

Doug Hardy
Independent Media Network

1. What do you look for in a resume?

I look for good writing on the resume itself. In an entry-level person I hope to see that they can cover everything on a single page. In terms of experience, a resume should come with clips of stories published in a professional publication.

Experience at a college news organization is good as well, but experience at a news organization with professional editors is most helpful. A short letter of recommendation or reference from a professional is also helpful. It shows that someone is willing to put their reputation on the line for an applicant.

2. What classes do you recommend for students interested in your field? What skills are important to develop? (writing, fiscal analysis, public speaking, etc.)

If you want to be a journalist, take journalism course in news writing, multi-media story telling, ethics, media literacy (new but long overdue field of study), and – most important – entrepreneurial journalism. You likely are going to need to be able to run a business on your own in this field. So there's quite a bit to learn. Study something else as well. It's important to have an understanding of politics and government, but it's just as important to have an understanding of insurance, financial instruments & Wall Street, which have a huge impact on government.

3. What keeps you motivated in your job day-to-day?

Competition. Fear of failure. Fear of not making enough money to pay the mortgage. But remember I don't have a job. I run a business. If you can get a job, do so. Cherish it and make sure you don't get into a rut of just showing up. Understand what your employer is doing beyond just your job and your department. This is where newspaper refugees are failing – they leave (or are asked to leave) a failing industry with only one skill set. It's part of the reason why the publications are failing as businesses – lack of communication between the various parts of the operation.

4. Do you work in a constantly changing field and how does that affect your job?

Journalism is in a period of massive transition. From printed news, to radio, to TV, to cable TV, to the Internet. At the moment, print journalism is failing because the owners of the printing presses have failed to protect their investments, and failed to accurately assess the impact of the Internet – which has eliminated the scarcity of distribution. For a long time, only the people with a printing press could distribute large amounts of information quickly. This is the crux of it.

Online, the industry is booming, though the revenue model is still tenuous.

5. What was your career and educational path to your current position?

Double-major in journalism and political science. Also took undergraduate law courses. I changed jobs every 1 or 2 years for the first 8-10 in my career. Journalism is about getting out of your comfort zone and learning about new people and industries every day.

6. What risks did you take?

It's a low-paying field, always has been. It was a risk to go into it without an understanding of how hard it is to make a living. Lately, the big risk was to leave the comfort of a job at a newspaper (with few prospects of survival) to become an entrepreneur. Maintained part-time gig on the side, as did my wife, in order to pay the bills.

7. What terms and acronyms do people need to know?

To use fewer acronyms maybe and stay away from industry jargon that outsiders don't understand. Communicate clearly and simply and you have a better chance of being successful.

8. What sources of info do you check regularly?

Too many to list. But along the way I've found that all of them are wrong once in a while, some more than others. Pundits are not journalists. All journalism needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Even a story that purports to have the "source" document may occasionally receive a document containing inaccurate information. Always be suspicious of "news" until you gain a level of comfort in the source and see how they react to their own mistakes. I tend to remain suspicious of just about every news operation I come across until I can see a lot of their work over time. Even then, I remain suspicious because it's in my nature to question.

Recommend: <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/>

During national or congressional elections, the 538 blog has been the best at predicting outcomes and analyzing trends. It was published originally by Nate Silver on his own, but now is published by the NY Times. Why is Nate Silver's the very best model for predicting election outcomes? There's only one poll that has better or more comprehensive data – and that's the actual ballots themselves on election day. Silver uses all the available polling data throughout the months/years leading up to an election. He continually updates his model to account for the good and the bad in every polling agency's methodology.

In terms of where I go for good information when I need it, there is no substitute in journalism for boots on the ground covering events as they unfold. There's no substitute for having a person monitoring – with a critical eye – the activities of a given agency/organization/government/industry/etc.

9. What's your best advice to students? What to do and what not to worry about

Live within your means and don't waste time. Get serious about your profession right away. A lot of people leave school and continue to live life in semester-like segments and operate as though they're going to "do this for now" and there's something else coming up that's better. I recommend attacking your profession as if the next five years of your life are your last. Don't forget to be humble with respect to how you learn from other professionals, but learn quickly and don't waste time.