

Advertising Art Director

What is the work like?

Art directors, often known as advertising creatives, are responsible for the visual elements of advertising campaigns. Usually working as a team with a creative copywriter, art directors may come up with visual concepts across the whole media, including television, cinema, internet, outdoor advertising, inserts and direct mailings.

Each project usually begins with a client briefing, where the creative team would learn about the client, the product and target audience and the main advertising message. The art director would usually then work closely with the creative copywriter to:

- generate original ideas that fit the brief to present to the client
- produce storyboards or sketches of ideas
- present ideas to the agency's creative director and account managers.

At this phase, the art director and copywriter (creatives) will usually attend the client meeting to help present their ideas before:

- working up designs and finalising copy
- commissioning specialists, such as graphic designers, artists, photographers and film crew, to generate artwork or TV adverts
- choosing locations, managing projects and attending photo shoots and/or film shoots
- ensuring budgets and deadlines are all met
- testing advert concepts with target audiences
- overseeing the final edit of all adverts for presentation to the client.

Most art directors work on several projects at once, under the supervision of a creative director. The work is fast paced and demanding.

Hours and environment

Most art directors work Monday to Friday, between the hours of 9.00am and 6.00pm. As with many creative jobs, flexibility is important and they would be expected to work additional hours to ensure tight deadlines are met. Part-time work or job sharing may be possible for experienced art directors.

Art directors spend most of their time working indoors, in offices or studios. They also travel to meet clients and visit television studios or other locations where advertisements are being filmed. Working on location may involve staying away from home for short durations.

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.

- Starting salaries are often between £18,000 and £25,000 a year.
- With three to five years' experience, art directors may earn anything from £35,000 to £70,000 a year.
- Senior creatives in leading advertising agencies can earn over £100,000 a year.

Skills and personal qualities

An advertising art director should be:

- highly creative
- completely familiar with photography, typography and printing techniques
- an excellent communicator, with good interpersonal and persuasion skills
- comfortable working in a creative team environment, with a diverse range of people
- good at managing and overseeing creative projects
- skilled in using the latest art and design software packages
- able to work under pressure
- highly motivated and well organised
- attentive, with a good eye for detail
- able to see other people's point of view and cope with criticism
- able to work within strict budgets.

Interests

It is important to have an interest in:

- social and cultural trends and fashions
- advertising as a business
- developments in the media.

Getting in

Most art directors work in creative agencies producing advertising, marketing and digital communications. Some art directors are self-employed and work on a freelance basis. At least 75 per cent of all jobs in advertising are based in London but jobs also exist in other major cities, including Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester. Well-regarded art directors are usually in constant demand, but advertising is an extremely competitive industry to break into.

Agencies generally employ teams, rarely individual art directors, so it's always a priority for candidates to find a creative copywriter partner alongside whom they can work, applying for vacancies together. Agencies would typically require a strong portfolio of work combining copy and artistic creative concepts.

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) runs a summer school each year, offering

students the chance to win placements in advertising agencies. The closing date for applications is usually in May. Agencies may also offer holiday placements, so it's worth approaching those listed on IPA's member page.

The IPA also runs a Graduate Recruitment Agency, and D&AD runs a Graduate Placement Scheme. The IPA's Diagonal Thinking website is a self-assessment tool that helps candidates to determine if they are suited to a career in advertising.

Most agencies advertise jobs on their websites. Vacancies for experienced art directors and creative teams may be featured in publications like Campaign, Creative Review, Brand Republic and Design Week, and at www.mad.co.uk.

Entry routes

While there are no set qualifications to become an advertising art director, it's usual to have an artistic and creative design background.

In practice, most art directors would have studied design and possess either a Higher National Diploma (HND), foundation degree or degree. Studying graphic design, advertising design, art and design, illustration or fine art can be particularly useful.

Entry requirements to courses vary, but are typically:

- HNCs/HNDs - one A level in relevant subjects plus three or four GCSEs (A*-C), or a BTEC National Diploma/Certificate in a relevant subject
- foundation degree - three GCSEs (A*-C) and one A level, or equivalent
- degree - five GCSEs (A*-C) and two A levels, or equivalent qualifications.

Candidates should check with individual universities for exact entry requirements.

For most courses, applicants would need to present a portfolio of their own art and design work. Any internships or relevant work experience, whether paid or voluntary, may also be advantageous.

There are postgraduate degrees and diplomas in advertising. Entry is usually with a first degree.

The Diploma in creative and media may be relevant to this area of work.

Training

Most art directors will join agencies as junior creatives and develop their skills in-house, under the supervision of more experienced colleagues. Some of the larger agencies offer structured training programmes, giving a broad overview of the different advertising functions. Attending external courses on specific areas, such as presentation skills or television advertising, may also be encouraged.

All people employed in advertising are expected to keep up to date with industry trends and standards by reading relevant publications.

Those working in IPA member agencies have access to the IPA's continuing professional development (CPD) programme, which supports structured career progression.

The IPA offers a Foundation and Advanced Certificate and Excellence Diploma, as well as a range of short courses and development programmes. D&AD runs Workout, a programme for creative professionals providing a range of one-day development courses.

Getting on

Movement between agencies is common. Experienced art directors may progress to middleweight creative and then senior art director or creative director, while some art directors set up their own agencies. Some may specialise in a particular media, for instance TV advertising, digital or branding work. Others may apply the skills learned in other creative fields, such as directing adverts for TV, film or cinema.

Through working on big brands and gaining recognition and industry awards, art directors and their copywriting partner will often find themselves in demand.

The most successful creative teams are often able to secure lucrative and high-profile freelance work.

Further information

Advertising Association, 7th Floor North, Artillery House, 11-19 Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RT. 020 7340 1100. Website: www.adassoc.org.uk

Creative & Cultural Skills, Lafone House, The Leathermarket, Weston Street, London SE1 3HN. 020 7015 1800. Website: www.creative-choices.co.uk/advertising

D&AD, 9 Graphite Square, Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5EE. 0207 840 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

Further reading

Advertising Works - IPA

Diagonal Thinking Self Assessment (www.diagonalthinking.co.uk) - IPA

Getting into Advertising - The Advertising Association

Working in marketing, advertising and PR - VT Lifeskills

www.mad.co.uk

Magazines/journals

Admap

Advertising Age

Brand Republic

Campaign

Creative Review

Design Week

The Drum

Revolution

(Some may be priced)

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