

Surviving an Animation Career

Contributed by Todd Robertson

There are many ways to become an animator. The first requirement is that you know how to draw. Practicing and refining the skill of drawing with good, old-fashioned tools like a pencil or charcoal will give you the skills you need to understand expression of art in all mediums. Just because computer software has wildly advanced, doesn't mean that the computer knows how to draw a good picture. After all, animation is only a series of pictures, and a computer is just an advanced artist tool, and is worthless as a tool without a good artist. So, if you're even thinking about being an animator, learn how to draw first.

One of the most frequent questions I hear is "do I need a college degree to get a good animation job?" A college degree will do you allot of good. I believe that one of the most important things you can learn in school is how to learn and open your mind. But the answer to the question is no, you do not absolutely need a college degree to get a good animation job. You have to be a good animator to get a good job. That means having a demo reel or samples of your work. I can tell you though... if you want to learn how to do animation, open your mind, because you have ALLOT to learn, and you'll never stop learning. I could write a book on everything you need to learn. Fortunately, allot people have already written those books. All in all, you can learn animation on your own, but it really does help to have guidance, and a good college is a great place to get that.

There are several opportunities in the animation field and several areas to get into, including: film, television, games, advertising, education and corporate. Then, there are several aspects of animation, including: design, modeling, texturing, rigging, composition, animation, lighting, rendering, research and development (programming), visual effects, etc. You'll never be able to master every aspect in your lifetime, unless you are some kind of animation Einstein. The best thing to do is learn how to do most or all aspects of animation - at least the basics. Figure out what you like the most and what you are best at, and focus on that. Master that aspect, and you will find a good career in any field you choose.

I've heard of animators referred to as the new 21st Century migrant workers. You have to be flexible on your location to find jobs and thrive in the industry. This is starting to change, as many producers are becoming flexible in developing long-distance relationships with animators, but don't expect that right away. It's also changing, because there are a few areas in the world that have become major hubs for animators to stay, like LA and several places around the world. You just need to find a place that you love, that offers good opportunities and go there. I chose to move to Hawaii, because it is paradise, but it is not the best place to be an animator, as the industry here is extremely limited. Don't give up hope on someday being an animator in Hawaii though, as my company is working hard to develop the industry here.

Overall, the key to surviving and succeeding as an animator requires skill and an open mind above anything else. Keep an open mind about the kind of work you will do, about what you need to know, about solving challenges and about learning new things every day. Develop your skill and become a master at what you do. Find a place in the world that you love, and that offers good opportunities and make it work. Keep a positive mind frame and develop your

creativity. Do these things and you'll not only survive, but you will rise to the top.

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"Creativity is more important than knowledge." - Albert
Einstein