can upload showreels and animations.
www.imagineanimation.net/ jobs in animation
www.mad.co.uk creative jobs
www.opmjobs.com agency specialising in computer / console games and on-line games development
www.animationmagazine.net/ animation news and jobs
http://jobs.chinwag.com/ digital jobs board
www.revolutionjobs.co.uk/ web jobs
www.develop-online.net/ web development jobs

The following journals are also available in the X section of the careers library in the Student Gateway:

- Arts Professional
- Artyfacts

As the industry developments occur at a very fast pace it is also worth keeping abreast of developments in technology to ensure that you keep up to date and remain employable. The websites of large software houses like Macromedia, Adobe and Microsoft and development sites such as WebMonkey and ZDNet are good places to start.

Professional bodies

Professional bodies look after the interests of the people within certain occupations and are often involved in activities such as: lobbying the government for resources or recognition, accrediting courses, ensuring that professional standards are met, advertising vacancies, running networking events, co-ordinating mentoring programmes, providing careers information and advertising jobs. Professional bodies linked to IT include:

The British Computer Society
http://www.bcs.org/
The British Interactive Media Association
http://www.bima.co.uk/
The Institute for the Management of Computer Systems
http://www.imis.org.uk/
The Institute of IT Training
http://www.iitt.org.uk/
The Institute of Analysts and Programmers
http://www.iap.org.uk/

Whilst Skillset isn’t strictly a professional body, it performs many of the functions described above and contains valuable tips about getting into animation and interactive media. See www.skillset.org.

Speculative applications

It is important to remember that many interactive media employers (especially the small specialist companies) don’t advertise their vacancies. Whilst competition for advertised jobs can be fierce, graduates who make an effort to track down hidden jobs face less competition and their efforts can be rewarded.

Trade press

There are a few paper based and electronic magazines which cater specifically for the industry. As well as helping professionals familiarise themselves with the current issues facing sectors, the trade press sometimes also publish vacancies.

Magazines include:
www.computing.co.uk
www.computerweekly.co.uk
www.theitportal.com IT news and information
www.nma.co.uk/ New Media Age
www.computerarts.co.uk/ Computer Arts
www.netmag.co.uk/ Internet Magazine
www.animationmagazine.net/ Animation magazine

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The first stage in making a speculative application is to identify companies that you’d like to work for. The following websites are useful when identifying companies which may be interested in your skills as an interactive media specialist.

- **www.skillset.org** Skillset is the sector skills council for the creative industries. A list of well established games companies can be found by following these links: computer games > about the computer games industry > where is the computer games sector based? > UKTI map of the UK games industry
- **www.theknowledgeonline.com** The Knowledge Online provides a source of contacts within film, video, TV and commercial productions.
- **www.kays.co.uk** Kays is a worldwide directory of companies which support and work in the creative industries.
- **www.imagineanimation.net** lists individual animators, production companies, post-production facilities, distributors and suppliers, web designers and game developers. Contains industry news, runs events and advertises jobs.
- **www.bima.co.uk** use the member directory search engine to find a range of companies working in digital media in the UK.

There are several books in our careers information room which provide contact details of TV/film companies, design consultancies and other organisations which may also be useful. These include:


The next step is to ensure that you know as much as possible about the organisation that you are approaching (such as their business functions, their products and their clients) and to write a CV and covering letter which is targeted towards the employer. As a creative person it is also important to have some means of showing to the employer, for example through a showreel, website or electronic portfolio. Further information on how to do this can be found in our careers essentials guide *Your CV* and *Creative Job Search Strategies*.

You then need to find out who to send your CV to. In a small company or enterprise this may be the general manager/ owner, but in a big organisation it may be the person in charge of the business function that you’re interested in.

Send your contact your CV and covering letter, and make sure that you ring them after a couple of days to ensure that they got your letter.

### Networking

Within animation and interactive media the most common way to find work is through informal methods. It is therefore essential that you take steps to meet people in industry through networking. Getting involved with specialist networking organisations is an excellent way to begin as they provide news about what is happening locally within interactive media, arrange events where you can meet people and often run websites, blogs and other online tools to help people with a common interest interact.

The following links are to networking organisations, employers and other groups which may be able to help you begin to network in the West Midlands. If you want to make industry contacts in another area of the country, the skillset website is a good starting point. See **www.skillset.org**.

- **Screen West Midlands** [http://www.screenwm.co.uk](http://www.screenwm.co.uk/) Lead agency for TV, film and digital media in the West Midlands. Promotes new talent and offers support through networking, mentoring, skills development and financial assistance.
- **Creative Networks** [http://www.creativenetworksonline.com](http://www.creativenetworksonline.com) Brings together all parties involved in sound and screen based media in the West Midlands.
- **Creative Alliance** [http://www.creativealliance.org.uk](http://www.creativealliance.org.uk/) Group of experienced arts professionals based at the Custard Factory who are committed to developing new talent
- **The Serious Games Institute** [http://www.seriousgamesinstitute.co.uk](http://www.seriousgamesinstitute.co.uk/) The Serious Games Institute conducts research and offers business incubation to companies working in this area. Website lists companies working in the serious games industry which students may like to approach speculatively for placements and work.
- **The Lighthouse** [http://www.light-house.co.uk](http://www.light-house.co.uk/) Independent production company, showcasing venue and gallery which is committed to
promoting digital media in Wolverhampton and the West Midlands. Website has a useful ‘links’ section detailing other organisations which may be of use.

The Custard Factory
http://www.custardfactory.co.uk/ A space housing small companies in the creative industries. There is a residents directory which could be used as the focal point for speculative applications.

Media Talent Bank www.mediatalentbank.com/
Media Talent Bank aims to promote the media industry in the West Midlands. The website allows freelancers to upload their details which can be viewed by employers.

For a list of networking groups within animation, visit www.skillsset.org and follow the links: animation > useful links

West Midlands Animation Forum
http://www.animationforumwm.com/ Project promoting the West Midlands as a key player in Animation. Runs networking events, advertises jobs in animation and disseminates news effecting animation professionals in the area.

www.ukita.co.uk Promotes networking amongst IT professionals in the UK, including the West Midlands.

Media Content Lab
http://www.mediacontentlab.co.uk A creative multidisciplinary team based in Birmingham who produce digital media products and who take placement students and graduates

Blitz Games http://www.blitzgames.com/ Games development company based in Warwickshire who take on placement students and graduates

For information about BBC jobs, their trainee scheme and work experience opportunities see www.bbc.co.uk/jobs

Channel 4 talent http://c4talent.illumina.co.uk/ Careers information about getting into TV and opportunities within Channel 4

http://www.guardian.co.uk/student-media-awards-2011 Every year the Guardian Media Awards take place which offers designers, presenters, editors etc to show case their talent with the winners significantly jumpstarting their career. The closing date is usually early July.

www.it4communities.org.uk Organisation advertising voluntary opportunities in IT.

Further sources of help

www.prospects.ac.uk Prospects is a career website for students and graduates

www.engagingwithemployability.co.uk/ Site designed by The School of Art and Design at The University of Wolverhampton. Contains a comprehensive list of useful sites.

http://www.e-skills.com Sector Skills Council for IT and telecoms

www.skillset.org/ Skillset is the sector skills council for the media industries

www.bcs.org.uk British Computer Society

www.bima.co.uk/ British Interactive Media Association

www.ncc.co.uk National Computing Centre

www.bectu.org.uk Independent union for those working in broadcasting, film, theatre, entertainment and digital media.

www.yourcreativefuture.org Information about the creative industries.

www.productionbase.co.uk Website for people wanting to work in TV or film.

http://www.hellodigital.net/ An annual media festival in Birmingham.

Business start up support

SP/ARK http://www.spark-spaceforcreativity.co.uk/ Business incubation unit for digital media companies at the Wolverhampton Science Park.

e-innovation centre http://www.e-innovationcentre.co.uk/ Business incubation space for IT companies at the University of Wolverhampton’s Telford campus.

Speed www.wlv.ac.uk/speed A programme enabling University of Wolverhampton students to develop a business idea whilst at university.

Enterprise Agencies www.nfca.com Free and confidential advice to anyone thinking of starting their own business.
The Prince’s Trust  www.princes-trust.org.uk
Source of business and financial support for people aged 18 to 30.

The Design Trust  www.thedesigntrust.co.uk
Open to all designers, provides advice and information on getting started.