

So You Want to be a Freelancer? Here's How!

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By Vishal P. Rao

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Not that long ago, freelancing was something people did mainly in larger metropolitan areas where work for writers, artists, and other creative types was plentiful and easily accessible. Today, however, the freelance landscape has dramatically changed.

For one, you can live practically anywhere in the world and still be able to maintain a successful freelance career. Not to mention that the creative fields aren't the only areas where freelancing is popular any more.

Today, accountants, trainers, computer technicians, etc. are all able to earn a living as freelancers. Regardless of the freelancing field you are interested in, there are some important things you should know that will help you get started and get successful.

Before we discuss those, however, we need to talk briefly about the pros and the cons of being a freelancer. You need to know both sides before you make your decision so you truly understand what you're getting into.

Freelancer Pros

1. You set your own schedule

As a freelancer, you get to determine what time you get out of bed and what time you turn in at night. You get to decide how much vacation time you can afford to take this year and you can elect to skip work one afternoon to spend time with your children.

2. You don't work for a boss

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Even though you are answerable to your clients, they don't wield the same power over your life that a boss does. Yes, they can fire you, but you can also quit working for them if things get too difficult.

3. You determine how much you earn

While a conventional job pays a set amount of money regardless of how hard you work (and in some cases how long you work), freelancing allows you to make practically any amount of money that you wish because you determine how much your services cost and how many jobs you take on at one time.

4. You are able to work from your own office

Whether you prefer working in a home office or renting space somewhere to do your business, you are in charge of designing and maintaining your own comfortable office. You get to pick the people you work with. You get to pick the type of computer, post-it notes, and bottled water that you use on a daily

basis also.

Freelancers Cons

1. You can become overworked quickly

When you start working steadily as a freelancer, it becomes nearly impossible for you to truly take a vacation. You have projects and clients that need your constant attention, so being gone or getting sick even for a day can put you behind schedule.

2. You have to deal with clients who can be more difficult than bosses

Most of the clients freelancers work with are genuinely good people, but there are others out there that are not. Every freelancer has probably been ripped off by a client at one time or another, even if they take steps to protect themselves.

3. You don't have a steady income

Unless you have one or two truly constant streams of work, you can expect your income to fluctuate dramatically. Some months you may feel like you struck the lottery while others may make you think you're heading for the food stamp line, especially when you are starting out.

4. You don't have a way to separate work from home life

If you have a home office, you may find it difficult to recognize the difference between being at home and being at work which means that while your watching television or eating dinner you may begin to feel like you're actually still on the job.

As you can see, each positive has a negative aspect as well. However, many of these negatives can

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be easily handled once you have experience as a freelancer, but to get to that point, you need to know how to get started.

Find Something You Enjoy Doing

This is critical to your success. If you don't already have something in mind to do as a freelancer, you need to be sure that you pick an activity that you truly love. Remember, you will be doing this type of work every day. Also, the more you enjoy your work, the more passionate you are about it. Potential clients will spot that passion and will be more inclined to work with you.

Save Some Money

Most freelancers actually start out as conventional 9–5 workers. In fact, many of them maintain their full–time jobs in addition to their freelance work for the sake of a stable income, health insurance, or other benefits. If you choose to go freelance full–time, however, you need to be sure to have a comfortable nest egg in the bank. Most experts agree that you should have enough money in your savings to cover six months worth of your basic necessities. If that sounds impossible, then try juggling some freelance work with your regular job for awhile. Save up all of the money you earn from your freelance work and use that as your nest egg.

Start Finding Clients Today

One mistake that freelancers often make is that think they can only start networking and marketing their services after they've gotten started. The truth is that if you're considering becoming a freelancer, now is the time to start networking and marketing. Let people know that you are thinking about going solo and get their reactions. Start building a database of possible job leads. In fact, you may want to line up some work beforehand so you can be sure of having an income initially.

Be Prepared

Most potential clients will want to see references and/or samples of your work before they give you a project. You need to have these prepared in advance. Don't wait until someone calls to possibly offer you a project to get your portfolio in order or to line up some qualified references. Have those ready to dispatch as soon as you get off the phone or finish the email.

Find an Accountant

The most difficult part of freelancing can be the handling the financial aspects: tracking invoices, staying on top of bills, figuring your yearly taxes, etc. Unless you are already skilled in accounting, you need to find someone to help you out with this from the beginning. It makes it much simpler for you and for the accountant.

Start a Web Site

Use the Internet to your advantage. Create a professional–looking but simple web site advertising your

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experience and your services, then place it on the Internet. It's one of the best ways of attracting new clients.

These suggestions will help you start your freelancing career on the right foot, but the most important key to your success will be your perseverance. If you give up easily or don't follow through with things, you may never truly make it as a freelancer. You must be able to take rejection. You must be self-motivated, and you must be persistent. Only then will you be able to experience firsthand all of the benefits of being a modern freelancer.

Useful sites:

<http://www.elance.com/>

<http://www.guru.com/>

<http://www.allfreelance.com/>

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The Free Agency Revolution

By Janet Ilacqua

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"I am as cool – or uncool – as my project. Period. My projects are my life. My projects are my legacy. Period."

Tom Peters, Author of the Project 50

What is a Free Agent?

Anyone who defines themselves as self-employed, freelancer, temp, home-based businessperson, independent contractor, solo practitioner, and operator of a micro-business (that is, a business employing less than 3) is considered to be a Free Agent. Today, there are approximately 33 million Free Agents across North America, which represents approximately one in every five people in the workforce.

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Freelancers vs. independent contractors vs. temp

Quite simply, a freelancer is an independent contractor who earns his or her living by contracting for projects on a project by project basis. A freelancer is not an employee of anyone and so he or she must actively seek out work, negotiate the terms and conditions of the project (the contract) and complete the work to the satisfaction of the client. Once the project is complete, the freelancer seeks out and enters into another contract for another project. A freelancer becomes a microbusiness when they obtain a business license. Independent contractor is a legal term for a freelancer. The importance is that independent contractors are covered by different labors than regular employees. Consultant, often a euphemism for unemployed white-collar worker, is now a common label for independent workers.

Freelancers are not exactly a twenty-first century innovations. Writers, artists, and photographers gave worked this way for decades. And both the idea of freelancing and the term itself are even older, dating back to the Middle Ages and the bands of Italian and French mercenaries who roamed Europe looking for a war. These so-called free companions would fight for any sovereign and march under any banner if the price is right. When this notion migrated to England, some British subjects began calling these rent-a-knights "free-lances." They weren't free of charge, just free of loyalty

On the other hand, temporary agencies hire the temporary worker and then sell the worker's services to an employer. So the "temp" worker receives their paycheck from the agency. Typically, employers may offer the temporary worker a permanent job, but terms and conditions apply that usually cost the employer an additional fee. This raises your cost of hire, but it gives both you and the employer an opportunity to "try before you buy" – testing the relationship and the job fit. Temporary workers, since they are employed by the agency, are not independent contractors. There are high-end temps, like 5000-a-day CEOs; however, many temporaries are not so lucky. They work for meager pay and no benefits. Temporary workers, since they have little control over the conditions of their work, tend to be the most dissatisfied member of the workforce. According to one economist's survey, only 27 percent of temporaries are happy with their present situation. (Sharon R. Conahy, "Workers in Alternative Economy" Monthly Labor Review (October 1, 1996))

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Today, accountants, trainers, computer technicians, etc. are all able to earn a living as freelancers. Regardless of the freelancing field you are interested in, there are some important things you should know that will help you get started and get successful. In addition, most importantly, freelancing is no longer considered something that you did when you could not find a real job, but rather as a viable career option. Check the Internet about getting started as a freelancer and also get involved in online forums. Of course, always double-check any information you get. Many unscrupulous people out there will promise you instant freelance success if you buy their products. Just remember that the road to freelance success will never be easy, but takes a lot of hard work and patience. Eventually, if you produce good work and market yourself incessantly, you will, with a bit of luck, find yourself on the path

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to being a successful freelancer.

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