



HOW TO BE A

ROCKSTAR FREELANCER

From the Authors of *FreelanceSwitch*

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ROCK*

Elevate Press

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eden.cc

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Foreword

Although freelancers today are usually designers, writers, programmers, photographers, or illustrators; a few centuries ago the word *freelance* had a whole other meaning. Back then mercenary knights or ‘*free lances*’ were soldiers for hire, named for the long poles they carried and the freedom they had in whom they fought for.

Though a lance is no longer required, today’s freelancer does share one thing in common with those knights: the freedom to choose.

It is this freedom to be your own boss, to select your projects and clients, and to have a different lifestyle. This is what draws so many people to a career in freelancing.

Although people freelance in many different professions, countries and clients, still we all share much in common. This book will show you the ins and outs of freelancing, dealing with subjects like how to get your first projects, what to do when a client won’t pay and how to handle tricky clients. It is written as a general guide that will benefit contractors of all professions.

Cyan and I have worked for many years as freelancers, and have had experience hiring freelancers also. Today we write about the subject on FreelanceSwitch.com.

As one freelancer to another, I wish you the best of luck with your freelancing career. I hope this book helps you to a more prosperous, exciting and rewarding future.

Collis Ta’eed



Getting Started

Beginning a freelancing career is one of the most exciting things you'll ever do. Maybe it's the thrill of giving your nine-to-five the flick, maybe it's the prospect of being your own boss, or maybe it's just the knowledge that you are the master of your own destiny.

What is Freelancing?

Put simply, a freelancer is a person who works for themselves. A freelancer provides some sort of service whether it is photography, design, programming or almost any other occupation. The main difference is that a freelancer has many clients rather than one steady employer. Freelancers often charge by the hour, the day or the project and are effectively running a small business with their skill set as the star product.

Freelancers can also be referred to as contractors as they take short contract jobs for their clients as opposed to a permanent position with a regular salary. A freelancer will usually have a few clients at any one time and will be juggling projects to ensure they are all completed to schedule.

Although you might be thinking that freelancing is simply a different kind of job, in fact it is running your own business. When you are a freelancer, you are a one-person business. At some point you might even expand to a larger operation by hiring staff. Or you could remain a freelancer permanently.

Working for yourself will afford the freedom to choose where you work, when you work, who you work for, what you charge and much more. Along with this freedom can come some new stresses. Where can you find work? When will you get paid? What do you do when there is too much work? What about too little work?

Anyone who is good at what they do can make it as a freelancer. But it will take work. There is a lot to learn that you will not have encountered when working for someone else. This book will guide you through these hurdles and give you a road map for what's ahead.

Though it can be a struggle at times, freelancing is infinitely more rewarding than working for someone else. When you get out of bed in the morning and know that you control your own destiny, that you are

the boss, that feeling is priceless. When everyone else is rushing to get to work, commuting through crowds, and you are relaxed in your own workspace, you'll know you've made the right choice.

Since you are reading this book, it's safe to assume that you have already decided to become a freelancer. The important questions then are where to start and what to do first?

Your Job and Freelancing on the Side

The very first issue to consider is your current employment. Will you be freelancing full-time or taking clients on the side while continuing on at your current job? If you do wish to freelance full-time, should you quit immediately or wait?

If you are anything like us you will probably be excited about quitting your job as soon as possible. However it is worth considering whether to use your current job as a platform to dive into freelancing.

Freelancing on the side while working a regular 9-5 job can help you get your freelancing business started. You can also earn extra cash without the stress of giving up your day job. Let's take a look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of moonlighting as a freelancer:

Advantages

- **You can test the waters**

Giving up the security of your day job can be a bit frightening. When you work for someone else it's their responsibility to bring in work and pay you even when business is quiet. As a full time freelancer you'll be inheriting all that and more.

The great thing about freelancing on the side is that you get to test the waters before you give up the security of your job. It is a little like wearing a swim vest to your first trip in the pool. If it doesn't quite pan out as you'd hoped and you turn out to be a slow learner, those little balloons of air will make sure

you don't get into too much trouble, and if you're the next Ian Thorpe then you can quickly slip out of them and splash away.

- **You'll still get paid holidays**

As a freelancer you will still take holidays, but there is nothing quite like having an employer paying you to sip drinks by the pool. As a part-time freelancer, you can easily turn away projects with the luxury of knowing that you still have regular work to come back to after your vacation.

- **Build a portfolio and stable of clients for future full-time freelancing**

When we left our jobs, our employers made it clear that we were not to use any work we had done for them when bidding for new jobs, in particular on our new freelancing website. Not every employer requires this and it somewhat depends on the industry. However, as a designer in particular this can be a significant setback as your personal portfolio pieces could be out of date or nonexistent.

Freelancing on the side means that you can slowly piece together both a portfolio and a client list so that when you do switch to full-time freelancing you've already done the hard yards.

- **Cashing up**

When you have a full-time job and a part-time freelancing business, you will have a good opportunity to build up some cash reserves. As we discuss in the next section these savings will be extremely useful when you switch to full-time freelancing.

Disadvantages

- **Less free time**

You wanted a full-time job, freelance work AND time to have a life? More often than not that is very hard to achieve. If your job is part-time then this is easier, but even then freelancing

on the side can take up your evenings, weekends and other spare time you might have previously had. Finding balance is always hard to do, but being careful with how much work you take on and focusing on productivity will help. These are generally lessons you need to learn the hard way, so expect your first few months to be a balancing act.

- **No freelancing at work**

There is a huge temptation to start doing your freelance projects while working nine to five. Whether it's using lunch breaks to finish off the odd job or just spare moments here and there, this can have consequences.

Your employer may start wondering why you take longer to complete tasks, and your stress levels will go up as you invent increasingly more complex schemes to make yourself look like you've been working when you haven't. You'll likely become all too familiar with "Alt-Tab" to switch between windows to hide work you weren't meant to be doing.

My advice is to not give in to the temptation and you're your freelance projects out of the office. If you must mix them up,

ROCK* QUOTE

"Don't leap without solid footing... Don't make the leap until you've got the necessary experience and exposure to make it all happen."

I said earlier that my leap was one of faith, and though it was, I was also quite confident the timing was right. I had the necessary experience (portfolio, client roll, variety of projects) and exposure (Google search, incoming links, readership) to leave the ground with solid footing..."

Cameron Moll

Full-time freelancing:

10 things learned in 180 days

CameronMoll.com



talk to your boss about it and see if you can find a solution that works for everyone.

- **No pressure release valves**

When you have far too much work to do, it's good to have an emergency escape route – a way to get the work done in time without too much drama. This might be working on the weekend. Knowing that you have a weekend or an extra night up your sleeve means that you can relax in the knowledge that if you somehow don't finish that Monday-due project by Friday afternoon that it's not the end of the world.

As a part-time freelancer one has far fewer pressure valves since you're already using spare time to freelance. If you accidentally bite off more than you can chew - something not uncommon to freelancers - then you may find that less sleep and a timely 'sick day' are the only cards you have left to play, and that's no fun.

- **Clients don't always want to talk outside of office hours**

Most clients see the hours of 9 to 5 as those to be used for doing business. Part-time freelancers see the hours of 9 to 5 as the hours when they need to switch off their mobile phone, not check their other email address and at least maintain the facade of working for someone else. This can often cause problems.

You may find yourself making hushed phone calls to clients in corridors or having to deal with irate requests to check your email. Try to be honest with your clients about freelancing part-time. They may expect to pay less, but you will also stress less.

Some office environments might be open to you running your freelance communications through them, but these are relatively few and far-between. Again, discuss options with your employer and see if there is a solution that keeps everyone happy.

- **Limited Energy**

Having a day job demands a lot of time and attention and it can be hard to have the focus or energy for freelance projects at the end of a long day. Some people love to work, and others need more downtime. It does take a great deal of stamina and commitment to work full-time and freelance. If you're the type who needs their weekend, then explore the following alternatives instead.

Part-time Work While Freelancing

Transitioning to freelancing is often most easily achieved when one also has a part-time job. A steady job for two-three days a week will give you the security of a reliable income with the time to get your freelancing career under way. Here are some of the benefits of working part-time when you begin freelancing:

- **The security of a steady pay check**

Working part-time will lessen the financial risks of transitioning to full-time freelancing. You'll hopefully be less stressed and be able to build up your business at your own pace. Because you will only be working part-time your salary probably won't be enough to live luxuriously but it should ensure the basics are taken care of.

- **You are reminded weekly why you want to become a freelancer**

Many of us choose to freelance precisely because we don't like working for someone else. When you still have to go in to work a couple of times a week, you'll have that added incentive to succeed at freelancing so that you can finally quit your job.

- **You have enough time**

While working full-time means you have very little time left for freelancing, a part-time job will leave you ample time to give it plenty of energy and focus. If you freelance every week for three weekdays and one day on the weekend, you will be freelancing close to a full-time week, but will still have the security of a job.

- **Once you have a healthy stable of clients you can easily quit the part-time job and make a smooth transition**

Because you have more time to freelance, you will build up a larger and steadier client base. You'll quickly get into a rhythm of work and will become comfortable with your new lifestyle. This means that the transition to freelancing full-time will be smooth.

- **You may be able to get guidance**

If your part-time job is in the same field as your freelance work and you have a good relationship with your colleagues, you may be able to ask for guidance and advice from your boss and peers. Having someone to talk to about work is extremely useful, and chances are any problems you encounter with the business of freelancing are fairly common ones.

Compared to working full-time and freelancing on the side, part-time work has very few disadvantages. There will still be a few days a week when you are not available for meetings or work and this unavailability and distraction can cause problems, but generally they should be relatively minor. In many ways you can think of your part-time job as one specific – and very demanding – freelance client. Here are some of the few disadvantages:

- **You can get *too* comfortable**

Freelancers who work part-time can avoid most of the time pressure of the full-time worker, and the cash flow pressure of the full-time freelancer. This can be beneficial, but there is the danger that without those pressures one can become

complacent and lose the drive to build a freelance business. If you do choose to work part-time, then ensure you have the determination to focus on your freelancing career, otherwise you may find yourself putting off beginning your freelancing career in earnest for the foreseeable future.

- **Your part-time job may drain you**

Chances are your part-time work will not be the job of your dreams. That's fine as it is intended to be temporary stop-gap, but do ensure you have some means to keep the enthusiasm and energy flowing after you finish work. If you find your part-time work is effecting you negatively (due to co-workers, your boss or your work) then you will need to be extra diligent to keep the dream alive and remember why you want to freelance in the first place.

That being said, if you can get part-time work to transition to full-time freelance, our advice is take it – especially if it is in the industry you intend to freelance in. You can get a feel for freelancing and build up a client with minimum risk and a smooth transition.

Full-time Freelancing

While we would not recommend quitting your job without having some freelancing experience, there are some who choose this route. If you are thinking about this path it is essential that you have savings equivalent to your cost of living for at least three months. There may be some who come to freelancing young and are still supported by their parents, or those who are coming to freelancing after leaving their job to care for their family.

Launching a full-time freelancing career without prior experience is a risky move, so we must reiterate that you must have savings equivalent to your cost of living for at least three months, have outside financial support or an established means of passive income. Here are some of the benefits of immediate full-time freelancing:

- **You don't need to 'switch gears'**

It can be challenging to shift your mindset from a job to freelance work, especially when you're trying to do both at once. Full-time freelancing not only allows more energy to be devoted to building your business, but will help you stay entirely focused on your goal.

- **You don't need to give up your free time**

For some, giving up weekends and evenings to freelance work is just impossible. Some need time to recharge and give time to hobbies, or spend quality time with their families, spouse or friends. Happily, full-time freelancers won't need to give up so much of their downtime to build their business. Chances are you'll still have the occasional weekend or evening panic while you find your stride, but this should be far rarer than for those juggling freelance projects while working.

- **You will be available during office hours**

Being available 9 to 5, five days a week will give you an edge when beginning your freelancing career. You can complete tight deadlines and have meetings during office hours which clients will appreciate.

Disadvantages

- **You may experience a culture shock**

Working alone is a surprising challenge for most new freelancers. Many experience loneliness or find it is challenging to get anything done without an authority figure watching over them. There is the inevitable temptation to watch television or even tidy the house. It will take a special type of discipline to work nine to five at home – something that develops over time.

- **You will be at a larger financial risk**

For those relying on savings alone there is the pressure to succeed before cash reserves run out. This can work as a

great incentive, but can also cause a great deal of stress and sometimes desperation. Plan what actions you will take if cash flow is a problem before you take the leap.

Quitting Your Job

For those working full or part-time, there will come a time when you need to take the plunge and leave your job to freelance full-time. While you may be quite keen to say goodbye to a job you've disliked, it is important to leave on a positive note, particularly if your job is in the same industry as your freelancing career.

An ex-employer can often provide a source of early clients for new freelancers. Many agencies will have run-off work or even need a freelancer themselves for busy periods. You will be in an excellent position to take advantage of this since you already have contacts, know the work environment and the type of work. While they may not be your ideal client, when you have a shortage of work, something is definitely better than nothing.

ROCK* QUOTE

You should think strategically about the perfect time to start your freelance life. Do you know when your target market of clients spends money? Don't make the jump to freelance work five minutes after all your prospects' budgets are set for the year...

Are there big projects at work you should finish first to get good endorsements and future work from your soon-to-be ex-employer? Do you have money saved, to handle potential downturns?

You can jump into the freelance fire with both feet without paying attention to the environment around you, but it will be much more effective and profitable if you time the move carefully.

Ben Yoskovitz
14 Tips for Moving From
Full-Time to Freelance Work
InstigatorBlog.com



Your Financial Situation

When you freelance, you are effectively running your own small business. Like any business you are going to need money to get started. Some likely expenses are:

- 1) Office equipment, stationery, software and supplies
- 2) Hiring an accountant and lawyer
- 3) Building and developing a brand, a website, business cards and other marketing materials
- 4) Reserve funds when you start your freelancing business
- 5) Fallback funds in case you are ill or other circumstances prevent you from working.

There is no magic sum of money and certainly if you are still working part-time or full-time then the amount you need will be less. Here are some guidelines:

- **Setup expenses**

List expenses for your workspace, equipment and promotional materials, as well as at least 10% on top for incidentals you might not have thought of.

- **Cost of living for at least three months**

Ensure that you have funds to cover your cost of living for at least three months. While situations will vary, we have found that this guideline should provide a good buffer.

Even the most talented of freelancers can occasionally find it hard to build a business due to outside circumstances. Err to the side of caution when calculating these costs – it's better to be safe than sorry.

Even when business is good you should aim to maintain savings to cover your cost of living expenses for three months. These savings need to be kept for times when you get ill, have no work, an emergency arises or some other situation requires it. Remember that as a freelancer it is your responsibility alone to cover holidays, sick leave and personal time and you should factor that into any financial equation.

Business, Accounting, and Legal Requirements

As with any new business there are government requirements you must fulfil in order to operate legally. These differ in different countries, so make sure to consult your local government.

Here are some general issues to look into when setting up your freelance business:

- **Choosing a business structure**

In most countries there are variety of business structures that you can implement. They usually range from simpler sole trader or partnership structure to a corporation or company structure. A sole trader or partnership usually involves less paperwork but leaves you personally liable. Corporation or company structures are more complex to set up but provide a degree of personal legal protection.

It's important to spend time deciding how to set up your business as it may have implications for things like filing accounts with the tax department, liability when things go wrong, and what paperwork you need to complete. If you need help it is worthwhile to consult a lawyer who specialises in this area. Lawyers aren't cheap so this will be an investment, but the wrong choice of business could potentially cost you a great deal of money and stress in the long run. A qualified

professional will help you understand your options and make an informed choice.

- **Registering or Incorporating your business**

You will need to register or incorporate your business with the government for it to become a legal entity. In the US this also means selecting what state you wish to incorporate in since different states have different laws. Wherever you are you will need to ensure that your business name is unique in its industry area. This can usually be done by consulting a database of local businesses. Contact your local government for more information and resources. We will delve into naming your business in *Chapter 2 – Your Brand*.

- **Registering for tax**

Once your business is registered you may need to register for tax purposes. Most countries give out an identification number to businesses to be used when lodging accounts with the tax department.

Remember, you should consult local government information for details on how to set up a business in your country. Although this can feel complicated or confusing, remember that your government is likely to want to encourage local business and there are generally ample resources available. If you run into problems, consult a lawyer for assistance.

Setting up a Bank Account and Credit Card

Spend some time investigating different business banking options and find a suitable bank and account type for your new business.

Opening a bank account in your business name will ensure that your business transactions and personal transactions remain separate. While at first it might be tempting to use this business account for your personal use from time to time, avoid this at all costs. It makes your accounting much more complex when tax time comes.

You will probably also want to get a business credit card, but this can

be difficult as your business will have no track record yet and banks want evidence that your business is solvent before offering credit. You can instead apply for a credit card in your personal name, but reserve it for only business expenditures so that there is no confusion. Credit cards are useful for purchases of equipment and software, particularly online. A credit card can also be useful to boost cash flow, but remember interest is high on credit cards so this should only be a temporary or emergency measure.

Legal and Accounting Advice

As soon as possible you should contact a lawyer and an accountant. It is always better to find individuals who specialize or are at least experienced in your industry. If you cannot get a personal recommendation then contact your local industry association and ask for their advice.

Lawyers and accountants can be expensive so ask for an initial consultation to discuss your needs before commissioning any work. Ask any questions you may have, and find out if there are any legal or tax issues you need to sort out that you may not be aware of. Ask for a quote for the work discussed before commencing so you don't get any surprises.

Your lawyer should assist you with both general business advice and any questions you might have regarding your liabilities, contracts with clients or potential intellectual property issues that may arise.

It is also important to build a relationship with an accountant. A good accountant can help you with financial advice, help you plan your business, make sure you pay as little tax as possible and ensure you don't get into trouble with the tax department. Try to find someone on personal recommendation and look for a person who is not only experienced in your area but will also explain things to you simply and answer questions in layperson's terms.

While an accountant will provide advice and manage the more major financial events for your business, they are probably too expensive for your day-to-day book keeping. You will either need to do this yourself or hire a bookkeeper.

Since your accounts are unlikely to be very complicated to begin with, we advise doing it yourself. Get yourself some bookkeeping software such as *QuickBooks* and take a short course on the topic. For the most part bookkeeping is simply keeping good records and so long as you are diligent you are unlikely to run into any problems. An accountant will often suggest a system that works well with their processes.

Make sure you record every expense related to your business as come tax time you will be able to claim a wealth of new deductions and save yourself a lot of money. Your accountant will be able to tell you what is tax-deductible in your region and industry.

Completing your own bookkeeping will also give you detailed insights into how your business is faring financially. If you are a little errant in spending, this will help keep you on track.

For more detailed business, accounting and legal advice consult a professional in your region.

While an accountant will provide advice and manage the more major financial events for your business, they are probably too expensive for your day to day book keeping. You will either need to do this yourself or hire a bookkeeper.

Having a Business Plan

A basic business plan is essential for any new freelancer. Even when you are starting a business as small as a freelance business it is worth doing some planning. That is after all why you are reading this book!

A formal way of doing your planning is to write a traditional business plan. We recommend doing this, but not spending too much time on it. The key with business planning is not to create an exact road map of what will happen in the future, but rather it is to spend time thinking about your business.

By spending time thinking about your plans you will be forced to question assumptions you may have falsely made and spot potential problems before they arise.

What is a business plan?

A business plan is a document that covers the following:

- **Organizational plan**

This section contains a detailed summary of how you intend to make money, what services you plan to offer and how much they will cost, who your clients are going to be as well as details like the business name, the office location and so on.

ROCK* QUOTE

When I refer to a business plan, I don't mean a 100-page monstrosity filled with five-year projections. A freelancer's business plan needs to have three qualities. First, it has to be written. The act of writing down your plan will force you to think it through much more carefully than if you "keep it in your head." Second, it has to set clear, measurable objectives. After all, how will you know that you've succeeded if you don't define success before you begin?

Chris Yeh
Best Practices for
Freelance Business
Sitepoint.com



- **Marketing plan**

This section outlines how you plan to get clients and work, what advertising or marketing you will do and what goals and estimations you have for the number of jobs you might get as a result.

- **Financial plan**

This section will outline how much you will be charging, how many hours a week you expect to bill, how many days a year you will be working, how much you need to spend on expenses, when those costs will occur and whether you will have enough money. It's good to map out a plan of the year in terms of expenses so you can analyse and plan with your expected income and cash flow.

It's a good idea to read a book on business planning for detailed guidelines. Most of these books are written for larger business plans so pick and choose what is appropriate for you. Don't spend too long on your plan and don't let it hold you back. Think of it more as an exercise to help make sure you've accounted for everything and that you're thoroughly prepared to begin your freelancing career.

2

Your Brand

As you may already know, branding is the art of distinguishing one product from the rest. In this case that product is you. Branding for a freelancer is about creating an identity that represents you and your services and sets you apart from other competing freelancers. Your brand will guide a potential clients first impression, will help you win projects, and will build your business.

What is Branding for a Freelancer?

The word branding originally comes from the farming practice of burning an emblem on to a cow's hide to identify who the animal belonged to.

The modern meaning of branding is actually very similar. A brand is an identity for a product or company that helps you distinguish it from other similar products and companies using things like graphics, advertising, and public relations. This branding can be the deciding factor in choosing between two products that are often near identical.

ROCK* QUOTE

Small business branding is not a good logo, a rhyming name, or special font. Small business branding is the owner. It's what the owner does, says and how the owner's traits come through in every aspect of the business. It's the way relationships are built and maintained, the way a person does business and treats other people. It's how rapport is established at an individual level, where trust and comfort exist as human characteristics, not from theme music, models or slogans.

Yaro Starak
Small To Medium
Business Branding
SmallBusinessBranding.com



For a freelancer, the brand is the product. The product is the company, and the company is you. How do clients and potential clients tell the difference between your services and your competitors? What makes you stand out from other freelancers that answered that job ad?

Branding your freelance business is all about creating a personal business identity for yourself. At its most basic, it will be a name, a logo, a website and a set of visual materials. You will aim for these elements to give you a professional and memorable image. They will be one reason to choose you over another freelancer.

Make no mistake – your branding can be the deciding factor between

winning a project and being passed over for another freelancer. In some situations you meet a prospective client face to face and win them over with personality and charm, but in many others they will come across your website, an advert, get handed a business card or simply receive an email. In these situations your brand should do the talking for you.

If you choose to take branding further, it can be about creating recognition of your name, mind-share to potential customers about what you do and a certain level of fame. Think of some of the best people in your industry and consider that their names and their businesses are their brands. They have most likely developed them up very carefully.

What Can Branding Do For You?

Let's briefly discuss what a brand can do for you as a freelancer. Consider two example:

- **Example one**

You and another freelancer are both competing for a job. You have similar styles of work and competence. Your price is double that of the other freelancer. Part of the reason your price is high is that you have cultivated a brand of service.

Materials such as your website define the level of service you provide. They are laden with testimonials from other clients and language that focuses on the customer. You have a polished set of business cards and stationery and when you meet your client you present them with a folder explaining what you do. Your competitor on other hand has a standard website and persona. There are many clients who will give you the job and pay the higher price. Why? Why do some people buy a *Rolex* and not a *Casio*? Does a *Rolex* really keep better time? It may do or it may not – it is our perception that is the deciding factor.

- **Example two**

Consider two freelancers who specialise in Search Engine Optimization – the art of getting a website found by searchers. Both have similar skill levels and services, however one publishes a well-read blog on the latest SEO techniques, has a popular book on the topic and regularly makes appearances on other blogs, forums and websites. This second freelance has taken time to create recognition of their name and a perception of being an expert in the field. Who do you suppose would get more work? Who could charge more?

Branding when used effectively can lead to more work, higher perceived value and premium prices. This is why the branding of your business should be one of your top priorities.

You as a Brand

The best place to start with branding yourself is to consider what it is you stand for. How do you want customers to see you? Although you may be tempted to list every positive adjective you can think of, try to focus on only one or two. A brand is always more powerful if it has a clear and concise message.

Some things you might like to stand for are:

- *Quality*
- *Experience*
- *Value*
- *Service*
- *Expertise*
- *Efficiency*
- *Reliability*

Your aim is to own a word the way *Volvo* owns 'safety', *Mercedes* owns 'engineering' or *BMW* and owns 'driving'. Sure *Volvos* are about driving and are well engineered, but it is 'safety' that people would identify as their defining trait.

Similarly a freelancer might give good service and be an expert in their field, but have clients identify them with 'Experience' and hence trust them with important jobs. Alternatively a freelancer could decide that they are all about 'Value' and 'Budget' and build a brand that promises clients that they will get a good deal. Yet another option would be for a freelancer building a brand around 'Expertise' who works on developing an industry reputation to bring in prestigious projects.

ROCK* TIPS

Some consider branding to be no more than a logo and aesthetic style, but it is so much more. Here are some of the areas you should think about branding – remember that each of these should reflect your core branding value:

[VISUAL] *Logo*

Colour scheme

Photography style

Fonts

Signage

Promotional materials

Your physical presentation (hair style, clothes, etc.)

[COMMS] *The tone and mood of your written materials*

Answering machine message and email auto-responder

Email style

Level and speed of service

Work processes

Invoice style, language and terms

Your contract

Whether you use the first, second or third person in copy

[ONLINE] *Email signature and format*

Website usability

Ways to contact you (form, email address, phone number, Skype)

Your blog (personal or business)

A photo of you

Your portfolio website

What types of work you show on your portfolio website



To create an effective brand you need to decide what you represent and then express that value in everything you do. The word you have selected will form your core brand value.

Of course the most important part of this brand is you! So it is important that it reflects your personality and disposition. Many people deliberately hire freelancers as they want to deal with a person as opposed to a larger business, so it's important not to feel you have to be something you're not.

Building a brand will take time and it will likely be something that develops with your freelancing career. However, it is important to decide on your core brand value right from the start, so that when you do create branding elements they express a unified message.

Naming Your Business

The cornerstone of every brand is the brand name. For a freelancer that will be your business name. Here are some of the qualities you should look for in a name:

- **Easy to spell**
Ideally your name should only need to be spelt once to a new client. Names that are difficult to spell should be avoided as clients may mistype when searching, emailing or worse, recommending you.
- **Easy to pronounce**
A name that is easy to pronounce is inherently more memorable. It will also mean clients don't feel silly saying it when they recommend you.
- **Short and memorable**
The shorter a name, the more memorable it will be.

- **Relevant domain name**

As the web is such an important element for marketing and branding, make sure you can find a relevant domain name before settling on a business name. While you don't need anything glamorous, it should still be related and reasonably short. Your domain name can have your country suffix, which should make it easier to find a reasonable domain.

- **Reasonably unique**

The less common a brand name the better. The whole point of a brand is to stand out, not fade into a mass of similar names. Before making your decision, search for similar business names in your industry and or profession. If another business has a similar or identical name, you may want to keep looking for a more unusual name.

Some freelancers choose to use their own name as their business name, while others do not. Here are some of the advantages and disadvantages of each:

- **A personal name** (e.g. *John Smith Design*)

The advantages of a personalized name:

- Easy to come up with,
- Often unique (depending on your name),
- Descriptive,
- Often easy to find a domain name for,
- Memorable, and
- Usually easily Googled.

The disadvantages of a personalized name:

- Not appropriate for expansion,
- Will not reflect your creativity, and
- Will probably not reflect your brand values.

ROCK* TIPS

When we set out to name our graphic and web design business, this is the process we took:

- [STEP ONE] We defined our core brand
We wanted to be the type of business that considered more than just the bottom line. We decided to give 10% of our time to not-for-profit projects, consider things like environmental and cultural impact, and give back to the community. Wherever possible we wanted to work with businesses that shared a similar philosophy to business. So our core brand value became ETHICAL DESIGN.

- [STEP TWO] We took our core brand value and brainstormed related words
We brainstormed around our core brand value ETHICAL DESIGN and eventually came up with the word GOOD. We felt it encapsulated our brand value and was memorable, but knew it was too common as a word to work alone. We extended it to GOOD CREATIVE as the word 'creative' would not limit the types of projects we could pitch for.

- [STEP THREE] We searched for other businesses with our name
Using Google we found a couple of other design agencies that used the word GOOD in their names, but they were located in other countries. We decided that this was okay as long as we differentiated our branding enough.

- [STEP FOUR] We chose a relevant domain name
We ended up choosing THEGOODNESS.COM.AU but in retrospect that was not the right domain name to choose. It created confusion over whether our business name was GOOD CREATIVE or THE GOODNESS for many of our clients. We should have named it an extension of GOOD CREATIVE instead – like GOODCREATIVESYDNEY.COM or GOODCREATIVESTUDIOS.COM would have been far better choices in retrospect.

- [STEP FIVE] We asked around
We asked our friends, families and colleagues what they thought of our name. Did they feel it tied in with our brand message? Could it be misconstrued? We got positive feedback so we decided it was indeed the right name for our new business. We registered it as a business name, purchased the domain name and got started!



- **A non-personal name** (e.g. *Click Photographic Services*)

The advantages to a non-personal name:

- You are free to find something catchy and fun,
- Can reinforce your core brand values,
- Can reference your services, and
- You can keep the name if you choose to expand.

The disadvantages to a non-personal name:

- It will be harder to find a name that reflects you, and
- It can be very hard to find an appropriate domain.

If you choose to use a non-personal name it can be worthwhile finding something that reflects your brand value, however this isn't essential as you can build brand value into a name. For example *Xerox* inherently means nothing, however over time for customers and the public it has come to mean various things – quality, efficiency and so on.

Your Logo, Business Cards and Materials

A large part of any brand is its visual elements. These are often referred to as a graphic identity. The most important thing to remember when developing your graphic identity is to think of every element as part of one core message. Your logo, colours, font choice, and graphic elements should be consistent across all of your materials, as if they are all from the same family. This unity of expression makes for a very professional image. Some of the materials you might apply your graphic identity include:

- Business cards
- Letterheads
- Email signatures
- Website

- Brochures or folders
- Documents such as invoices, quotes, estimates

Your graphic identity should reflect your brand value and your personality. The colours, fonts, elements and design should ideally tell the viewer something about you and about your work, and should always reflect your core brand value.

Consider product packaging in a supermarket. What is it that makes certain products look like they should cost more, like they will taste better, like they will be superior to the no-name version next to them? Freelancers are certainly not food items, but the same principles apply. Solid visual branding can make you look like a contender, increase the worth and value of your services and win your projects.

Hiring a Designer

If you aren't a designer yourself, it is essential to hire another freelancer or design agency to produce a logo and at least some business cards for you. If you are on a tight budget often a designer can work cheaply if you forfeit your right to ask for revisions and multiple design options.

When choosing a designer, first consider what aesthetic would best express your core brand value. Find a designer that has work in their portfolio that has a similar aesthetic.

Buy or borrow print design books and find three samples of the style you have chosen for your brand. If you're on a tight budget this will help your designer quickly and easily understand the look and feel of your intended brand. Once this is done, if you have hired a talented designer you should be able to let them guide you to the best solution for your needs.

Interim Design Solutions

For some freelancers, hiring a professional designer just isn't an option yet. For the new freelancer money can be tight, and you may need to come up with an interim branding solution. If that's the case for you,

follow these steps to create something yourself:

- (1) Select a font that you like. Choose something simple!
- (2) Choose a simple 2-3 colour palette. You can find lots of palettes to choose at *Adobe Kuler* - <http://kuler.adobe.com>. Consider your branding message when choosing your palette. For instance, a corporate brand might stick to black, navy or grey, or an environmental brand might utilize greens and browns.
- (3) Write your business name in your chosen font. Use only one colour for one word business names. If your business is two words, you can use one colour from your palette for each word. Never use more than one colour in your logo. Your aim should be something like the *Sony* logo - very simple and understated. Use this logo and typeface on any document you create.
- (4) Get a small number of business cards printed. The best service we've found is *Moo Mini Cards* - <http://moo.com>. Find a stock photograph you feel expresses your core brand value in an abstract way and use that for the back of the card. Make sure the colours in the photo complement the colours in your chosen palette. *iStockPhoto* - <http://istockphoto.com> is a good place to look for stock photography.
- (5) Hire a professional designer as soon as you can afford to. The directions above will never replace the work of a professional designer! The work of a professional designer will make all the difference to your brand and perceived professionalism.

Your Website

For most freelancers a website is the single most important piece of branding and marketing they will do. A website is not only the first port of call for many new clients, it showcases your portfolio, is a marketing tool in its own right and can produce new leads through listings in search engines and directories.

Again unless you are a professional web designer, you should hire someone to design and build a website for you. If you are on a tight budget you can try one of the following services which offer customizable template websites as an interim solution:

- **OtherPeoplesPixels** - <http://otherpeoplespixels.com>
A solution for artists and designers to get their work online quickly and easily. Choose a design then fill it with your work! It costs between US\$8 and US\$25 per month and is suitable for a web novice.
- **Wordpress** - <http://wordpress.com>
Wordpress has a free blog service where you can set up a blog style business website. It has design and layouts to choose from and is suitable for those with at least a bit of experience with the web. If you want to use your own domain you need to upgrade to a US\$10 plan if you already own your domain, or US\$10 if you want to purchase one through them.
- **FolioSnap** - <http://foliosnap.com>
FolioSnap offers self-managed portfolio websites for creative people. They offer more features and better designs than the other two options, but cost more too. Prices range from US\$19 to US\$59 per month with a two week trial.

Here are some important considerations to bear in mind when creating your website:

- **Brand your website**

Your website is the jewel in your branding crown. Make sure it emphasizes your core brand value at every turn through, look, feel, language and usability.

- **Aim your website at your clients**

It seems obvious but freelancers sometimes make websites that are unconsciously aimed at people in the industry. Remember clients aren't necessarily interested in cutting edge design or inventive navigation systems. Generally speaking clients are interested in one thing – themselves. When they are viewing your website they are thinking about how you can help them and their business. Keep this in mind and make sure that your website helps them to see why they should hire you.

- **Give your website some personality**

As with all the elements of your brand, your website should represent YOU. There is nothing worse than a website that feels 'standard' or is filled with stock business photography and vague marketing language that doesn't really say anything. Make sure your website sounds and feels like you.

- **Consider including testimonials**

Client testimonials can be a fantastic tool to lend credibility to a website. Some freelancers are nervous to ask for a testimonial, but most clients will be happy to provide one if they are satisfied with your service. If the client in question has a recognizable brand name then the endorsement will be all the more powerful and will prove effective in convincing new clients to choose your services.

- **Describe what you do in laypersons terms**

You may know all about what you do and what services you provide but most prospective clients won't clearly understand what you do and how it can benefit their business. Use language a layperson could easily understand and term everything in the context of it's usefulness to your target market. Try to think about what information you would like to see if you went to another freelancer's site. So for example if you are a designer, what details would you want if you visited a programmer's website, and vice-versa. Explaining clearly your services ensures your prospective client will see what it is you can do for them.

Hiring a good copywriter will make all the difference to your communications, and give you that extra element of professionalism. Of course if you can't afford a copywriter right now you can write your own copy, but nothing can replace the work of a qualified professional.

- **Have an easy call to action**

After visitors to your website have learned about your services and have decided that you are someone they want to work with, make sure they have an easy way to contact you. This might be a form to request a quote, a telephone number, an email address or all three. Emphasize your contact details on your website – don't just have a small link tucked away somewhere. Remember you are a business and the call to action is one of the keys to converting an interested party into a paying client.

In *Chapter 5 – Getting Work*, we'll discuss your portfolio and more about your website.

Building Your Reputation

You can build your reputation on three levels:

- **Amongst clients**

When you do consistently good work you will naturally develop a positive reputation amongst your clients. Every freelancer should strive to build a strong reputation with their clients as it leads to referral work and repeat jobs.

- **Locally**

Being known in your area is one step better as you will be get work from unexpected sources who may have heard of you even though you haven't heard of them. This is the first step to having a reputation that proceeds you.

- **In your industry**

If you are known as being amongst the best in your industry in a specific area or overall, you will be able to command far higher rates as well as better jobs. As an expert, you will also earn the respect of your clients, and your suggestions and input will carry more weight.

ROCK* QUOTE

One of the best ways of becoming a successful freelancer is to become the person people want to do business with... When looking for a new freelancer I'll get a much better sense of their interests and abilities though their blog than I'd ever get from reading a resume. It's a great marketing tool, so if you don't have a blog, you should set one up straight away.

Andy Budd
7 Habits of a Highly Successful
Freelance Web Designer
AndyBudd.com



Sometimes you may not even need to be amongst the best to be well known. You may simply be outspoken or have a knack for generating publicity.

A reputation takes time to build and requires you be genuinely good at what you do. You should be aiming to build a reputation that reinforces your brand value, however a natural part of any reputation is expertise.

Building a reputation is dependant on three elements:

(1) You must do something to set you apart

The actions you take to improve or expand your reputation depends on whether you want to focus on your industry, clients or your community at large.

If your focus is your industry you might speak at an event or create a local group.

If your focus is the community at large, you might speak at your local chamber of commerce to small businesses wanting to learn more about your industry, or create a blog that offers information to those wanting to learn more about your industry.

If you are building a reputation amongst clients you might aim to win awards, produce consistently good work or provide amazing levels of service that people can't help but talk about.

(2) You must generate publicity

Building a reputation is to become renowned or famous in one area. To do that you must be noticed. This means networking, being seen at events, or volunteering for not-for-profit activities. Your aim should be to network and become widely known in your industry or community.

(3) You must be consistent

The reason a reputation takes time to build is that it must be done consistently and over time. You can't provide great service to one client and not to another and expect to maintain a reputation for great service. Similarly you can't build a reputation as an expert by writing a single article or winning one award. You must repeat your achievements and develop your reputation over time and on a consistent basis.

Although difficult, building a reputation will reap rewards. You will gain respect in your industry and from clients, you will win better jobs and your rates will be a reflection of that.

3

The Working Day

As the new master of your working destiny, you now have full control and responsibility for your working day. That means thinking about productivity, organization, the environment and how you can make the most of your new found freedom!

Home or Office or ...

One of the first things you should decide is where will you be doing your work. Before you wave goodbye to commuting and don your pyjamas let's look at three scenarios:

Home

There is something very relaxing about working from home. Perhaps it's the familiar surroundings, perhaps it's the fact that at any time you could go take a nap on the couch. Home is where most freelancers begin their careers. Here's a look at the benefits and drawbacks, as well as some tips for working from home:

The benefits:

- **Super cheap**

Perhaps the biggest draw of working at home is the price. Since you're already living there, you won't have extra rent or bills. You can make use of existing phone and internet connections, and you'll be able to claim back from tax many of the things you were paying anyway. Claiming part of your rent or mortgage payments and bills against your tax can save a lot of money.

- **No commute**

Commuting to and from work in a big city can eat up valuable hours every day. Along with the wasting time, it can also be a pretty frustrating and stressful experience. Work at home, however, and you kiss all that goodbye. The only commuting you'll be doing is down the hall!

- **Nice and quiet**

Depending on your situation, working at home can provide a very quiet environment for you to work in. With any other residents usually at work or school, you will have a more peaceful environment to work in than to most offices.

- **Personal routine**

Working from home gives you flexibility to fit in your personal routines. Whether it's an exercise regime, making lunches to save cash or just an afternoon siesta that you love to take, when your workplace is your own home you can do pretty much whatever you feel like.

- **Works well if you have children**

If you have children, young children in particular, working anything resembling 'normal' hours can be challenging. When you choose to work at home you can fit your work schedule around the rest of your life, not the other way around.

- **Relaxed and casual**

Working from home can be very relaxed. In fact, unless you have clients visiting you can even work in your underpants!

The drawbacks:

- **Doesn't look very professional for clients**

If you are in an industry where you need to meet with clients it can be difficult to work at home. At some point a client will offer to come see 'where you work', and some of them will be insistent! There's nothing to stop you inviting them to your home, but most freelancers will feel a bit unprofessional and inappropriate doing so.

- **Clutters up your home**

Most of us have enough clutter in our homes without adding desks, computers and office equipment into the mix.

- **No separation between home and work**

One of the biggest problems when working at home can be the lack of separation between work and the rest of your life. Rather than switching off in the evening you can't help but feel that maybe you should finish that project instead of relaxing. Or instead of waking up on the weekend feeling like you have the day off, you still feel a little like you are at work.

- **Strange hours**

Nothing is more conducive to working bizarre hours than working from home. Where once you woke up at a decent hour, worked a normal day and then had evenings off, you suddenly find sometimes you work late into the night, or sometimes you take mornings off and then make it up by working Saturday afternoon. This does afford a lot of flexibility, but sometimes it's good to know that you've put in a solid days work and you can enjoy your evenings and weekends like the rest of the working world.

- **Always in the same place**

And finally, unless you go out a lot, you are always in the same space. You wake up there, you spend all day there, you spend all night there. It's a little like being in prison... well, not really, but you get the picture.

Tips:

- **Have a separate space**

If you can set up your workspace so that is separate from the rest of the house, this will help you separate your work from the rest of your life. Working on your dining table or on the couch will not only make it hard to concentrate on work, but will make it hard to relax in that space too.

- **Keep it near the front door**

If you need to meet clients, keep your workspace near the front door. That way you won't need to guide your client through the house to get to it.

- **Get out more**

When you worked in an office you couldn't wait to get home and throw yourself on the couch to unwind. When you work at home all day, you need to get out to unwind. Whether it's taking a walk or going out on the town, make sure you spend time out of the house as well as in.

Office

Renting a small office either in town or near your home can be a great way of keeping your work and home life separate. It's also quite fun putting together your own office. Somehow it feels very satisfying knowing you have your own personal office for your business. Here's a look at the benefits and drawbacks, as well as some tips for working in an office:

Benefits:

- **Looks and feels professional**

Where working at home can look and feel very unprofessional, an office has the opposite effect. Having clients come to visit is not a problem and you will most definitely enjoy saying things like *'my offices are located at ...'*, *'step into my office'* and *'drop by my office tomorrow'*.

- **Separates home and work**

Having your work take place outside your home goes a long way to keeping life and work separate. As a business owner you will find work still has a way of worming itself into your thoughts more often than an employee, but at least when it does there won't be a computer a few steps away from you.

- **Forces you to switch off and go home**

Strange as it sounds, the act of going home can be a good period to switch off from work. Whether you are walking, driving or commuting back, having a little time to debrief yourself isn't always a bad thing.

Drawbacks

- **Expensive**

If you are just starting out, the added cost of office rent can be crippling. Unless you have plenty of cash reserves in the bank, moving to an office is probably a step to take after you've been working for a few months.

- **Might bring back memories**

Plenty of people become freelancers to escape the office, not to create a new one. If this is you, enjoy working from home before you hurry to recreate your past.

- **You have to commute back and forth**

Again if you are trying to escape commutes, then having an office you have to travel to could just be more of the same.

Tips:

- **Start small**

Tempting as it is to rent a giant workspace and deck out your new office in style, you should start small. Over time you'll have a chance to build up a slick workplace and take the cost in small lumps instead of one big hit. And if your budget allows it you can always move up to a bigger office later.

- **Get somewhere nice and light**

Cheap offices can be like prison cells. Avoid a neon lit office with no windows at all costs. You want to be a freelancer to make your life better, not worse.

- **Get a place nearby**

Most built-up areas have offices for rent so you don't necessarily need to rent a space right in the heart of the city. Rent somewhere close to your home so you can minimize the commute.

Elsewhere

Although at first glance it appears that your choice of workspace is limited to home or office, there are alternatives. Using a public library is a particularly good option as the quiet, the facilities, the internet access and the general hum of the place are all great for working and saving on office rent and ISP bills.

Other options include coffee shops or working outdoors. You will require a laptop to make use of these different locations, but if you have one it can be well worth it to experiment, especially if you are finding yourself spending too much time at home.

A Happy Workspace

It is important to spend the time to properly set up your office. After all you will be there for a good portion of your waking day (and sometimes night!)

It's not difficult or necessarily expensive to create an efficient and comfortable workspace. Rather it's a matter of taking the time to get it right.

The Ergonomic Workspace

Whether you work from home or in an office, there are easy ways to optimize your workspace for productivity and health. The ideal workspace will minimize your risk of injury and will make it easy to stay organized. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Your location**

Ideally, your desk should face the door, so when you are seated you are facing it. This is not only the position found to be the most calming for the occupant, but is also the most welcoming for someone entering the room.

- **Natural light**

If at all possible, find a space with a good source of natural light. A window allows you to give your eyes a break by looking out every so often, not lose track of time, improves your mood and lessens eye fatigue from looking at a bright screen. Plus if you are a graphic designer or illustrator, natural light will help you view colours accurately on printed materials.

- **Your chair**

In all likelihood you will spend at least eight hours a day in this chair, so it is worth investing in a good one. When looking for a chair, it is best to go into a store and sit on the chair before purchasing it. You may wish to find a better price online after that, but don't skip giving it a test-sit, so to speak.

If you don't have an office budget, let alone a chair budget, you may want to try an exercise ball. They cost around US\$20 to US\$30 and makes a great interim office chair. Exercise balls help your posture and increases core abdominal strength, which will help you avoid back pain. When purchasing an exercise ball, go to a fitness store and get assistance finding the right size for you.

- **Your desk**

It is pivotally important that you get a desk that is the right height. Work on a desk that is too high or too low and your posture and circulation can suffer, increasing the risk of strain and injury.

- **Your screen**

It is important to adjust the brightness of your screen. A good rule of thumb is that your screen should not be brighter than the brightest point in your room. This means you should never work in the dark!

Glare or reflections on your screen can be very distracting, not to mention bad for the eyes. Avoid facing your screen towards a light source.

Finally your screen should be at least an arm's length away from you. When seated, you should have your screen positioned so that you are staring straight ahead with a relaxed neck.

- **Your keyboard**

Your keyboard should be relatively close to your screen, so that when you type your elbows can rest on your desk. This puts your arms in a resting position and reduces the strain on your wrists.

Tips and Tricks For Your Workspace

Along with ergonomic considerations, there are other factors involved in optimizing your workspace. Here are some tips and tricks:

- **Lock your workspace door**

If you have unruly kids or pets, get a lock on the door and get used to using it when you leave your desk. It may feel strange to lock a door in your own home, but keep in mind that your livelihood is behind that door. Little accidents like a spilt drink or a deleted file could cause serious consequences. If you do choose to lock your door when you're away from your desk, give a key to someone you trust also, just in case.

- **Buy some sound-isolating earphones**

You don't want your neighbour's construction or heavy-metal marathon ruining a whole day's work. These cost between US\$30 to US\$80, depending on the sound quality and protection you want.

- **Keep it light**

If your space feels dark, get a cheap mirror and place it opposite a window. This will increase natural light and give the impression of a larger room

- **Empty the room of clutter**

Since you'll be spending a lot of time in your office, it's worth keeping it clutter free. If there's anything in the room that is not related to your business (a spare bed, boxes or exercise equipment for instance), move it somewhere else. The space should as feel roomy and airy as possible.

- **Avoid patterned or dark walls**

If your space is a dark colour or has patterned wallpaper, consider painting it white. White walls keep you alert and if you are a designer looking at printed materials, the reflections won't alter colours.

- **Consider a bulletin board or white board**

These are all terribly handy for organisation, and if you place them a little ways away will make sure you occasionally get up out of your chair!

Equipment

One of the most exciting parts of setting up an office is buying the equipment to fill it. Here is a list of some items you might consider:

Computer

Important for: All industries.

Your computer is amongst the most important pieces of equipment you'll own. Where you may wish to scrimp on some other things, it's worth investing in a reliable computer that suits your industry and situation, and that you love working on.

Colour Printer

Important for: graphic designers, photographers, web designers, illustrators.

Colour printers are far less expensive than they were in the past, so you can get one for US\$150 to US\$500. When purchasing a colour printer, factor in ink and paper costs too. Quality inks and papers can be very expensive and add up quickly. A more expensive printer can in fact be more economical when inks and paper costs are taken into account. Aim for a printer that has separate ink cartridges - that way you only need to replace the inks you've used up. It's kind to the environment too.

If you are often going to be printing pages of text as well, it can be more economical to buy an additional cheap black and white printer. Printing out pages of text on a colour printer will send your ink cartridge expenditures skyrocketing.

Black and White Printer

Important for: Writers, copywriters, translators, project managers

Black and white printers are extremely cheap (as little as US\$50) and essential for almost any office.

Fax Machine

Although many of us would not use a fax machine any more, you'll still find many clients who will. Often you can get a printer/fax/scanner all-in-one and this can be a handy way to hit three birds with one stone. One tip when buying a fax is to avoid fax machines that use rolls of fax paper. Many faxes will now print to ordinary paper making it easier to refill.

There are also many services that allow you to send and receive files as faxes. Some examples are:

- **Flat Rate Fax** - <http://flatratefax.com>
- **Internet Fax Provider** - <http://internetfaxprovider.com>
- **Green Fax** - <http://greenfax.com>

This option works for anything except sending pages that need your signature, in which case you'll need a scanner or just a regular fax machine.

Scanner

Important for: Photographers still working with negatives, some graphic and web designers, some illustrators.

A scanner is useful if you regularly use physical materials (hand drawn or painted elements, old photos, etc.) in your work. A scanner will cost US\$150 to US\$600 depending on its speed and resolution.

Backup

Important for: All industries.

ROCK* QUOTE

When you're working for yourself, backing up your data is your responsibility and duty to yourself and your clients. I'm embarrassed to admit I've learned this the hard way - twice! Ow! It's embarrassing because it's so simple to backup your data! My problem is I don't think about the techie, networked blah blah side of my business (like many designers) until something blows up in my face and I find myself sprawled on the floor crying, hands flailing in the air - as if to catch the missing data. Not pretty.

Jen Gordon
Top 10 Mistakes Made
by New Freelancers
FreelanceTipster.com



Almost every seasoned freelancer has a nightmare story of losing client work and not having a backup. Ideally you should be backing up your work daily. If you lose work you might repeat days of work (unpaid of course), seriously upset your client and even get sued. It is your responsibility to keep your work safe.

One backup option is to invest in a portable hard drive. These cost between US\$70 and US\$200. The advantage of a portable hard drive is that it is fast, doesn't eat up your bandwidth and can handle huge files (especially important for graphic designers and photographers.) However, they can be expensive. Additionally unless transport them to another location after each use, you aren't protected against a physical mishap, such as fire or water damage or even theft.

A second option is to use remote backup. Remote backup systems will update relevant files via the Internet. These systems generally work via subscription and cost around US\$5 to US\$20 per month for your average freelancer. You can set most of these systems to backup your files automatically every time you log on to the web. This is a big advantage, especially as they are able to only backup the files you have edited since you were last online.

Because a remote backup is out of your office completely you are safe against anything but the worst of luck.

The disadvantage of course is that if you have very large files remote backup systems will eat up your bandwidth, take a long time to upload, and slow your internet connection down.

Some services to look into include:

- **Mozy Pro** - <http://mozypro.com>
- **SOS Online Backup** - <http://sosonlinebackup.com>
- **Backup Right** - <http://backupright.com>

I would recommend using these two both a remote and local backup system in tandem.

Finally you should always burn DVDs of completed projects, send one to your client and keep one for your archives.

Surge Protectors

Important for: All industries.

Surge protectors aren't often mentioned when it comes to essential workspace equipment, but they can save you a great deal of money. Surge protectors stop a surge of electricity destroying your equipment. They cost around US\$20 to US\$50, are easy to use and could save you thousands of dollars in damaged equipment.

Avoiding Repetitive Strain Injury

Repetitive Strain Injury (or RSI) describes a group of conditions that arise from overuse of the computer. It affects muscles and nerves in the back and arms when these areas are kept tense for long periods of time due to repetitive motions, poor posture and stress.

Freelancers are at high risk of developing RSI for the following reasons:

- Many freelancers work in unconventional and non-ergonomic setups (on our laptops, on the couch, in bed, etc.)
- Many freelancers work late at night and/or very long hours on a regular basis.
- When working alone there are less natural distractions to force us to get up or at least reposition our bodies (meetings, coffee breaks, trips to the photocopier, etc..)
- There are no such things as sick days or paid personal time for freelancers, so when we do see early warning signs we are more likely to ignore them.

Freelancers need to be more aware of the risks RSI poses. Not only is RSI a miserable condition to have, but it can impair your freelancing career if it gets bad.

Happily, some simple steps will help avoid injury.

Warning Signs

Look out for:

- Pain in the upper body, such as in the neck, shoulders, upper back, wrists, hands or fingers.

- Tingling or numbness, as though the affected area has lost circulation (this can also sometimes be present when lying in bed at night.)
- Weakness or fatigue in the affected area.

Good Posture

Firstly, you should position your chair correctly. Start by pushing your hips as far back as they'll go in the chair. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, and if necessary adjust the seat so that your knees are on the same level as your hips.

If you have armrests, adjust them so that you can lean on them with your shoulders relaxed. If your shoulders have to hunch at all for your arms to rest comfortably on your armrests, either adjust them or take them off completely.

Finally, adjust the back of your chair so it is completely upright. Your whole back should feel supported. If not, you may want to add a small pillow or back support.

Work breaks

As mentioned earlier, many freelancers have a habit of sitting at their desk for hours on end without moving. As you can imagine, this is not what our bodies were designed to do. Keep your body happy by doing the following:

- **Every thirty minutes take a two-minute break**
Stretch out your neck, arms and back and get out of your seat. Jumping up and down a couple of times is a quick way to get your blood circulating.
- **Every hour take a five to ten minute break and walk around**
It only has to be down the hall, but make sure you get moving and give your eyes something else to focus on. If you're trying to drink more water you can get up every hour to drink

a glass. If you drink one glass of water every hour for a full workday of eight hours you'll be drinking the amount of water recommended for an adult.

- **Place objects farther than arms-length away from you**

Have objects like your telephone or stationery away from you so you need to get out of your chair to get them.

- **Look into the distance to protect your eyes**

Take care of your eyes by looking off into the distance at regular intervals. If you look into the distance and feel eyestrain or your vision is blurry, you know it's time to take a longer break.

- **Blink more**

Place your palms on something cool like glass or metal so they become cold, then gently rest them on your eyes for a moment. Most computer workers do not blink enough which can lead to dry and uncomfortable eyes.

- **Do not eat lunch at your desk**

We all get tempted to eat at our desk when we're facing a deadline (or just feeling lazy). Resist the urge and get outside if you can.

- **Consider dumping your mouse**

If you use your mouse a lot (illustrators, designers and photo retouchers in particular) consider buying a graphics tablet. Mice put strain on your whole arm, while a graphics tablet is more ergonomic and well suited for detail work.

RSI Software

It's easy to get lost in work. Fortunately there are special software packages designed to help you remember what you should be doing. Some tell you when to take breaks, others offer added features like exercise prompts and screen freezes. Here are some to consider:

- **Desk Doctor** - <http://einspine.com>
- **Time Out** - <http://dejal.com/timeout>
- **MacbreakZ** - <http://publicspace.net/MacBreakZ>
- **Workrave** - <http://workrave.org>

An Environmentally Friendly Workplace

There are lots of little things you can do to achieve an environmentally friendly workplace. Most things take relatively little effort and expense, and you'll get the warm fuzzies knowing you're doing your part. Here are some easy things you can do:

- 1) Switch off your computer at the end of the day.
- 2) Make it easy to recycle by placing a paper recycling tray on your desk and a bin for other recyclables below your desk.
- 3) Print on both sides of your paper, or use the blank side as note paper.
- 4) Turn off your equipment at the socket at the end of the day.
- 5) Buy recycled paper.
- 6) Don't put your printer cartridges and batteries in the bin. Most cities have drop-off points for these items so they can be disposed of properly.
- 7) Don't print out your emails unless you really need to.

- 8) Use a virtual fax service rather than having a physical fax machine.
- 9) Use natural light where possible, and install energy-saving light bulbs.
- 10) When possible, email rather than sending a courier or mail.
Not only is it cheaper and more convenient, but it saves paper and energy. If you have a large file to send, consider using a service like:
 - **You Send It** - <http://yousendit.com>
 - **Drop Send** - <http://dropsend.com>
- 11) Buy a plant! Not only will your office look nicer, but your little plant goes a small way to purifying your air.

Being Productive

As a freelancer it's all too easy to lose focus, get distracted or find yourself wondering where the day went. Happily there are some easy ways to stay on track so you can meet deadlines without a night-before panic.

To-do lists

Organization and time management is an issue for any freelancer, and the best way to stay organized is by utilizing to-do lists.

To-do lists help you stay focused on the days and weeks ahead, and guard against forgetfulness when juggling a few jobs and clients.

One effective strategy is to utilize two to-do lists – one for long term and one for the following day.

- **Long-term to-do list**

The long-term to-do list has every project you have in play and what is required. It also has all the bits and pieces required for your business that need to get done.

- **Short-term to-do list**

Your short-term to-do list should be written out at the end of each day for the following business day. You should refer to your long-term list when drafting it up. If you number your list in relation to importance and urgency, all you need to do is sit down in the morning and follow your list, without having to decide what to work on first.

If you tend to put things off, you may want to put your unpleasant tasks first up in the morning, that way you can get them over and done with and reward yourself with ‘fun’ tasks later in the day.

The great thing about writing out your to-do list the afternoon before is that you won’t be swayed by what you feel like doing that day.

Many people are happy with a paper and pen on their desk, but if you’re a high-tech type there are lots of handy little apps to help keep your lists neat and tidy:

- ***Ta-Da Lists*** - <http://tadalist.com>
- ***Backpack*** - <http://backpackit.com>
- ***Remember The Milk*** - <http://rememberthemilk.com>

Time-tracking

Another great productivity habit is to track your time. Of course you’ll need to track your time if you bill by the hour, but even if you don’t it’s a great idea to learn how long certain tasks take you. This will help you quote accurately in the future, see where you waste time and where you’re really on the ball.

There are some great applications to help you keep track of your hours:

- **SlimTimer** - <http://slimtimer.com>
- **Tick** – <http://tickspot.com>
- **Harvest** - <http://getharvest.com>
- **PunchyTime** - <http://punchytime.com>

Dealing with Distraction

Working in an office for a boss is very different to working for yourself. It's much like going to college after high school – suddenly no one

cares whether you're there or not, and the temptation to slack off becomes very real.

ROCK* QUOTE

First, let me say that there should be room in your life for distractions. Work should be fun, and without a few distractions, things can get boring. That being said, when it's time to do a task, there's no reason to do it while handling a million other things. You'll never get things done that way. When you're ready to work on a task, block out all else, and really focus on it. Do your best on that task, and get it done as quickly as possible. Then reward yourself with distractions.

Leo Babauta
10 Ways to Eliminate
Distractions
FreelanceSwitch.com

As an employee you still get paid the same amount whether you work hard or not. You might get fired or miss that promotion if you slack off, but as long as you fly under the radar you can generally get away with a less than stellar work ethic.

When you're working for yourself, however, if you don't work you don't get paid. And when it's quiet, there's no boss around to make sure you stay at your desk. So you need to develop a good work ethic quickly when you freelance. Below are some tips to help you stay at your desk and work hard for the money.



- **Starting the day on the right foot**

Some freelancers can wake up a midday and work in their underpants until midnight, but for many that is a recipe for disaster. If you find it difficult to begin work sometimes, you may need to develop a morning routine.

A morning routine might include waking up at a reasonable hour, having a shower and getting dressed, and being at your desk in time for the commencement of normal business hours. This will help you avoid procrastinating on the couch (or in bed) and will have the added benefit that clients can contact you during their hours, which they will appreciate.

- **Strict deadlines**

For freelancers who tend to let a job go on forever unless it is an emergency, try making up a fake deadline then telling the client to expect it to be completed on that day. Once you tell a client when a job will be completed, you need to have it ready by that day. Until you get used to working to deadlines you might have a few sleepless nights, but an enforced deadline will ensure you get jobs done and get cash in the bank.

- **Regular business hours**

You may find it helpful to only work regular business hours. Most freelancers will tell you they work evening and weekends. Occasionally this is a necessary evil if you are making a deadline. However, telling yourself you can work in the evening or catch up on the weekend is a great way to procrastinate and avoid harder tasks.

Try your best to work regular business hours and take weekends off. Knowing you have to leave your desk in an hour is a great incentive to pound out a project.

Staying on Top of Your Game

As a freelancer you must continually improve and hone your skill set if you want your service to stay valuable and in demand. This is true no matter what field you are in, but it is perhaps most critical for those fields where you work with technology - industries like programming, web design, or flash animation. Even if you are a writer, graphic designer or illustrator, keeping up with current styles and new ideas is invaluable.

When you work in a job where you are surrounded by others, or when studying your trade at university, you will naturally feed off other people and push yourself to compete. As a freelancer, often working alone, you can easily fall into a vacuum where your current level of expertise feels 'good enough'. Give in to this and your service may lose value over time.

Unless you have a burning urge to improve, you may find it helps to put yourself into situations that force you to push yourself. There are many things you can do to help keep yourself at the top of your game:

- **Go to industry events**

Attending special lectures, conferences, user groups, industry associations and other events is a great way to keep up to date with what is happening. There are also lots of great networking opportunities at these places so you have two reasons to attend!

- **Subscribe to industry magazines**

Staying up to date doesn't have to be hard work. Grab a few magazine subscriptions and read up in your spare time. The great thing about this approach is magazines are designed to be accessible, easy and fresh.

- **Chat regularly to other people in your line of work**
Whether they are freelancers or regular workers, keeping in touch with people who do the same job as you will naturally lead to conversations about work. Whether it's meeting up for coffee, chatting on IM or exchanging emails now and again, you will benefit from the contact.
- **Regularly buy books (and read them!)**
We love the web, but nothing replaces the feel, smell and weight of a book. Buy them. Read them. Get better.
- **Surf the web and check out sites in your field**
There is so much great information out there, and plenty of people to chat with and learn from.
- **Write a blog or teach on your area**
Teaching others or providing commentary in the form of a blog or magazine column inevitably forces you to keep up-to-date. Writing helps build your reputation, and by teaching, you are forced to think something through in much more detail than you normally would, increasing your understanding as you help others to learn it.
- **Regularly scout out competitors and what they are doing**
Not only will you see related work but you are quite likely to scare yourself into action if your competitors are getting too far ahead. Even better: become friends with your competitors, there may be chances to collaborate that will benefit you both.

Often with the passage of time a freelancer can lose some of their early enthusiasm and the thirst for knowledge may dissipate. The more this happens, the more important it becomes to fuel that passion externally to keep driving yourself forward. Being at the cutting edge will make your services that much more marketable.

Freelancing Loneliness

One of the most insidious and unconsidered aspects of freelance life is loneliness. At first working alone every day sounds wonderful – no one to distract you, and the freedom to come and go as you please.

However, many freelancers find that after the first couple of weeks they miss not only the friends at work but even the annoying co-workers. This is particularly true if you live and work alone. Suddenly that enforced socializing is gone and you can find yourself mumbling to your goldfish. Here are a few strategies to avoid freelancing loneliness:

- **Meet or call clients and colleagues regularly**

The word networking tends to make many freelancers nervous, but often networking can be nothing more than a coffee with an old client or a quick phone call to an old colleague to check in. Getting in touch will remind someone you exist (so that next time a job comes up you're fresh in their mind) and give you some human contact. Aim to call or see a current or past client or colleague at least a couple of times a week.

- **Go to industry events**

Industry events are perfect for staying at the top of your game, and they can be a great way to ward off loneliness. Just being in an atmosphere with your peers, where you can discuss your work can be very refreshing for the work-at-home freelancer.

- **Take a walk every day**

Exercising is extra important for the work-at-home freelancer, as working from home removes whatever exercise you used to get during your commute. Exercising outside or at the gym is a welcome change of scenery and a good way to fend off loneliness.

- **Get a hobby**

Having a hobby becomes a lot more important when freelancing, especially if that hobby involves interaction with other people. A Friday night poker game or being part of a sporting team can help you get that extra social interaction in.

- **Get a pet**

Having a pet is like having a little furry colleague with you all day long. People who have pets on average live longer and are happier, and if you work at home, you are perfectly placed to take good care of a pet. Dogs are especially good as they need daily walks, which are great for meeting other dog owners and getting some exercise.

- **Work somewhere else**

If you have a laptop and are feeling a bit low, try working in a coffee shop or even the library for a few hours. Being in a busy and loud environment may be just what you need to remind yourself how much you enjoy the solitude of your workspace.

- **Get a share office**

If working at home is really making you crazy, you may want to consider working in a share office with other freelancers. If you can find one with other freelancers in complementary industries it can be a great asset to your business too.

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