

Keep Working!

A Freelance's Guide to Getting Work

Working in the creative fields doing a variety of jobs and getting paid for it can be a truly exciting way to earn a living. But working successfully in this way means being able to work the 'cycle of freelancing'. That continuous round of:

- looking for work
- getting the work
- keeping an eye out for the future and getting more work

If you get to grips with how best to work that cycle then the chances of you keeping in work can be significantly higher than if you don't. There are some fundamentals to be aware of:

Know your markets

- It is very important to keep up with your existing contacts. If you find this difficult to keep on top of, then make a schedule. Plan to connect with contacts at regular intervals, even if it's just a quick email once every few weeks to remind someone that you are around.
- Sometimes our best contacts do dry up or there is no work available from them at the time we need it. So, the best way to keep the cycle of freelancing fresh is to continuously look to see where there may be new places and people to pitch to.
- Start thinking laterally. Where might there be new markets/clients? And if you are thinking about diversifying your range of work, (eg if you are an actor, you may want to offer yourself for corporate role play work). Where would you begin to open up these new opportunities?

All of this takes time and effort but, in effect, you are doing the work to get the work!

Show what you have to offer

Obviously we need to be able to tell prospective clients and markets what we have to offer and get noticed, so that we can get the work. All freelancers who make a living have to be good at this to some extent. But it can really help to audit how we sell ourselves and see if we can do it better and if and how we can do more.

- Firstly, do an honest appraisal of how you currently market yourself. Audit how successful each marketing tool has been, be it CV, agent, website, networking events, word of mouth/contacts. Can these be improved? For



example, is your website or web presence up to date and looking good? Do you have up-to-date CVs and various versions, depending on what skills you are promoting?

- Are there tools you are not using to market yourself? For example, many freelancers are still confused and a bit wary of how social media can help them self-market. But social media is an increasingly important tool. Help and advice can be found on using social media from the FEU website.
- Networking is also part of self-promotion and another way of accessing, not just existing but new clients/markets. There are as many ways to network as you can imagine but organized events can be useful for keeping up with industry gossip and knowledge. It's vital to keep up-to-date. You can pick up industry inside information at face-to-face events that might be a gateway to job leads.
- 'The elevator pitch' – to have a short, succinct way to explain (in person or in writing) what you have to offer can be invaluable and, as with CVs, you may well have different elevator pitches for different occasions, depending on what parts of yourself you are promoting.

Do the business

The business side of creative careers can seem daunting but it is all manageable. It sounds obvious but if you do find yourself being busy, working job to job, it is very easy (understandably so) to become short-sighted and only focus on the here and now. However busy you are you will still need to do a number of things:

- **Invoices** – ensure that your invoicing is up-to-date. Chase any outstanding.
- **Tax** – be aware of your tax affairs (are you regularly putting money aside for those two big payback days with the revenue that the self-employed need to meet: end January and end July). Remember, tax advice can be found through your union or HMRC. Or you may use an accountant.
- **Budgeting** – work out your income needs; plan for down time; budget for holidays; budget for professional needs – what you need to run you as a business, including paying for any training/upskilling.
- **Receipts** – keep track of what you spend in the line of business. With receipts, write on it what the receipt was for and then file it – a good way is to file by the month.
- **What you can claim for** – there are many claims we can make eg use of home, computer/IT equipment, clothes allowance. It depends what you work at. If in doubt, consult your union or the relevant part of the Revenue that deals with your tax affairs.
- **Time Management** – all the above looks daunting and time-consuming. Not necessarily. Never forget that you are primarily a creative professional and that creativity is what matters most. But you still have to do the other tasks to make everything work smoothly. Looking at how you spend your time, especially the time when you are not working but doing related tasks,



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can be enlightening. You may find that you are wasting a lot of time and could be working more efficiently. (You can find a time management exercise and advice on the FEU website)

Keep upskilled

- To maximise the chances of keeping marketable, it's vital to always think about what new skills, training or learning would be useful.
- Also, if you are considering diversifying into other areas of work, think about what new learning/training needs you may have to help you achieve this.
- Once you know your needs, find a suitable training provider. There are a lot of providers out there. Research is key. Ask around your networks and colleagues for advice and opinions on what provider is best.
- Ask searching questions of the provider; to make sure that they are going to deliver what you expect and at a reasonable price.
- Also, remember, professional training is a legitimate tax expense
- Training can be expensive. It always helps to ask around colleagues if they know of any funding, unions too and always ask the provider if there is any funding/bursary attached to their training.

QUICKTIPS

