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Advertising Account Executive

What is the work like?

Advertising account executives are employed by advertising agencies and act as the main point of contact between the agency and client.

The job of an account executive is to quickly grasp each client's goals, and make use of the resources of their agency to build the most effective campaign. They may find themselves promoting business brands, from cars to cat food, or developing awareness campaigns for a charity or government body.

Agencies are constantly seeking new ideas to engage the public. They increasingly use methods such as 'viral' online campaigns, as well as traditional advertising methods such as TV, newspapers, posters, radio and direct mail.

Tasks may include:

- researching clients' products, services, plans, competitors and target markets
- meeting clients for briefings
- briefing agency colleagues, and working with them to plan and implement the best advertising solutions for the client
- presenting proposals to the client for approval
- ensuring that projects are completed on time and within budget
- meeting clients to discuss strategy and report on progress
- responding to clients' requests as they arise
- taking part in pitches for new contracts
- keeping records and handling invoices.

Account executives may focus on a single client or work on behalf of several at once.

To ensure client requirements are met, account executives need to work closely with colleagues, including media planners and buyers, copywriters, designers and administrative staff. They usually report to an account manager or account director.

Hours and environment

Long hours are common, and advertising staff are expected to work flexibly to meet project deadlines. This may include evening and weekend work.

Advertising account executives are office based. They travel frequently for meetings, and may be expected to socialise with clients.

In agencies with international operations, travel abroad may be required.

Salary and other benefits

These figures are only a guide as actual rates of pay may vary, depending on the employer and where people live.

- Salaries may start between around £15,000 and £20,000 a year, depending on the type and size of the employer.
- Experienced account executives or managers may earn from around £25,000 to £45,000 a year.
- Account directors may earn up to around £80,000.

Skills and personal qualities

An advertising account executive must be:

- quick to absorb and analyse large amounts of information
- enthusiastic, energetic and imaginative
- approachable, outgoing and diplomatic
- a clear communicator, in person and writing
- able to present ideas with conviction
- highly organised and flexible
- good with figures
- IT literate
- comfortable working as part of a team
- skilled at negotiating and motivating others
- commercially aware.

Interests

It is important to have:

- a passion for advertising and business
- an interest in people.

Getting in

There are around 4,000 account executives and managers in the UK. Around 70 per cent of the total advertising workforce is in London. Other main centres include Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Leeds, but there are small agencies in many towns.

There are several different types of agency:

- integrated or 'full service' agencies, offering clients the whole range of advertising advice and creative services
- media agencies, which specialise in buying advertising space
- digital agencies, which focus on online marketing
- direct mail and direct marketing agencies.

Agencies vary in size. Almost half employ fewer than 20 people. Competition for vacancies is intense.

It is very helpful to find a work placement with an agency, although these are also in high demand.

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) website lists member agencies with structured recruitment programmes. It also lists member addresses and the fields they specialise in, for people wishing to make a speculative approach to agencies.

Job vacancies may be advertised in Campaign, Creative Review and The Drum and in national newspapers. Many are published on the internet, including on the IPA website and www.mad.co.uk. Many jobs are not advertised and experienced account executives are headhunted for these roles.

Entry routes

Most advertising account executives hold a degree or foundation degree. This is not necessarily in a directly relevant subject, although degrees in advertising, marketing and business are available.

Entry requirements to these courses vary, but minimum entry requirements are typically:

- foundation degree - three GCSEs (A*-C) and one A level or equivalent
- degree - five GCSEs (A*-C) and two A levels, or equivalent qualifications.

It is possible to enter without a degree, although this is quite rare. Entrants may be able to progress to the position of account executive by working their way up from a work placement scheme or employment in a junior administrative capacity.

Employers will normally expect candidates entering the industry in this way to have some A levels, as well as knowledge of and enthusiasm for the industry.

The 14-19 Diploma in creative and media may be a useful starting point.

Training

Graduate trainees generally undergo an induction period of a few months before becoming account executives. During this time they learn about the industry and shadow experienced colleagues.

Training typically covers:

- marketing skills, such as how to gather brand information and analyse competition
- advertising skills, including research techniques
- organisational skills, such as team co-ordination and drawing up schedules
- communication skills, such as drawing up contact reports to record details of a client meeting
- people skills, including negotiating.

The IPA offers a Foundation and Advanced Certificate and Excellence Diploma, as well as a range of short courses and development programmes. Graduates employed by IPA-affiliated agencies can join a seven-stage training programme that offers training at each stage of their career, up to the level of managing director.

The Communication Advertising and Marketing Education Foundation (CAM Foundation) offers a Diploma in Marketing Communications, which includes an advertising module. Study is through part-time, intensive or distance learning. Entrants need to have a degree-level qualification or experience in a relevant role.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) offers a range of marketing qualifications, including a postgraduate Diploma.

Getting on

Experienced account executives may progress to an account manager post, and later to account director.

With further training, they may become client services director, with overall responsibility for the account management department.

After establishing a reputation, some account executives work freelance or set up their own agencies.

Further information

The Account Planning Group (APG), 16 Creighton Avenue, London N10 1NU. 020 8444 3692. Website: www.apg.org.uk

The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), Moor Hall, Cookham, Maidenhead SL6 9QH. 01628 427500. Website: www.cim.co.uk

Communication Advertising and Marketing Education Foundation (CAM Foundation), Moor Hall, Cookham, Maidenhead SL6 9QH. 01628 427120. Website: www.camfoundation.com

Creative Choices (Creative and Cultural Skills), 4th Floor, Lafone House, The Leathermarket, Weston Street, London SE1 3HN. 020 7015 1800. Website: www.creative-choices.co.uk

The Design and Art Directors Association (D&AD), 9 Graphite Square, Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5EE. 020 7840 1111. Website: www.dandad.org

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), 44 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8QS. 020 7235 7020. Website: www.ipa.co.uk

Young Creatives Network (YCN), 72 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3AY. 020 7033 2140. Website: www.ycnonline.com

Further reading

Working in Creative and Media - VT Lifeskills

www.mad.co.uk

Magazines/journals

Campaign

Creative Review

Design Week

The Drum

The Guardian (Mondays)

Marketing

Marketing Week

Media Week

Revolution

(Some may be priced)

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