

How to Kick-start your Freelance Career



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Introduction

I can still remember working as the deputy editor on a fantastic business publication, flying out to France one minute, then Milan the next – all for business. Then one day it dawned on me that I had no consumer publication experience – I was desperate to get a taste of working on the women's glossy magazines, so that my portfolio would be complete. The truth was that I thought it might be a little more glamorous than writing about boilers or builders' merchants.

One day, I decided to go freelance – I had managed to secure two weeks worth of freelance work, and at that stage, having no children, just a husband and rent to pay, it seemed like one of those 'now or never' moments in my life.

I spruced up my CV, revamped my wardrobe and was enjoying freelance life. It was one of the most enjoyable times of my life. Feeling needed – a frantic editor would call or email to ask if I could come in at short notice, or if I could cover for a two-week holiday etc. it was fantastic – the feeling that I could work wherever I wanted, not being tied down to any particular desk, or working with people who annoyed me.

And I earned and saved so much more money – freelance rates are usually a lot higher than what is paid to an employee because, of course, the company does not have to pay for their holidays, sickness etc, so if you plan your finances properly you can actually make a tidy sum.

These days, one of the best ways for you to start earning money online is by freelancing. It allows you to leverage your current skills and use them in order to earn. You probably already have skills that you can get freelance work with, whether they are your skills from your job or the skills you have learnt whilst Internet marketing.

Online businesses are always looking for people to do work for them, whether it is graphics design, article writing or even directory submissions or something similar.

It doesn't matter whether you don't have any specific skills, you can still do some work as a freelancer and start earning.

The nice thing about freelancing is that you don't need to have any money in order to earn money. You can start freelancing with no money down.

Many freelance consultants do start their career freelancing and then use the earnings from that to finance their online empire. It's a great way to start. One of the most important things for online success is to start seeing results. The quicker you see results from your online business the more motivated you are going to be to make it work.

You are going to learn about the tools you need to succeed as a freelancer. You are also going to learn what skills you have and how you can use these to earn money as a freelancer. And if you are worrying that you aren't an expert in any particular subject, don't. There are plenty of unskilled jobs out there you could do whilst you are training yourself up on other skills.

You will also learn how much you can expect to get paid and what it will be like competing in the global marketplace. We will walk you through some sites where you can advertise your services and find work. Some of these are free and good for you to start off with. Others may cost you money and require a credit card but will give you access to a much wider job market.

We'll look at the offline consultancy avenue. You may not realise that the skills you charge £100 to an internet marketer may be worth £1,000-plus to a company in your area of work.

You will also discover how to make freelancing extremely profitable and a full time business as you learn how to outsource the work you are getting. There are a lot of pitfalls associated with this, but you will learn how to avoid them and massively increase your profits.

Freelancing is a great way for you to start earning online. You can use it to finance building your own online business or make an online business out of it. Businesses are always after reliable freelancers and it could be a profitable new enterprise for you.

Joycellyn Akuffo

What Tools Do You Need?

The chances are you will already have all of the tools that you will need to start your career as a freelancer. There may be some tools you need that you don't have, but there are usually free tools available if you can't afford them yet.

As you earn as a freelancer you may choose to invest some of your profits in to your burgeoning business and buy additional software or tools to help increase your profits.

Initially you will need a computer and an Internet connection if you are planning on doing any sort of online freelancing work.

You will need the computer to be good enough to do everything you want to do. If you are doing lots of video processing and graphics work, you don't want to be using an old computer (unless you have to) as it will take a long time. You may need to invest in a newer computer in order to improve the speed you can work at.

You should also ensure that you have a method of backing up your data. If you are doing freelancing work you need to ensure all the work you do is kept safely. If your hard drive fails a day before you are due to deliver 3 months worth of work then you have a serious problem on your hands that could potentially destroy your freelancing business.

Either back up your work regularly (weekly at a minimum or daily, ideally) to a DVD or external drive. If your files start to get too big for a single DVD or external drive then you may want to look at buying what is known as a RAID array. This is two (or more) disks working together to give you some protection in case one fails. One of the two drives can fail and your data will still be safe.

This is a fairly major investment (£200+) so it may not be one you make initially. However, as your business goes it is worth pursuing this course as it will ensure your data is safe and protected.

You will need a word processor of some sort in order to type, if that is what you are doing. Microsoft Word is very popular but there are free alternatives. Wordpad that ships with Windows is good and you can always use [Openoffice](#).

If you are doing any sort of recording you want a good quality microphone. This needs to be on an anti-vibration stand with a pop filter. You are looking for a USB microphone as it reduces the noise from the computer in your recordings.

You will also need software for recording. [Soundforge](#) is free and very popular. This is good for audio recording, as is [Audacity](#).

If you want to record video then you would need something like [Camtasia](#) or [Camstudio](#). Camtasia is an expensive tool to buy, but it is very powerful and fully featured. Camstudio is free and is perfect if you are starting up.

If you are recording live video you will need a web cam, a digital camera with video facilities or a video camera. You may already own some or all of these.

If you are going to be programming then you need to own the software that you are programming in. Some of these are free, e.g. PHP, but others such as Microsoft's programming languages charge you for their tools.

Graphics designers will want Adobe Photoshop or failing that [GIMP](#), which is free. You need to be able to deliver your graphics in PSD format as many marketers will expect this. Adobe Photoshop has the advantage of what is called Action Scripts that allow you to transform a normal image into a book cover or something else.

You can often find second hand copies of Photoshop on eBay, though always check they are legitimate. If you buy a legitimate copy there is nothing to stop you upgrading it to a newer version in the future. The cost of upgrading is often far less than the cost of buying the new version outright. This is a cheap way to get your hands on the latest versions of software!

Remember that you are running a business here. Anything you purchase for the business can be written off against tax, i.e. offset against your profits.

If you need extra training in order to improve your skills then visit your local community centres or adult education centres. They run lots of courses, some of which are free and you may be able to improve your skills (and hence your rate) there. Sometimes you can get on paid courses free by offering to teach another class there.

You will know the type of tools you need to run your freelancing business. If you don't have the tools at the moment then you either need to buy them or to find some free tools and make do for now.

As you earn money from your freelancing career you can re-invest that money into your business by purchasing the tools (including a computer) that you need.

Identifying Your Skills

This is what really determines how much you can earn ... your skills.

What skills you have, their rarity and their demand will determine how much you can earn, but firstly you need to work out what skills you have. You may have skills that you don't really think of but are very valuable to other people!

If you visit http://www.elance.com/web_programmemeing_skills and look through the skills there you will see the sort of skills people are hiring. Some skills from the Writing and Translation categories are shown here:

Academic Writing (2281)	Medical Writing (1760)
Arabic Translation (174)	Microsoft Office Word (3199)
Article Writing (9649)	Newsletters (2753)
Blogs (5160)	Non-Fiction Writing (2051)
Business Writing (9137)	Online Writing (4648)
Children's Writing (1644)	Poetry (964)
Chinese Translation (410)	Portuguese Translation (254)
Content Writing (6770)	Press Release (2526)
Copywriting (3425)	Proofreading (5748)
Creative Writing (8322)	Proposal Writing (2090)
Dutch Translation (127)	Report Writing (3567)
Ebooks (2234)	Resume Writing (1408)
Editing (9715)	Russian Translation (398)
English (11639)	Sales Letters (1191)
Feature Writing (1741)	Sales Writing (3554)
Fiction Writing (4867)	Screenwriting (247)
Financial Writing (1579)	Script Writing (1292)
French Translation (1168)	Spanish Translation (1531)
German Translation (700)	Speech Writing (1002)
Ghostwriting (1629)	Spelling (2952)
Grammar (4048)	Sports Writing (1075)
Grant Writing (1077)	Swedish Translation (75)
Italian Translation (428)	Technical Writing (4777)
Japanese Translation (265)	Travel Writing (2296)
Journalistic Writing (1307)	Ukrainian Translation (1)
Korean Translation (94)	User Guides (572)
Legal Writing (1317)	Web Content (4462)
Letter Writing (2326)	
Lyric Writing (139)	
Mandarin Translation (129)	

You can see there are a lot of different skills in demand – including translation skills. The fact you can speak your own language and another could get you work.

I would recommend printing out the page listing all the skills and circling the ones that you have. This will help you work out their value and help you understand what you can offer to people.

Don't be quick to dismiss any skills you have gained from your job or from your hobbies. These are very valuable skills, and even something that you take for granted like organisational ability is something that someone will value very highly.

Often the skills you have learned in your profession can be in high demand, e.g. proposal writing, sales training, engineering, etc. These can be skills that companies want to bring on board for a specific project but not need enough to hire a full time person.

If there are skills that you have a degree of competence at and want to improve then do so. Go take some training courses and then hire yourself out as a freelancer.

If you feel that your skills don't fall into any of those categories then go to <http://forums.digitalpoint.com> and look through their marketplace. This is lower paid and lower skill work but if you can move a mouse, you can earn here!

People at DigitalPoint will hire you to do work like post in forums, comment on blogs, and submit to directories and so on. It is manual work, but you need no skills at all and it can keep you going whilst you develop skills and / or find better paying work.

No matter what your level of skill, you will be able to find some work you can do online as a freelancer and start earning.

How Much To Charge?

The amount you can earn from a freelancer depends on:

- The amount of time you spend working as a freelancer
- The value other people put on your skills

The amount of time you are able to work as a freelancer is limited to a maximum of 24 hours in a day. However, there are ways you can increase this, which we will talk about later on in this book.

Obviously you won't be able to work for the entire 24 hours due to the requirement to eat, sleep and have a life. Generally, you can work effectively for between 8 and 12 hours.

This does, of course, depend on whether or not you have a job to go to as well, which will reduce the amount of time you have available to work as a freelancer.

Your skills are valued by other people based on a number of different criteria:

- The rarity
- How much time it saves them
- The level of skill

A higher level of skill is going to be much more valuable to someone than a lower level.

If your skill saves them lots of time then it will be more valuable to them.

If your skill is scarce and not many people have it then it will be a more valuable skill. However, the downside of this is that often scarce skills mean there is not a massive amount of work for people with that skill set.

When you start off as a freelancer on a job site you may sometimes have to offer your skills at a lower rate than you would normally charge in order to get work coming in and build your reputation.

On these job sites, reputation is everything and it is vital that you work hard to preserve your reputation and keep it high. As your reputation improves then you will find people will pay the higher prices you charge with less concern.

One thing you may find (and we will talk about this in a later chapter) that the skills that you have may be worth a lot more money offline. For example, an internet marketer may only pay you a couple of hundred pounds for a website, but a local business may pay a couple of thousand pounds for something similar.

Online you are competing in a global marketplace rather than a local marketplace, which means you are competing for work with people from all over the world.

The downside of this is that different countries in the world have different costs of living. Someone in India has a much lower cost of living than someone in the USA. This means that the person in India can afford to charge a lot less for work as they do not have the same level of expenses.

This can cause problems for the person in the USA to compete on a level footing with the person in country with a lower cost of living. However, many people are specifically after recruiting native language speakers and don't always look for the lowest bid.

You need to understand how much the market will pay for your skills. If you want to earn £50 an hour but the market will only pay £20 an hour then you are going to struggle.

Most skills have a ceiling for how much you can earn just from that. If you want to improve your earnings you are going to have to develop your skills further to make them more valuable.

If you calculate how much you need to earn from your freelancing work and then divide this by the number of hours you have available to work as a freelancer then you will have figure showing you how much you need to earn per hour.

From this you will be able to determine if a piece of work is worth bidding on or not.

You may want to lower your prices if it is for long term work. For example, if you normally charge £10 per article and you've been approached by someone who wants a thousand articles over the next six months, then you may agree to drop your price to £7 in order to get six months worth of regular work.

As a freelancer you are never sure where your next piece of work is coming from and so regular work is good to have and worth ensuring you get.

Remember if you are not sure how much to charge for your skills, look at some of the job sites and see how much other people are charging. Where you position yourself depends on your skills and ability. If you are very good, position yourself high, otherwise position yourself in the middle.

Succeeding As a Freelancer

If you want to succeed as a freelancer then you need to be prepared to blow your own trumpet. There will be people on the job sites singing their own praises and it is no time for you to be coy about how good you are at what you do.

Don't be overtly 'salesy' or over hype yourself. Be factual and tell people you are good.

Avoid the temptation to only compete on price. The best freelancers are fully prepared to walk away if the price goes too low because they know what they are worth.

If you know how much you need to earn and you know how much your skills are worth then you will know how much you can afford to take a job for. There are always going to be people who will pay for good quality work. It just means that sometimes you have to walk away from potential work.

This can be very hard to do, particularly if you need the money, but if you start to compromise on price then you can find yourself stuck doing work for less than you are worth.

Always make sure you deliver top notch quality. A freelancer gets more work based on their reputation and if you have an excellent reputation you will find people seeking you out to work for them rather than you having to look for them.

This is a very beneficial position for you to be in because they will know your worth and be happy to pay it.

Make sure that every single piece of work you do is the best you can produce. This will justify your worth and keep people coming back to you. The hardest job is to find freelancers that produce high quality work, and this is why you will do very well if you keep your quality high.

Ensure that you understand what you have been asked to do as well as your deadlines. Make sure you stick to the deadlines and meet them. If you continuously miss them then you are going to find that you stop getting work and get a bad reputation.

If you are in any way unclear about what you have been asked to do then you need to clarify it. Use [Skype](#) to keep in contact with your customers as well as email. Skype is very useful to quickly ask a question to clarify a point.

You may need to send an outline back to your client first to ensure that they are happy with it before you progress into the main work. The last thing you need is to spend weeks working on a project to find that you hadn't understood what you were asked to do!

Whenever you work for anyone, ask them for feedback and testimonial that you can use in your marketing of yourself. Ideally get a picture and a web address to use in order to make it more authoritative. If you can, get them to record an audio or video too.

This social proof adds value to you and your services and will help to remove doubt from people who are thinking about employing you.

You need to keep a record of all of your clients as well so that you can email them when you are in need of extra work. If you are looking for work you can send an email to your client list reminding them of your services or offering a special deal.

This is a really good way to quickly get some work when you need it.

Using Job Sites Effectively

Starting out on any of the job sites can be a bit daunting. They are busy sites with lots of people and lots going on. These marketplaces can be confusing and overwhelming to the newcomer.

When you start on any of the major job sites like www.peopleperhour.com, www.elance.com, or www.remoteemployment.com, you will need to create a profile.

Make sure this profile sings your praises but without too much hype. Be factual and precise and make sure you tell your potential clients just how good you are.

Wherever you can, show some samples of your work. If you are new to a site then this is often a good idea as it can overcome the objection people have about hiring new people. Make sure they are the best samples that you have in order to really impress your potential new clients.

If you have had any clients from other places then use their testimonials or show the work you did for them (if you are allowed to). This again helps overcome the objections your potential new clients may have.

List your location in your profile. Employers often want to hire people from specific areas or countries for various reasons. You never know when your location may make the difference between getting the job and not.

Also don't be afraid to list your prices.

Putting your prices in your profile (if it is appropriate) means you eliminate a lot of the tire kickers. You don't get the people who only want to pay £2 an article troubling you because they know you charge £10. It will save a lot of time for you and will mean potential clients know what you are worth.

If I see someone offering to write articles for £2 or £3 an article then I instantly discount them from the running because I assume they can't be any good if they are charging such a low

price! If I see an article writer charging £250 an article I think he is a bit overpriced and wonder what he thinks is so good about himself. If I see one charging £70 to £100 an article then I know that is about right for a good quality article writer and then I need to start looking at their profile to ensure they have the skills I need.

A photo and a phone number also go down well.

Make sure the phone number has an answering machine on it as you may get calls at strange hours and you need to be able to take a message. Make sure the message on the answering machine is professional and relating to your clients. Make sure as well that you get back to them as soon as you can. Don't leave it too long as you could lose business.

Your photo needs to be smart casual and one showing you looking relaxed and calm. Don't go for a photo that is too relaxed and don't go for a photo that is too formal.

When you start out on the job sites you may find that you have to initially bid lower than you would like to get jobs and build up your reputation and feedback. Don't worry if this is the case, it sometimes happens and as you get more feedback so you can increase the prices that you charge. A lot of people do this as it allows them to rapidly increase their feedback.

Bid for as many jobs as you can on the job sites – the more you bid for, the more you can potentially get and so the more you can earn. If you get one in every twenty jobs you bid for and you bid for three jobs a month it will be a long time before you earn!

If you bid for twenty jobs a day then you will be earning in a much shorter timeframe.

Always be professional in everything you write and do on the job sites and elsewhere. Remember, with a quick Google, your potential client can find out a lot about you and that may be a problem! Don't write any responses in anger and always be polite.

When bidding on a job, tell them how long it will take you to complete it. Be realistic about this. They will already know how long it will take and if your timeframe is too short or too long then it will put off potential clients.

Make sure you tell people in your bid what you are bringing to the project rather than just stating “I’ll bid” or something equally inane. Tell them what qualities you have that will make the job succeed and what other jobs you have worked on that are similar.

Be aware that you won’t get every single job that you bid on. You are going to get rejected and probably a lot of the time. However, it is the jobs that you get that will be worth it. Bid on as many jobs as you can and you will end up getting much more work.

Once you have worked with someone you can either work directly with them or you can get them to post you private jobs on the job boards. A lot of clients prefer working through the job sites as they provide a degree of accountability and safety for them. If that is the case then you can respect it and work through the sites knowing you are getting work and are protected yourself.

The job sites are an excellent source of income for you as a freelancer and you should be using them. Be prepared for some stiff competition, but if you are good at what you do, deliver quality and hit the deadlines then you can expect some excellent results!

Offline Consultancy

Many freelancers get obsessed with the freelancing websites and forget that there is a whole world outside of their front door ... some of which would love to employ them!

Many of the skills you have are probably useful to companies in your local area.

All you need to do is identify the companies, approach them and offer to do work for them for a fair price. Be aware that the price you get offline may well be much higher than you can get online due to the lack of global competition.

Many local companies are completely clueless about the Internet and websites and you probably know a lot more than they do. This means you can sell your skills to them and help them compete in the global marketplace through their website.

You probably won't find many larger companies that will hire you. They probably already employ someone with your skills to work for them. The small to medium companies are the ones you want to be targeting. These are companies that will need your skills but not need them enough to hire someone, which means they are open to hiring a freelancer, i.e. you!

One thing you can do, which will be discussed in the next chapter is outsource this work. Charge the offline company £1000 for their website then outsource it to a cheaper country for £200 and keep the difference. It is very profitable and good for you ... but more on that later.

Again, as with working with clients, always provide high quality work, get testimonials and use the clients as references if you can.

A rough outline of how to get offline clients is:

- Draft a letter to the company: Tell them how they can benefit from your services and what you are offering them. This is best to be an individual letter after you have done some research on the company to see what they need.

- Send the letter to the company first class (first class means you are serious ... second class means you are cheap).
- A few days later, when the letter has arrived, phone them up to discuss the contents and arrange a time to see them.
- Show them what you have done for other people and demonstrate the value it has had for their business, e.g. increase sales, etc
- Seal the deal
- Perform the work
- Rinse and repeat

Offline clients are a real goldmine. The small to medium sized companies are often forgotten about by many companies who offer these services as they don't see them as having enough cash to be of interest. But to a home based freelancer they have plenty of cash to be of interest to and will happily take on people like you to do work for them.

Outsourcing

As a freelancer, you have been hired by someone else to do work for them. The work you have been given has been outsourced.

You can increase your earnings significantly if you can then outsource this work again!

If you are an article writer, you can only write so many good quality articles in a day, maybe twenty at the most. At £10 an article, that limits you to earning at most £200 a day from writing articles.

There are only two ways you can increase your earnings. Increase your prices, which the market may not bear, or increase the amount of articles you write, which you may not be able to cope with.

What if you assembled a team of writers and gave them work?

Imagine your team of writers were capable of writing 200 articles per day.

You charge £10 an article and pay them £5 per article. This means you generate a total of £2000 in a day and pay your writers £1000, leaving £1000 in your pocket ... all without you doing any work at all. Even if you pay them £7 an article, you are still left with £600 in your pocket for just getting these people to talk to each other.

As you can see, this is immensely profitable and potentially very valuable for you. It is something to consider if you want to take your freelancing business to the next level and make it a business instead of a job.

Of course, if you are hiring people to do the work for you it is vital that they are high quality and reliable. You can't afford for them to let you down or for you to have to rework their work to make it presentable.

You will perform quality checks on their work to ensure that it is decent quality, but as you work with your outsourcers more and “train” them they will produce the quality you need.

This approach works very well with the offline consultancy discussed previously. You can spend your time selling and managing whilst your outsourcers get on with the work.

This type of outsourcing is not in any way unethical, it is perfectly ethical and a very good idea! You maximise your revenue. Your client gets high quality work with a rapid turn around and your outsourcers get paid. It’s a win-win situation.

Initially when you start out you may not have enough money to start outsourcing any work. However, you can build up experience you can build up some cash reserves and use those to launch your own freelancing business.

This is really an opportunity for you to move away from being an employee and into being a business owner. It is not something that is for everyone, but many people will enjoy this.

Endnote

Freelancing is an excellent way for you to start earning. It is highly competitive, but also highly profitable. As you saw in the Elance video, there are companies and people earnings hundreds of thousands of pounds from freelancing every single year.

You could be enjoying a slice of that pie.

Freelancing is a good way to start earnings because there is a minimal or even zero budget and you probably have everything you need to start freelancing in front of you right now!

Whether you need to replace your full time income, earn some extra money or are looking at financing your own online business, you can find the results that you want within freelancing.

There is a lot of work out there for freelancers and you need to be prepared to compete in the fast-moving global marketplace where the person from the UK is competing with people in Russia, Phillipines, India and other countries.

You can increase your earnings by developing your skills and reputation and by outsourcing the work you get so you can effectively work more than 24 hours a day. Using this mindset, you can actually build a business and not just a job, which many people will love.

There is always work for freelancers and over the coming years the amount of work will only increase. You have an opportunity to tap into this buoyant marketplace and enjoy the many benefits it brings.

It is up to you now to take action, join the sites we have talked about and start bidding on work or placing your offers. Hopefully by now you will have identified your skills and how much you are worth for them and be in a position where you can look forward to taking on your first freelancing jobs very soon.

Resources

Now that you are well on your way to starting your freelance business, you need to take the first step and start building your profile online now. Of course, you must set up your own website, but other websites that you need to register your freelance consulting business with are:

www.peopleperhour.com

www.elance.com

www.remoteemployment.com

Also, list your business on the Mumpreneur Directory on Mothers Who Work, <http://www.motherswhowork.co.uk/mumpreneur-business-directory>, it's FREE.

Here's to your success!