



dear john

Q  
A

## What do I need to do behind the scenes to develop my presenting career in a specialised field?

I was recently asked whether I felt there are more or fewer opportunities in today's industry for developing a presenting career. If clarity is one of the vital skills a presenter needs to have, I doubt I will be making the grade anytime soon as my answer to the above was, "Yes, no and maybe".

"Yes" because the explosion in new media platforms means there are more places to present, "no" because, as a consequence of there being more platforms, there are more people than ever having a go (making it statistically harder

for a newcomer to stand out) and 'maybe' because it is often in carving a specialist niche that the path to a long term career – and that all important brand recognition – lies.

While there is no shortage of weather or sports presenters on our screens, our two guests have both successfully developed their own recognition factors in their respective fields and, as they reveal, when it comes to specialist presenting neither the presenting or the specialisation come without a degree of preparation and hard work.

### what the experts say...



#### Nazaneen Ghaffar

Nazaneen is a Sky News weather presenter who presents regular weather bulletins on Sky News' 14 metre long news wall, as well as recording weather updates for Sky News Active and the Sky News iPhone app. She joined Sky from BBC South East Today, having previously presented the weather for ITV West, following training at the Met Office.

"When I was 15, I went on a school trip to BBC Television Centre where I was given the chance to record a weather presentation in front of their green screen. Straight away I fell in love with the idea of telling the nation their weather forecast, and from then I made it my mission to make it a reality.

"I did A levels in the three sciences but decided to do my degree in broadcasting and journalism. I felt this would give me a good understanding of the news industry and also something to fall back on should I find it hard to become a weather presenter.

"After a few months as a runner for Deal or No Deal, I landed a job

at ITV West in Bristol working in production in the newsroom. To be honest, from day one I was very vocal on making it known to everyone how much I wanted to present the weather. After six months the editor gave in.

"Not all weather presenters are capable of reading data and interpreting it into a forecast, but I believe it is very important to have the knowledge and know how to forecast, which is why I made sure I went on several Met Office courses over the years. If you're interested in becoming a weather presenter, I would definitely advise you to know your stuff.

"The Met Office has a number of courses you can go on and there is more information on their website. Their website also has a learning section with a wealth of information to get you started ([www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning)).

Over the past seven years, I have been lucky enough to present the weather for pretty much all the terrestrial television stations in the UK and I think the best skill I have picked up is presenting the weather without the use of an autocue. It was a difficult skill to learn at first and at times rather nerve-racking, but I think it is one of the most useful skills I have as a presenter."

#### Annie Emmerson

Annie is a former athlete, who competed in triathlon, duathlon and running winning five major medals. She retired at the top of her sport in 2006 as the world No 1 duathlete, and has since worked for BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, and Eurosport as presenter, commentator and race pundit.

"My twin sister Charlotte is an actress and we often spoke about how similar our careers were.



Competition is all about performing so I guess I had always thought about presenting after competing, but I had to really work the contacts I made as an athlete to get the jobs – I still do.

"I got some good coaching from [television director] Kathryn Wolfe, who taught me how to relax and be myself. That's very important when

you're working in front of the camera.

"I'd agree with Nazaneen that it is fundamental to know your stuff. You can never have too much information on sports people that you have to talk about or interview. That was something the ski and triathlon commentator Matt Chilton taught me. He comes to jobs with sheets and sheets of paper full of facts and figures. My sporting background has also taught me a lot about dealing with nerves, which I suffered a lot before competitions. Now when I'm working in a high pressure situation I have the tools I learnt from competing.

"My own goals are to keep working hard and pushing myself to be the best I can be. I think if you do that then doors will open for you, although in this game there are no guarantees. Try to start out by focusing on one sport that you can be highly knowledgeable about. Never stop learning – my sister still does workshops and she's a phenomenal actress."

### dear john sums up...

The fact that being clear on what your personal goals are is a good first step to helping you achieve them is probably not news to anyone in sports or television. That said, Nazaneen's reminder that you also need to make other people aware of what you are aiming for, not least the people who can make it happen for you, is a simple point but one which not everybody observes.

There is a balance to be struck between being persistent and being a pain, but as evidenced by Nazaneen and Annie's own careers, two key factors in striking that balance are firstly to show you can do the job you are currently doing well, whether that is being a backstage runner or an athletic runner, and secondly to make sure that when the door of opportunity does open for you, you have done the necessary homework to make the most of the chance. While you may not be able to predict when that door will open, doing the background work is a task you can start working on today.

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