

Evolving your niche as a FREELANCE PRODUCER



ILLUSTRATED BY AJAY PECKHAM



Don't give up on your Emmy dreams!

Say NO more than you say yes (listen to that inner voice!)



Focus on those dearest to you during the inevitable downtimes



Treat everyone with kindness & respect



Keep adding skills to your wheelhouse



Dig deep for diamond-in-the-rough material

We reached out to six successful PGA members who are or have been freelance producers to learn how they started and developed their business. They share ideas so others may also shape their destiny in an industry where the only constant is change.

Compiled and Edited by
Jacob Kamhis

Jacob Kamhis is a producer, screenwriter and writer/editor.



Sasheen Artis

Independent Producer

“Produce content that will expose you to new problems so you can develop new skills.”

I'm sitting on the edge of my bed, tears streaming down my face on a Saturday night in July. It's five months into the citywide lockdown and I'm not having a breakdown. I'm watching the Los Angeles Area Emmy Awards and I just won *two* awards. OMG!!

No special dress. No champagne. Definitely no after-party. Just your peers saying you do great work and here's the hardware to prove it. I'm sure all of us have daydreamed about winning that special award. We've chosen the outfit, written and rewritten our acceptance speech. We know

exactly how that night is going to play out.

Sometimes it doesn't happen the way we imagine. For one of the best nights in my career, I was wearing sweats, drinking peppermint tea and watching the show unfold on my laptop during a pandemic. The win was just as sweet.

For 25 years, I have been developing and producing documentaries, talk shows, scripted series and live events, including a Prince concert and two national book tours that garnered two *New York Times* Best Sellers.

My first major production job was assistant to the showrunner on Lifetime's first hit police drama, *The Division*. It was my first time on set as part of the crew—amazing!

I learned the magic of moviemaking and how to make a raid on a San Francisco Chinatown sweatshop seem realistic while shooting in a freezing warehouse on the Vancouver waterfront in Canada. More importantly, I learned that a producer's main responsibility is to make decisions that help the team reach its goal. A good producer knows how to communicate her vision and troubleshoot crises while keeping the entire project and her team in mind.

A huge pitfall for freelance producers is getting pigeonholed into one type of project. Freelancing is a delicate balance between paying bills, maintaining independence and growing your network.

When you do a great job, you may be asked to do the same thing next year. Don't be afraid to say no. Yes, it's a guaranteed paycheck and you're comfortable with the team, but comfort can breed complacency.

Diversify your resume. Move from documentary to competition or indie film to soap operas to podcasts. Produce content that will expose you to new problems so you can develop new skills. If you're not learning, you're not growing.

Stephanie Purcell

Freelance Producer

“Natural transitions have been present throughout my career, with life often dictating work.”

I thought I would work in news, but in my senior year of college I was selected for an internship on the *Late Show with David Letterman*. From there, I knew I wanted to work in entertainment TV and film. I had hoped for full-time studio work, but it was 2008 and jobs were scarce. I accepted gigs as I could get them and became a freelance producer.

Now I love it and can't imagine working as full-time staff. Being a freelance producer allows me to travel and work on a variety of projects, which I love. I have worked all over the world and have met many wonderful people.

Because of my start in news, I have a strong foundation in research and interviewing. This initially led to producing documentaries, reality TV and international events. These types of natural transitions have been present throughout my career, with life often dictating work.

While working with my husband on interior design for his real estate investment company I was able to become a producer for home-renovation shows. I also developed a TV scripted comedy with my producing partner that draws from our shared Midwest experiences. This has made our pitches more relatable and personal.

But being a freelance producer is not always so cohesive. When I was starting out, I moved to Los Angeles while my husband worked in Nebraska. For five years, we lived in different states and traveled back and forth. We made it work and knew our marriage was strong, but it didn't come without hardships.

Freelance producing means shifting between demanding set hours and unemployment. When I work, my family knows they may not see me much. In between jobs, I spend as much quality time as I can with those dearest to me. It's a balance, but worth it!

