

Retooling Your Career: Transferable Skills and Industry Shifts Webinar Q&A

Q - I recently transitioned from VFX Production to Business Development after noticing a growing demand for business-focused roles in our industry. As an independent consultant, I'm keen to understand what best practices I should adopt to provide meaningful value to studios in the current market. Are there any niche skills or areas of expertise you'd recommend I focus on developing? Thanks again for sharing your perspectives.

A - Susan O'Neal: Hey there - this is a niche within a niche but I think the ideals of Biz Dev carry through - knowing your company's capabilities, knowing who their direct competition is, and bringing meaningful connections (already existing or perhaps brand new) is the way to succeed. Good luck!

Q - Why do we mostly see senior-level positions available, while opportunities for mid-level or junior artists seem so limited?

A - Debra Coleman: Hi, as a global marketplace, the more junior work is increasingly done in countries with lower labour costs. And, automation is also reducing this need a little too.

Q - Where do you see the geographics of VFX settle? The U.S seems to be losing out a lot, with Canada and Europe becoming the top dogs. Do you see that happening or will we eventually settle to a wide range of work across the world?

A - Debra Coleman: We'd need a crystal ball for that one! Global tax incentives have huge impact on where the work is awarded. There is certainly expertise in all of those areas - and others.

A - Andy Cochrane: I would add to this that subsidies and rebates are a never-ending process of new locations offering better or additional incentives so it will never settle in to a long-term situation, it will change every 6-12mos as the work moves to chase more money

Q - How do you deal with burnout when now having to shift your career? I've found that 20 years in the industry has exhausted me (as much as I love it and want to stay in it) now trying to figure out where my Compositing Supervisor skills can maybe shift to another industry I've already exhausted all my energy.

A - Andy Cochrane: Burnout is REAL. For me, I need to take some time away from the box and do something I want to do, which might be R&R or a personal project or something silly. I don't know if that works for you, but I think you might find joy in just trying something else for a minute. Try games, interactive, immersive, or a totally non-entertainment industry like automotive or medical or a startup etc.

A - Debra Coleman: If you're feeling burnt out you need to take care of your physical and mental health first and foremost. Rest, be healthy, do things that bring you joy, reset. And then it will be easier to find your way forwards.

Q - Do you see remote work becoming a norm across VFX, or are most studios once again pulling back on offering those options to their employees?

A - Debra Coleman: In my experience (UK based) the move is towards hybrid working. Most artists have a preference for working from home, however, spending time together in person is generally helpful for team building, knowledge sharing and even mental health - hence the preference/push for hybrid (2 days a week in the studio).

Q - Are there any roles or departments that tend to be more welcoming for career changers? I'm a Brazilian architect currently working on transitioning into the world of VFX/CGI

A - Debra Coleman: In my experience, VFX is welcoming across the board! I guess, most often, I've seen people transition into production or recruitment roles.

A - Andy Cochrane: we've definitely moved away from specialists towards generalists, so make sure that you work to cultivate skills in both 2D and 3D (and totally unrelated skills like photography etc.). Be flexible and being reliable (always deliver, never give up, never stop learning new things)

Q - what are some examples of immersive or interactive companies that I can look up and research? What about job examples?

A - Andy Cochrane: A lot of immersive and interactive looks like tech startups - small teams with some kind of seed funding building products and experiences to directly monetize. I would recommend starting to search for "XR", "VR", "AR", "immersive", "experience", on LinkedIn and start finding small early-stage companies that are building out IP or tech or both. I would cold email them and ask if they are looking to build out the 3D or 2D aspects of their team, I bet most of them will either say yes or realize that they should be doing that.

Q - Loving all this inspiring information. One direction which hasn't been mentioned is fashion and digital textile. Any insight on that?

A - Debra Coleman: Yes! That's an equally valid adjacent industry - certainly, cg artists are now working in this space: digi doubles for virtual runways, cg assets to demo products, fluid sims for cloth, etc.

A - Susan O'Neal: Lots of call for Marvelous designers!

Q - Any thoughts as to opportunities or stints for those that have been part of the production on set side of VFX, data wranglers, photographers, etc. those who aren't part of the "artist side" maya, compositors, etc.?

A - Andy Cochrane: In a weird way, those roles are the easiest to broaden into a wider career in Film/TV. I know a lot of folks that are able to fill many roles on set - VFX, gaffing, grip, camera, Production. It's about spending your time on set learning everything you can (while doing your VFX job obviously) and helping out how you can. Everyone is always looking for proactive go-getters who can fill many roles. Outside of entertainment there are a lot of industries that need people who can observe and gather data from a physical location. Architecture, construction, etc. have entire fields focused on LiDAR, photogrammetry, and other types of reality capture, and they make a lot more money per day than anyone in VFX :)

Q - Thank you for this panel! Andy had touched on the fact that soon/in the end, quality over cost/quantity will win out. Why is this notion even taking time? Why are studios/producers choosing low quality just now?

A - Debra Coleman: It's not that they're choosing low quality, it's that there's a push for "do more with less" as Laurence said. So, more of a "good enough for the budget/time" rather than prioritising quality above this. Basically, profit margins....

Q - A lot of talk on CG artist and software work. What would a good translation of the discourse be for on set, wiccam ops, coordinators, post coordinating? Thanks!

A - Susan O'Neal: This question was just touched upon - take a look at Andy's answer - In a weird way, those roles are the easiest to broaden into a wider career in Film/TV. I know a lot of folks that are able to fill many roles on set - VFX, gaffing, grip, camera, Production. It's about spending your time on set learning everything you can (while doing your VFX job obviously) and helping out how you can. Everyone is always looking for proactive go-getters who can fill many roles. Outside of entertainment there are a lot of industries that need people who can observe and gather data from a physical location. Architecture, construction, etc. have entire fields focused on LiDAR, photogrammetry, and other types of reality capture, and they make a lot more money per day than anyone in VFX :)

Q - Andy, where can I find people or companies who might need help from a 3D Generalist like me? Are there specific communities, platforms, or types of projects where our skills are especially in demand outside of traditional VFX studios?

A - Andy Cochrane: I answered a similar question from another attendee, will paste below but: meetups, meetups, meetups is my biggest advice. A lot of immersive and interactive looks like tech startups - small teams with some kind of seed funding building products and experiences to directly monetize. I would recommend starting to search for "XR", "VR", "AR", "immersive", "experience", on LinkedIn and start finding small early-stage companies that are building out IP or tech or both. I would cold email them and ask if they are looking to build out the 3D or 2D aspects of their team, I bet most of them will either say yes or realize that they should be doing that.

Q - Agism. "Senior artists" who are over 60 can't even get an interview.

A - Debra Coleman: It's such a challenging time, so it's about doing what you can to stand out. I wonder if there's a way to communicate how your experience is a strength?

Q - I'm at the end of a 30-year run with a small VFX Studio 1995-2025, this talk is extremely positive and helpful. This wealth of ideas on cross pollinating the VFX industry technical, artistic and project management skills is amazing. Are there any known job boards that attempt to aggregate these jobs to VFX professionals? It seems it would be very helpful for both the VFX professionals in this current state of the industry, but also these other adjacent industries that may struggle in their recruitment.
Thank you!

A - Andy Cochrane: I spend a lot of time on LinkedIn and IRL meetups and conferences, there are so many opportunities to meet people and make connections that can lead to jobs. I highly recommend starting to build a network in a tangential industry that interests you

Q - Aside from Unreal Engine & Houdini what other software that meets industry standards overlap between Gaming & Film?

A - Andy Cochrane: Touch Designer, Resolve, Pixera, Unity, Resolume, Notch

Q - What's a reasonable way for someone such as a compositor or 3D artist to rebrand their resumes to appeal to a broader market?

A - Susan O'Neal: Use the job description to reframe your own experience, being sure to utilize key words pertinent to the new job description - and if you have a friend who's moved on, contact them

Q - Is Shotgun relevant across industries?

A - Susan O'Neal: Sometimes - but people use other project management software so the skills could be portable to other industries, if that makes sense.

Q - Thank you Andy for that answer. For the 2nd part of my question any thoughts? Are there any existing known job boards that attempt to aggregate these industry adjacent jobs to VFX professionals? It seems it would be very helpful for both the VFX professionals, but also to these other adjacent industries that may struggle in their recruitment.
Susan O'Neal is going to answer this question live.

A - Andy: This was just addressed by Laurence - conferences, meetups, and online communities are more effective in finding new opportunities than job boards.

Q - Also, a VFX friendly piece of software that's an entry into AI/ML is ComfyUI

A - Debra Coleman: Thanks!