



So you want to be in pictures: jobs in video production

By Alan Zilberman

Some people think you need to be a celebrity to work in the movies or in television. This is not the case. Although actors might be the most visible occupation in the field, many people in lots of different jobs provide their talents to make movies, television shows, and even advertisements. Several of these occupations are projected to have employment growth that is faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for the occupations' services will stem from heightened demand for video content. In this **Beyond the Numbers**, we'll look at some of these video-related occupations and explore the forces behind their projected employment growth over the 2016–26 period.

“Video” encompasses the production, recording, and broadcast of visual images. Video content is available via traditional methods—theatrically released films and broadcast, cable, or satellite television—as well as through streaming services on the Internet. Consumers continue to demand video entertainment. In 2012, 59 percent of adults attended a film or movie at least once, and far fewer attended a performing arts or sporting event or a museum at least once.¹ No matter the education or income level, movies are a common arts expenditure in the United States.

How about time spent watching television? According to the American Time Use Survey, the U.S. civilian population spent about 2.7 hours per day watching television in 2016—more than any other leisure activity.² The ongoing demand for filmed content, whether it is for a movie or TV program, and whether it is on a streaming platform or on network television or in theaters, has created more opportunities for these occupations.

Projected employment growth by occupation

The Employment Projections program at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) releases long-term employment projections for more than 800 detailed occupations, including those involved in video production. Some of these occupations include those that perform or direct the video content, like actors or producers and directors, and those that operate the equipment that create the content, such as camera operators. Others work in arts and design, such as multimedia artists and animators, and still others attend to the cast, such as costume attendants.

The average employment growth for all occupations is projected to be 7.4 percent between 2016 and 2026. All of the following video-related occupations are projected to have faster-than-average growth or close-to-average growth during the 2016–26 decade. (See table 1.)

Table 1: Projected employment change for selected video-related occupations, 2016–26 (numbers in thousands)

| Occupation | Employment | | Employment change, 2016–26 | |
|---|------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------|
| | 2016 | 2026 | Number | Percent |
| Total, all occupations | 156,063.8 | 167,582.3 | 11,518.6 | 7.4 |
| Actors | 63.8 | 71.2 | 7.4 | 11.6 |
| Producers and directors | 134.7 | 151.2 | 16.5 | 12.2 |
| Music directors and composers | 74.8 | 79.1 | 4.3 | 5.7 |
| Musicians and singers | 172.4 | 182.8 | 10.4 | 6.0 |
| Writers and authors | 131.2 | 141.2 | 10.0 | 7.6 |
| Camera operators, television, video, and motion picture | 25.1 | 26.9 | 1.8 | 7.0 |
| Film and video editors | 34.2 | 40.0 | 5.8 | 17.0 |
| Audio and video equipment technicians | 83.3 | 94.0 | 10.7 | 12.9 |
| Sound engineering technicians | 17.0 | 18.1 | 1.1 | 6.3 |
| Set and exhibit designers | 14.6 | 16.1 | 1.5 | 10.3 |
| Multimedia artists and animators | 73.7 | 79.9 | 6.2 | 8.4 |
| Art directors | 90.3 | 95.2 | 4.9 | 5.4 |
| Costume attendants | 6.6 | 7.3 | 0.6 | 9.7 |
| Makeup artists, theatrical and performance | 4.8 | 5.4 | 0.6 | 12.5 |

See footnotes at end of table.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program.

Actors express ideas and portray characters using a writer’s script to entertain or inform an audience. Some work as “extras”—actors who have no lines to deliver but are included in scenes, usually in the background, to give a more realistic setting. Others do voiceover or narration work for animated features, audiobooks, or other electronic media. Employment of actors is projected to grow 11.6 percent.

Producers and directors create motion pictures, television shows, and other performing arts productions. Producers make the business and financial decisions behind a project; they raise money for the project and hire the director and crew. Directors are responsible for the creative decisions of a production. They select cast members, conduct rehearsals, and direct the work of the cast and crew. During rehearsals, directors work with the actors to help them more accurately portray their characters. For nonfiction video, such as documentaries, directors choose topics or subjects to film. Employment of producers and directors is projected to grow 12.2 percent.

Music directors, also called conductors, lead orchestras and other musical groups during performances and recording sessions. **Composers** write and arrange original music in a variety of musical styles. Some composers write scores for movies or television; others compose popular music or write jingles for commercials. Employment of music directors and composers is projected to increase by 5.7 percent.

Musicians and singers play instruments and/or sing in bands, orchestras, small groups, or solo. They perform in a variety of styles, such as classical, jazz, opera, hip-hop, and rock. Musicians and singers may record scores for a television program or feature film. Employment of musicians and singers is projected to grow 6 percent.

Writers and authors, including screenwriters, create scripts for movies and television. They may write original stories, characters, and dialogue, or turn a book into a movie or television script. Employment of writers and authors is projected to grow 7.6 percent.

Film and video editors and camera operators record and manipulate images that entertain or inform an audience. Camera operators capture a wide range of material. Editors take footage shot by camera operators and organize it into a final product. They collaborate with producers and directors to create the final production. Film and video editors’ employment is projected to grow 17.0 percent, while camera operators’ employment is projected to grow 7.0 percent.

Audio and video equipment technicians connect wires and cables to set up and operate sound and mixing boards and related electronic equipment. Employment of audio and video equipment technicians is projected to grow 12.9 percent.

Sound engineering technicians operate computers and equipment that records, synchronizes, mixes, or reproduces music, voices, or sound effects. They record audio performances or events and may combine tracks that were recorded separately to create a multilayered final product. Their employment is projected to grow 6.3 percent.

Set and exhibit designers include workers who design sets for movie and TV productions. They may study scripts, confer with producers and directors, and conduct research to determine appropriate architectural styles. Employment of set and exhibit designers is projected to grow 10.3 percent.

Multimedia artists and animators often work in a specific medium. Some focus on creating animations, while others create visual effects for movies and television shows. Creating computer-generated images (known as CGI) may include taking images of an actor's movements and then animating them into three-dimensional characters. Other animators design scenery or backgrounds for locations. Multimedia artists and animators are projected to have employment growth of 8.4 percent.

Art directors involved in video production typically oversee the people who work on sets, such as set and exhibit designers. They determine the overall style in which a message is communicated visually to the audience and articulate their vision to the workers they direct. An art director for a film set in colonial America, for example, makes sure all the costumes and sets look authentic for the period. Employment of art directors is projected to grow 5.4 percent.

Costume attendants select, fit, and take care of costumes for cast members, and aid entertainers. They may assist with multiple costume changes during performances. Employment of costume attendants is projected to grow 9.7 percent.

Makeup artists, theatrical and performance apply makeup to performers to reflect period, setting, and situation of their role. Employment of makeup artists is projected to rise by 12.5 percent.

Factors driving growth in these occupations

There is an abundant appetite for video content, which is reflected in the employment projections described above. Video content is available on multiple platforms—including streaming services or subscription video-on-demand platforms that produce their own original entertainment, in addition to airing TV series or movies produced by others.

One important factor in the growth of video-related occupations is the sheer quantity of television. This phenomenon is often referred to as “peak TV,” the idea is that there is so much television, on so many networks, that it is virtually impossible to keep up with what is available. But “peak TV” has not been reached yet:

“Peak TV was once again far from peaky in 2016, with a record 455 scripted original series across broadcast, cable, and streaming sources. This estimate reps [is] an 8 percent increase over just last year (421 in 2015)—but an astonishing 71 percent increase over 5 years ago (266 in 2011) and 137 percent over a decade ago (192 in 2006).”³

In addition, reality shows are as popular as ever.⁴ Streaming networks are picking up more reality shows than their broadcast competitors.⁵ Although reality shows do not require actors, other occupations are necessary for the “behind the scenes” work such as filming, editing, sound design, and composing and performing the music.

Aside from television, there are also more movies than ever before. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) recently put out its annual *Theatrical Market Statistics Report*, which found that

“total films released (718) [U.S and Canadian box offices] increased 1 percent since 2015. Films released by MPAA members (139) were down 5 percent in 2016 compared to rate in 2015, which was a 5-year high. Non-

MPAA affiliated independents continued to release the most films domestically (579) and were up 3 percent from 2015.”⁶

The rise of independent films in particular, should it continue, will provide more employment opportunities. In addition, the MPAA report notes how the international box office (in U.S. dollars) increased by 12 percent in the past 5 years—from \$23.9 billion in 2012 to \$27.2 billion in 2016—indicating that movies remain in demand across the globe.

The proliferation of streaming content is arguably the biggest, most important factor impacting employment growth in these occupations. Millions of customers buy subscriptions to the library of films and shows available instantly on the Internet’s various popular streaming services. These companies saw millions of new subscribers in 2017.⁷ Additionally, they plan to spend between billions of dollars in 2018 on buying/producing shows and films, including new seasons of existing shows, and the rights to stream older shows and films.⁸

Another factor driving the growth of streaming video content is the use of smartphones and tablets to watch content. According to the *Online Video Forecasts 2017* from the London-based technology and marketing firm Zenith: “Global consumers will spend an average of 47.4 minutes a day viewing videos online this year, up from 39.6 minutes in 2016. This increase will be driven by a 35-percent increase in viewing on mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) to 28.8 minutes a day, while viewing on fixed devices (desktop PCs, laptops, and smart TVs) will rise by just 2 percent to 18.6 minutes a day.”⁹

Along with increased video content comes advertisements, which, like films or television, need to be written and produced, and may need to include actors. Zenith forecasts continued growth in video advertising, with spending on advertising on mobile devices to overtake spending on fixed devices in 2018.¹⁰ However, subscribers to streaming platforms do not see ads because they pay a monthly fee for an ad-free streaming experience.

Conclusion

You do not need an Academy Award or an Emmy in order to be a success in the film and television business. Everything from *Survivor* to *Stranger Things* to *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* requires hundreds of talented, committed individuals to make sure the projects are ready for public consumption.

Some of these workers need to be in front of the camera, but the vast majority of them work behind the scenes on special effects, scripts, music, sets, and more. Most of the video content is available to stream, with some of it made exclusively for streaming platforms. These platforms, along with film and television companies, continue to invest in more shows and films, to the point where there will be continuous demand for jobs that help create quality video in service of an audience’s need for entertainment and joy.

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² “American Time Use Survey – 2016 Results” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 27, 2017), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>

³ Lesley Goldberg, “Scripted Originals Hit Record 455 in 2016, FX Study Finds,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/scripted-originals-hit-record-455-2016-fx-study-finds-958337>

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⁹ “Mobile devices to lift online viewing by 20% in 2017,” *Zenith*, July 2017, <https://www.zenithmedia.com/mobile-devices-lift-online-video-viewing-20-2017/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

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