

>>Snap**shot**

Mark Jay

Children's Entertainer & Stand Up

Equity

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Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?

After university I wanted to work in film and advertising but instead worked for BT for five years. At that point I recognised that I really wanted to perform so I signed up for adult education classes on clowning at City Lit. From there, I headed straight to the fringe.

Then I became a Kid's Entertainer doing puppet shows, parties, performing in tiny theatre venues and schools. To supplement my income, I trained as a teacher and still do a bit of supply teaching. I've recently started doing Stand Up, which I love.

What do you like most about your work?

I love working with a live audience, the feedback is instant. There is something very special, magical almost, about creating a moment with an audience.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

Marketing yourself can be hard, finding the impetus to keep pushing yourself out there. Calling venues can be tough and can make you feel quite exposed. I've realised that you just have to keep going.

Stand Up is great fun but carving out a new niche and coming up with new material is a challenge. Often you develop your act with the aid of your audience. When it doesn't go well, it's very easy to step back and give it a break. Keeping going can be difficult but it is essential to persevere to keep developing yourself.

I've discovered that you have to do a little bit every day and set yourself reasonable goals.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

I've learned more magic, which I use in clowning. I'm

seeing lots of people putting work on YouTube now, which is helpful. Suddenly the internet is allowing a community of performers to develop. I'm now adding material myself. This lets you study what works so you can learn from others online. Also, you can watch recordings of yourself and focus on what worked, so you can continue to improve.

Learning to market myself has been a skill I have acquired with some help from FEU Training.

What are some of the challenges of learning the skills that you need?

I can think of many challenges to learning new skills particularly overcoming old habits, which I've learned you need discipline and focus to break.

For example, what helps me is to focus on one thing at a time, not just in terms of getting things done, which of course is important, but also in not staying too general in what you do.

Prioritising can be difficult as I have a tendency to put things off! I've found that taking small steps consistently makes all the difference. Gathering information can seem like a challenge but there is a lot around if you just drill down.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

• Running a social media campaign

- Finance for freelances
 - Developing resilience webinar

What are the most important things that you've learned and how has it helped?

What I have gained from these workshops has made a solid difference to me. For backroom activities, the workshops have helped me sort out my finances and tax.





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One specific change is that I now invoice every single client straight away as part of my routine. Not only do I get paid quicker, I look more professional.

I understand lots more social media jargon, so areas that had passed me by have opened up and are now accessible to me. I know that if I keep doing something every week, my systems will keep improving going forward.

I have learned to be more supportive of myself as a performer, which has given me much more confidence. Just recently I reached out to a local illustrator who has agreed to work on a colouring book with me for fun. It was the help I have had from FEU Training that encouraged me to contact them.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU training sessions?

I love the variety of courses and webinars. The session times are good as they let me avoid rush hour travel. I really like the locations and venues. Content-wise the courses provide a surprising treasure trove of extra information.

I really like that the four unions feed into each other in this way. It dilutes the feeling I sometimes have that I am not quite an actor. Attendees have such a variety of skills and professions, there is no hierarchy, we are not in competition with each other. It all helps you to feel connected.

When I read about an upcoming workshop, I weigh up the cost of a lost day of work against the value of the course. I've always been glad I took the day off.

Do you know any other organisation that offers business skills courses for creative? No

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