

# How to Make Money as an Online Freelancer



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## Introduction

There are quite a few ways to make money on the Internet, but most of the time, when you start thinking about the process, you only consider the affiliate marketing, product creation, and auction routes. What about finding honest, steady work that will help pay your bills, supplement your income, or even help you get out of that office job and into your own, work-at-home career?

The truth is that more people than ever are finding the Internet to be an ideal workplace—an opportunity to say “forget it” to the 9–5 grind and start working full-time for yourself. Freelancing is a common practice in countries around the globe. In the United States alone, more than 50 million people have been doing freelance work, a number that has massively increased over time. This is all thanks to the outreach made possible by the Internet.

Just think about it. Almost all content creation has gone digital in recent years. Even traditional media like newspapers, TV stations, and radio have turned to the Internet and the bevy of content that can be created by highly specialized providers.

That’s why, in a rapidly evolving economy, it’s very important to know exactly what options you have open to you. If you are a writer, a designer, or a programmer, or just really don’t enjoy your job and know you have creative skills you can offer online, the world of online freelancing may be for you.

I’ve contended for years that a college education, real-world work experience, and references are not necessary to start a career as an online freelancer. In fact, it just takes persistence and an understanding of the system. Once you can inject yourself into the perpetual system that requires so much content on a daily basis, you’ll find it increasingly easy to make money, pay your bills, and live your life free of the burden that a desk job can cause.

So keep reading, because you’re about to learn exactly what it takes to take your skills online and become a freelancer through the Internet.

## Your Skill Sets

Before you get started as a freelancer, you need to sit down and map out exactly what you have to offer potential clients. Too many people assume that it’s so simple to become a freelancer that they don’t need to have anything to offer up front.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t work like that. Business owners, Internet marketers, and the other people who are likely to hire you need to see that you not only have experience working on their type of project, but that you have *good* experience.

That’s where skill development and analysis comes in. If you don’t have a college degree or other advanced education, don’t worry—it’s not necessary to be

successful in this industry. It might help open a few doors early on, but realistically, it's not the end-all.

### **Make a List of Skills**

Start by making a list of each skill you currently possess that would be valuable to a business owner. Imagine someone was starting a website right now and needed a writer, designer, and programmer to put it all together. What aspects of their site could you complete at a high level of quality?

If you're having trouble thinking of what you're good at, go to Upwork or Guru and look through the listings of skills that their providers have. All three of these sites allow tagging for skill sets including knowledge, software use, and specific experience. Here are some examples:

- Article Writing
- Software Programming (C, C++, Java, Perl, .NET, ASP, etc.)
- Blogging (WordPress, posting, editing, commenting)
- Translation
- Creative Writing
- Technical Writing or Transcription
- Graphic Design
- Search Engine Marketing and Social Media (Google, Local Search, Facebook, Twitter)
- Data Entry and Desktop Publishing
- Administrative Assistance
- Financial and Legal (Copyrighting, Contracts, Litigation, Research, Consultation, CPA)

Pretty much any one of these skill sets can be outsourced over the Internet. Most of the examples in this book will fall into the Writing, Programming, and Designing categories, as these are most common, but if you have other skills to share, the strategies here will work equally as well in helping you get started.

### **Testing Skills**

While it is good to know what you have to offer, you should also make sure your perception of your abilities is the same as what someone else would see. That's where testing can come in handy. The major freelancing hubs all offer skill tests that allow you to check your knowledge and showcase the results of those tests to potential clients.

Before taking any tests, I recommend you research a bit more about the skill set. If you're testing yourself on a language that you know you're fluent in, that's one thing. But, if you're testing yourself on a software program that you've used a lot, but have never used in a business setting (Excel is a good example of this due to how complex it can be), you should get additional knowledge from outside sources.

Something as simple as spending the afternoon in a Barnes and Noble can be extremely helpful in developing a basic understanding and list of notes to reference when taking your tests. You generally get 30+ minutes to take any one skill test, so if you have notes or books on hand to supplement your knowledge, it is relatively easy to find the necessary answers and pass your test.

### **Gaining New Skills**

Finally, consider gaining new skills. While you may be a competent article writer with a lot of experience on the school newspaper, you should consider developing basic skills that will make you more desirable to online marketers. For example, most writing jobs online consist of keyword optimization. Keyword optimization is a relatively simple process of adding a phrase or multiple phrases to a body of text at a certain density. If you were writing a 500-word article about dog training and the client gave you the keyword phrase “border collie food bowl aggression” with a density of 3%, you’d need to include that phrase in the article three times.

Seems simple enough, right? Skills like this can make you much more desirable to potential clients, especially if you practice and develop a viable portfolio you can use to show off your skills. Again, go to Upwork and make a list of skills that are related to your main skills.

Then, start learning the basics that go into developing skills in those areas. As a writer, learn how to write blog posts, SEO articles, press releases, and short reports or user guides. As a programmer, make sure you can develop WordPress plugins and use the newest versions of HTML and CSS. If you’re a designer, be sure you know how to develop HTML-friendly graphics, mini-site designs, and high-resolution files. You may not need all of these skills for any one project, but you’ll certainly benefit if you have them.

### **Before You Get Started**

When it comes to making a living on the Internet, keep in mind that this is not just another job. You’re not about to have a boss who will dump things on you that you must muddle through by the end of the week. When you work for yourself, you must become your own boss.

Before you even take on your first project, change your schedule. If you’re still working at your current job, set aside hours after work or on the weekend and stick to that schedule. If you’re unemployed, work on your freelancing the same way you would a normal job—from 9–5 (or whatever works best for you).

When you procrastinate as a freelancer, you don’t just upset your boss or bring the company’s bottom line down—you fail to pay your own bills. The rewards are many, but the stakes are significantly higher as a result.

## Getting Started

With a clear idea of where your skills lie and what you'll be working on, it's time to get started in the business. Luckily for you, a few million other freelancers have come before you and paved a clear and easy path to making a tidy little income. But, without a good plan, all the tools and resources out there can make it very complicated.

So, before you take on jobs and start worrying about how much money you'll make, we're going to get some housekeeping out of the way.

### Building a Portfolio

As with any career, you need to have a background that tells potential clients you're capable of completing the work they set before you. If you've never done anything professionally before, it can be pretty hard to make a name for yourself. And even if you have worked professionally, most clients will look on published work or school papers with trepidation. Not only are those pieces done with greater timeframes and less stress, they tend to breed an expectation of higher pay than most of this content will award.

While there is certainly a market out there for writers and designers who want to make \$100 an hour, you have to start somewhere, and most marketers and business owners need to keep costs down. Fortunately, most of what you're writing will be written on a much smaller scale and at higher speeds. If you're lucky, you'll be able to complete as many as 4+ articles an hour to make up for the lower pay you get per article.

Don't worry—these rates will increase later. But, as you get started, don't expect a fortune to fall in your lap. You need to develop a portfolio of the work that your clients will be asking for. Essays, poems, art contests, and hobby blogs are all fine and good—but what clients really want is to see that you can take on their projects with specific expertise. Here are some tips on getting that experience:

- **Practice on Low-Stress Jobs** – It's much easier to start with projects where you're already familiar with the topic or style that's being asked for. If you're a writer, look for jobs where you're familiar with the topic you'll be writing about. It'll also be easier to convince them that you're the freelancer for the job, compared to someone without an interest in the area. If you're familiar with any specific businesses or companies, see if they'd like any writing done. You can offer a low-cost option for them, and use this to build your portfolio.

If you're a designer, consider working with a friend or developing sites as a hobby. Programmers can often find open-source jobs to work on or plugins to develop in their spare time. Apps for the iPhone or iPad are also simple, high-profile ways to build a portfolio.

- **Separate Your Samples** – Avoid posting links to your content unless it's on a standalone website and you have permission to post it. Instead, separate the content into its own sample file or folder and upload it to your profile or website.
- **Give Away Samples** – Sites like Upwork often frown on giving away free samples of your work, but if you're working on other sites or your own website, consider handing out samples to anyone who might be interested. This will help develop your reputation.
- **Accept Very Low Pay** – Along the same lines, when using the freelancing sites, you can work for peanuts on a handful of jobs to help build your portfolio. I've seen beginning writers work for \$4–5 an article to get a couple good reviews and work their way up from there. I recommend not going any lower than that if you can help it. Some people are not willing to pay for what they get, and usually, extremely low-paying clients have high expectations.
- **Practice on Your Own** – Finally, you can just create content for yourself and hold it over. If you know you like to write about dog training or develop content for WordPress installations, do a handful of them on your own time and have them ready to hand out as samples. Knowing what you'll most likely bid on will help you develop the content samples you need to get those jobs.

Eventually, you will want a portfolio consisting of 2–3 samples from every potential niche you would ever work in. This will allow you to attach relevant samples to every bid you place. Writers I know have between 200 and 400 sample articles in folders, separated by topic and ready to distribute when bidding. Start building that now and you'll have a massive pool of content to draw on when you start bidding on high-paying jobs.

### **Creating Accounts on Freelancing Sites**

The next step is to create your profiles on major freelancing sites. There are a few ways to go about this. For many freelancers, a single site will eventually stand out as the best option—the one with the most jobs and the highest-paying contracts. However, when you get started, I recommend putting yourself out there in as many venues as possible. The more potential projects you have to bid on, the better your chances are for landing jobs.

### **The Dedicated Freelancing Sites**

There are four major freelancing sites, in my opinion. In reality, there are dozens of them, but these four sites make up a majority of the online freelancing business—with accounts on these sites, you can be sure to find a large chunk of projects at any given time.

## **Upwork**

For a long time, if an aspiring freelancer came to me like you have, I'd recommend Upwork. When other sites were still trying to figure it all out, Upwork (formerly known as Elance) was developing a network of thousands of freelancers and clients.

Upwork operates by charging you a percentage of the final project cost. This starts at 20%, but if you have an ongoing work relationship with a client, this can get as low as 5%. For that money, though, Upwork provides seamless escrow services, dispute resolution and arbitration and a fairly decent set of tools for project management.

If you plan on getting started with Upwork, you will almost always have to provide low-cost projects for a short while to build up a reputation. Most bids are predicated on experience and the percentage of job success freelancers have. Also, make sure to add any credentials to your profile if you have them. Credentials include college degrees, certifications, and references.

The majority of clients on this site will expect hourly rates, though you can bid on fixed-rate projects. Stay clear of hourly rates for anything that doesn't make sense hourly. Writing, design work, and small coding projects should probably be done at a fixed rate. Many freelancers in these fields find they get paid less for hourly work.

That said, Upwork has a fantastic project management system and a massive database of projects. Major companies and small businesses alike are using it these days to generate new content and it's received a lot of attention. Every freelancer should at least have an Upwork profile.

## **Freelancer**

This site can also be used for programming, design, writing, and marketing work, among other things. If you are a programmer, you will find a tremendous volume of work here, as this site absorbed the former king of sites for freelance programmers, RentACoder. Freelancer.com is getting a lot of positive feedback from users, so it's well worth checking out if you're looking to go beyond Upwork.

## **Guru**

Guru.com is another option for you finding freelance work. There are similar messaging systems to what you'll find on other platforms, and plenty of opportunities to build relationships with clients. Guru is generally for long-term freelancers and employers, as it can take a bit of time to learn how to find the best working relationships on this platform.

As with any freelancing site, beware of less than desirable clients. Filter out jobs that look too good to be true, or ones that are entirely unreasonable, and start with small jobs where possible to test the waters with a client. It's always good to make sure you're a good fit before moving on to bigger jobs!

## **Other Sites for Finding Work**

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At least one writer I know didn't start using the major freelancing sites until he was making a steady income from other sources—and there are plenty of other sources out there. Forums, classifieds, and your own website can all be good places to develop relationships with clients and start earning big money.

When using these sites, remember to have a verified PayPal account set up and always request a deposit or upfront payment. Because you don't have the benefit of escrow and dispute resolution, you need to protect yourself. Ask for a work-for-hire contract when possible and if you take on a large project, make sure to get at least 50% up front. Most clients will understand your hesitance to work on good faith. If they do not, let them go. It may hurt to lose a job, but not as much as if you didn't get paid for all that hard work.

**Forums** – If you want to try the “free trial” method of getting work, check out sites like DigitalPoint and WarriorForum. Once you've established a few posts on the sites, you can place classified listings on their “for hire” forums. It costs money on WarriorForum for each bump of your post, so beware of the added costs. But, if you offer one free article or small graphic to start, you'll be surprised by how many people take you up on it and then come back for more. Just beware of how savvy and cutthroat some of the marketers on these sites can be. Veterans know exactly what they want and what they should have to pay.

**Craigslist** – There are always small postings for work on Craigslist. Generally, work on Craigslist will be less structured than what you'd find on major freelancing sites, but you can sometimes find large-scale, long-term projects here. Avoid anything that pays by results or wants samples. Also, be aware that there are hundreds of people responding to these posts on any given day.

**Your Own Website** – Eventually, you should build a website and market it freely to get more job opportunities. A simple WordPress blog is plenty to draw attention, but make sure to have contact information and rates for your work posted. That site will ideally become a primary source of work for you in the future—allowing you to gain new clients without running around looking for work.

### **Setting Your Rates**

While your early jobs will generally be gained by bidding less than your competition and showing off a handful of small samples you've developed, eventually you'll want to move up to larger jobs. This is when people will start raising their rates and it needs to be done carefully.

I always recommend that writers start at no less than \$0.01/word when they get started and that they move up from there quickly. For graphic designers, work for no less than \$20 per graphic, and for programmers, no less than \$15/hour. Designers and programmers will have an especially hard time raising their rates due to the large amount of overseas contractors willing to work for next to nothing. Eventually, you will need to develop a selling point that can convince people you're worth it, so

keep open your lines of communication and always be as helpful as possible for your clients.

As you start to take on more projects and build a reputation on these sites, you'll need to increase your rates to match the quality you are delivering.

This can be hard. First, you need to be okay with losing existing clients. Expect that the client paying you \$5 for 500-word articles will not gladly pay you \$10 instead just because you feel it is time to increase your rates. This is where you need to trust in yourself; be willing to compromise only when it's necessary to pay your bills.

I recommend you start bidding on projects with higher rates first, looking for work that pays higher. Once you start to get more projects, let your existing clients know that the rates will be increasing soon. By giving them time to react, they can either find a new freelancer or adjust their budget and stick with you (if they feel your quality is worth the extra pay).

This is a double-edged sword in many ways. First, you should know what you're worth. If you write quality articles with few errors and solid returns on investment, you are worth more than \$1 for 100 words. However, don't expect that any of your clients are so enamored with your work that they won't go anywhere when you raise your rates. If they were paying you that little to start with, it was probably for a reason.

Raising your rates is hard—it's one of the most uncomfortable things you'll ever have to do because no one wants you to do it. However, be realistic about what you're worth (check other providers in your category to see what they bid on projects to get an idea) and ask for fair compensation.

### **Always Focus On the Future**

Finally, I want to say this—always work toward goals that will make your business more successful. So many freelancers spend 105% of their time looking for more work and almost no time improving themselves, learning new things, writing new blogs, creating products they can sell, etc.

Your goal as a freelancer is to become an independent, work-at-home success story. So, stop wasting time on things that you think you have to do and start focusing on the projects that will actually make you a profit and help you live your life as a freelancer more successfully. I won't go into the ins and outs of Internet marketing here or how to develop your blog to boost your reputation, but you should always have something to work on that helps develop your skills and expertise in your field.

## Getting Jobs

Now that you've established some of the basics that are necessary to get started as a freelancer, it's time to land some jobs and make some money. For a lot of freelancers, this is tough. How do you convince people that you're not only qualified but *uniquely* qualified for their job?

It takes practice—something you'll get quite a bit of when you spend 25% of the week in those first crucial months just looking for new projects. Later on, if you're good at what you do, you'll never need to look for work. An occasional search might yield some interesting propositions, but mostly you'll get repeat clients and ongoing projects—allowing you to focus more intently on growing your business and your side projects.

### What People Are Looking For

Before you get started, you should know who your potential clients are. Every client is unique in his or her own way, but they all have certain expectations from you in terms of what you'll provide. You can learn a lot about them from the job descriptions they post, and even more by the way they interact with you on the message boards.

- **Searching for Projects** – When you search for projects on the freelancing sites, always check for key indicators of what your client might expect of you. Review their timeline, their budgetary limits, the feedback they seek and whatever other requirements they have. Keep in mind that you can convince many people to go above and beyond the budget they've set, but rarely can you convince them to accept someone with lower feedback or a longer timeline. The cost of a project is directly related to the quality of the finished product, so if you can convince them that you provide highly valuable content, they'll often accept the higher cost.
- **Other Bids** – Most sites don't allow you to see the other bids on a project. However, you can see the average bid on some sites by mousing over the project and budget in the search interface. You can then see the maximum, minimum, and average bids and adjust yours accordingly. Only do this if there are a lot of bids on a project, though. Ideally, you should be able to sell yourself and your rates regardless of what other people bid.
- **History** – Check the feedback history of any potential clients. I try to avoid anyone who has no history at all, as they tend to be flaky and rarely have a good idea of how these sites work or what to expect from you. You'll spend more time explaining escrow and freelancing than you will actually working. Also avoid anyone who has repeated negative comments for unrealistic expectations or rudeness. Eventually, as you grow, you may need to take on such clients, but as a new freelancer trying to build your confidence, try to find people who will offer constructive criticism and be realistic about what you can

offer.

- **Communication and Details** – Always review communications methods that are offered by a potential client. If they don't offer enough ways to contact them, you may need to ask for it later on. You'll want to get immediate feedback whenever you have a question or need a review of your work.

A good client is just as important as a good job. Not only do they make it easier to go above and beyond in what you produce, they will appreciate your talents and often hire you again in the future for ongoing work. Nothing is more valuable than a recurring client, as they cut out the time needed to find new projects and generate new work.

### **Writing Bids**

The bids you write will be the foundation of your new freelance business. A good bid can make all the difference between snagging a project and constantly sifting through low-pay, uninteresting jobs that no one else will bid on. Here are some important tips to help you generate the best bids and draw the most attention.

### **Projects You're Interested In**

First, whenever you do a search for new projects, always start with ones you have a special interest in. Most people will spend a lot more time on these bids—providing significantly more information and better-edited reasons for the client to hire them. You'll want to maintain that level of quality with all your bids, so priming yourself with the projects you really want is a good idea.

### **Tracking Your Success**

I had an acquaintance who was trying to determine what worked in their bids and what didn't. The problem was that he never recorded any of his data. How can you know which types of bids work when you don't take notes on the ones that are successful? Just like any other subjective activity, you need to record data to get an idea of what works and what doesn't.

Keep a notepad or a Word document on your computer and record all the jobs you receive a message about. Mark any of those projects that you are actually awarded, but record every project someone asks for more information on or says you're in the running for. If your bid caught their interest in any way, you want to keep track of it.

With that data in hand, start looking at any factors that are consistent in all of your successful bids. For example, if you find that all of your winning bids tend to be longer, with three or more paragraphs, start extending your bids. There are quite a few rules to follow that we'll get to, but by recording data, you can test different methods in all your future bids.

## Setting a Quota

Unless you have so much work you can't get any sleep, set a weekly quota and bid constantly. Too many times, freelancers start riding those peaks and valleys of work and end up in valleys too often because they are not working on replenishing their work stash. The key is to be realistic about timeframes.

For example, if you currently have three projects that you'll finish within the next 10 days, don't wait until those 10 days are up to bid on new projects. It can take anywhere from 2–7 days for someone to determine who to hire when all the bids come in. Some projects are never awarded, and you should never assume you'll get any of them, no matter how good your bids get.

If you bid with only five days left, though, the longest you'll have to wait for decisions is five days. And rather than overlapping work, just offer a slightly longer timeframe. You can even say something to the tune of "I'm currently finishing two projects and will be available to start on April 30<sup>th</sup>." This way, they know when you can start and how long it will take from that exact date.

The important thing here is to keep bidding every week and to never let your workload run down to zero. You will have valleys in your work, but our goal is to reduce those as much as possible. Later, when you have repeat clients, you should be able to remove as many of those valleys as possible, but for now, you need to do a little juggling.

## Don't Use "Canned" Bids

I cannot emphasize this enough. Do NOT write canned bids. You're severely underestimating the intelligence of the client if you try to copy and paste a bid that has no specific information about their project. Always mention at least two facts about the project, even if the project's description is something as simple as "I need 30 articles" with no other details.

I've seen writers and designers increase their bid response rate by as much as 30%—on average—by simply writing original bids for every project they bid on. That's a LOT more responses just for taking a few minutes to write out a response.

## The Bid Itself

A good bid will depend almost entirely on the project you're bidding on. I find that short bids work well in some cases, and long bids are practically required in other cases. To start with, you should always read the project description carefully. Even if it's a small thesis and you're trying to bid on 20 projects at a time, take the time to read it out.

You may find something in there that removes you from the running (low budgets, geography, and specific experience can all do this). But, more importantly, you'll learn about the project and the client and can cater the tone of your bid to their needs.

If they are very short and to the point, keep your bid short—they're probably in a hurry and don't want to read 1,000 words about how awesome you are. If they are quippy and funny and ask you for creativity in your product, be funny and creative in your bid. Even if you're not a writer, you can relax a bit and keep it straightforward.

Here are some more tips on how your bid should be written:

- **Professional** – Every bid needs to be written as professionally as possible. This is not an email to your cousin Jimmy. It's a bid for a project. Treat it like a job interview. Would you show up for an interview in shorts and a tank top? Then don't write a shoddy bid. Proofread every bid, especially if you are a writer.
- **Short Bids** – For short bids, make sure to touch on every important piece of information. The three vital pieces you should hit on are timeframe, cost, and experience. Attach samples directly to the bid, even if you have a portfolio. People in a hurry will rarely go to the portfolio unless you're extremely enticing.
- **Long Bids** – For long bids, I like to use at least three paragraphs. Paragraph one should introduce yourself and your expertise in the niche. Don't just say "I've been doing this for five years." Say how you are suited for their project, when you worked on similar content, and how you did. In the second paragraph, outline your work process. For large projects like eBooks or website development where budgets are large, outline the milestones you will use, the timeframe for each, and how you handle editing and revising. This shows that you are organized and responsible. Finally, for the third paragraph, get to the details. Tell the client how much and how long, and show samples. I recommend following this format with any project of more than \$400. Unless you already know the client or suspect he or she is in a hurry, the more specific details you can offer the better.
- **Offering Advice (When to Do It)** – Every now and then you'll run across a project where the client is just learning how to use the Internet or has not yet built a website before. In these instances, you can clinch a job by offering simple advice or detailed outlines of how you work. When someone is new to the Internet, they cling to any help they can get. If you can not only write their articles but give them advice on how to format them, where to post them, and how often to post them as well, they will usually pay you as much as double what another writer would ask for. Do NOT, however, offer advice to anyone who has more than three projects on the site and who clearly understands what he or she is doing. These clients know their business and want someone who will follow directions, not rock the boat.
- **Confidence without Arrogance** – Like in a job interview, a bid is your chance to show off a little bit and tell the client how you're perfectly suited to their project. However, steer clear of the arrogance trap. Too often, I've seen bidders talk negatively about other providers, making wild boasts that cannot be true, and generally coming off a bit full of themselves. If you really want to

write bids like this, use humor to do it. And even then, be especially careful. This is still a professional forum.

- **Specific Examples and Knowledge Demonstration** – Always offer very specific examples and ways to demonstrate the knowledge you claim to have. If you're bidding on 25 articles about dog training, discuss other articles you've written about dogs, books you've read, or the dog you own and have trained according to Dr. XYZ. This does two things at once. It shows how you're qualified, and it assures the client that it is not a canned bid.
- **Asking Questions** – If you have questions, ask them. Just make sure they're real questions, not just an excuse to contact someone on the message board. On sites like Upwork, though, sending message board posts is a fantastic way to get attention. Most clients have message board posts directly forwarded to their inboxes while new bids are just left to be reviewed later.

How you write your bids will have a tremendous impact on how effective your business is in the long run. Keep track of what you do right, adjust constantly and hopefully you'll eventually master the process.

### **Managing Projects**

One of the immediate and obvious benefits of working on a site like Upwork is that the site will keep track of and manage your projects. Odesk in particular is a very good site for tracking progress easily and updating your clients. However, as you start to develop a larger list of projects and start getting them on multiple sites, you'll need to make adjustments to how you track things.

1. **Create a Spreadsheet** – Have an Excel spreadsheet with every project you get listed on it. This list should include the client, the project, the cost, the due date, and any fees associated with the project. You can easily keep track of your current income this way—an extremely valuable tool when tax time comes.
2. **Create a Schedule or Calendar** – Some writers I know use a simple Word document with dates and tasks listed while others will use a calendar like Google Calendars or Outlook to keep track of their projects. I recommend you break down specific tasks by day and time. Even when you only have two or three projects early on, this is a great habit to get into.
3. **Update Your Data Daily** – Don't just check and update your schedule and spreadsheet on the weekend or after a project is awarded. Check it once a day and make any necessary adjustments. If edits or a new project on a short timeline come up, you need to be able to find time for them immediately.

4. **Use and Follow Milestones** – Every project you start should have specific, well-structured milestones that you can realistically meet. I cannot stress this enough. If you do not meet deadlines and milestones, you will not last long in this business. You HAVE to be on schedule. Not only do punctual freelancers get more work from happy clients, they can map out their schedule and ensure their income remains steady at all times. If you cannot meet your deadlines, reassess how you're planning your work.
5. **Make Some Friends** – Freelancing is a very solitary career option. However, it can be very rewarding if you make a few friends in your area on whom you can rely when things get too busy or too slow. Find someone you can hand excess work to or get excess work from and you can make sure nothing ever gets too unbearable.

In addition to handling the work schedule itself, you should take time to learn how to handle the actual clients. Every client is different in what they want and need from their contractors. Keep a close eye on those needs and you'll do very well. Here are some tips:

1. **Track Communications** – In your calendar and schedule, make notes of when you need to write your clients and what you need to say. It is very easy to forget that you need to write someone next Tuesday to check in about a new project. If you write it down, you'll get a happy reminder on Tuesday morning to get it done.
2. **Respond Immediately** – If you get an email, respond to it right away. I like to check my own email three times a day. It may not be the most efficient way of doing things, but having those constant, immediate lines of communication ensures things keep moving smoothly at all times.
3. **Send In Samples** – Don't try to complete an entire project all at once before sending anything to a client. If you have 20 articles, send in the first four on day one so you can receive feedback. Would you rather need to edit four articles or all 20 with no time left on the project?
4. **Prioritize** – If you have a small project due in two days, just get it out of the way. Clients with eBooks, full websites, or \$1,000 design projects are generally more patient, despite the larger budgets. Small projects tend to be immediate and should be completed first. This is not always the case, so use your best judgement, but it often is. Ideally, this will rarely come up, as you should never double-book projects. We all know it will eventually, though, so be ready when it does.

Clients are your bread and butter. If someone needs something, give it to them. Don't argue with them, don't ignore them, and never, EVER, get rude with them,



even if they are rude with you. Unless you're comfortable cutting ties with that client forever and getting potentially negative feedback, tread carefully.

## Growing as a Business

For this final section, I just want to go over a few simple things you'll need to maintain your newfound career as a freelancer. Too many freelancers get stuck in ruts or fail to map out a clear plan for their future because they see what they're doing as a job, rather than a business. But, face it—you're about to become a business owner and all good business owners need to have a plan.

- **Reaching Your Threshold** – Always be aware of what your threshold is. Eventually, when your work speed levels out, your rates stabilize and you have work every week, you'll find out exactly how much money you can make in a standard week. Is it enough? If not, keep planning ways to make more money and grow your business.
- **Taking on New Project Types** – If you've only ever written SEO articles, consider expanding what you do to include eBooks or blog posts. No matter what kind of freelance work you do, there are always options available for generating more work and making more money. Plus, it keeps you from getting bored with the same old work. Diversify constantly. The more things you can become an expert in, the more successful you'll be.
- **Developing Long-term Goals and Strategies** – Always have a list of goals that you can work toward. A freelancer without goals is in a dead-end job, even if he is his own boss. I like to have both short-term goals (3–6 months) and long-term goals (1–5 years). Re-evaluate what your goals are every month or so and keep track of your progress to see if you're getting close to reaching them. Along the same lines, make sure your goals are realistic. If your goal is to make \$100,000 a year in your first year, you might be pushing it a bit. If your goal is to be financially independent in the first three years, that's probably more realistic. Knowing your threshold can also help you set goals as you try to expand and develop that threshold.
- **Creating a Legal Business** – Eventually, you may need to create a legal business entity to protect your personal assets, look more professional to potential clients, and present a brand that can be recognized easily. At first, a simple Sole Proprietorship will do well for you, but eventually you'll want to consider a limited liability company (LLC), a business structure that protects your assets like a corporation, but taxes you like a Sole Proprietorship.
- **Hiring Other Freelancers** – If you reach the point where you can no longer complete all of your work on time or would like to make more time for other

projects, you may consider outsourcing some of your work to other freelancers. Sounds like a big step? It's not. In reality, it takes only a few seconds and will free you up in a number of ways. It is also the fastest and easiest way to grow your business and guarantee ongoing income.

- **Taxes and Record Keeping** – Ah, taxes. Don't be like 90% of the freelancers out there and forget to take care of your taxes before you reach April 15<sup>th</sup> next year. Yes, you do still need to pay taxes, and yes, the IRS has many ways of finding out if you're not paying those taxes. Most of your US clients will file 1099 forms to show the income you made from them. The IRS then knows that you have income they can tax. Upwork will generally file these 1099s automatically for clients, making it very likely they get sent in.

To manage your taxes, keep close track of every project you complete, and set aside at least 25% of your income throughout the year. Because you're not employed, you will be taxed double what you normally pay for social security and Medicare. This is called Self Employment Tax and is around 15% (an employer pays half of this normally, so without an employer, it's up to you to pay all of it). Pay your taxes quarterly, in April, June, September, and January, and keep track of all business expenses if you can. If possible, hire an accountant to help with your taxes. But, even if you cannot, having good records and keeping track of everything you make will go a long way toward avoiding any audits.

As a freelancer, your career path has been set before you. Whether you wander toward Internet marketing or decide you rather enjoy content production, you should always be working toward something bigger and better. The ability to start your own career path and generate work is tremendous—something many freelancers ultimately fail at. Be proud of that and tap into it—you will ultimately go very far if you do.

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