

# **Freelance Kickstart**

**By Phil Ebiner**

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO FREELANCING BY A FREELANCER**

So you're thinking about freelancing, and you need some advice. You've come to the right place. As someone who has worked both 9-5 style jobs and the freelance lifestyle, I can provide you with some tips to get started. Before we begin, I want to be completely transparent about my own freelancing. Currently, I'm actually working a regular 40-hour per week job. I landed this job after spending quite some time as a *full-time* freelancer. As a freelancer, I work in the video & design world. I do mostly video editing & motion graphics work, and I find the extra income from this work a great benefit to continuing to do freelance.

Ever since I graduated from college, I've gone back and forth between the freelance & full-time world. This, I believe, makes me the perfect person to help you make the decision to start freelancing. Not only do I have experience freelancing, but I've also been quite successful at it. Your success is what is most important to me, through this writing. I want to give you all of the tips that I've learned so that you can jump right into the freelance world without hesitation.

***What does freelancing mean to me?*** Freelancing is both a type of work and a lifestyle. Freelancing, at its core is **FREEDOM**; freedom from *the man*; freedom to do what you love; freedom to spend your days how you like; freedom to truly live a *life you love*. That is why I love freelancing so much, and why I plan to do freelancing forever.

The first thing I want to go over are the pros & cons to freelancing. Because while there are many benefits, there are some drawbacks that you should know about before quitting your day job. You can find many of these lists on the *interwebs* and I've extrapolated the key points that align with my experiences. Here we go:

- Pro - Great work life balance & flexibility. As I mentioned, freelancing gives you the freedom to spend your days as you please. You can work 2 hours, or you can work 10 hours. You can work in a coffee shop, in your bed, or at the beach. Most freelancers actually work less than 40 hours per week. This is very important to having a balanced life. *Seriously, who wants to be sitting at a desk for 5 out of 7 days until the time you're retired?!* When freelancing, you're your own boss. You get to tell yourself when to start working, when to end, when to go on vacation, how many vacation days you get.
- Pro - Higher pay. While starting out, you may have to charge less to get jobs. As time goes on, you'll be able to charge more and more for your work. In fact, according to research freelancers make 45% more than workers at comparable jobs. You will also spend less time in meetings, commuting, and doing all of the other things at a regular job that increase your time spent and decrease the dollar/hour.
- Pro - Flexible location. Above, I mentioned the benefit of being able to work anywhere, while in your pajamas. More broadly, you can literally work *anywhere in the world* thanks to the amazing connectivity that the Internet brings. Tired of living in an expensive city like Los Angeles or New York, move! You can move to somewhere cheaper in the middle of America and not have to earn as much (aka. work as hard) to survive... to thrive. Or, you can move to another 🌍! Think about that. We are the first generation of workers who have the relatively available option of moving to the other side of the world and still work. This is one of my **favorite** aspects of freelancing - location freedom.

- Pro - Freelancers are happier with what they do. Think about it, freelancers choose exactly what type of work they do. If they don't like what they're doing, they don't have to do it. Of course there may be projects that last longer than expected, difficult clients to deal with, and other issues that make a particular job dreadful. All in all though, freelancers are happy. When was the last time you heard someone proclaim '**I don't want to go to work!**' It probably wasn't too long ago. You'll hear this a lot less with freelancers.
- Con - Lack of Stability. As great as it is to be free to do whatever you want, the truth is that there is an inherent lack of stability while freelancing - *especially when starting out*. You might not know when your next job or paycheck is coming. You can waste a lot of time being unproductive. This can all be very stressful, and is one of the reasons I'm currently only doing freelance part-time. I found the lack of stability too stressful at this point in my life, when I'm starting a family & trying to save up for an early retirement (combined with the *awesome job* that I *do* go to during the week).
- Con - Can be harder to start. I say *can* because finding a job is really hard nowadays. Even though our economy is pushing uphill, companies are still being very picky with new hires. So getting a job is really difficult. Still, starting out as a freelancer is difficult. You have to figure out how to market yourself, find clients, and survive. Luckily, you have me to help you out!
- Con - lack of benefits. Working 40 hours a week at a giant company can suck. But most of these companies include some kind of benefits. Health insurance, retirement benefits, vacation; these are all things that freelancing doesn't offer. Of course if you are freelancing, you should be saving for retirement, putting aside money for health insurance, and building in vacation

time. But with a regular job, you're literally getting paid to go on vacation once you accrue your vacation time. That being said, the vacation standards in the States are despicable. Countries like Switzerland & Australia have laws that give employees at least 4 weeks of vacation per year - *paid vacation*. Many get up to 6 weeks. This is unheard of in the States. With freelancing, you can take 6 weeks of vacation each year - so I guess this is a pro as well.

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And that is how I'm going to end this pros and cons list. I wanted to end on a happy note to get you excited about freelancing. All of those cons can be dealt with, if you put in enough work and are organized. In fact, there may be no cons to freelancing at all if done correctly!

Are you ready to start freelancing? Have I convinced you yet? If you've made it this far, you're ready. I'm excited to have you on this journey. After each of these sections, I'm going to give you actionable steps towards creating the freelance lifestyle of your dreams. Today, I want you to make your own pros & cons list of freelancing. What is most important to you? Is it the flexibility? The ability to make more money? What is the biggest drawback? Lack of benefits? Hard to start? Knowing what is most important to you will help you stay focused on this journey. This focus will help you succeed!

## **FREELANCE BASICS: CHOOSE YOUR CRAFT**

In this section, we'll begin your freelance journey by looking at your skills, passion, self-discipline, & goals. All these put together will make you a successful freelancer. My personal goal with this section is to have you be honest with yourself. As mentioned before, your own personal honesty will help guide you through this journey. Your thoughts & feelings might change the way you go about this endeavor. Listen to yourself. That's what the freelance lifestyle is all about. Listen to yourself, and create this lifestyle of your own.

## SKILLS

To be a successful freelancer, it helps to be in certain fields. Below I'll give you a list of the top 15 freelance skills according to the amount of freelance work being done in the States. That being said, I believe that anyone can freelance with the skills they have. While being a freelance politician might be difficult, one's communication skills can lead to freelance work as a consultant. Being a freelance nurse doesn't make sense. But you can use your skills as a nurse to teach online courses, to write books or articles, or to do freelance caregiving work. *You get the idea.*

The basic premise is to figure out what skills you have. Then out of those skills, which ones can be translated into some type of freelance work? Finally, how can you market those skills to actually get work?

First, let's look at some top 15 freelance skills according to [Elance.com](https://www.elance.com):

- Designer
- Writing
- Editing
- Copywriter
- Translator
- Web developer
- Marketing
- Business Consultant
- Illustrator
- Researcher

- Video
- Photographer
- IT Systems Support
- Software Developer

Let's now look at some of the highest paying freelance jobs according to

[Payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com):

1. Attorney/Lawyer (\$147.40)
2. Clinical Psychologist (\$125.30)
3. Senior Copywriter (\$85.00)
4. IT Security Consultant (\$81.80)
5. Management Consultant (\$75.00)
6. Senior Software Engineer (\$75.00)
7. Human Resources (HR) Consultant (\$72.20)
8. Life Coach (\$70.00)
9. Information Technology Consultant (\$69.00)
10. Certified Financial Planner (\$61.40)
11. Speech-Language Pathologist (\$60.80)
12. Senior Graphic Designer (\$60.00)
13. Physical Therapist (\$59.20)
14. Public Relations Consultant (\$58.90)
15. Interior Designer (\$57.70)
16. Education/Training Consultant (\$56.30)
17. Real Estate Agent (\$55.00)
18. Licensed Massage Therapist (\$49.60)
19. Private Detective or Investigator (\$49.60)



20. Marketing Consultant (\$49.10)
21. Healthcare Consultant (\$48.30)
22. Musician or Singer (\$48.20)
23. Landscape Architect (\$45.20)
24. General Contractor (\$45.00)
25. Certified Public Accountant (\$40.30)

As you can see, there are differences in between the two lists. This shows two things - *you can't believe every list you see on the Internet & there is a range of skills that can be done as a freelancer.* Do you have any skills on these lists? Are these jobs that interest you? If not, don't be alarmed. I truly believe everyone has skills that can translate to freelance work. You just have to find it. One thing you can do is to search around on Elance.com to find what other freelancers are doing. We'll talk more about getting work on Elance.com later. For now, head over there to get a sense for what types of jobs you would be interested in.

The second thing to think about with freelance skills is whether or not your skills can be used remotely. Can you do jobs that you get from across the country, or world? Can your job be done through a computer? Many can. But some can't. Location-specific jobs will be harder to come by, just because of the lower amount of jobs needed in your area. So finding a skill that can be used across the world is the best way to launch a successful freelance career. For an example of the differences between these two types of job, let's look at my work.

*What are my skills?* I'm primarily a video creator. Most of my freelance work has been done doing some kind of video work: cinematography, editing, motion

graphics, etc. Obviously, the video aspect has to be done on location. I've started a successful wedding video company, and have been shooting weddings since college. These jobs are location-specific. I have to actually be there to shoot the wedding. The good thing about wedding videography is that weddings happen everywhere. No matter what city I live in, I can find work as a wedding videographer. Editing these weddings can be done wherever. I've shot weddings in Los Angeles that I edited in San Francisco. This is why my editing skills are more marketable as a freelancer. I can do it wherever, whenever. Another freelance project that I recently worked on was editing a feature-length documentary. I got this job through a connection at work (*It's always easier to find a job when you have a job!*). Again, this is something I could do on my own time, in my own house. I share my examples to show you that my skills as a video creator can be used remotely, as well as on-location.

*So what are your skills?* Think outside of the box. What skills do you have that are marketable? Imagine a company (any type of company will do, but let's just say a big tech company) that is based hundreds of miles away. Now think to yourself - *what could I do for this company?* Stay away from whatever traditional job you currently have or had. Just think about what you're good at, and come up with a few things that you can do for that company.

In the next part, we'll be looking at your passions. ***Is following your passion the best advice?***

## FOLLOWING YOUR PASSION

You've heard a thousand times - *follow your passion and you'll find the job of your dreams*. I'm here to present both sides of this popular phrase because I believe in it, with a grain of salt.

Let's get something straight - I am absolutely, 100%, without-a-doubt against trying to make a living doing something that you don't want to do. I saw countless fellow university students in majors that they didn't like, heading towards a career they didn't want. Why do people do this? There are a number of reasons. *My parents want me to be a doctor? I want to make more money so I can provide for a family. There are a lot of jobs in this or that field. I'm good at chemistry, so I'm going to be a chemist.*

What do all of these reasons have in common? They're all based on fear - the fear that you'll disappoint your parents; the fear that you won't make enough money; the fear of not finding work; the fear of trying something new. Fear is not something you want to listen to for major life decisions. Fear is actually a good thing, in some cases. Fear can keep you alert when walking down a dark alley. But fear can hinder you when it comes to truly living a life you love.

This is why I do think it is a good idea to choose a freelance job that is enjoyable for you. Choose something that you are good at, AND also have a fun time doing. *Why do people hate work so much? BECAUSE THEY HATE WORK!* If you're doing something you enjoy, it won't seem like work. You will feel good about what you do with your time, contributing to our world in some way or another. ***But is this the same as passion?***

For some, what I just explained in the above paragraph might be their passion. You're good at it. You enjoy it. That sounds like passion, right? To me, one's passion is something that you could spend all of your days doing. It's more than something you enjoy, more than something you're good at. It's what you wake up thinking about, fall asleep dreaming about. It's what you talk about with your friends... for hours on end. **That's passion.** And it's good to be passionate about what you do every day. But there are also some downsides to following your passion, when trying to find a job.

When you do something every day, it inevitably becomes work. It feels like work. And some days, you won't want to get up and deal with it. But you have to, right? You have to pay the bills. You have to eat. You have to. And that's when following your passion becomes a chore. *How sad is that?* You used to love carpentry, writing a blog, making movies, you-fill-in-the-blank. But now, it's 'just another day at the office.' This is not a position you want to be in.

What should you do? Find a balance. Find something that you enjoy doing and wouldn't mind getting paid to do. Keep some hobbies on the side that you're passionate, so you have something fun to come home to (or stay home, if you're freelancing at home). This will lead to a fruitful freelancing career in whatever you choose.

**But Phil, you followed your passion, right?** I did, actually. I followed my passion for video making from the time I was in high school, through college, and today. To be honest, it's been mostly great. There are days that I love going to work. There are days when I can't stand it. As someone who followed their passion, I can honestly say that I miss just making videos for fun. I would love to use my skills as a video creator to do more creative projects, to make documentaries about topics I'm

passionate about, to make videos on the weekend. But when the weekend comes, I'm tired of making videos, editing, etc. So I've found other passions - like building websites, teaching online, adopting a cat, starting a family, finances - the things I love talking about and doing when I'm at home with nothing else to do. It has worked out, and I'm actually happy that I followed my passion because I ended up in a field that I enjoy - on 90% of the days.

I guess what I'm saying is, follow your passion, but know that it comes with downsides.

What are you passionate about? ***What do you love to do?*** What would you do with your days if you had all of the money and time in the world? *What do you talk about with your friends when you get together?* These are your passions. Now try to imagine doing this every day, and having to do this every day, and doing this for other people on projects that you don't enjoy. Are you happy? If so, follow your passion? You will find other passions down the road of life.

## SELF-DISCIPLINE

The key to success as a freelancer is self-discipline. Talent, fancy websites, and knowing lots of potential clients - these are all great things to have. But when it comes down to having a sustainable and successful freelance career, self-discipline is the most important, and maybe most difficult thing to have. It will determine how much work you have, how happy you are with work life balance, and ultimately how much money you make.

*What do I mean by self-discipline?* I mean setting a schedule for how much work you do per day. I mean waking up early to start a productive day and not sleeping in, just because you can. I mean putting in hard work up front to reap rewards later. This is self-discipline.

From my own experience, I know it is really difficult to get out of bed at 7 am when you don't have to be at the office by 9. I know how easy it is to spend an entire day surfing the Facebook newsfeed when you don't have a boss breathing down your neck. I know how easy it is to spend 16 hours in a day trying to get work done, only to burn out and hate the project I was working on. Being disciplined, setting a schedule, and having boundaries will combat any of these issues.

**You are your own BOSS!** That's amazing! You don't have to deal with anyone telling you what to do. It's the number one reason why so many people hate going to work every day - dealing with *the man*. And you don't have to deal with it any more! *With great power also comes great responsibility*. So you have to be ready to be the boss, to take charge, and to finish what needs to get done.

I could go on and on about the importance of self-discipline, but I think you get the idea. I just wanted to prepare you for the future, to let you know it's not *all* fun and games. Here are some questions to answer before you start freelancing:

- What time will you wake up?
- When do you start work?
- How long do you work per day?
- Can you work in the evenings?
- Do you work on the weekends?
- How many projects can you take on at once?
- When is it acceptable to take the day off? To get off early?
- How much vacation do you want to take off each year?

There are many more questions that will pop up on this journey, but those are some of the best ones to keep in mind while starting out.

## MOONLIGHTING

Everyone's situation is different. *That's a blanket statement, Phil.* What I'm saying is that as someone who wants to start freelancing, your situation is going to be different than mine was when I started. You may be coming out of college, looking for your first job. You may be retiring after working 30 years at the same position. You may be quitting your job with six months of savings. You may have just been fired, and are scrambling for ways to make it by. You may just want to make some extra money, and are doing freelancing on the side of a full time job. All of our situations are different, so there isn't one ***perfect way*** to start.

Starting your freelancing by moonlighting - doing freelance work on the side of another job - is the safest way to start. I really suggest this method of freelancing because you are truly free to experiment with it. You're not counting on a paycheck from freelance work. You can see it as *extra* income. So when you do get a job, it will be a great blessing.

Co-workers can be a great source of work. The more people who know you are available for freelance work, the more opportunities you'll have to get work. For some industries, freelance work naturally comes in addition to a regular job. As a video creator, everyone I work with knows that I make videos. A lot of people are looking to have videos made, and have asked me if I do freelance. Some of the jobs that I've gotten through co-workers include: wedding videography, kickstarter videos, business promos, and feature length documentaries. You name it, and I've been asked about it.

We'll talk more about strategies to get this type of work from your co-workers later. For now, keep in mind that the best way to start a freelance career is to do so



while you have another steady source of income. This is just something to keep in mind if you're seriously thinking about freelancing. **Don't quit your job yet!** It might be the perfect launching platform for your freelance journey.

## DEFINE YOUR GOALS

The final thing you should do before getting to work as a freelancer is to define your goals. *What are you ultimately trying to do?* Are you working at a job that you hate, and trying to come up with another source of income before quitting your job? Are you just trying to make some extra money for your vacation plans? What do you imagine your ideal life to look like - now, five years from now, twenty? These are questions that will help guide you throughout this journey.

**Self Case Study:** Let's look at my journey a little bit more in depth to understand how to better define your own goals. Coming out of college, I was hired for a 6-month contract by the production company that I had been interning at. This was great! **MONEY!** I was out of college with a full-time job with more freedom (*and responsibility*) than ever before. Lots of my fellow classmates who did the same film and TV production program as I did didn't have jobs, and went straight into the freelance market. After the six months were up, I needed to find another job. So I started to put together a wedding videography business.

A couple years earlier I shot a wedding for a friend's sister. I knew wedding videography could bring in some decent money, so I always figured that I could really try to do that if I needed to. When my contract ended - *I needed something*. I started pitching myself to all of my friends and family. I put together a website. I made business cards. *But what were my goals?* To be honest, I wasn't clear with myself about my goals at the time. In hindsight, I know that my goals were basically to have enough work to last me until my next full time job. Soon enough, I was hired to do a few weddings and getting great reviews/referrals. To this day, I still get

requests to do wedding videography. I still do it when I'm available and willing. It's a great source of income when I need it.

During this time, I started doing more freelance work for friends in the film industry. But I didn't really know what my goals were. I didn't know where my career was headed. I wasn't sure if I could make enough money freelancing. My girlfriend was stressed that I didn't have a steady paycheck. I was living in my parent's home trying to figure things out. But jobs kept coming in. I did some big projects included a high-quality awards package video for a major non-profit. Ultimately, I decided that I wanted to move out of my parent's house - that was my goal. To do this, I needed a steady paycheck. To have a steady paycheck, I needed a full time job. So I applied to a few jobs and landed one doing video production at a private college.

This was great. I made more money at the job than I was freelancing. I was freelancing on the side. I was paying down student debt. Most importantly, I had accomplished my goal of moving out and living on my own. I bought a car - in cash after three months of biking around Orange County, CA. Life was good, and about to get crazy. My girlfriend was applying to Masters programs around the country. I basically told her that I was up for the adventure - I was going to follow her wherever she went. It came down to Seattle or Berkeley.

*What would I do in a new city?* I had few contacts in either city. The job prospects for my industry were significantly lower in both cities than in Los Angeles. So I decided early on that I needed to be prepared for this move. I started early - ten months before school would start. This gave me enough time to plan out how to freelance in a new city, and to build up some streams of income to keep me going during the transition. I started teaching online courses, doing more video work to

make extra cash, and booked more wedding gigs so that I knew that I had, at least, a few months of income after the move.

Everything worked out smoothly. I quit my job in June. We traveled to the Philippines for a few weeks. I spent the rest of summer doing some freelance work and prepping for our move up the Berkeley. **My goal** for my new lifestyle was to do freelancing full time, and to thrive at it! I didn't necessarily want a full time job. I wanted the freedom of freelancing so that I could spend enough time discovering Berkeley - going to parks, trying to restaurants, starting a new life there!

I started reaching out to people in the Bay Area and came up with some potential job prospects. Once we moved, I was able to get some steady freelance work with a production company. I pitched myself on Craigslist and on local job boards. I continued to teach online courses. Things were going great! I was a happy-freelance-camper. I was making more money than I was at my previous job - A LOT MORE! I was confident in the amount of work I was getting, and most importantly - happy.

I tell you my story to show that at times I didn't have goals. The times that I did have goals were a lot more successful than the times I didn't. The initial time of freelancing between my first two jobs was full of stress, anxiety, and questions. This wasn't fun for my family, my girlfriend, or me. Part of the reason it was such a confusing time is due to my lack of goals. If I had really set out with a personal goal of doing freelance full time, I would have done it! Instead, I was lost in a world of not knowing what was best for me at that time. So when I moved up to Berkeley, I knew that I wanted to do freelancing full time. I didn't want to get into another full-time job that I would end up hating.

Right now I don't know exactly what the future looks like, but I have a decent idea. I have goals for the next year, five years, and for the rest of my life. I know these will change, and **it's good to be flexible with your goals** so you're not stuck in some unrealistic vision of your life.

For now, start writing down your goals. What do you want as a freelancer? How much money do you want to make? Do you envision freelancing for the rest of your life, or just a few months? By writing them down, you are taking action. You are stepping one step closer to attaining those goals, and I applaud you for that. This is a huge step towards a successful freelancing career! **GO YOU!**

## **BUILDING YOUR BRAND**

Now that you've put a lot of thinking into this whole *freelancing thing*, it is time to start making progress. In this section, I'll show you strategies to start building a brand that people will want to hire. To be successful, you have to have a strong brand. Some basic practices include:

- Having a professional website
- Building a portfolio of samples
- Joining freelance networks - online & in-person
- Carrying around business cards

As you read the next few chapters, start to **take action**. Or read through everything, and then *take action*. Only through completing the practices mentioned in these pages will you begin the successful road of a freelance career!

## WEBSITES

I believe having a website is important for everyone in today's world. Whether you're freelancing or not, the first thing people will do when they're thinking of hiring you is search for you online. By having your own personal website, you have ***complete control*** over how you represent yourself, your brand, and your business. Of course there may be reviews of your work on other websites (another big part of creating a proper online presence), but having a personal website is your number one project to start freelancing.

While I could clearly show you how to create your own website, that would take an entire book. There are many tutorials online that you can find on creating a website. I will tell you some amazing resources that make website-creation easy & fun. I will also let you know what to include on your website so that potential clients get all of the information they need but aren't overwhelmed.

Creating a professional looking and engaging website doesn't have to hurt the bank account. [Wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com), [Weebly](https://www.weebly.com), and [Wix](https://www.wix.com) are all free website building platforms. Pick a theme, customize, add your content, and you'll be good to go in no time. With these websites, you won't be able to have an easily shareable URL. You'll have to have something like [wordpress.com/philebiner](https://wordpress.com/philebiner). This isn't terrible, but I would invest a few bucks in getting your own URL from somewhere like GoDaddy. I just recently purchased a few domains for just \$1.49 each for an entire year. Before you check out, search for a promo code - *there are always promos going on!* Type in 'GoDaddy Promo Code' to Google. One of my favorite websites for getting deals is RetailMeNot. Click on their link and find a promo code that works. *I just saved you some cash!*

Choose a URL that is easy to remember and tell people. I suggest using your name for your URL and freelancing brand. I use PhilEbiner.com for my personal website. If you really want to use a creative name for your 'company,' that is okay. Just make sure that whatever your brand name is (your name or a company name), try to get the matching URL. Nowadays, many URLs are already taken. There is a high chance that even your name is taken. You can do something like HirePhilEbiner.com or ThePhilEbiner.com or EbinerVideo.com. Get creative if you need to. I suggest registering a .com rather than a .info, .net, .org because .com web addresses are easier to remember and have better search engine optimization (easier for people to find when searching online).

If you're really up for a challenge but want to create a more customizable website, you can build your own using Wordpress.org templates. **NOTE:** Wordpress.com & Wordpress.org are two different things. Wordpress.org has thousands more templates, better plugins, and higher-quality tools to make a completely customizable website. With this type of website, you'll need to purchase web hosting. I use [BlueHost](#) for all of my websites because it is very reliable with plenty of customer support. They're also quite inexpensive for hosting. Purchase your *hosting* [here](#). Once you have hosting, you will need a theme. These can be downloaded for free from Wordpress.org. Higher-quality themes can be found on sites like [ThemeForest.com](#). They have great themes starting at \$3. Again, it would take an entire book to explain how to build your website from scratch. A good starting point is my [Bluehost to Wordpress course](#).

In general, simplicity is key for creating a website. You may be tempted to create a website with lots of pages. *Howabout a blog!?* Can't I start some sort of ecommerce site? *Whatabout a live chat feature!* **HOLD YOUR HORSES!** I have



done all of those things, and then settled on a simple one-page website that includes all of the information one would need to hire me. I'm not saying my website is perfect, and that you should try to replicate it. I am saying that for many of the jobs that I did get, the person hiring commented on how great my website was: how easy it was to find the necessary information, the great amount of sample work, and the overall cleanliness of my site. Check it out at [PhilEbiner.com](http://PhilEbiner.com).

My site also gives off a vibe. Your site should too! The vibe comes through the colors, the imagery, the style of writing, etc. On my site, I have a very casual tone. I write in the first person. I include photos that I've taken that build the template of my site. This all gives off a very definitive feeling when one reaches my websites. If you don't like it, you're not going to hire me. *And that's okay!* Because if you hired me, you probably wouldn't like my work.

**What should you include in your website?** Again, be simple. You don't need to write a novel of a bio. You don't need to share every project that you've ever worked on. Only include what is necessary for a potential client. These are:

- A short bio that gives them a little bit more information about who you are, where you came from, and what kind of work you do.
- Sample projects or work. This is easy if you are a creator (videographer, photographer, writer, web designer). If you don't actually *create* things for your jobs, it is okay to write out what you did - similar to a resume.
- A way to contact you. I have a contact button on the top of my website so that people can easily contact me about potential work. It's not a bad idea to include an email somewhere on the page as well.

While creating your website, think about the visitor flow - *what a visitor will be doing while they visit your site*. This will help you stick to the basics and create an engaging website - engaging, meaning, that a visitor actually stays on your page for a while, sees your stuff, and contacts you. Let's look at a typical visitor to your website, in the ideal world.

1. Visitor types in the URL of your website or searches for your name online.
2. Your website pops up and the visitor is greeted by: a nice picture of you, your bio, a greeting line *like on my website*.
3. Visitor is intrigued and continues reading your bio.
4. Visitor wants to see what you've done and easily finds a sample work or portfolio to look through.
5. Visitor wants to contact you about a job and can easily do so because on your website is a clearly labeled contact page or email address for them to use.
6. Visitor contacts you, and you take it from there!

This is the ideal visitor flow. You don't want a visitor to get to your website, not understand where they are supposed to look for more information about you, and leave the site. For example, I strongly suggest not having a blog on the homepage of your website. I know it seems like a great idea to be posting things every week to show off how much cool stuff you do. But for someone looking to hire you, all they want is the information I stated above. Keep the blog to a separate page if you need to, or skip the blog entirely.

Hopefully at this point you have a better idea at how to build a website and what information to include on your website. As always, I suggest searching around the web to find freelancers' websites that you like. Use them as inspiration for creating your own website. ***I'm so excited to see your websites up and running!***

**Resources from this chapter:**

- **Bluehost webhosting - sign up [here](#)**
- **Godaddy for your domain name - get your url [here](#)**
- **ThemeForest for a custom website theme - search around [here](#)**
- **Bluehost to Wordpress Online Course - enroll [here](#)**

## PORTFOLIOS & TESTIMONIALS

Building up a portfolio of *stellar* work is really important for any freelancer, just starting out or otherwise. You want people to see the work that you've done. If you feel like you don't have work to show off, you might want to wait until you feel confident in your work before trying to freelance. You're your own boss when you freelance, so you're going to promote yourself. No one else is going to do it.

*What types of things should you post?* As I mentioned before, not every freelancer has something **visual** to show to others. This chapter is more focused towards those that do, but it is still worthwhile to have testimonials (another part of your portfolio) of your amazing work. We'll talk about how to do that below. As for your portfolio, you want to obviously show your best work. I will use videos as an example because it is what I'm most familiar with. I only include the best work (*or at least my favorite*) in my online portfolio. You don't want to overload the potential customer with too much work. ***But maybe you have a ton of great stuff to show!*** If this is the case, organize it in a way that is easy to view.

For me, I have a demo reel, which is a sampling of all of my work from the previous year. This is the perfect video for customers to start with. It's an overview that will let them know my style and qualifications. Below my demo reel, which could be your favorite web design, best testimonial, or best photography if you're not a video creator, I have a grid of my favorite videos. These can be organized by kind to make it easy for the viewer to find what they're looking for. I actually didn't do the best job at limiting the number of samples. Ideally you'd want around 10 samples. Customers will have a great idea of your skills after just a few samples.

Include a variety of projects. Clients come from all sorts of backgrounds with all sorts of projects. Unless you only want to work in a very specific niche (i.e. explainer videos for non-profits), try to show off a variety of projects so that people know you are versatile.

***What if you don't have a lot of great things to show, but you are amazing at what you do?*** This is possible. It is especially possible if you are just starting out to not have samples of work you've been hired to do. First, include stuff you've done for free. Second, do stuff for free for other people. Third, do projects for yourself for fun! On my website, I've included some motion graphics projects that I've just done for fun because I didn't have enough motion graphics examples. Spend an hour really creating something that you are proud of - a sample website, a photograph, a video, etc.

It would be even better to donate your skills to some company or non-profit to get experience. I did this with a non-profit up in Berkeley before getting my job at UC Berkeley. I donated some time to Grid Alternatives, a solar power non-profit, and made three really great videos for them. One of them is now in my portfolio, and that free work led to other companies contacting me for paid projects. We'll talk more about this in the next section because doing free work can have some drawbacks.

Along with samples of your work, it is a bonus to get testimonials of your work. You can see on [PhilEbiner.com/weddings](http://PhilEbiner.com/weddings) (my wedding videography site) that I include testimonials from some of my wedding couples. Now of course, this isn't some sort of official yelp review. I just took what the couples said in their emails (with permission) and put them on my website. But even though it's not an official yelp review, customers who come to my weddings page can see that they're dealing with

a human. The reviews humanize my work, and the potential customer will feel reassured that I am actually a great wedding videographer.

When you're building your online presence, ask past clients for a quote about your work. Send them an email that says something like:

*Hey buddy (or name)!*

*I'm putting together a website for my new business. I'd love to include a few of your thoughts on the page about the work I previously did for you. So how did I do? What did you like about the work I did for you? What did you like about working with me?*

This short email or text that you send out to past clients can result in **LOTS** of work. It's a simple thing that goes a long way. Note: some people include dates for their testimonials. I suggest not including dates because time really does fly, and soon your most recent review will be from a few months ago and customers might wonder why there aren't any new reviews.

To wrap up this action-packed chapter, I just want to remind you that posting a portfolio with testimonials on your website is one of the best ways to get more work. Show off your best work. Start by directing the viewer to your favorite project. Keep your projects organized. Limit it to around 10 samples. Email your past clients for testimonials. Post the testimonials online. That's it! **GREAT JOB!**

## FREELANCE NETWORKS

Another good way to build your online presence is to join freelance networks and other websites for freelancers like you. A freelance network is a place for freelancers to create a profile, bid on jobs, and get hired by people looking to hire freelancers. There are also many websites built for freelancers in your field - to communicate, post your work, be inspired, and get jobs. Even if a website doesn't have a *hiring* component, by joining these websites and creating a profile with current information, you are increasing your online footprint. This inevitably leads to more people finding you, more people hiring you, and making more money.

Elance.com & Odesk.com (now the same company) are two great places to create profiles. These are freelance networks that connect freelancers with someone looking to get a job done. I have personal experience hiring freelancers to do a range of jobs on these sites, and can tell you that it is a great place to make some extra money. You can view jobs posted in your field, bid on them, and get paid through the website (rather than having to deal with all of the financial stuff yourself). Anyone hiring can also search for freelancers and directly message them about doing a job. Make sure that you have a stellar profile with current information and a link to your website.

Here are some helpful tips for getting hired through one of these sites:

- Check the job boards daily. Jobs get taken quickly, sometimes within the hour. While I don't want you addicted to going on these sites, I don't want you to miss out on any cool jobs.
- When bidding for a job, customize your message to the person hiring. If you see a job that you like, you have the opportunity to submit a bid with more

information about you and how you would approach that particular job. As someone who hires, I can tell you that if you don't personalize your message to me, I won't hire you. It shows that you won't have enough time to give to the job.

- Include relevant samples in your bid. It's great to see freelancers who've done projects similar to the one being hired for. People will rarely hire without knowing you can do a good job. The only way they'll know you can do a good job is through your sample work and whatever you're saying.
- Get whatever jobs you can to start out with. This may mean charging lower than what you're used to. But you want to build up a reputation. You'll have a 1-5 star ranking, and you'll want to show that you are a great worker. These sites also track and share how many projects you've done on the website. Someone hiring will be more likely to hire someone with a higher ranking and more past experience than a newbie.
- Ask for a good review, or find out why they gave you a bad review. Bad reviews don't necessarily have to be bad for you. They help you improve your business, and this will help in the long run. Try to catch the reviewer before they left a review and politely ask for a great review or an explanation on how to improve.

Following these tips should help you get some jobs on these freelancer networks.

I mentioned joining other websites created for your line of work. One great example of this is [Dribbble.com](https://dribbble.com). Dribbble is for graphic designers to share their work with the world. It's a great place for inspiration. Viewers can also hire people through



the site. It's not easy to get your work on the front page of Dribbble, but if you do it can be a great launching platform for getting even more work.

There are probably sites like Dribbble for your freelance field - web development, photography, writing, etc. Search the Internet for 'photographer network' or similar to find these. Join them. Post a few samples of your work. Create a profile with your bio, a link to your website, and contact information.

Now is your time to take action. Stop reading this book, and get a move on!

**Resources from this chapter:**

- Elance & Odesk - sign up [here](#)
- Dribbble - check it out [here](#)

## **BUSINESS CARDS**

There isn't much to be said in the chapter, because the title says it all: business cards. Carry them around with you wherever you go. Have at least three in your wallet or purse at all times. I've made the mistake of not carrying them around and meeting someone that needs video work. You'll never know whom you'll run into today. They might be a potential recurring client.

Business cards don't have to be expensive, and you don't have to know how to design a business card yourself. [Vistaprint.com](http://Vistaprint.com) is a great place to get your personalized business cards. At the time of writing this, you can get 100 business cards starting at \$15. They have an online business card building tool where you can pick from hundreds of styles. Or you can upload your own style!

What should you include on your business card? I'm all about simplicity. I just have my name, email, phone number, and website. I would even say that just your name and website could be enough if your contact info is easy to find on your website. No need to include your address, unless people are sending you a lot of mail or something. Just include the main way people can connect with you.

***That's it!*** Get your own business cards and feel like a baller!

## FINDING WORK

Up until this point, I've been talking a lot about how to prepare your freelance career. This preparation is very important, and every step that I laid out before you will help you be more successful. But like me, you probably just want to know *how do I get the job? How do I get money? How do I survive?* I don't want you to just survive - I want you to **THRIVE**. To find work, you need to know where to look. Let's cover that base first.

I've already mentioned in previous chapters places that you can find work - through friends and connections, on professional freelancer networks like Elance & Odesk, by volunteering for local organizations to get your foot in the door. Some other places that will have jobs are Craigslist and other online jobs boards. Craigslist can be difficult to land a decent-paying job because the people that are looking to hire on Craigslist are usually looking to do so on a budget. But if you're starting out, you're going to need to do some work *on a budget*. I found some work on Craigslist that led to a few referrals for more work. To find jobs, look under two locations - **Jobs & Gigs**. I actually see more freelance work under the gigs section because these are usually one-off projects. Many people forget to look under gigs though. Once you click on the gigs button, search for jobs using keywords related to your field (i.e. video, videographer, film, editing, cinematographer, editor, motion graphics, etc.). When you email the job, include a link to your website, and in 3 sentences or less explain why you're the perfect candidate for this job. Sit back, and wait for replies. When you're starting out and really needing to find work, try checking Craigslist once in the morning, and once at night - every day. There are other

websites like Craigslist that might have paying gigs - think [Monster.com](#) or [Indeed.com](#).

Search for local professional organizations in your area. I know that in San Francisco, there are many organizations for freelance video creators. They have their own job board, mixers, and other events where you can meet professionals in your field. There is probably something similar in your area for your field.

Cold calling companies and organizations is another way to get your name out. Find big companies, schools, and organizations and send an email to them introducing yourself and your business. Don't say that you're a *freelancer looking for work*. This sounds like you're someone that can't get hired. Rather say that *you've started a company that does x, y, z, in their area and that you just wanted to reach out to say hello*. Give them your website and contact information. You never know when companies are trying to find a new graphic designer or photographer for an event.

I mentioned this before, but once you have your website up and running - send an email blast to your friends and family that says ***you're in business!*** Post your website on social media. Create a LinkedIn account and post in groups relevant to your work with links to your website and samples of your work. The more places your name and website are, the better. Better than just blasting out something on social media that most of your cousins will ignore, call them up and ask them if they know if anyone is hiring for your skills. At the same time, you'll be able to catch up with a family member. If you're currently moonlighting and have another job - tell your inner circle of co-workers that you needed to make some extra money, and have started doing your freelance work on the side. They might know someone who

wants to hire you. Be careful as to not let your supervisors get upset that you are doing outside work that may affect your current work.

If none of these things are working, it's time to volunteer your talent to a local organization. Idealist.org is a website for non-profits and organizations to get volunteers for a variety of things. I found an NGO looking to have a short video series made, and sent them my sample reel. They loved my work and asked if I could do their project. It was a fun project, I got to meet a lot of great people, and my brand got bigger as more people knew what I did.

The key thing here is to stay busy. Even if you're not finding paid work, do some volunteer work. Practice your skills. If you're posting samples of your work or volunteering your time in your community, I assure you that you'll eventually find work. **BEST OF LUCK!**

## THE PROPOSAL

Finally after all of this hard work, you get a response or inquiry from someone asking about your work. *What do you do now?* The first thing to do is put together is a simple proposal for them. What is included in the proposal? There are few main ingredients: a project description, schedule, and bid. All of this should be limited to a single page so that someone can quickly see the entire scope of the project on one page.

The project description describes what the project is and includes the objective of the project and the process for doing so. The schedule includes specific dates that you will be working and/or an estimate of the time you will be putting into the project as well as when the project will be complete. The bid includes the price you are willing to do the project for and can include a breakdown of what makes up this price (equipment costs, hourly rates, etc.). It isn't necessary to explain where every penny is going unless they ask. Here is a sample proposal for a photography event that you can base your proposal off of:

### **Project:**

Event coverage of the end-of-year gala. I will shoot photographs of the entire event including: people mingling, speakers, performances, and general coverage. I will edit the photographs and send you the files digitally. You will have the opportunity for one round of re-edits for the photographs.

### **Schedule:**

The gala takes place on December 15, 20\*\* from 6pm-11pm. I will edit the photos and send you the first round of edits the following day.

**Bid:**

Total cost: \$575

Breakdown:

- 5 hours shooting @ \$75/hour
- 4 hours editing @ \$50/hour

This is a very basic example, but I hope it gives you a good idea for what needs to go into a proposal.

With your proposal, they may ask for a contract. Or, you might be asked for a contract after they've seen your bid and tentatively accepted it. The contract will consist of what's in the proposal including a spot for signatures from both parties. There is a great [online contract creator](#) that you can use to automatically build a contract for your job.

That's the basics of creating a proposal and contract! **NOTHING** *is holding you back now!* Get to work!

## PRICING STRATEGIES

*How much should you charge? Am I charging too low? How can I make more money? When should I increase my rates?* These are all questions that I used to ask myself. Setting your prices can be one of the most difficult things to do. It comes down to a few things: quality, competition, and *really* how much you want to charge.

Setting your prices should be based on the quality of your work, and not the quantity. I've been in situations where I see companies paying top-dollar for one-off projects, but pay a measly amount for a series of projects. Of course it is good to have consistent work, and if you can set up a deal to do multiple projects for a company that would be **great!** But doing this doesn't mean you should give them a dirt-cheap rate. Base your prices off of your quality. You're a person with a lot of skills - *skills that they don't have!* That is why they are hiring you. You know that you can do top quality work. Charge accordingly. Don't be scared to ask for more than your gut says.

Make sure you are **covering your expenses. Let's step back and look at the big picture.** How much do you need to make in a year to cover your expenses? How much more do you need to start saving up, and afford a comfortable lifestyle? How much work will you be able to do in one year? Now set your prices accordingly. *Do you get what I'm saying?* You need to charge the amount of money that you need to survive - **and thrive!** So when a project comes in, calculate how many hours you are going to put into it. Set your hourly rate. This will vary depending on where you live (including what the market rate is in your area). It could be anywhere from \$15/hour to \$75/hour. Add the cost of any equipment or tools you'll need for this



project. Add some cost for depreciation. Add 15.3% for taxes. That should get you to a decent figure.

**Should you charge per project or per hour?** This is a big question that really changes how you work. My rule of thumb is if it is going to be a big project - 40 or more hours, I'd like to charge per hour. You never know how long a project can drag on. So stay safe by charging per hour. If it is a one-off, quick-and-dirty project, it's good to charge one fee. Of course, as I mentioned above this fee will be based on your estimated hours and hourly rate.

If you get stuck in a job that expands the original scope, it is okay to **increase the cost**. You'll need to have an honest conversation with your client, and let them know that you need to charge them more to complete the project. **NOW**, only do this if the project doesn't stay consistent with your contract. Don't let them take advantage of you! You don't want to burn out.

Another tip is that you can **charge more for *rush work***. The client needs it fast, and should be willing to pay a premium. Charge 20-40% more for rush work.

**Update your prices regularly** - at least once per year. As you get more work, and get better at what you do, it is a good idea to update your rates. If you're in the middle of a project you can let the client know that after this project your rates will increase to x, y, z. This also gives you an opportunity to reach out to previous clients at the start of the year. Keep an email list of all past clients, and send them an email at the start of the year with your new rates.

**Keep track of your time**. This will let you know if you are charging too much or too little. At the end of each project, calculate what your hourly rate was. Now you'll have a better idea for what to charge in the future.

**Never guess.** Always have a reason for how much you're charging. The client might ask why you are charging a certain amount, and it is good to have an answer. You don't have to explain all of your reasoning up front - just when they ask. As I mentioned before, check out your competition to see what they're charging. You can send an anonymous email to other freelancers in your area to see how much they would charge for a project. You can search online forums to find the going rate. But know that rates will dramatically fluctuate. For example, videographers make a lot more money in California than in Kansas - due to higher cost of living and competition.

**Find your sweet spot.** It's tough to price right. I often have felt like I charged too low. It will take time. Charging too high can show you're too cocky or too inexperienced trying to get projects. Charging too low might show that you don't have much to offer, or that you don't dedicate much time to your work. So try to find some middle-ground that will be fair to you and the client! If your client is happy with your work, they'll be happy with what they paid you. That's the *bottom line*.

## TAXES & MONEY TIPS

I won't pretend to be an accountant, so I'm not going to give you very specific advices on taxes or money. You should consult an expert about all things money. I don't want you to get in trouble. That disclaimer being said, I do have some tips that will help you while you start out. So pay attention, because this is important.

**SAVE!** Just starting out, it is hard to tell how much money you'll be making from your freelancing, or if you'll be making money at all. *I believe in you though, and really think you're going to do great! Heck, you 10 steps ahead of everyone else after reading through this book and taking action.* So we're going to assume that you're going to make a decent amount of money freelancing. That means you have to save. Save at least 15% of your income for taxes. I actually suggest saving more because you want to have extra just in case you make a ton of money and end up in a higher tax bracket. Put it away when you get paid, and don't touch it. I've seen so many fellow freelancers spend the money they've earned as soon as it hits their checking account. When it comes time to pay taxes the following April... literally 15 months after doing the work for that particular project, it can be hard to remember where that money went. So do yourself a favor, and save!

Pay quarterly taxes. *Did you know about this?* Well, I sure didn't when I started. Quarterly taxes are taxes that you need to pay four times throughout the year. **What!?! I have to pay taxes four times!** Sounds crazy, but it's important. It actually helps you, because now you don't have to worry about accidentally spending money that's not technically yours. We all owe Uncle Sam part of our paychecks. Talk to your accountant to find out more about quarterly taxes. If you

don't pay them, you'll incur fees and interest on the taxes that you don't pay by the end of the year.

Taxes aren't fun, but they are important. For those of you that live in the United States, we live in one of the greatest countries in the world. As messed up as it sometimes seems, traveling to third-world countries over the past few years has consistently shown me how amazing our lives really are. I'll use the postal service as an example, a heavily government-subsidized organization. Sure the lines in the post office are too much to deal with, but what they provide is freaking amazing! For less than fifty cents, you can put letter outside your front door. A professional mail carrier will walk up to your doorstep, take that letter, hand deliver it to the distribution center in your town that deciphers your scribbles, puts that letter on a jet plane that uses far too much fuel to a truck that takes it to another distribution center, that organizes the mail and puts your letter on a car that is driven by a man or women who hand delivers your letter to the doorstep of your intended receiver.

**WOAH!** How amazing is that? And it's less than a buck! You can't get much for a buck nowadays, but you can do all of that?! That's awesome. And the only way it's possible is because your tax dollars go to this (along with a number of other questionable but also amazing things). My point is: pay your taxes, and realize how awesome life.

Those are my tax & money tips. If you have more questions, get on the phone with an accountant or do some in-depth web searches.

## **SETTING UP A WORKFLOW**

The freelancer life-style is all about staying organized and staying positive. Having a good workflow to your day-to-day routine is key. It may be helpful to schedule out your weeks in advance. For example, know that on Monday and Tuesday you will be applying to new jobs and reaching out for new leads. Wednesday, you will spend some creative time working on a project for your portfolio. Thursday and Friday are days spent reaching out to old friends and clients to see if they have work.

Once you have a job, set up your work-day flow. When will you wake up? When will you start working? How long will you work before you take a break? How will you complete your job? Is there a routine that can be replicated for each job? The more systematic you can make your freelance lifestyle, the less crazy and stressful it will seem.

When I do freelance work, I now have a very good flow from proposal to final delivery. I know exactly what I should be doing and when to do it. This makes freelancing fun and rewarding!

## **AND THAT'S THE BALL GAME!**

Hopefully by this point you feel like you have a grasp on launching your own freelance career. If you follow my tips, and take action after each chapter you'll be landing jobs in no time. **I BELIEVE IN YOU!** I know how it is to start freelancing without support. Maybe you have a boyfriend or girlfriend who is afraid that you won't have enough money. Maybe your parents will be ashamed of their non-doctor/lawyer/banker. Maybe you are worried that it might not work out.

Take charge of your own life. If you believe in yourself, everything will work out. Most importantly - **TAKE ACTION!** Spend time each day building up your freelance career. It can (and will) be so rewarding. Freelancing is freedom. It is control. It is no-bosses-looking-over-your-shoulder. It is fulfilling. And I'm so excited for you.

Thanks for reading this book. Please leave a review of the book wherever you downloaded it. Share it with a friend. Keep it as a reference. If you're interested in diving deeper into all of the topics I mentioned in this book, please enroll in my full video course on launching a successful freelance career. Because I like you so much, I'm going to give you \$150 off the full course. Now you can [enroll](#) for only \$49! [Click here to enroll!](#)

See you inside the class!

-Phil