

The Production Team and Who Does What

INTRODUCTION

“Who does what?” is one of the most-often-asked questions I get from students, interns and production assistants. Even people who have been in the business for a while are sometimes unclear as to exactly who performs which functions on any given project — especially when it comes to producers. Although some duties can only be performed by individuals who occupy certain positions, and others can be accomplished by a number of different people, depending on the parameters of the project — there’s no doubt that production requires a team effort.

From where I sit, there’s a core group that constitutes the production team, and they are the:

Producers

Director

Unit Production Manager

First Assistant Director

Production Accountant

Production Supervisor

Production Coordinator

Second Assistant Director

Think of casting directors, location managers, travel coordinators, post production coordinators and the studio and network executives assigned to your show as auxiliary team members.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t always happen this way, but the ideal is a team that works well together and where members understand and support each other’s boundaries and goals. In other words, should you find yourself with a producer and director (or any other members of the team) who don’t see eye-to-eye and can’t find enough common ground to get along — you’re cooked! An adversarial relationship within this group becomes a problem for everyone. On the other hand, efforts made to collaborate on shared common objectives, enhanced by a mutual respect for one another, will inspire the cooperation and loyalty of the cast and crew, will be helpful in promoting a pleasant working environment and will favorably influence your schedule and budget. Once you have a viable script and either a studio deal or outside financing in place, this is the group of people who will take these elements and make them into a movie. The mood and

temperament of the production team is going to permeate the entire project and affect everything and everyone involved. It therefore behooves you to put together the very best team you can.

There are six phases to any film. From conception through projected finished product, they are: *development, pre-production, production, post production, distribution and exhibition*. Although some members of the production team are involved in more than two phases, everyone on the team is involved in both pre-production and production. These phases represent the putting together and coming together of all elements necessary to shoot a film.

The job responsibilities attributed to members of the production team will vary depending on how the film is being released and on the project’s budget, schedule, union status and location. The chart at the end of the chapter illustrates job functions (ranging from acquiring the rights to a project through the submission of delivery elements) and indicates which position or positions generally fulfill those responsibilities. And though I can’t create a chart big enough to include every step taken to prep, make and wrap a film, this one covers key operations routinely performed on most shows.

The following sections will explain some of these pivotal positions in more detail.

PRODUCERS

On a feature film, there will customarily be at least one executive producer, a producer, possibly a co-producer and/or a line producer and possibly an associate producer. On a one-hour episodic television show, you might see as many as a dozen producers listed in the credits. And when it comes to Reality — they have their own producer categories (which you’ll find listed in Chapter 24).

Years ago, everyone understood what a producer did, and there weren’t so many of them. In recent years, however, producer credits are often confusing and nebulous — often handed out like candy at a kid’s party. Producing credits of one kind or another have been afforded to key performers, the performer’s manager or business partner, to financiers or the middlemen who bring financiers into a specific project. Producer duties often

overlap, and the credit has at times been afforded to individuals who have never set foot on a movie set. If you happened to see the movie *Narc*, you might have noticed the multiple producers listed in the credits — nine executive producers, five co-executive producers, four producers, one line producer, two associate producers and one consulting producer — 22 in all. I can't imagine what all of them did, but it's unlikely that all 22 were instrumental in the day-to-day running of the production.

In response to this unacceptable and confusing trend, the Producers Guild of America (PGA) has actively lobbied to standardize producing credits and to limit them to the individuals who actually perform the duties of a producer. They've instituted a *Code of Credits*, which includes guidelines governing the arbitration of credit disputes. You can go to the PGA's website at www.producersguild.org to find out more about the Code of Credits and to access their producer definitions and job descriptions.

Executive Producer

A rudimentary definition of an executive producer is someone who supervises one or more producers in the performance of all of his/her/their producer functions on single or multiple productions. On theatrical features, the *executive producer* may be the person who raises the funding, provides the funding, owns the rights to the screenplay and/or puts the deal together. It could be one of the principal actors whose own production company packaged and sold the project or (as has been the trend of late) the line producer. It could also be an established producer who's lending his or her name (and prestige) to a project, so a lesser-established producer can get a film made — or an established producer supervising a production at the request of a studio.

On a television show, the executive producer (also referred to as the "EP") is often the "showrunner" — the David E. Kelleys and Dick Wolfs of the industry — primary providers of television content — the ones who create, develop, sell and produce a plethora of the shows found on the TV and cable networks. In television, an EP would be equivalent to the producer on a feature — the ultimate authority and liaison between the production and the network. It could also be a lead actor whose name and/or production entity got the project off the ground to begin with. A co-executive producer may very well be a lesser-established individual who brought his project to the showrunner/EP who in turn sold it to the network.

Producer

A producer is basically the one who initiates, coordinates, supervises and controls all creative, financial, technological and administrative aspects of a motion picture and/or

television show throughout all phases from inception to completion. On a theatrical feature, the person with this title is also referred to as the *creative producer*, because he or she will be involved with all creative aspects of the project, and — in conjunction with the director and the studio and/or financiers — will have significant input on the script, cast and crew selections, production design, wardrobe, location selections, editing, musical score, marketing and so forth. This person will often be the one who acquires the rights to the story or screenplay and develops the material until it's ready to shop. He or she will most likely be the one who sells the project to a studio or possibly raises the necessary funding. He or she will establish the legal structure of the production entity, sign all union agreements and contracts, function as liaison between the production and the studio and be responsible for delivering the completed film. Working closely with the director, he or she walks a tightrope — striving to protect the intentions of the writer and the vision of the director while balancing the fiscal constraints of the production's schedule and budget. The feature producer is the ultimate *buck-stops-here* person — the one who must answer to everyone for everything, but... he or she is also the one who gets to collect the Oscar when the film wins an Academy Award. If you'd like to find out more about the job of a producer, pick up a copy of Buck Houghton's book, *What a Producer Does — The Art of Moviemaking* (Silman-James Press, 1992), and/or Myrl A. Schreiber's *The Indie Producer's Handbook — Creative Producing from A to Z* (Lone Eagle, 2001).

Television producers come in many varieties. A line producer is the individual responsible for making sure a show is completed on schedule and on budget and for overseeing all *physical* aspects of the production. Staff writers and story editors have for a while now been given producer credits as have (in many instances) post production supervisors, who at one time were given the title of associate producer.

Co-Producer

On a feature, the co-producer could be another title for the line producer (the definition of which is stated below). This credit could also denote a lesser-established producer who, the first or second time out, must take a reduced credit or share responsibilities with *the* producer. It could be the lead actor's business partner or manager who comes with the package or the person who sold the rights to the property to begin with — even though he or she may have never produced before.

Line Producer

A line producer is also referred to as the "nuts and bolts" guy or gal — the producer's right-hand person and the budgeting-scheduling expert who supervises all

administrative, financial and technical details of the production — a distinct challenge, no matter what the show's budget or genre. This individual is responsible for all the day-to-day matters that go into keeping the show running smoothly, while striving to make sure it remains on schedule and on budget. The line producer functions as liaison between the crew and the producer and is also answerable to the studio exec (or completion bond company rep) assigned to the show. He or she has to have keen people skills and negotiating skills and be proficient at putting the right team together, putting out fires, making decisions on a dime and walking a tightrope while balancing the director's vision, budgetary considerations, the studio's concerns, union and guild regulations, the cast and crew's needs, comfort and temperament, the weather, the right locations and innumerable other details. Whether it's changing and re-changing the schedule to accommodate an actor's other commitments, finding ways to keep a tired crew's morale up, figuring out how to fill a stadium full of people when you can't afford to pay for that many extras, knowing how to make one location look like several or attempting to reduce the budget so the picture can be shot locally instead of having to take it to another country, it's an extremely pivotal position. And although the duties of a line producer are rarely as ambiguous as are other producing categories, the exact screen credit a line producer receives can occasionally be confusing, especially with the recent trend of giving line producers executive producer credit.

At one time, there was no designation of line producer — only a production manager (or unit production manager or UPM) who performed most of the same functions. Today, a UPM can also be a line producer; although on many pictures, you'll find a line producer *and* a production manager with the production manager reporting to the line producer.

Post Production Producer

The title of Post Production Producer has been popping up on feature screen credits lately, but it's still a rare occurrence and is generally only given to those who make a significant contribution to a film. Previously, these individuals would have been given an Associate Producer or Post Production Supervisor screen credit.

Associate Producer

Associate producer is probably the most nebulous title of them all. It could denote someone who makes a significant contribution to the production effort, or it could be the producer's nephew. It could be the person who brought the producer and the financier together or a producer's assistant who's recently been promoted. At one time, an associate producer credit on a television show signified that that person supervised the post production, but that's not always the case any longer.

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Production management is another term for physical production, and it not only encompasses the studio and production company execs who supervise the freelancers working on their shows, but also incorporates those who are “in the trenches” — the line producers, unit production managers, assistant directors, production supervisors, production coordinators (also referred to as production office coordinators or POCs) and assistant production coordinators (APOCs).

In a nutshell, the production department is a “service” department that handles the logistics for the entire company. It's the ever-so-important spoke of the wheel that enables everything else to keep turning and happening. It's exhaustingly hard work — fast-paced and challenging. And though not considered creative or glamorous by most, those of us who know differently understand that there's something pretty amazing about creative problem solving. And as in most other freelance positions, there's always something new to learn, new people to meet and work with and new locations to travel to. Production is the behind-the-scenes office responsible for dispersing all information, making sure everyone involved has what they need to do their job and ensuring that everyone and everything arrives to the set each day — on time and prepared. They're responsible for budgeting and scheduling, as well as for negotiating for and securing a crew, locations, equipment and all outside services. They generate and distribute scripts, script changes, schedules and a plethora of other essential paperwork (even though less and less of it is now being distributed in paper form). They make sure all contracts and releases are signed, and handle all manner of issues relating to insurance, unions and guilds, safety, product placement, aerial work, clearances and local, distant and foreign locations. Like a band of gypsies, they're used to setting up mobile and/or temporary, full-functioning units and offices almost anywhere and in no time — experts at transporting to and accommodating entire shooting companies on just about any location in the world.

Production also tends to the comfort and needs of its cast and arranges for all cast member perks — all those extra goodies listed in their contracts (some of which happen to be the size of small phone books) such as extra-wide “popout” trailers, cell phones, TV/DVD players, microwave ovens, specially prepared food, transportable gyms, personal trainers — and the list goes on.

Unit Production Manager

The line producer and the unit production manager have very similar responsibilities. Generally the one to prepare the first complete schedule and budget, the UPM still function as a troubleshooter and problem-solver, be able

to think on his or her feet, and have the ability to anticipate problems before they occur. UPMs need to be good negotiators and thoroughly understand the production process, because they're the ones who make the deals, hire the crew and approve all expenditures, time cards, call sheets and production reports. Good people skills are a tremendous asset to UPMs, as they must routinely interact with the entire cast and crew, a myriad of vendors, agents and managers, union reps, studio executives (or investors and bond company reps), film commissioners, etc. They're quickly blamed when something goes wrong, not always appreciated when things go well and are well known for having to say "no" more often than others care to hear it. Having to work closely with each department to stay on top of what and how everyone's doing and to make sure they all have what they need; they're also under constant pressure to control and/or cut costs. It's quite a balancing act, and one must be diplomatic, creative and adept at finding compromises to do it well. And although their capabilities must be multifaceted, the skill most valued by a studio or bond company is a UPM's ability to keep a show on (or under) budget.

First Assistant Director

First assistant directors are the director's right arm and the liaison between the director and the crew. They're the ones who, once all final determinations are made during pre-production, prepare and issue a final shooting schedule and a selection of breakdowns (schedules of extras, stunts, special equipment, picture vehicles, etc.). The 1st AD ("the First") is instrumental in setting the director's pre-production schedule, and in conjunction with the director and UPM, oversees the survey and selection of shooting locations. During principal photography, the First runs the set, is largely responsible for ensuring that each day's work is completed, directs background action, supervises crowd control and is the one who yells "Quiet on the set!" On episodic television, where the directors constantly change, the 1st AD has a great deal of input and more of an opportunity to shape the outcome of a show.

Second Assistant Director

During pre-production, the second assistant director works closely with Casting, Extra Casting and Locations; goes on tech scouts ("technical" scouts are when specific department heads are taken to selected location sites to ascertain requirements needed to prepare for shooting at that location); helps with breakdowns and clarifies all needs in as much detail as possible. He or she makes sure everything is ready, call times are issued and all paperwork is in order and packed for the set. During principal photography, they're responsible for the cast, stand-ins,

background actors and photo doubles — making sure everyone is where they're needed, when they need to be there. They take care of all on-set paperwork, coordinate the schooling of minor cast members, work closely with Casting, liaison with the production office, issue work calls, check cast members in and out, order background actors and supervise the second second assistant director, PAs and interns working under their supervision. A second's rear rarely sees the top side of a chair. They're the first ones to report to set at the beginning of the day, the last to get lunch and the last to leave once wrap is called.

Second assistant directors usually move up to become first assistant directors, and some firsts are perfectly happy to retain that position throughout their entire careers, because when working on a fairly regular basis, the salary and benefits are terrific. For those who do move up, they tend to become UPM/line producers, producers, second-unit directors, directors and production executives. Working as an AD is a great way to learn while amassing an extensive network of contacts.

Production Supervisor

The production supervisor isn't a traditionally standard position, but one that's continually becoming more common. This person is a step higher on the food chain than a production coordinator but doesn't work as a UPM for various reasons. Either he or she isn't a member of the Directors Guild of America, or he or she is, and the show already has a UPM, or the show's budget won't accommodate another DGA salary. On some shows, the line producer and UPM are one and the same, and the supervisor helps to handle the production manager duties. Other shows are busy enough and spread out enough to utilize the talents of both a UPM and a supervisor.

Production Coordinator

The production coordinator sets up and runs the production office; hires and supervises the APOC and other office personnel; interfaces with each department head and assists them with all their needs; helps the UPM by checking availabilities and assembling the crew; obtains bids on equipment and services; places orders for film, equipment and special services; handles all distant and foreign location travel (if there isn't a travel coordinator on the show), accommodations, shipping, customs and immigration matters; makes sure all paperwork and information is generated and disseminated in a timely manner; communicates with the set, the studio, the vendors, film commissions, agents, casting, etc.; handles all production-related insurance matters; oversees the "taking care of" the cast, making sure their perks are arranged for and ready on time; coordinates the screening of dailies and prepares

Screen Actors Guild (SAG) contracts for day players, stunt players and anyone else whose contract is not generated by the project attorney or casting office. The coordinator definitely has to be someone who enjoys multitasking, is super organized, detail-oriented, patient, diplomatic, can anticipate the next step and be prepared, is good at problem solving and has the ability to pack up one's life and office on a

moment's notice and move to the next location. It's a tough and often thankless job, but it can also be rewarding.

For a more in-depth interpretation as to how a production team functions, primarily from the perspective of the production manager and first assistant director, I recommend a book entitled *The Film Director's Team* by Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward (Silman-James Press, 1992).

PRODUCTION TEAM JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

| | STUDIO | PRODUCER (S) | DIRECTOR | CASTING DIRECTOR | LINE PRODUCER/ PRODUCTION MANAGER | PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR/ COORDINATOR | 1ST ASST. DIRECTOR | 2ND ASST. DIRECTOR | PRODUCTION ACCOUNTANT | LOCATION MANAGER | POST PROD. COORDINATOR |
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| <i>Note: The position of PRODUCER represents a combination of producing positions. Other positions are also combined as their duties overlap and vary from show to show.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Acquire rights to story/script | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Select & hire writer/ have script written | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Select & hire the Director | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Select & hire the Line Producer/UPM | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare preliminary budget & schedule | X | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| "Pitch" the story & sell the script | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Make the studio deal and/or arrange financing & distribution | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Open bank account(s) | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Signatory to bank account(s) | X | X | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Arrange for completion bond and union/guild bonds as necessary | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Arrange for the legal structure of the production entity | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare a more realistic board, schedule & budget | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Prepare a cash flow chart | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Sign all union agreements and contracts | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Select & hire a production designer | X | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| Submit script to research company | | X | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Secure all necessary clearances & releases | | X | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Secure insurance coverage | X | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Set-up vendor accounts | | | | | | X | | | X | | |
| Approve invoices, check requests, purchase orders & time cards | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Hire a visual effects supervisor and select a VFX house & hold an initial VFX meeting | X | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Get bids on equipment | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Check crew availabilities | | | | | X | X | | | | | |

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| Request specific crew members | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | |
| Select 1st Asst. Director & Script Supervisor | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Negotiate key department head deals (for Production Designer, Cinematographer, Editor, Costume Designer) | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Negotiate crew deals | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Prepare crew deal memos | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Issue memo re: accounting procedures to department heads | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Investigate potential product placement deals | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Liaison with unions & guilds | | X | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Apply for permit to employ minors (if applicable) | | | | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Issue pre-production schedule | | | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| Cast film | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | |
| Prepare cast deal memos | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Station 12 cast members | | | | X | | X | | | | | |
| Select locations | X | X | X | | X | | | | | X | |
| Secure locations | | | | | X | | | | | X | |
| Arrange for film permits, location parking & neighborhood approvals (if necessary) | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Work with the production designer to establish the look of the film | X | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| Approve wardrobe, sets & special props | | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| Make sure necessary script re-writes are made in a timely manner | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Set-up & run the production office | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Hire assistant production coordinator & production assistants | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Prepare & submit Tatf/Hartley reports | | | | X | | X | | | | | |
| Sign-off on a final budget | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | | |

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| Create final board & schedule | | | | | X | | X | | | | |
| Create one-liner & day-out-of-days | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Negotiate equipment deals | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Order film & equipment | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Create & distribute crew list, cast list, contact list, etc. | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Issue purchase orders | | | | | | X | | | X | | |
| Handle time cards & payroll | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Line-up special requirements such as animals, blue/green screens, backdrops, mock-ups, miniatures, etc. | | | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| Prepare a breakdown of extras, stunts, vehicles, effects & multi-camera days | | | | | | | X | X | | | |
| Disseminate scripts & all essential paperwork & information | | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Work with film commissions & local authorities | | X | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Arrange for location travel & hotel accommodations | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Handle shipping & customs (when necessary) | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Prepare welcome packages | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Arrange for cast physicals & performers' special needs | | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Procure cast head shots for stunt & photo doubles | | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Inform Wardrobe of cast info. (including sizes) | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Officiate at production meetings | | | | | X | | X | | | | |
| Arrange rehearsals & still photo sessions | | X | | | | X | X | X | | | |
| Orchestrate & attend table reading(s) | X | X | X | X | | | X | | | | |
| Set-up editing rooms | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Line-up lab, sound house & dubbing facilities | | | | | X | | | | | | X |
| Submit copies of production reports to SAG on a weekly basis | | | | | | X | | | | | |

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| Set-up accounts for sound transfers, video transfers, etc. | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Issue certificates of insurance | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Complete & submit Workers Compensation claim forms | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Oversee day-to-day production | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| Responsible for keeping the production running smoothly | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Enforce safety guidelines & hold safety meetings | | | | | X | | X | | | | |
| Constantly monitor budget & schedule | X | X | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Continually balance the artistic integrity of the film while maintaining the budget & schedule | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Liaison between the crew & the director | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Liaison between the UPM & the director | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Assist the director w/production details, coordinate & supervise cast & crew activities and facilitate an organized flow of activity on the set | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Issue work calls | | | | X | | | | X | | | |
| Prepare maps to location(s) | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Order stand-ins & extras | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Prepare call sheets & production reports | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Sign-off on call sheets & production reports | | | | | X | | X | | | | |
| Coordinate the delivery of film to the lab & the screening of dailies | | | | | | X | | | | | X |
| Handle insurance claims | | | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Strategize/take meetings regarding publicity | X | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare & issue weekly cost reports | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Meet to analyze cost reports before they're submitted to the studio or bond company | | X | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Check and/or distribute weather reports | | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Call for "QUIET ON THE SET!" | | | | | | | X | | | | |

