



» **FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT** Jane Probert, receptionist for Manchester law firm Ralli, says the role can be one of the most important in any business, because so much can depend on people's first impressions - and she wouldn't change her job for the world

Being the centre of all that goes on ...

Not the chief executive, but the receptionist fills this role, according to those who find it their wouldn't-change-it-for-the-world occupation, writes **Sheryl Moore**

FIRST impressions are crucial. And the role of the receptionist will create a lasting impression of any organisation. But the days of the receptionist sitting filing her nails all day have long gone. Today's receptionists have to be efficient and organised, as well as having excellent people skills.

Rachel Marten, 31, is the face of Fresh, a creative events and video specialist in Cheadle.

Rachel joined in July after working for nearly 10 years at Manchester advertising agency Cheetham Bell JWT. Before that, she worked at the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Rachel's responsibilities are wide and varied and include booking the company's internal travel requirements, sourcing suppliers and motivational

speakers for events; assisting with office activities such as furniture hiring and hotel bookings, and meeting and greeting clients.

She says: "The job is invariably fast-paced - you often have to do everything at once."

Rachel says that being a receptionist enables you to experience a little bit of everything, as people often come to you for assistance.

She says: "The role is so diverse that I've never wanted to move across to other positions. I prefer to be the front face of a company, interacting with everyone, and being at the centre of everything that goes on."

After covering for her colleagues on the reception desk while they were on lunch, Jane Probert, too, decided to make reception her career.

She has spent the last decade

as the receptionist at Manchester law firm Ralli and says it is the best job in the world.

She says: "I started out as an office junior at a law firm in Manchester city centre. During lunch breaks I used to cover the reception - and I took an instant liking to the role."

Jane says: "As well as greeting people, I also help project the personality of the firm on visitors. Organising meetings, booking diaries and ensuring clients are presented with the right legal advisers are other key tasks."

Jane believes that anyone who is thinking of becoming a receptionist in a business environment needs to radiate charm and be enthusiastic.

She says: "It's important to be able to deal with people professionally, calmly and confidently, whatever their status."

While Jane did not have any

formal training to get into the job, she has been on a number of courses that have helped her add more value to the business.

She says: "I'm always willing to learn new techniques and methods of dealing with clients and colleagues. In my opinion it's one of the most important positions in any business, because so much can be won or lost on first impressions. I wouldn't change my job for the world."

Employment experts says a receptionist must be able to stay helpful and cheerful to every single customer, employee and supplier, and be capable of multi-tasking.

Duties today include arranging appointments, managing and scheduling meetings, dealing with distribution and collection of mail, word processing and filing, as well as answering the phone and greet-

ing clients and customers. Many employers require GCSEs or equivalent, particularly in English and maths. Clerical, secretarial and IT skills would also be useful.

The majority of employers offer on the job training, and there are also a number of courses available to boost skills and enhance opportunities for career progression, including NVQ levels 1 to 4 in business and administration, and levels 1 to 3 in customer service.

For more information, contact the Council for Administration at www.cfa.uk.com, or call 020 7091 9620.

A trainee receptionist can expect to start on a salary of between £12,000 and £14,000 a year. With experience this can rise to between £17,000 and £24,000.