

Advertising Installer/Bill Poster

What is the work like?

Any person who leaves their house is exposed to outdoor advertising. Advertising installers/bill posters are the people responsible for fixing outdoor advertising into place. The outdoor market is broken into three key areas:

- roadside, which includes everything from billboards and hoardings to phone kiosks and special builds
- transportation, where advertising appears in railway and underground systems, airports, buses, taxis and truck sides
- retail, point of sale and leisure, including ads appearing on street furniture, small digital screens or even trolleys as well as traditional posters in public places such as health and leisure centres, night spots, shopping centres, supermarkets and petrol stations.

In recent years, the largest revenue growth has been in digital display units. This means advertising installers increasingly need training in electrical installation to install and fix electronic signage, such as revolving tri-vision units which rotate ads.

Advertising on banners, high hoardings or buildings can involve working hundreds of feet off the ground. If there is no hoarding already in place, installers fix steel structures to support banners or poster sites. Ropes, harnesses and access gear are used to climb high structures and installers must maintain their equipment in a safe condition.

Even on low-level sites, it is important for advertising installers to pay great attention to health and safety.

Fixing paper advertising posters involves:

- cleaning sites and surfaces, removing all traces of the previous posters
- preparing surfaces with fresh paste and smoothing new posters into place
- firmly brushing over posters to remove any wrinkles or air bubbles
- washing down the whole board to remove excess paste.

Very large posters come in sections, so each sheet is individually fixed and matched to form the full advertisement.

Installers also look after the maintenance of sites and display units, cleaning and repairing the units and surrounding areas. This may involve removing graffiti, and painting and repairing frames.

Safety guidelines from Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) require a minimum team size of two when working at heights.

Hours and environment

Advertising installers/bill posters usually work around 40 hours a week. They often work flexible hours, sometimes with early-morning starts and late finishes in areas that may be busy with traffic and people during the day. Overtime work is sometimes required to complete projects.

Much of the work is outdoors, in all weathers, although rope work cannot be done in high winds or rain. Work is also carried out from ladders and painters' cradles. Some display units are indoors or under cover, for example in airports or shopping centres.

Warm clothing is required for high-level work and protective overalls are usually worn when pasting posters. Ropes, harnesses and access gear for work at heights must comply with the law.

Installers travel regularly to different advertising sites, so a full driving licence is usually essential. They may have to work away from home during a contract.

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.

- Trainee advertising installers usually earn around £10,500 a year.
- With experience, installers may earn up to £16,000 a year.
- Very experienced installers or team leaders may earn up to £25,000 or more.

Skills and personal qualities

An advertising installer/bill poster should be:

- physically fit and strong
- comfortable working at heights and have good balance
- safety conscious
- keen to apply health and safety best-practice procedures
- efficient and careful in their work
- attentive to detail and overall visual effects, with normal colour vision
- good at working with their hands
- self-motivated and enjoy working alone and in small teams
- flexible and be prepared to work long, sometimes unsociable hours.

Interests

It is important to enjoy:

- practical work
- working outdoors

- being part of a team.

Getting in

Installers work mainly for contractors recruited by outdoor advertising site owners, although a few owners, including Clear Channel or JCDecaux, employ them directly. Jobs are based throughout the UK, but mainly in or near cities or busy transport networks.

Some advertising installers/bill posters are self-employed and work for different companies on contracts. They would need to be prepared to travel to different locations to undertake enough contracts to make a full-time living.

In 2008, the advertising industry spent over £930million on outdoor advertising which has remained reasonably stable despite cuts in advertising revenue. This is mainly due to the growing popularity of digital and even newer innovative technology. However, this digital technology is changing the skills that installers require, as some mechanical and electrical training is usually required.

Jobs may be advertised in local or national newspapers or Jobcentre Plus offices. The IRATA website has a vacancy section for installers with a rope access qualification.

Entry routes

There are no formal academic entry requirements. Applicants need to be physically fit. Experience of working with ladders and confidence at heights can be useful.

Advertising installers/bill posters working at heights with ropes, harnesses and access gear must hold an IRATA qualification to at least Level 1. This covers the basics of industrial rope access use as well as health and safety requirements.

Increasingly, employers and contractors will look for candidates with electrical experience, for the installation and maintenance of digital screens. It may be possible to enter this specific area via an electrical installation Apprenticeship and work towards appropriate electrical qualifications. See the Electrician profile for specific details about entry options and training.

Training

Employers provide on- the-job training for employees. They use training hoardings, and practise hanging posters and unloading and reloading wall- and floor-mounted displays. Trainees then work under the supervision of an established installer.

An essential part of training is the Health and Safety Passport Scheme established by the Outdoor Advertising Association (OAA). This is a one-day course, managed by HSS Training, which must be taken within three months of starting work in the industry.

Many installers go on to take higher levels of IRATA qualifications:

- Level 2 Technician Training, after 1,000 hours' experience, provides additional rope access skills and health and safety knowledge.

- Level 3 Safety Supervisor Training covers detailed health and safety aspects, as well as supervisory skills.

All IRATA courses last five days. Personal protective equipment is provided, as well as a training manual for future reference.

Installers holding an OAA Passport Scheme card for two years are encouraged to undertake the OAA half-day passport refresher course to enhance and improve the overall health and safety standards within the industry.

Getting on

Opportunities may occur for advertising installers/bill posters to be promoted to supervisor or team leader or, with additional training, to a wider role in the company, such as project manager. Some installers set up their own business.

Those trained in rope access may be able to move into many other areas where industrial rope access training is useful such as civil engineering, cleaning and painting and decorating.

The progress of self-employed advertising installers depends on becoming established in the field and working to a consistently high standard.

Further information

Creative & Cultural Skills, Lafone House, The Leathermarket, Weston Street, London SE1 3HN. 020 7015 1800. Websites: www.ccskills.org.uk and www.creative-choices.co.uk

HSS Training, 1-3 Westinghouse Road, Trafford Park, Manchester M17 1QP. 0845 766 7799. Website: www.safeonsite.com

Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) International, Tournai Hall, Evelyn Woods Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2LL. 01252 357839. Website: www.irata.org

Outdoor Advertising Association (OAA), Summit House, 27 Sale Place, London W2 1YR. 020 7973 0315. Website: www.oaa.org.uk

Further reading

Real Life Guides: Working Outdoors - Trotman Publishing

(Some may be priced)

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