

Chapter One

The bad, the good and the ugly and me

The bad: TV – are you tough enough?

I could start this book with a eulogy about how lucrative, fantastic and fun it is to work in TV. It is. But let's start with a few home truths. If you want to work in TV you need to know what you're getting into. It's not a career for the faint hearted.

Satirical BBC 4 TV show *Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe* makes a few well-placed observations. The episode, *A Career in Telly*, is biting funny with more than just a modicum of truth. It starts:

'Ooh, look it's you, a fresh faced nigh on foetal 21 year old finishing your media studies degree with an earnest documentary about a local homeless man called Billy. It's well received and you send your CV to 10 million different production companies and finally get a reply from a company offering you a job as a runner – but it's a start . . .' The letter the innocent young hopeful is holding says, 'Please be prepared to sell your soul'.

Sometimes your ideals, values, family and friends can go out the window in pursuit of a challenging career in TV.

'Television is full of very entertaining, very exciting and very fun interesting people,' says Kate Phillips, head of development at BBC Entertainment. Yes, some of the most clever, gifted, funny and creative individuals you'll ever meet work in TV but there are also some pretty horrendous people too. 'It's also full of egos, so if you're sensitive I really don't think you'll last that long,' she adds.

'The most difficult thing about working in TV is probably the team you find yourself working with,' says assistant producer Harjeet Chhoker. 'Despite what people say about TV, it is a very hard industry to work in, with long hours, stressful situations and some of the most

unglamorous situations you'll ever find yourself in; you'll be asked to do things you'll wish you didn't have to. Therefore, having a good team to work with is vital. You could be doing the worst programme in the world, but if you have a good team then it's not that bad. But there are times when you end up working for people who are rude, unreasonable, manipulative, discouraging, easily stressed and under pressure. You can work on the most resourced, big budgeted show, like *Big Brother*, and it can still be hell!

Jo Taylor, talent manager at Channel 4 agrees, 'It's a very selfish industry and it's very ruthless. It doesn't suffer fools gladly or tolerate weakness. If someone's not able to do their job properly it's so inescapable that it gets around the industry really quickly. It's a very superficial industry. If you have a hit, everyone wants to know you, if not...'

Not only do you need to be tough to work in TV, you need to be absolutely driven to succeed. It's an industry that's notoriously difficult to get into and you're competing against hundreds of other clamouring wannabes. Because it's perceived to be so glamorous many, many people want to work in TV.

'Before you set out you should know that the competition is extraordinary. There are many more candidates trying to get into the television industry than there are jobs,' says Julia Waring, head of creative talent at RDF Television. 'You need to be very realistic.'

Internet TV website Production Base is *the* online job network for TV production. It's the most popular and easily accessed website and most freelancers use it to find work. It's primarily a marketplace for hiring talent where freelancers can post their CVs and details of their availability for TV production companies to view. Production companies also use it to advertise jobs.

According to statistics from Production Base (2006) there are 70,000 researchers currently working in TV, but on any one day there may be 5,000 subscribing freelancers but only 250 jobs posted. In these recent lean times of recession 100 applicants could be chasing just one job and there are hardly any jobs advertised at all.

Getting into TV is hard; it is all about who you know. According to Skillset (the skills sector council for the creative industries in Britain) only 27 per cent of people working in the industry heard about their most recent job through a traditional recruitment route such as an advertisement; 70 per cent rely on contacts to get a foothold. ‘Word of mouth is very important in this business,’ says Richard Hopkins, of Fever Media, ‘which makes it difficult for outsiders to break into. Few jobs are advertised, it’s about contacts.’

‘You get jobs by knowing people, not necessarily intimate friends but the last person you worked for may take you on or recommend you to somebody else. In fact, the pool of good talented people is very small. That’s the real horrible truth of it,’ says Julia Waring.

You get work by hearing of jobs – not easy if you don’t know anyone, as people tend to work with people they’ve worked with before. But if you’re hungry, tenacious and good enough, once you are in you can progress fast. If you get along with people you’ll hear about work through them and will be recommended to others. ‘If they like you then they’ll work with you again,’ says Daisy Goodwin, managing director of Silver River. ‘If I like someone I would tend to give them lots of breaks.’

‘If somebody does a really good job then you are more likely to ask them back again,’ says Julia Waring. ‘You are always going to go with someone who’s been recommended strongly rather than a new person. You are always going to go with the familiar and ask the same people back again.’

But making contacts and being good does not always ensure continuous work in an increasingly competitive freelance market of shrinking budgets, uncertainty and cut backs. Good people can remain out of work for long periods too.

‘The downside of working in television is the instability, insecurity and the knowledge that however right or however good you are, it might not be enough. It’s seen as a labour of love,’ says Moray Coulter, production and talent executive at ITV Productions. ‘However committed you are that’s not necessarily the thing that’s going to make your career shine.’

TV is a mostly freelance industry. It's unusual to stay with one company and become a contracted member of staff. You'll probably be on a short contract with no job security, no sick or holiday pay. You might be unemployed for weeks between contracts or go from one burn-out job to another without respite.

'Changing teams all the time in a predominantly freelance community is quite a difficult discipline,' says Richard Hopkins. 'I don't suppose many people in most professions will change the people they work with as much as happens in television.' This can sometimes work to your advantage – if you find someone difficult to get along with then you don't have to work with them for very long but it's important to get along with everyone and fit in which is not always very easy.

As time goes on and you work in the same genre you'll probably come across and work with the same people time and time again. You'll work in new production companies where you know people from previous productions. They will become friends as well as colleagues; as you progress up the ladder you'll be in a position to pick your own teams, colleagues and associates. And if you impress your producer you might be taken from job to job with them.

It's either feast or famine being a freelancer. In recent years with personnel changes at different channels and a down turn in advertising, not to mention a global recession, there are more good people competing for the same jobs which means more freelancers are out of work than ever. 2007 was a particularly bad year. 'The industry was in a state of flux with controllers, heads of departments and commissioners changing and things being restructured,' said Michelle Matherson, talent executive at BBC Factual. Some freelancers worked regularly but for many it was grim and many left the industry. Things have become worse in the recession with cutbacks and budget cuts at all broadcasters.

I've been a freelancer in TV since 1994 and have worked for 15 different production companies – I've been invited back to several a few times and worked at Planet 24 on and off for over five years in

production. The longest I was out of work was three months. On average I might have a break of three to four weeks between productions. As a single woman in my 20s I didn't mind the long hours. To recuperate I'd take holidays after a stint on a production – despite the fear, between jobs, that I might never work again. This is a common feeling whatever level you are at.

Ruth Wrigley has had a successful career in television as a freelancer for over 20 years. She was the founding series editor on *The Big Breakfast*, the executive producer on the award winning first *Big Brother* and won a BAFTA for *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?* She admits that in between jobs she experiences the same feeling of apprehension. 'I always think I'll never work again. That's what's so horrible about telly, it's like playing musical chairs. People work, work, work and suddenly they bring someone else in and the in crowd's the out crowd and vice versa.'

Being a freelancer is precarious and there can be long periods of unemployment. 'I was once out of work for five weeks when I finished my first AP job,' says assistant producer Harjeet Chhokar. 'I went from being a very experienced researcher to being a very inexperienced AP. Companies wouldn't give me a job because they felt I needed more experience as an AP. Eventually a small company which was making a series for ITV2, which didn't have a big budget, took a chance on me and I was AP for the whole four-part series.'

It is also full of dilemmas – do you take the first job that comes along or do you wait for a show you really want to make that you might not necessarily be offered? The important thing to remember is that it's all about making strategic decisions, grasping opportunities as they arise and thinking about whether the project will suit you as an individual. 'Just be true to yourself, that's the thing,' says Ruth Wrigley.

It's important to hold your nerve if you do turn something down and to have faith that the right thing will turn up – eventually. But this unpredictability doesn't suit everybody.

The good

I've had the most incredible experiences in a career that has given me unique access to people and stories, and has allowed me to work with some of the most talented TV people in the country. I've produced several comedy game shows that have been fun to make and been hilarious to write and edit. I've worked with talented writers like Lucy Porter, Nick Hildred, Robin Ince, Phil Nice and Dave Cohen. I've cried with laughter filming a hidden camera show in towns and cities across Britain, making surprise hits on unsuspecting members of the public.

I've met and interviewed a wide range of celebrities from Simon Cowell, Ant and Dec to Michael Caine and Robbie Williams, as well as charity campaigners, obsessive collectors and experts of subjects I could never master.

TV allows you to enter worlds and to ask questions that people would like to ask but never get the opportunity. 'It brings privileged access,' says Moray Coulter. 'You've got a free path into other people's lives, other organisations' lives. You get a unique view of the world that not many other jobs do.'

'I love the fact that you get inside people's lives in a way that you could never do in any other job. It's amazing that you can ask people anything,' says Liz Mills, managing director of Top TV Academy, a training and recruitment agency. 'Because you wear the TV hat you can go behind the scenes and go to all sorts of places.'

TV is exciting and varied and it's never boring. 'Every day is different,' says Grant Mansfield, chairman RDF Media Group Content. 'No two days are the same. The truth about television is that it's enormous fun and collaborative, which I really like. People get well paid and what they make is watched by lots of people. People do work long hours and it is a ruthless industry but it gives you a grandstand view.'

'When I was working my way up it was three months in one place, six months in another, really good fun shifting and moving all the time. When you're doing a weekly live show the adrenalin

is pumping; you're aiming for one show and then working on the next one.'

TV is full of bright, inventive, inspiring people. It's irreverent and creative. And it is constantly stimulating – there is nothing like the buzz of coming up with ideas for a programme and seeing them go out on air for thousands of people to watch and talk about.

'Nothing, nothing beats seeing the final product and knowing all the tears, blood and sweat was worth it,' says Harjeet Chhokar. 'Some of the best times of my life have been whilst I have been working. I honestly think that it is a privilege to do what we do. I love working in TV and the thrill of seeing your show on the screen or hearing people talk about it is great.'

'You have to live every day of your working life determined to enjoy it. But never underestimate how easy it is to fail in television,' says Richard Hopkins. 'The fear of failure drives you and the absolute desire to get the next big hit is what drive you on, like a sad addiction!'

If you can cope well under pressure, are happy to sacrifice your friends and home life at times, weather the storms of freelancing, suffer constant rejection and compete for jobs with your former colleagues, television can be the most satisfying career.

It's interesting, entertaining and absorbing, giving you the most incredible and unique access to real stories of ordinary and extraordinary people, celebrities, experts, heroes and villains. It's also very well paid especially when you reach the top with salaries paid to executive producers in the six figure bracket with bonuses, company shares and a percentage of the formats and programmes they generate on top.

The ugly – how do you plot the right career path?

The right job doesn't always come along when it suits you – luck, chance and being available at the right time all have a major part to play. This could mean not working for a few weeks and waiting or taking something that's less appealing because you need to

financially. It's not always easy to turn down work because it's the wrong type of show or the wrong rate if you have rent or a mortgage to pay, but if you want to make a name in a certain genre you must have the nerve and the finances to hold out for the right job.

If you want to work on a certain type of programme or genre it's best to try to concentrate on being continuously employed in that field, but it can be difficult. You won't get a job without the right experience but how do you get that experience if no one is willing to take a risk on you?

Working in TV at any level isn't always easy and is never straightforward. If you do manage to pull off the impossible you might not always get the recognition you deserve or even a thank you – and someone else is always ready to claim the credit. You have to be calm under pressure, cheerful, tenacious and resourceful even when the going is tough and you're tired beyond belief.

With more broadcast TV channels than ever and advertising revenue being diluted between these and internet websites, budgets are getting tighter, schedules and teams are getting smaller, making it harder for those who are making the programme, forcing them to do a job that would have been shared between two or three people. It is quite common for producer directors to shoot, direct, produce, do the sound and even edit their own programmes. In the past they would have had the support of a cameraman, soundman, researcher and editor.

When you start working in TV it can be extremely stressful, delivering seemingly impossible programmes to unworkable deadlines, schedules and budgets.

'TV can be a nightmare, where you can find yourself still at work at 4am, not having slept or eaten and you can't remember the last time you saw your friends or family,' says Harjeet Chokker. 'It's full of egos and quite nasty people who are not afraid to shout and make others cry. This is when you have to remember that TV is a great industry to work in'.

You have to be mentally and physically tough, confident and focused. 'You've got to be able to work well under pressure because

inevitably there is going to be a deadline at some point when a show is going to go on air, whether it is pre-recorded or live, there's an enormous pressure to reach the deadline,' says Richard Hopkins.

You need to be resilient and resourceful in the face of a constant stream of dilemmas and conundrums. 'Something is going to go wrong, you're going to lose a location or the talent's going to pull out. It's always fire fighting in TV,' says Richard Drew. 'You need to be someone who's going to be positive and expect that things are going to go a little bit wrong. You need to find a way of overcoming those problems and solving those challenges and not be someone who's going to lose their head or get annoyed or moody.'

You need to have a contingency plan and a cool head. You need to be committed in order to immerse yourself in your production to the exclusion of everything else. 'You've got to have an instinct for getting on with people, for knowing what makes a good story, for working really hard and not getting too pushy. You've got to be dedicated to hard work and absolutely love telly,' says Liz Mills.

It's gruellingly tiring as most jobs are stressful, demanding and all consuming. 'Quite often it is long hours,' says Richard Hopkins. When in production, you have to be prepared to work weekends, late nights and early mornings (even through the night if you are working on a daily or live show) and do what it takes to deliver the programme. You might not see your friends and family until the show is over because even if you do have the time you're too exhausted to go out.

'You have to put your personal and social life on the backburner,' says Richard Drew. 'When I was show running I had to give up concert tickets, missed birthdays, all kinds of things. You shouldn't get yourself exploited, you shouldn't have to work 24/7, but you need to be able to put in the time when needed to get the show done.'

'When you're in your 20s you are prepared to undergo a lot of discomfort, big demands, no social life, to give in to your work,' says Moray Coulter. 'By the time you're 30 you're wanting a bit of your own life back, maybe you're having a family, maybe you're seeing

more of your friends, maybe you want a hobby. People drop out as it's so unforgiving. You have to give your all.'

TV is a young person's game or someone with boundless energy, commitment and enthusiasm. TV can be exploitative and some of the jobs you'll do as a runner are menial when you start. 'You have to do a lot of rubbish when you're a runner,' says Kate Phillips of BBC Entertainment. You're on the lowest rung of the ladder, a chauffeur, gofer, getter of lunch and in some cases barely on the minimum wage. The pay is low, though you can progress very quickly if you're good and get noticed. 'The worst thing about telly when you start is the hours, but if you're good you'll move up fast.'

Dealing with the talent

As well as off screen talent there's the on screen talent – presenters, celebrities, actors, reality show contestants and contributors. They're essential to your programme but often they can be difficult, unco-operative, prone to tantrums and a nightmare to work with. Often they'll have their own agenda and ideas which may not be the same as yours; you have to manage that difficult relationship.

I've seen presenters square up to producers, swear at them and threaten to walk out just before a live show, refuse to ask questions, attend interviews and create havoc because they refuse to wear something. I've seen presenters reduce producers to tears, have them fired or vilified. They can seem incredibly confident and funny on screen but some may just repeat what they hear on talk-back verbatim. As the producer you have to be on the ball knowing all the questions, the running order, the content and the timing of the interview. You'll be juggling the team, the schedule, the budget as well as the talent and content. So you need to be focused and strong.

I've had to:

- Brief a notorious sex pest presenter and then ignore his advances when he 'accidentally' brushed against my breast
- Silently take a tirade of abuse from a furious celebrity after a colleague failed to book them a cab

- Ask a shamed boxer who had been knocked out within 59 seconds of entering a ring to punch his way out of a giant paper bag
- Find hilarious contributors with extreme and usual hobbies/pets by phone and put them on a live studio breakfast show without meeting them first
- Find and vet (on the phone), test and produce a live five-minute item with new inventions and insane and eccentric inventors
- Persuade a pregnant mother of four disabled sons to come onto a daytime relationship show to discuss whether she would have an abortion if she was carrying another son with disabilities
- Find and then persuade the bereaved owner of a stuffed dead dog to drive down from Leeds to London overnight to appear on a show the next morning to celebrate their pet's life by performing a live tribute funeral
- Within a year of being in TV step in to direct a shoot I had set up when the director was fired and then edit the films I had shot for that week's transmission – with no experience of either
- Persuade an angry celebrity whose fee and travel expenses had been reduced to those his agent had agreed to go on air
- Calmly brief a late celebrity during make up, while the show was being transmitted live, to agree to and understand five different items before delivering them on air
- Find a double decker bus for filming an interview for the next day for free (no easy task when no bus company will release a vehicle from service – let alone for free)
- Direct and produce an item with a group of grumpy, naked, smelly and unco-operative poets without showing any dangly bits
- Found my job description had changed overnight and had to fight the world's press at film premieres to get access to and interview celebrities for next day's transmission (with no training or experience)
- Find factually accurate stories, with credible witnesses, which had the potential for dramatic reconstruction that could work as

12-minute films for a paranormal series, which hadn't been covered in the four previous series

- Answer the unreasonable demands of a bullying executive producer when I was in hospital with my mother who was having chemotherapy
- Create, produce, script, format and find talent for a 13-part travel gameshow in six weeks before six weeks of filming started with two teams filming around the world
- Devise, shoot and create the format for a 10-part gameshow with 200 films in six weeks then work for three weeks from 6am until midnight recording the studio shows
- Format, create and set up a 90-minute Saturday night gameshow pilot with 100 contestants filming around the country with a 20-foot egg in six weeks!

And me – how did I get my first break in TV?

I read history and English at the University of Sussex at a time when media studies degrees were pretty rare. It never occurred to me to train for or seek a job in TV. It seemed such an impossible task with no easily discernable career path and just six places a year on the BBC researcher trainee scheme to which thousands applied but for which only people from Oxbridge seemed to be accepted. I didn't have the confidence then to even try. I fell into television by accident.

I left university and worked as a journalist on a trade magazine before doing a post graduate qualification in journalism and freelancing for the music press. I believe that the skills I learned as a journalist were invaluable if not essential for a job as a TV researcher, as you use the same investigative and writing skills when putting together a brief, script, writing a list of questions, doing interviews or looking for new ideas and stories.

I got my first break in TV through word of mouth. I applied for a job as a music researcher on an entertainment show called *Big City*, a topical entertainment show made by Wall To Wall Television for

Carlton/ITV. Anna Richardson, a colleague from my journalism post grad course, told me that they were looking for a music specialist. She told me what she had been asked in the interview. I thought, 'I know that! I could do that!' and after several interviews with Nicola Gooch, the series producer and the executive producer, I was given a junior researcher position with a six week probationary period. The fact that I was a music specialist enabled me to make a shortcut into TV production, bypassing the usual first TV entry job – the runner. I was unusual in this respect but by no means unique. It is possible to go straight in as a researcher if you have a unique specialism and transferable skills to offer.

I was never given a clear brief or job description and I had no idea what I should be doing but I figured it out quite quickly. Using my experience as a journalist I found stories and came up with ideas, found and booked contributors, bands and celebrities, researched subjects and wrote interviews, briefs and scripts. I also found unusual (and free) locations, had to recce, set up and go on all the shoots – doing everything from writing the call sheet and arranging travel, parking, and lunch to finding any props, and supporting the edit by obtaining and clearing stills, music and clips.

These were all things I learnt as I went along, delivering what was asked of me – sometimes when I didn't have a clue where to look and didn't dare ask for fear of looking stupid!

It was fun and exciting but also frightening because it was constantly challenging. Although I was organised and planned ahead, I was always being asked for things at the last minute (and for free). Also, celebrities, bands, locations, contributors and stories could fall down at the last minute – as they always do. The schedule couldn't change with the show on air every week, so I'd have to find replacements at the last minute and rewrite and plan everything to fill our shoot day and the show.

It was stimulating but stressful. Failure was not an option. All the other researchers were all more experienced and more confident than I. I felt that I could be asked to leave at any time, but I worked

hard and was promoted to researcher after my six week probationary period and worked on the show for eight months until it finished its run. I never lost this fear of failure. It gave me an unrelenting desire to deliver and achieve results and so I was employed continuously.

Before this first job came to an end I heard by word of mouth of a new Saturday night ITV 1 entertainment show. Planet 24 had a terrible reputation as the TV equivalent of a sweat shop – the hours were long and gruelling and it was based in the Docklands, miles away from anywhere and difficult to get to. Former employees warned me against applying but my boss, Nicola Gooch, said that it was the best training ground in TV I could wish for. I'd make contacts, learn new skills and gain invaluable experience; that if I could survive there I could work anywhere.

So I decided to apply. I had a challenging interview with the series editor who sat with his feet on the desk, watching TV and typing at the same time as firing questions at me about what suggestions I had for guests, VTs, studio items and new ideas. I was offered the job the same day. I started the week after finishing at Wall To Wall Television.

Where have I worked?

I've worked in production making shows for all broadcasters, programme development and recruitment. I've worked on live studio shows as live pre-recorded shows, on location and across entertainment and factual entertainment genres.

I worked for the TV production company Planet 24 (a now defunct indie but pioneers and creators of defining and groundbreaking TV programmes *The Word*, *The Big Breakfast* and *Survivor*) between 1997 and 2002. I had five different roles on *The Big Breakfast* from producing and directing celebrity VT packages and producing the live show to features editor.

As well as working on *The Big Breakfast* in several different roles I have worked as a researcher, assistant producer, producer and series producer. I've series produced six different entertainment shows for

Endemol, BBC Entertainment, RDF Media and Prospect Pictures amongst others.

For the last five years I've worked in programme development for RDF Media, Fox and Celador Productions and my credits include *Rock School* (Channel 4), *Brand New You* (five), *Who's Had What Done* (ITV), *The Tim Lovejoy Show* (Sky One), *Turn Back Your Body Clock* (Channel 4) and *World of Compulsive Hoarders* (Channel 4).

I've also worked in programme recruitment which is where the inspiration for this book came from. In 2005 I became head of talent at Zig Zag Productions, hiring and spotting creative talent, nurturing and promoting runners, mentoring the trainee on the Channel 4 researcher scheme and helping freelancers find work when their contracts with the company ended.

Since 2007 I've worked on a freelance basis crewing up shows and finding creative talent up to senior level for the BBC, Objective Productions, Impossible Pictures and North One amongst others. This role involves finding, matching and nurturing key talent to specific programme briefs and giving freelancers help and advice to help them achieve their potential.

So, if you're still with me and you think you've got what it takes read on because I'll show you how you start . . .

PROFILE

Andrew O'Connor, chief executive officer, Objective Productions

Andrew has had a varied career in theatre, in television as an actor, writer, producer and director, and executive producer. In 1997 he retired from performing to concentrate on running his television production company, Objective Productions.

As a performer, Andrew began his career as a child actor in BBC TV



series, *Canal Children*. Later he appeared regularly as a comedian and presenter in TV programmes such as *Copycats*, *Live from the Palladium* and *The Alphabet Game*. Andrew also toured extensively as a live performer, first as a magician and then as a stand up comedian. As an actor he played lead roles in the musicals *Barnum*, *Me and My Girl* and *Billy*.

As a writer/producer he has created/co-created over fifty TV series including: *The Quick Trick Show*, Derren Brown's TV series and specials, *The Real Hustle* and *Peep Show*.

Andrew's TV shows have been nominated for national and international awards and have won two BAFTAs, a Golden Rose, a Silver Rose, a South Bank Show Award, three RTS Awards and four British Comedy Awards.

Programme credits

2007—at the time of writing (spring '09)

Comedy Sketchbook Series (BBC), *Derren Brown Mind Control* (USA) (Sci Fi Channel), *Mike Strutter 2* (MTV), *The Real Hustle* series 3, 4 (BBC), *Return of 'Allo, 'Allo* (BBC), *Star Stories* series 2, 3 (Channel 4), *The Peter Serafinowicz Show* (BBC), *Convention Crashers* (C4), *Derren Brown: The System* (C4), *Derren Brown Trick or Treat* series 2 (C4), *Comedy Live Presents* (C4), *The People Watchers* (BBC), *The Real Hustle Las Vegas* series 5 (BBC3), *Peep Show* series 5 (C4), *You've Got The Answer* (BBC pilot), *Kevin Bishop* series 1 (C4).

2006 Credits on co-productions

Indestructibles (BBC), *50 Greatest Television Dramas* (C4), *The Real Blue Nuns* (C4), *What the Pythons Did Next* (C4), *The Fame List* (C4).

2003–2006 executive producer

Derren Brown Russian Roulette (C4), *Greatest Magic Tricks in the Universe . . . Ever* (five), *Magick* (Channel 4), *Psychic Secrets Revealed* (five), *Secrets of Magic* series 1, 2 (BBC), *Comedy Heroes* 1, 2 (five), *Derren Brown Trick of The Mind* series 1, 2, 3 (C4), *4 Go Dating*, also co-creator (C4), *50 Worst Decisions* (Sky), *Best Unseen Ads* (Sky),

Britain's Favourite Comedian (five), *Derren Brown Messiah* (C4), *Derren Brown Russian Roulette Reloaded* (C4), *Derren Brown Séance* (C4), *Greatest TV Moments* series 1, 2 (five), *John Lydon Goes Ape* (five), *John Lydon Shark Attack* (five), *Monkey Magic* series 2 (five), *Peep Show* series 2, 3, 4 (Channel 4), *Secret World of Magic* (Sky), *Thomas Solomon*, *Escape Artist* (C4), *Britain's Most Watched TV* (five), *Undercover Magic* (Shock Magic) (Sky), *50 Questions of Political Incorrectness* (Sky), *Balls of Steel* series 1, 2 (C4), *Derren Brown: The Gathering* (C4), *Derren Brown: The Heist* (C4), *Dial A Mum* (ITV), *Dirty Tricks* (C4), *Extreme Family Values* (Sky), *Ghosthunter* (Sky), *Greatest Tabloid Headlines* (Scoop) (C4), *Massive Balls of Steel* (E4), *Miracle of Jesus* (C4), *Rajamnn*, *The Evil Hypnotist* (E4), *Return of . . . The Goodies* (BBC), *Rewriting History* (C4 Learning), *Seven Stupid Escapes* (E4), *Top 50 Celebrity Animals* (Sky), *When Magic Tricks Go Wrong* (C4), *Ricky Meets . . . Larry David* (C4), *Deathwish Live* (C4), *The Last Word* (More 4), *The Real Hustle* series 1, 2 (BBC 3), *Tricks From the Bible* (C4), *TV Heaven*, *Telly Hell* series 1, 2 (C4), *30 Greatest Political Comedies* (More 4), *Age Concern: Celebrities Go To Seed* (five), *Derren Brown: Something Wicked This Way Comes* (C4), *Dutch Elm* (Paramount), *Fear of . . . Flying* (C4), *Greatest TV Cock Ups* (five), *Is Benny Hill Funny?* (C4), *Mike Strutter* series 1 (MTV), *Point Break: Celebrities Off The Rails* (five), *The Real Hustle Christmas Special* (BBC3), *Ricky Gervais Meets . . . Garry Shandling* (C4), *Ricky Gervais Meets . . . Christopher Guest* (C4), *Size Matters: Celebrities on the Scales* (five), *Star Stories* series 1 (C4), *Starkey's Last Word* (More 4), *Bullsh*t Detective* (BBC), *Derren Brown Trick or Treat* series 1 (C4), *Eejits* (C4), *Dog Face* (C4), *Perfect Night In* (C4), *The Real Hustle USA* (Court TV), *The Real Hustle: Winter Special* (BBC), *Twisted Tricks* (C4).

2003 – Executive producer and co-creator

Peep Show series 1 (C4), *19 Keys* (five), *Bedsitcom* (C4)

1999 – 2003 Executive producer at Objective

Producer: *Hyp The Streets with Paul McKenna* (C4), *Hypnosex* (E4), *Psychic!* (five), *Surprising Stars* (ITV), *The Quick Trick Show* series 3,

4, 5 (ITV), *5 Go Dating* series 1, 2 (C4), *Derren Brown Mind Control* series 2, 3 (C4), *Extreme Magic Extreme Danger* (ITV), *Meet the Challenge* (BBC), *50 Greatest Magic Tricks* (C4), *Monkey Magic* series 1 (five), *Movie Mistakes Uncovered Uncut* (five), *The Hidden Camera Show* (BBC), *Celebrity 5 Go Dating* (five).

1996–1999 Executive producer/Co-creator

The Quick Trick Show series 1 (ITV), *The Alphabet Game* (BBC) also presenter, *The Quick Trick Show* series 2 (ITV), *Derren Brown Mind Control* 1 (C4).

1996 – Founded Objective Productions

What does your job involve on a day-to-day basis?

I format and co-executive produce shows and support our executive producers. All five heads of department and the executive producers report to me. I pitch ideas two or three times a week. I help run the business on the bottom line trying to grow it. Since the company sale I have to report upwards on how it's going and what's happening.

Your output is incredibly prolific and your hit rate amazing – how do you do it?

Objective has created a brand and environment where talented people want to come and work and then, crucially, stay. There hasn't been a single producer who I rated and I really wanted to keep who has ever left the company. It's all down to the incredibly high quality of the ideas and the execution of those ideas of the people who work here.

What inspires your ideas?

God knows!

How did you get into television?

I was a performer up until 1997. Before that I had written some kids' dramas and some game shows. I had some producer credits in my late 20s/early 30s. I hosted some shows that I wrote, like the pilots of *Raise The Roof* and *Lose A Million*. I wrote the *Quick Trick*

Show with a producer who ran his own production company and I had a deal that when they sold it as a format I would get half the format fee, half the executive producer fee and part of the production fee. After he sold his company he couldn't afford to give me the same deal so I formed my own company, Objective Productions, and started pitching. The first thing we did was *The Alphabet Game* which was a daytime game show for the BBC. I hosted it. The first series was made from the front room of my house with a producer, two researchers and a production manager!

We had quite a lot of success with that, it kept coming back. Then there was a Saturday night show called *The Hidden Camera Show* with Ainsley Harriet. So we proved quite quickly what our brand would be – comedy entertainment. The first few years were great. We had a daytime show called *Meet the Challenge* for BBC 1, but then that didn't work and then *Hidden Camera* didn't work and we had a tough couple of years.

Did you have a game plan?

The long-term plan was to have a company that I cared about and loved.

What advice would you give to someone starting out?

Make shows that you want to watch. That's the key thing. The shows that I make are ones I would watch if I wasn't at Objective. Decide what you like to watch and then find out which companies make those shows. You should work for free at those companies until you're fifty! Your job is to go to a production company and make yourself indispensable so they're unable to cope without you. Anthony Owen came here as a magic researcher and now he's head of magic.

What skills have contributed to your success?

Being able to create, sell and make an idea. From that everything will follow. Setting up a production company is a simple thing. You can get people to help you run it.

What's the best piece of advice you were given?

Never give away a bit of your company to someone who is not creative. You can always find people to do the business side of it – balance the books, sort out the HR – but the most valuable thing in British television is the people who can create, sell and make successful programmes. If you can do one of those three you can have a career but if you can do all three you can make a lot of money.

What have been your best moments working in TV so far?

The success of *Peep Show* and recording *Russian Roulette* with Derren Brown in Jersey. It was an amazing feeling when it was going out live. What I really care about is making shows that engage the audience, that's the best bit. But I love the process of making TV even more than that – having an idea, working on it, getting into the edits, working out if it any good, crafting it. You've got to have fun during work.

What's the worst thing about working in TV?

Nearly going under wasn't very good. I was cashing in pensions to stay afloat. Things were so hard at that stage. And the competitiveness. I still get upset when a competitor has an idea that I wish we had made.

What personal qualities have helped you?

Tenacity and whatever creative judgement I may have. I've learned that from the outside other people's careers may seem blessed and easy but from the inside it is a great struggle. I feel like my career has been a huge battle.

What's the best way to get a job in television?

Find a show that is already successful and formatted that you love and do whatever you can to get a job on that show – offer to make the tea!