

HOW TO FREELANCE IN ADVERTISING

TOOLS AND TRUTHS FOR
TAKING THE LEAP

A practical guide to getting started and not being homeless, by someone who's been doing it a while.

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CHAPTER 1

HELLO

NEW PHONE, WHO DIS?

I got married in early 2017. On our honeymoon I decided it might be time for a new job. I was five years into my current role, my second gig in advertising. I'd had a good run and put plenty of wins on the board. But half a decade in any agency might be too long. It was time for something different.

The problem, I didn't know where I wanted to go. And the bigger problem, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was a digital strategy director who liked writing creative briefs more than digital strategy.

So I took a leap, and started freelancing. My mission would be to spend at least one year working out what I wanted to do, and where I wanted to end up.

18 months later I'm not homeless, and in fact doing pretty well. I've worked with big agencies, small agencies and clients direct. 26 sources of income in total. I've taken contracts as long as three months, and did one project for \$30.

I've slowly started finding the places I like working, and what I like doing, but more on that later.

Since taking the leap, I'm often asked about freelancing, usually by people thinking about doing it themselves. The questions are always the same, so this is my collection of answers.

If you're considering, or have already jumped, this is a practical guide to freelancing in advertising.

These are my tools, truths and battle stories.

A SAMPLE OF ONE

I can't stress enough, the words in this guide (I can't bring myself to say "book") are based almost entirely on my personal experience to date. Yours might be better, or worse. Advice from other freelancers will probably contradict mine. Some of what I've recommended might not even be legal – I'm no accountant or lawyer.

Instead I'll share how I do things and what I've learned. I've rounded my opinion out a little with some advice from others. But take everything with a handful of salt. You do you.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

I work in advertising. As a strategist. Mostly for agencies. Which are creative agencies. In Australia.

You probably don't tick the same boxes. If that's the case you'll still find most or some of this useful. Pick and choose what works for you.

For our friends outside of Australia, the tax and finance details will be redundant but the principles should still apply. When I refer to super or superannuation, it's a 401k or pension plan. Dollar references are in AUD (also known as dollarydoos).

CHAPTER 2

SHOULD I FREELANCE?

Taking the leap can be scary, but it doesn't have to be. Worst case scenario, you lose some income and end up back with a real job. Best case scenario, well, there's plenty of upshot. But in all decisions there's good, bad and ugly.

WHY YOU SHOULD FREELANCE

THE COIN IS GOOD IF YOU KNOW HOW TO EARN IT

The money is good, even great. In my first year I increased my income 36%. And that's working fewer days, although not always by choice. It will take time to learn what you're worth, and even longer to become confident enough to ask for it. I cover more on how you do this in Chapter 4. But if you're even remotely busy, you can make good bank.

CHOOSING YOUR OWN HOURS IS A SUPERPOWER

The ability to choose your hours, in terms of when and how many, does incredible things to your happiness. Early on I decided to work no more than four days a week in big agencies. This creates time to work on other projects (paid and unpaid), chase new ones or just enjoy a sleep in on a Friday.

It gifts you more time during the week, which is good for adulting and giving you back some freedom on weekends. It was only by freelancing that I was able to run a half marathon in 2018, because when working from home I could drop everything when I wanted to go for a jog.



If you're financially comfortable, you can take more time off. In the past year I've taken trips to South Korea, the US and Tanzania. Good luck fitting that into your four weeks annual leave (or two weeks in some countries).

Or do other things which are important to you. 19 years after its release I finally finished *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

However your down time isn't always in your control. Sometimes the stars align. But in others you're deep in a drought, then moments later a flood. I'm doing more weekend work now than in my permanent life (although former colleagues would probably tell you that wasn't much). When the work's there you tend to take it, even if it means getting home from one job to start another or giving up a Sunday.

YOU GET TO BE A FIREFIGHTER

Everybody loves a superhero – someone who turns up and saves the day. As a freelancer, you have to like putting out fires, and be good at it.

A nice side effect of this is people love it when you're helpful. Everyone likes the guy or girl who rescues the kitten. They got you in because they need help, and if you can be even a little bit useful, people are exceptionally grateful. You don't even have to be brilliant, just nudge things in the right direction, and be pleasant to work with.

YOU SKILL UP FAST

The changing nature of work exposures you to more problems, more people, more clients and more processes. You see different ways of working. And you figure out who you could learn more from, and who are the dickheads.

You get to steal the best bits of everything and leave the rest.

In my first year of freelancing I grew more professionally than in previous years combined. For example, before taking the leap I'd never run my own research groups. But in one of my first freelancing jobs I was invited along to watch a few. And then on my next contract I knew what needed to be done, and ended up running six of them.

If you're hungry, you'll learn real fast.

THERE'S VARIETY IF YOU WANT IT

There's work of all shapes and sizes if you want it. Which is particularly helpful if you're seeking answers on what to do with your career. If you want to play wide, you can - flirt around with different types of agencies and different types of projects.

Over time you work out what you like and what you don't, as you get closer to bullseye.

I also enjoy working at different speeds. Some projects last weeks or months. Others need something done in hours (when you work with small clients that's often all they need). Freelancing gives you a good range of big-and-chunky long work through to small-but-done-and-onto-the-next short work.

YOU GET TO BE A BOSS BITCH

Freelancing is always short term. Which can seem counterintuitive if you're a strategist who should be accountable long term.

But when you walk into a contract, there's no client baggage and you're not there long enough to worry about politics. Because you're not around forever, it gives you a sense of freedom – a permission to be bold and say it like it is. Or put forward a stronger recommendation. I've definitely been in situations where I've said: "I'm not around tomorrow, so I don't care what you do, but if you want to win then this is the right answer." It's empowering.

EVERY CONTRACT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REINVENT YOURSELF

I feel like when you start a job, you're that person until you leave. Even if you grow or change over years, you'll still be seen as the same person who walked in on Day 1.

Freelancing allows you to reinvent yourself, and redefine who you are with each gig. You can make big jumps in experience, seniority and confidence every few weeks if you want to.

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T FREELANCE

EVERYTHING ABOVE MIGHT BE A CON, NOT A PRO

Starting from scratch or fighting fires may be your idea of a nightmare, not a dream. Taking control is a responsibility as much as a power and it's fatiguing always being in the deep end.

**The great things about freelancing
can quickly become its challenges,
especially after the novelty wears off.**

YOU NEED TO BE OKAY WITH SOME UNCERTAINTY

Get used to being okay with having nothing lined up. At the end of last year I was finishing a contract and everyone asked where I would be after Christmas. I had no idea. And I told people I had no idea. You need to be okay with that – financially and mentally.

Not having a regular income is part of it, but so is the bit in your head which starts to worry when you're a few weeks without anything substantial lined up.

You do get better at this over time. I'm much more comfortable now with the unknown but it takes some getting used to.

DOWNTIME CAN SUCK

You also need to be okay in the downtime. I was told you gotta make the most of these opportunities - head down to your beach house whenever you have a day off. Which would be nice if I had a beach house.

I stand more in the camp that unplanned downtime should be utilised if possible. Hustle or create or write. Or do things to free up the weekend. My first day without a gig I donated blood.

Or just take the moment to catch your breath. As a freelancer you're not just working, you're also looking for work. You're making more decisions and with that comes more stress. It can take its toll, and the extra down time is good to recover.

But prepare yourself for quiet days at home where you feel a little useless. Which you might find particularly challenging if you live with a partner who's working their ass off.

If you're introverted there's an appeal to spending more time with yourself. But it can be lonely and you'll need to manage it.

YOU WON'T HAVE A CREW

Easily the thing I miss most from my old life is not having a crew. People you work with long enough to call friends. After work beers and daily banter are harder to come by when you're running solo. It takes a while to get used to not being part of a family.

You miss culture. You miss working in teams. You miss celebrations in the good times, and commiserations in the bad.

If you're lucky you land in a nice agency with nice folks who take you under their wing. But building a rapport takes time, and is always fleeting.

NOT BUILDING YOUR FOLIO

When you're freelancing there are fewer milestone moments. While I've learned more since taking the leap, I wouldn't say I've contributed much outstanding work to my folio.

That's not to say you only work on the shit briefs. I expected this going in, assuming agencies would favour the permanent staff with the good stuff. But more often than not you're covering for someone who's on leave or has resigned. You pick up where they left off.

Yet the work which would be good enough for case studies doesn't materialise too often. This may be specific to strategists, but most of my better opportunities in the past came through hard work in setting them up. Rarely does a good brief or project just accidentally land on your desk.

So there's fewer things to put on your resume. Depending on your role, career stage and what you might want to do next, a folio filled with work collecting dust might be problematic.

You'll also find your name rarely appears on the credits of campaigns, usually because you're long gone. This might be important to you.

YOU DON'T GET TO SEE STUFF THROUGH

Freelancers come in for a very specific role on a very specific project. You're often not around for the start, and rarely around for the end.

Once you've played your part, you're outta there. No opportunity to clarify, or nurture projects through. It might come off the rails, or not happen at all, and you won't know why.

I've written strategies, only months later to see the ad on TV and realise it was a bit shit. You gotta be okay with that. (And those are the ones where the agency will include your name on the credits!)

WORKING FROM HOME MOSTLY SUCKS

It's fun for a few days, then argh. Especially in winter. It's impossible to be productive for long hours, and you'll feel guilty when you're not.

YOU'RE IN THE WORK, NOT ON THE WORK

Before quitting I managed a small team. I was good at it (I'm also very modest) and I miss it greatly. Freelancing means I no longer get to discover and mentor young talent, or watch them grow into rock stars. You're not paid to think about the

business and how to improve it, something I also enjoyed. “Proactive” isn’t a word that comes up often.

Freelancers put out fires, they don’t prevent them from happening or nurture future firefighters. If you like leadership and management, you probably won’t find it.

HOME GROUND ADVANTAGE

If you’re not a resident, visas and/or sponsorship as a freelancer can be harder to obtain. Sometimes impossible. (On the flip side if you’re a local, this means reduced competition. I don’t have to go up against all those amazing English planners!)

NO HOUSE FOR YOU

If you’re considering buying property, freelancing makes it harder to get a loan, particularly within the first two years. Some lenders will make exceptions, usually if you’re staying on the same career path. But your borrowing power is lowered and you’ll have fewer options resulting in a higher interest rate.

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Wow, okay, that gets a bit negative when you write it out like that. But don’t be deterred, only aware of what you’re getting yourself into.

For most, the good far outweighs the bad.

CHAPTER 3

TAKING THE LEAP

If you're on the edge, here's how you launch off and get started.

GETTING THE TIMING RIGHT

Jokes - there is no good time. You can wait around forever but you'll never know for sure if you're ready or not. The only way to find out is to jump.

If I was to set arbitrary requirements, I'd say there are two:

- Be at least four years into your career
- Have worked in at least two agencies

Some proper experience under your belt is a must. Working with at least two agencies gives you exposure beyond a sample of one. And you'll have a larger network to draw on, which is where most new opportunities will come from in the early days.

If you tick both those boxes then it comes down to scientific thing called 'a feeling in your gut'. It might be from dissatisfaction in where you are now, or a yearning to do something a bit crazy. In which case, keep reading.

SETTING UP SHOP

Before Day 1, here's some things you should do.

REGISTER YOUR BUSINESS

To invoice clients, you'll need to register an Australian Business Number (ABN). You'll set it up in your own name as a Sole Trader. It's free.

If you intend to earn more than \$70,000 in a year through your ABN, you'll need to tick the box registering for Goods & Services Tax (GST). Ticking the box creates about 10 minutes of work every three months, more about this on Page 24.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT A TRUST

You may be advised against registering as a sole trader, instead to create a trust. The trust then earns the income instead of you, while you take a salary from the trust. At the end of the year you can distribute the remaining money to other people, such as your partner or children.

This is a tax minimisation strategy. Because the trust pays only 30% tax, if the people you distribute to don't earn enough to reach this threshold your household ends up financially better off.

Long term freelancers swear by this, but I found it complicated and wasn't sure how long I would be doing it. My wife also earns more than me.

I was quoted \$2,000 to setup the trust, and it adds complexity to your annual tax return so your ongoing accountant costs will be higher.

Don't worry about it, at least not in your first year.

INSURANCE

The first contract I signed said I agreed to have my own professional indemnity insurance. I shrugged my shoulders, assuming it was a standard cost of freelancing and got 12 months of cover for \$700.

When I started asking around, 9 in 10 freelancers told me they didn't bother. Even those who had signed the same contract didn't have it.

In my second year I decided not to renew. Your call on this one, both the risk of not having it and signing contracts saying you do.

I haven't seen that requirement in any contracts since.

GOOGLE DRIVE & GMAIL

I pretty much run my whole business through Gmail and Google Drive. It's where I manage my documents and store my financial records.

Instead of using a generic email (like `zac@gmail.com`), you can setup a custom domain (like `zac@pigsdontfly.com`) for \$8.40 per month with Gmail. If you don't have a domain, you can buy one for \$10 a year.

This also gives you plenty of cloud storage, easy collaboration on documents, and the ability to send large files to clients.

A MONTH OF CASH

The last piece of prep is having a month of cash. Not because it might take that long to find work, but because invoices take forever to get paid (more on this in Chapter 4).

LANDING THE FIRST GIG

Finding your first paid gig is a big deal. Here's how to make it happen.

DEFINE YOUR OFFER

“Know what your offer is. You have to operate a self-contained service. Just saying what you do isn't enough. You have to have some kind of angle or edge. Or something you feel people need. Then make sure it gets out there somehow, even if it's just six coffees a week for the first few months.” – Camilla Grey Petty, freelance strategist.

You can't just be a designer. Or a project manager. Give people a reason to choose you. Write it in a sentence. Articulate what you're good at, what you like doing and what will make money. If they make a Venn diagram, you've nailed it.

If you're not sure what your thing is or what you want to do, that's okay. Write that into your sentence, that you're on a path of discovery and going to flirt around.

Also make a list of work you don't want to do, even if it makes you money. Some of my early projects were buying Facebook ads. I'm both not good at it, and it bores me to death. In hindsight I should have passed on this work.

START BEFORE YOU LEAP

Start to hustle some work long before you freelance. Find a small business or agency who sometimes needs a hand on small projects, and do them on the side. Look for ad hoc work that's flexible enough to do on evenings and weekends. (Some full time contracts prohibit you working elsewhere... so don't tell anyone.)

Scott Pape, author of *The Barefoot Investor*, calls this the 'Trapeze Strategy', where you don't have to let go of the bar (your secure pay cheque) until you're safely holding onto the next (the beginnings of your freelance career).

This will get you comfortable, build your confidence and might even turn into your first big paid opportunity once you let go of the bar. If not, the ongoing ad hoc small projects are still there as a safety net.

But...

**Don't build too many safety nets.
You'll stall forever, and never jump.**

At some point you need to take a chance on yourself.

TELL THE WORLD

After you give notice, announce your availability to the world. Do it long before you actually finish - start meeting people and lining things up.

Use LinkedIn and other social channels to tell people how you've always wanted to go out on your own (or whatever works for you). Some people hesitate here thinking it's arrogant. But if you don't make it known, people won't know they can hire you. Or more likely, they won't know they can recommend you when they hear about an opportunity.

Stanley Johnson, consultant creative director, says: "Don't take your skill for granted. Just because you know, doesn't mean everyone else does."

Work out what you're good at, then wave that flag loudly.

COMMIT

There's no time like now. Quit already and make it happen. Don't wait for a proper gig to line up – it makes you hungry. 🍊

CHAPTER 4

LET'S TALK CASH

Money is the big one. It's taboo to discuss, the biggest cause of stress, and most people get it wrong. Let's shed some light on it.

HOW MUCH TO CHARGE

Every single new freelancer undervalues themselves. Whatever you're thinking of charging is not enough!

You'll feel like an imposter. You'll feel awkward asking for so much. But freelancers should be on good rates. If the number isn't making you uncomfortable then you're doing it wrong.

At the most basic level, you need to factor in your future personal leave, annual leave and public holidays, all of which are now unpaid. I just had my wisdom teeth out and didn't earn a cent last week. You're also covering your own training, expenses and some expected down time.

But it's much more than that – your premium rate covers the fact that you are available right now. And that they need your help right now. And the anxiety which comes with uncertainty. And contracts which allow the employer to cancel with one day's notice. There are many reasons you must charge more.

I know some freelancers on \$2,500 a day. I've heard rumours of one American big dog on \$25,000 a day. Now I'm a bloody long way from both of those, but you're worth more than you realise. Make sure you charge accordingly.

Janet Kinghorn, freelance brand consultant, says: "Have a figure in your head that you are comfortable with then double it. People undervalue themselves, and you can always negotiate backwards."

HOW I DID IT

Some people work out how much they want to earn, what their expenses are for the year and determine how many days they wish to work. From this, you get your rate. The challenge with this approach is it assumes you know those answers, and that you'll be busy as often as you want to be (which I've found to be too hot or too cold, but rarely just right).

Another approach is to ask around for some averages, and align yourself to the market. But reliable numbers are hard to find, and who wants to be average?

Here's how I did it.

Start by working out your current full-time day rate. Take your annual salary, inclusive of tax and super. Divide it by 250, the rough number of working days in the year.

Then double it. This is your new day rate. At a minimum.

It might look like a lot, but if it doesn't make you feel a bit squeamish then you haven't gone high enough.

Initially the 100% increase between my full time and freelance rate felt crazy high. But after my first 12 months of freelancing I was busy only 68% of the year. The rest was unpaid.

I finished the year with revenue up 36% compared to the previous period. Obviously, I was stoked, but at the same time I was probably due a pay rise so that needs to be factored in. And as I head toward the end of my second year, my income this time could be down as much as 15%. Suddenly doubling your rate doesn't seem too crazy.

IT'S OKAY TO BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE OVER TIME

You don't have to come out of the gates swinging. I encourage you to push the rate as high as you feel comfortable asking, then add more. But in the real world it's okay to build your confidence over time and assure yourself that you're not going to end up homeless. Then slowly raise it.

A good tip - if your proposed rate is accepted without negotiation, it probably means you went too low. Use that knowledge next time.

NEGOTIATION IS A MUSCLE

You will suck at your first negotiation.

Imagine you have a meeting with someone, and let's say it goes really well. They have a problem, and you're the person to solve it. And you're available. Then they ask you what your rate is.

**You have to be able to look them in the eye
and say a number. It's hard. And sweaty.**

Even to this day I have to be careful not to negotiate myself down - "Well, I would usually do this project for \$5,000 but I'm open to negotiation. Let's say \$4,000?"

Like a muscle, the more you work it the stronger you'll get. You'll build your confidence, and find the strategy that's right for you. You'll also get better at reading the situation, getting a feel for if and how they'll negotiate. You'll learn to go a little higher if needed to give yourself some room to come back.

Most importantly, you'll get comfortable with a number, saying it and not getting in the way of yourself. Let them bring you down, you shouldn't do it to yourself.

With some practice, you'll start finding the right numbers pretty quickly. You want something where you don't feel completely fraudulent (although it's always higher than you think, you'll need to get over your imposter syndrome!). But not so low it makes you resentful while doing the work.

Heather LeFevre, freelance strategist, recommends learning industry averages where you can, then if you're offered a low rate to counter with: "Don't you think I'm at least average?". You're better than the bottom!

A MOVING TARGET

You won't have a one rate for everyone. I have a consistent starting point and negotiation strategy, but some people will push you harder. Others are more desperate. And sometimes you'll have a bad day. In my first year, I was all over the place with variances as much as \$200 per day.

But now I've built some confidence, I'm a bit more consistent and also have established relationships with some of my preferred agencies and clients. It's nice not negotiating on every job.

GOING HIGH ON WORK YOU DON'T WANT

A project may not appeal to you. Or an agency. Sometimes you'll be able to turn this down, other times you might just want the cash. If it's the latter, try bumping up your rate to see what happens. Add at least 20%. If they decline then no worries, and if they accept at least you're on good money. But don't do this for anything longer than a week or two - it will crush you.

(It's also a good exercise for your confidence – sometimes you throw a number out there you think would be impossible but they accept without negotiating.)

WORKING FOR FREE

Never work for free. Definitely never work for "exposure".

The one exception may be for charity. Even then:

- Only work on causes you have a passion for. There's heaps of non-profits out there, pick something you give a shit about.
- Remember your skillset is how you make a living. Every freebie has an opportunity cost where you could be earning money or doing something that leads to your next paid job.
- Ask the people you're working for if they're taking a salary.
- Always be clear up front on how many hours you're willing to give. Don't leave it open ended - it's like donating a blank cheque.
- Make sure you're doing something you love or learning something new.

MATES RATES

I don't believe in discounting just because you're in love with an agency, client or project. But there are times you may want lower your rate.

I work with a lot of friends and family. Or former colleagues who now run agencies.

I'm sometimes compelled to give discounts ('mates rates' in Australia). But only if they're small and independent. And only if I believe the discount will be appreciated.

I have a base rate I won't go below, which is what I'll offer friends. It's about 8% cheaper than my big agency rate.

But remember pricing is a signal. People (and organisations) often value something by how much it costs. When you discount your rate, you discount your contribution and output.

(I appreciate the irony of giving away this guide for free. Because you're not paying, you're more likely to download but less likely to actually read. If you've made it this far, that's awesome!)

You also might be asked for a discount on longer contracts. Less money, in exchange for guaranteed work. I'm not against this, but don't drop your rate by more than 15%. And don't be fooled, two weeks is not a "long contract" no matter what the agency tells you.

If you do this, have a contingency in place. I had an agreement for a month of work, which was cancelled three days in. They honoured my original rate for those three days, but in hindsight I should have had that in writing. (Also, not all agencies are jerks!)

Alan Weiss, author of *The Consulting Bible*, advocates giving clients a 10% discount for upfront payment. It helps with cash flow, you don't have to chase invoices, and

the commitment means fewer clients will change their mind. It wouldn't work if you're freelancing with agencies, but could be worth trying on a client project. Although you have to decide if peace of mind is worth 10% of your revenue.

ALWAYS TAKE THE MONEY (AND RUN)

You might be offered payment in other forms. Don't take it.

I did one project for some cryptocurrency. Mostly I wanted to learn about the technology. I should have sold it immediately but was interested to see where it went. It's currently down 90%. No wait, 92%.

A few times I've been approached by smaller agencies to work on a new business pitch. To minimise their risk, we struck a deal where I would take 50% off my day rate, but if they won the pitch I'd add 50% back on top. It's never worked out for me (although I have helped other agencies win pitches!). This remuneration model can create some tension – what happens if they win work from the client but technically it's not the pitch project? Best to avoid messy situations like this one.

Working for 'sweat equity' is a little more complicated than a blanket "no". The likelihood it pays off is small. So if you do say "yes", you need to believe it's going to pay a 10x return. And you have to really like the people and the business, and be willing to be involved long term (which might be the opposite reason you started freelancing). I've found the businesses I want equity in aren't giving it away, and those who are, aren't the ones I want to work with. At least not for free.

INCREASING YOUR RATE OVER TIME

Once you build a relationship with a client or agency, it can be difficult increasing your rate between contracts. But don't be afraid to try.

Wait at least 12 months since your first engagement. And align it with a new year or financial year. I've had success with language like "I'm revisiting my rates for 2019, and looking to bring you in line with what I charge my other clients."

HOW TO CHARGE

Once you've worked out your rate, on some projects you'll need to work out how much time to allocate.

For clients, they often want a project fee. They're less concerned with hours and more focused on outcomes. This is good if you can do the project quickly, or create some replicable solutions for efficiency. But it can also bite you if the hours start to blow out.

To determine a project fee, I estimate how many days I think I'll need and multiply it by my day rate. Not rocket surgery. And you'll get better at estimating over time. Often with clients I'll start on a project fee, then move onto a retainer for ongoing work, charging by the day/hour.

For agencies, they almost always work on a day rate. For partial days you charge accordingly. I work on the standard 'there are eight hours in a work day' rule to determine my hourly rate.

Be aware a day rate is left open-ended regarding how many hours you're expected to work in a given day. I've been lucky and haven't been exploited on this. Like any agency job, occasionally you're expected to pull some late nights and there's no such thing as overtime. But I know people who have been bled.

To manage this consider building a clause into your contract. I know a freelance designer who negotiates his day to officially end no later than 6.30pm. After then his hourly rate kicks in. In some cases, this rate is higher than usual, and higher again if he's asked to work weekends.

(I've not heard of strategists being able to do this, so it may be role dependant, but no harm in asking.)

ALL INCLUSIVE

Don't forget, your rate includes tax and super. They aren't added on top. The only thing it doesn't include is GST. Keep reading for more on this.

GETTING PAID

There's four ways you can be paid as a freelancer.

#1 CASH IN HAND

If you can, avoid this. You're an adult and shouldn't be taking money without a paper trail. You could end up paying unnecessary tax if you report it as income (which you should). If you have to, write up a fake invoice and treat it as you would other payments.

#2 INVOICES

This is how most agencies and clients will work, where you send an invoice for payment. In this case you are responsible for your tax, GST and usually your superannuation. There's heaps more information about this below.

#3 PAYROLL

If you take a longish contract, some agencies like to put you 'on the books'. I've found about one in five big agencies are working like this. When this happens, you're treated like an employee where you're automatically paid each fortnight or month and you won't have to submit any paperwork (although yes, you'll still have to do timesheets). The employer looks after your tax and your super.

This might be preferable if you're not good at managing money, but personally I prefer to keep control of everything by invoicing. It means you can earn interest on your tax before paying it. You probably won't have a choice, but ask.

#4 RECRUITER LOOKS AFTER IT

If you take work through a recruiter, they'll often look after everything for you. Unless they're just doing the introduction (in which case you'll be paid in one of the methods above), you essentially become an employee of theirs, on the recruiter's payroll.

INVOICING

For most of the work you take, you'll invoice your client or agency at the end of each project (or every fortnight/month – whatever you agree on).

YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED A PAYMENT SYSTEM

Some people swear by finance software to send invoices and track payments. In Australia, Xero (big) and Rounded (startup) come highly recommended. Depending on how many invoices you plan to send, subscriptions start around \$25 a month.

But I'd suggest most people can manage this themselves. Unless you work on heaps of small projects, it's rare to send more than a handful of invoices a month, and with the tools below it's pretty easy to look after yourself.

GOODS & SERVICES TAX (GST)

If you've registered your ABN for GST (which you should have done if you're planning to earn over \$70,000), you add GST to every invoice.

This means 10% is added on top of your fee. A \$100 invoice becomes \$110. In this case you'll pay the additional \$10 as tax at the end of each quarter (more about this on Page 24).

If your ABN is not registered for GST, you don't need to add anything, and on the bottom of each invoice you should write "Not registered for GST".

It's well accepted that GST is added on top of your rate, rather than included. If you negotiate \$800 per day, it's universal that this means \$800 per day plus GST.

INVOICE TEMPLATE

If you're not sure where to start, steal my Invoice Template. It sits on Google Drive, and if you click the button below it will create a copy of the template for you.

Invoice Template

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help [All ch](#)

75% \$ % .0 .00 123 Calibri 12

fx

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1									
2		INVOICE							
3									
4		Employer Name Here					Your Name Here		
5		Invoice Number	#1001				ABN 12 345 678 910		
6		Purchase Order	#9999				0400 000 000		
7							name@email.com		
8		Date Issued	01/01/2019				123 Fake Street MELBOURNE		
9		Date Due	15/01/2019						
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Bank Account Details

Account Name Name
 BSB 12 3456
 Account Number 1234 5678

Not registered for GST. [\[Remove if your ABN is registered for GST.\]](#)

STEAL MY INVOICE TEMPLATE

INVOICE NUMBER

Every invoice needs a number. This is *your* reference. I started at #1001 (because I didn't want to start at #1) and add one each time. Good employers will reference this in the transaction when they process your payment so it's easy to track who has and hasn't paid.

PURCHASE ORDER NUMBER

Sometimes you'll be asked by the employer to add a purchase order number to your invoice. This is *their* reference, and they'll provide you with the number before hand. I've only had two agencies ask for this.

PAYMENT TERMS

If you have a contract it will outline how often to invoice them. For agencies it's generally every two weeks. For clients I'll usually wait for the project to conclude, or invoice once a month, whichever comes sooner.

The payment terms should also outline how long it will take to process your invoice and put the money in your account. If there's nothing specified I use a default of two weeks from the date the invoice is sent, which is highlighted on the invoice.

SUPERANNUATION

In rare cases, some agencies will take super out for you, even if you invoice. This becomes one less thing for you to worry about, but if they ask for your fund's details you know why.

LATE INVOICES

Never rely on an invoice to be paid on time. It's sad but true.

Most invoices are late.

I've had to chase people plenty of times, and usually it's the big agencies who are problematic. My record is eight weeks late.

Don't be afraid to annoy people once the invoice is past due – it's a shit thing for employers to not pay on time. Language can get more aggressive as needed, and don't be afraid to lay on some guilt.

Also, make sure you're not part of the problem. If you're outsourcing work and receive an invoice, be a legend and pay it on the same day if you can.

NON-PAYMENTS

I've been fortunate and haven't had anyone bail on an invoice – but I know others who have.

It's easy to say “work with people you trust”, but it's not always possible to vet them. You might find it hard to get any money up front for a project, but if it's early in a relationship don't be afraid to increase the frequency of payment - agree to a few smaller invoices with smaller milestones, rather than waiting until the end of the project.

If you've exhausted all options and it's clear you're not getting paid, the government has some resources on [how to take legal action](#). Although it might be more trouble than it's worth.

If you really want to push it, I've seen freelancers call out employers in public (tagging the brand's Twitter account seems to be effective), or holding client websites/social media channels hostage if you have access. This is extreme, and you risk burning future opportunities. But each to their own.

PAYING TAXES

Freelancing means you're responsible for paying your own taxes.

GOODS & SERVICES TAX (GST)

Each quarter you need to submit a Business Activity Statement (BAS), which includes paying your GST (if you've registered your ABN for GST). Lots of initialisms coming at you now!

You'll hand over all the GST you've been paid for the quarter, less any GST you've paid on your expenses.

For example, if you earned \$5,000 on invoices for the quarter, you'll have collected \$500 in GST on top of that. But let's say you bought an iPhone for \$1,000 which you're claiming as a business expense. Of this, \$90.91 was GST.

For that quarter you'd pay $\$500 - \$90.91 = \$409.09$ in GST.

If that sounds confusing, don't sweat. If you keep good records, you'll be fine. The interface to submit your BAS is surprisingly good, managed through MyGov which is very user-friendly.

Trust me, you'll be fine to do this yourself. But if you're really not comfortable talk to your accountant. I've been quoted \$165 per quarter for submitting your BAS.

INCOME TAX

In your first year, you won't pay any tax until you process your tax return. This can grow to a significant amount (tens of thousands) and is potentially a risk, so be sure to set this aside.

In your second year, after submitting a tax return where freelancing is your primary income, you'll move onto quarterly payments. This is called Pay As You Go (PAYG) and you process this with your BAS.

At this point your income tax for the quarter is estimated based on your previous year earnings. This can be wildly inaccurate if you had a really good or bad period, or didn't earn anything while on a big holiday. You can have this adjusted if needed. You can also put in a special request not to pay instalments if you have a good reason (for example, if a client was going to pay you in full at the end of a six month project - you'd be crazy to do this but it's the only example I have).

Again, I manage these PAYG quarterly payments myself.

However I do use an accountant once a year to process my annual tax return. You might be capable of doing it yourself, but I outsourced this even prior to freelancing. I find they easily earn their fee with advice on expenses and other savings. This cost is also tax deductible. My accountant charges me \$280 for my annual tax return.

MANAGING YOUR FINANCES

SUPERANNUATION

More often than not, employers won't automatically take out your super. And legally you're not required to contribute anything yourself.

But you should make your own contributions. At least 9.5% from every payment. Don't shoot your future self in the foot. The extra cash might be good now, but you'll regret it when you're old and grey.

I find it easiest to make one lump sum payment into my fund before the end of the financial year. You'll need to notify them in writing that you intend to claim it as a tax deduction – your accountant will give you advice on this.

KEEP IT OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

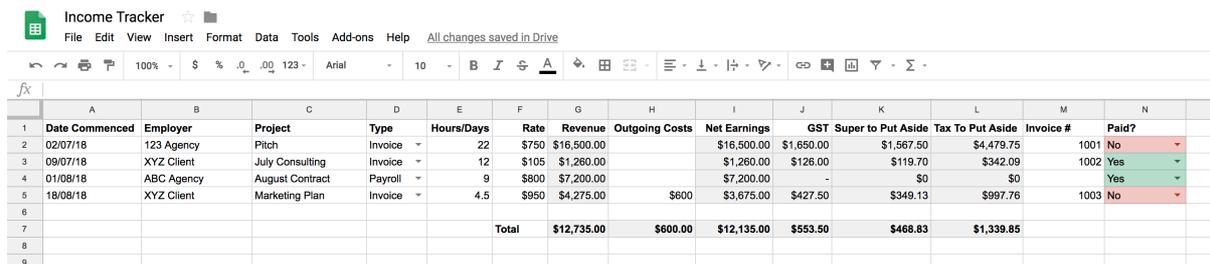
I learned early that your tax, super and GST, all of which you don't want to be tempted into spending, is best kept in a separate account.

Set up a high interest online account, ideally with a separate bank so you can't see it when you log in to your daily account. Then when every payment comes in, transfer 50% immediately (which is roughly 30% for tax, 10% for super and 10% for GST). Out of sight, out of mind. You won't be caught with a tax bill you can't pay.

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR INCOME

Keep track of everything you earn. It's good data to analyse how your decision to freelance is affecting your finances, but is also useful to mark off when a client has paid (and who you need to chase!). It also makes your quarterly and annual tax much faster to process.

I update my Income Tracker each time I land a job, and review at the end of each month which is when I sent out most of my invoices. Feel free to steal my mine and make it your own.



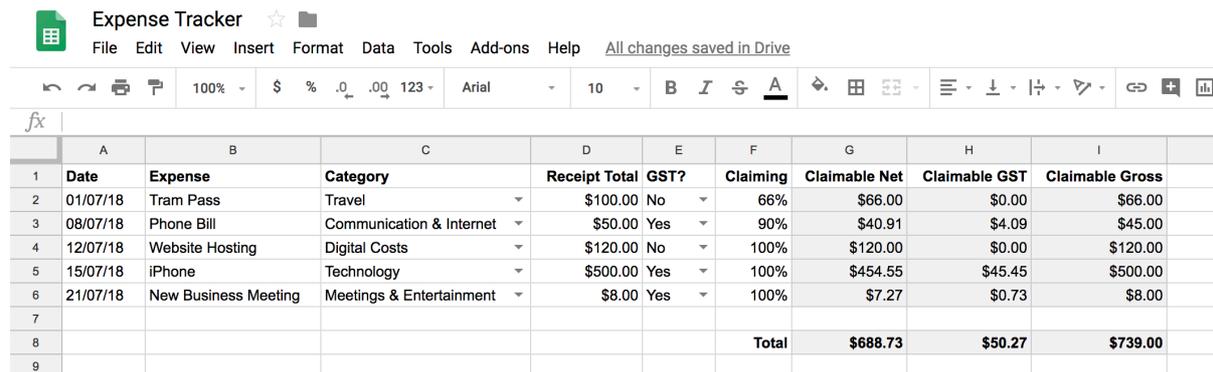
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	Date Commenced	Employer	Project	Type	Hours/Days	Rate	Revenue	Outgoing Costs	Net Earnings	GST	Super to Put Aside	Tax To Put Aside	Invoice #	Paid?
2	02/07/18	123 Agency	Pitch	Invoice	22	\$750	\$16,500.00		\$16,500.00	\$1,650.00	\$1,567.50	\$4,479.75	1001	No
3	09/07/18	XYZ Client	July Consulting	Invoice	12	\$105	\$1,260.00		\$1,260.00	\$126.00	\$119.70	\$342.09	1002	Yes
4	01/08/18	ABC Agency	August Contract	Payroll	9	\$800	\$7,200.00		\$7,200.00	-	\$0	\$0		Yes
5	18/08/18	XYZ Client	Marketing Plan	Invoice	4.5	\$950	\$4,275.00	\$800	\$3,675.00	\$427.50	\$349.13	\$997.76	1003	No
6														
7						Total	\$12,735.00	\$600.00	\$12,135.00	\$553.50	\$468.83	\$1,339.85		
8														
9														

[STEAL MY INCOME TRACKER](#)

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR EXPENSES

You should also track your expenses as they come in. It helps with decisions (you might be surprised how much you're spending) but also makes your quarterly and annual tax a walk in the park.

I keep all my receipts in a folder in Gmail (including photos of paper ones I email myself) and then update my Expense Tracker each time one comes in. Steal my template.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Date	Expense	Category	Receipt Total	GST?	Claiming	Claimable Net	Claimable GST	Claimable Gross
2	01/07/18	Tram Pass	Travel	\$100.00	No	66%	\$66.00	\$0.00	\$66.00
3	08/07/18	Phone Bill	Communication & Internet	\$50.00	Yes	90%	\$40.91	\$4.09	\$45.00
4	12/07/18	Website Hosting	Digital Costs	\$120.00	No	100%	\$120.00	\$0.00	\$120.00
5	15/07/18	iPhone	Technology	\$500.00	Yes	100%	\$454.55	\$45.45	\$500.00
6	21/07/18	New Business Meeting	Meetings & Entertainment	\$8.00	Yes	100%	\$7.27	\$0.73	\$8.00
7									
8						Total	\$688.73	\$50.27	\$739.00
9									

STEAL MY EXPENSE TRACKER

FREELANCERS CAN CLAIM MORE

As a freelancer you may be able to claim more in expenses.

Working from home and meeting clients become costs which are tax deductible. This will vary depending on how much you do of each, but to give you an idea I claim:

- 90% of my phone bill
- 66% of my public transport
- 40% of my home internet
- 100% of meeting coffees and food (clients or new business)
- 7% of my home water bill
- 33% of my home electricity bill
- 100% of new technology like iPhones and MacBooks
- 100% of stationary and business cards
- 100% of business books (fancily referred to as “reference materials”)
- 100% of client and referral gifts
- 100% of website, email and cloud costs

CASH FLOW

Be aware of cash flow. Direct debits or automated mortgage repayments can catch you if people don't pay your invoices on time (which they won't).

Always leave a buffer and don't over extend yourself. If you're outsourcing anything, you don't want to delay their payment if yours is.

A bit extra in your account is one less thing to stress about.

CHAPTER 5

IN THE THICK OF IT

The hardest part is leaping, but once you're up and flying there's always the next source of income to be thinking about.

FINDING WORK

Freelancing means you're constantly feeding the beast. You might be deep into a project, but still need to hustle for the next. It's a juggling act, and balls end up on the floor. This is how I try not to drop them.

THERE'S PROS AND CONS TO RECRUITERS

I've been fortunate and not needed to use a recruiter to find freelance work. So I'm a little biased on this one.

The few times I have spoken with them, they've told me it wouldn't be possible to get the day rate I want. I tend to believe this is because their fee comes out of yours. One recruiter I've since spoken to countered this argument saying their fee was charged on top, but I still feel this hurts your leverage in a negotiation.

The same recruiter suggested their fee can be anything from 15% to 40% of your day rate, which starts to add up.

In their defence one might argue that, yes, you could lose out on say \$100 a day, but is that better than losing a whole day of work if you can't find anything on your own?

Your need for recruiters may vary by what you do. Roles like producers and designers seem to use them more often, with agencies relying on them to find people rather than hunting themselves.

If you like hustling, and are good at it, then you may not need one. But this means you'll also have to write and chase invoices, instead of going onto a recruiter's payroll (some of whom pay weekly which is nice). If you're early in your career or new to a market, they'll also help cover the gaps in your network

Of course, some recruiters are good and some are shit.

You may find it easier to outsource this part of freelancing, but personally I'd prefer to keep the earnings. _(ツ)_/

KEEP TOP OF MIND

When someone has a problem, you want them to think of you first.

Being prolific online helps with this. It's a fine line between turning into a LinkedIn Influencer/Wanker, but channels like these can be very effective to occasionally appear in someone's newsfeed and remind them you exist.

It doesn't have to be frequent, go for quality over quantity. Write a really great thought leadership piece. Or create something people will share.

The key is distribution. Your blog or Twitter account probably doesn't have much reach. Yet you'll find 100s of websites or publishers out there who are dying for free content, especially if it's good. Some of them have decent audiences.

Don't be afraid to approach your local trade press and ask if they'll syndicate a piece you've written. I blog something half decent every second month, and get ten times more views when it's published onto local marketing rag Mumbrella. More importantly, this is what agency people read and it does good things for me when they see my name on the front page.

I set a mission early that I wanted to work with some craft breweries. So I started writing about marketing for craft beer, and approached local beer website BrewsNews who now regularly publish my pieces. It's directly led to two new clients.

On rare occasions some websites will even pay you for your articles. Not much, but hey, more beer money!

COFFEES

You'll do a lot of coffees. Too many.

Learn to love decaf.

Sometimes they're a complete waste of time, you can usually tell within 5 minutes. And people are often late, or don't turn up at all. But it's part of the game.

Finding time for these can be a challenging, and is another reason to only take work four days a week.

Early on I scheduled more beers than coffees, but now I'm finding it's more productive to have meetings in the morning and keep your evenings to yourself.

NETWORKING

The more you network, the more opportunities you'll find. Attending events and meeting people are also good ways to keep you stimulated, something you tend to lose a bit of when you leave an interested agency.

If the thought of networking makes you a bit queasy, I love this advice from Leanne Ledger, freelance strategist: "I'm terrible at standard networking, so instead I volunteer at events. You have much more organic conversations, and with the right event, attendees are potential users of your service."

BRIBES... I MEAN CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Every year I give my agencies and clients a custom beer for Christmas. Mostly because I hate Christmas cards, but also because a thanks goes a long way. No harm in reminding them how awesome you are, right?



REFERRAL THANK YOUS

Most of the time people will refer you work without any expectations in return. I like to send them a six pack, or on a big contract, a bottle of something nice. It's tax deductible and doesn't hurt to be nice human.

MANAGING THE PIPELINE

I can't recommend enough working four days a week, if only to help you manage the pipeline of work. The fifth day is good for coffees, or creating content to get your name out. It also helps when two projects cross over, giving you time in the week to work on both, rather than having to turn one down because you're fully booked.

It's challenging managing the pipeline too far in advance. I've had work booked six weeks away, only for them to bail the day before the contract started. Likewise things can fall apart once you've already begun. This is frustrating when you've just turned down work.

You can minimise this by asking the employer if they have sign off from decision makers and finance departments, but nothing is concrete.

**Expect some instability.
It's another reason to increase your day rate.**

DON'T STRESS TOO MUCH

Slowly I've learned there's always work around the corner. I'm sitting here writing this a few weeks into the new year, and have billed only a few days. This time last year I would have been getting anxious and starting to ask myself questions. But you learn to be okay with it.

(About four hours after I wrote the above I got a call for three days of work next week. Don't stress!)

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GIGS

A popular freelancer has the luxury of choice. These are some things I've been thinking about as I get better at filtering the projects I want to work on.

MOST BIG AGENCIES ARE THE SAME, SOME HAVE BETTER CULTURE

You might be surprised to find most big agencies look and smell the same. The people who work there are kinda the same too. They tend to dislike their clients, work longer-than-healthy hours and think the chaos is unique to their agency. But they are good people who come to work every day wanting to do good work.

Culture is distinctive though. You notice it particularly as a freelancer where you see lots of it fast. It's most evident in how much an agency encourages you to get among it or put your head down and work. It's like gravity - you can feel it immediately but it's harder to identify the cause. Sometimes you can tell in the first ten minutes, usually when someone in IT tells you they don't allow freelancers on the WiFi.

I also didn't realise how spoiled I was in my permanent life after leaning most agencies don't have coffee machines. (Seriously agencies, sort this shit out!)

If you're leaving a big agency expecting something drastically different, don't be surprised to find more of the same. The grass is brown.

FLIRT AROUND A LITTLE, AND STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Use the opportunity to check out different types of agencies or clients. If you've only worked in a creative agency, see what happens if you go into a design firm. Or a startup.

My mission this year is to spend time in a consultancy (which seem to be all the rage at the moment). I'd also like to check out a client-side in-house agency (also trending).

But more than the types of clients, be open to different types of work. Maybe it pushes your skillset, or is a job that's entirely remote. Or maybe it's much bigger or smaller than you're used to. You don't grow when you're comfortable.

One of my favourite adventures last year was writing a marketing strategy to launch a gluten-free brewery. Not quite my heartland of creative strategy, but it's a category close to my stomach. It was a rewarding project which turned into ongoing consulting. And soon we'll be making some ads.



Also be cautious of getting stuck somewhere. It's an easy trap to fall into. A friend of mine took the leap three years ago. He started a job and has been freelancing there ever since, on rolling six month contracts. The money is good, but you need to remember why you started in the first place. (To be fair he did just have a kid and was happy to prioritise his family. And I'm pleased to say since writing the above he's decided to try his hand elsewhere.)

As a personal rule I won't accept a contract for more than three months at a time, just to keep me on my toes.

BUT DON'T TAKE EVERYTHING

Freelancing gives you the power of "no". It's hard turning down paid work, especially early on and even more so when you're not flat chat.

But just because someone's throwing money at you doesn't mean you need to accept. I had a very grownup moment about 12 months in, when I was offered a pretty lucrative contract but for work I wasn't into. Although I had nothing else lined up, I turned it down. (And something else did turn up.)

Small projects are another one to consider carefully. You can eat up the same amount of time working on proposals and managing the relationship. These are overheads you can't charge for.

As you get more senior you may find it's harder to justify your rate on smaller projects. Can you really make a difference in one or two days and charge that much? Some freelancers won't take anything less than a week.

I tend to think I'm not that senior, and often work with smaller clients where you can make an impact in a few days, or even a few hours. I wrote one pitch strategy for an agency in three hours because they were desperate. It wasn't my best work, but 'good enough' was better than nothing.

OUTSOURCING WORK

Once you're settled, you may wish to consider sub-contracting work out.

I haven't yet outsourced strategy, but I have landed projects where I needed creative love to bring my strategies to life. Sometimes I white label them under Pigs Don't Fly (my sort of agency-ish entity when I need one) and others I just introduce them directly to the client.

Be aware this is a whole different skillset to find and manage resources. If they don't deliver, the buck stops with you. And you need the cash flow to pay their invoices potentially before you've been paid yours.

BEING GOOD AT FREELANCING

Some people are better at freelancing than others. This is how not to suck.

SWIM FAST AND PUT A WIN ON THE BOARD EARLY

You're constantly thrown straight in the deep end and you need to swim real fast. You gotta hit the ground running, and the sooner you can be impressive the better. Even a small win early gives everyone some reassurance you've got this.

And don't expect to have a desk waiting for you, or a MacBook. Bring your own technology just in case. Sometimes you're not even introduced around or shown where the toilets are, so be proactive. Receptionists are great best friends.

WORK YOUR OWN WAY, BUT ADAPT AS NEEDED

Daniel-Jacob Santhou, freelance strategist, says: "It's the same shit done in different ways. Stick with what has always worked for you – you can always 'super' it on after."

You often don't have a lot of time, so stick with what you know. Don't be afraid to challenge the process or the thinking - in fact it might be exactly what's needed. But. Don't be precious about it. Most big agencies have their methodologies and

frameworks, find ways to make it fit in. Use their logos and their templates – don't be a pain in the arse.

BE A GOOD HUMAN

Be nice. And helpful. It goes so much further than you think. I'm surprised by how many freelance dickheads I've worked with. Then they're surprised when they don't get invited back.

Smile. Be positive. And turn up to meetings on time.

“When you're friendly, people call you in again. Or bring you along to their next job.” - Mario Djuhadi, freelance designer.

Being a good human might actually be more important than being good at your job.

OTHER THINGS I WISH I KNEW BEFORE I STARTED

This is the section for stuff I think is useful to know, but doesn't fit anywhere else.

DON'T FORGET YOUR SIDE PROJECTS

When quitting my real job I told everyone how awesome it was going to be to work on side projects. It was also the reason I told myself why I should only work four days a week.

Despite being the master of my own calendar, my grand plans to work on side projects failed miserably. It's rather easy to take on more paid work or look for paid work or just procrastinate while passion projects collect dust.

If making things is important to you, be disciplined about it when you leap. Make time and set deadlines. Find ways to keep yourself accountable.

Projects on the side are also a good opportunity to see work through from start to end, something you often lose as a freelancer.

EXPECT JANUARY TO BE QUIET

Everyone will tell you to expect January to be quiet, and often December too.

This is a good time to ship something into the world. My project this Christmas was the thing you're reading right now.

CONTRACTS ARE RARE, BUT ALWAYS GET SOMETHING IN WRITING

Big agencies and some big clients will make you sign a you contract. But you won't get them with small agencies or when you're working with medium to small clients.

Those you do sign, will always favour the employer. The notice period for which they can cancel a contract is usually only a day. I've had jobs cancelled the night before. That's freelancing. But it's also another reason to increase your day rate.

I've had some cheeky tactics used where you don't sign the contract until well into your first or second day. I don't mind this, but I do when they try to slip something by you like a reduced day rate. Don't let this shit fly.

On projects without a contract, I'm a pretty trusting human being. With that said I do like to have something in writing, even an email, outlining a scope and a rate. On bigger projects I'll write up a one or two page proposal with a bit more detail, including assumptions and payment terms.

Make sure you agree on your rate up front. Negotiating after is a losing position.

KEEP STIMULATED

I like big agencies because they are stimulating environments. Interesting people coming in to present, creatives being weird, sales people giving you tools and things to make you look smart. Even the all-staff emails with inspiration most people cringe at.

When you're on your own you'll need to find this by yourself. Niche Facebook groups, Slack channels and podcasts are great. Add a few more interesting people on Twitter. Invest in yourself to attend events or training (which costs both time and money, but are good for your advertising brain).

BUILDING A BRAND

Most of the work I do as Zac Martin, rather than Pigs Don't Fly (my pseudo agency/entity/thing). It depends on your audience. Clients might like you to pretend to be a bit bigger than you are, while agencies want you not your brand.

If you're selling wares in your name, some freelancers prefer to avoid the word "freelancer". I'm told there can be perception issues where it's not taken seriously or senior-ly. They choose "consultant" instead or don't advertise it at all. Personally I'm okay with "freelancer", and believe using the word make me easier to find.

If you do go down the path of building a brand, don't waste time on logos and Powerpoint templates and business cards. Make them as you need them, don't worry about doing any of it up front.

GET OUT OF THE HOUSE, AND KEEP IN SHAPE

If you're working from home for an extended period, consider getting a co-working space. It's healthy to get out of the house (and out of your trackies). It will make you more productive, more social and creates serendipity.

If you don't want the expense, ask a small agency if they've got a spare desk. Sometimes they won't mind giving up for free – they might be looking for the same things you are.

If you are working from home, this might sound obvious, but make sure you get out of the house at least once a day. I force myself to go to the gym or for a run. And make sure you speak to at least one human face-to-face. If you live near a café, make friends with the barista.

AGENCIES USING YOUR IMAGE

I've been asked a few times by agencies to use my credentials – either in a pitch deck or on their website as a talent roster. I said yes, but nothing came of it.

Since then I've decided to no longer give permission to use my image for free. They get something out of it, but you don't. You're told you'll work on the pitch or the business if they win it – but that's a gamble, and it's more than likely you'll be booked on something else. I freelanced not to have commitments.

MARKETPLACES ARE A RACE TO THE BOTTOM

There's a number of market places out there, where buyers pitch projects and sellers pitch their skills. Avoid them. They're entirely driven by price. It's an unsustainable game you can't win, and not one you want to play. Plus the good stuff never happens on marketplaces.

**“In a race to the bottom,
the winner generally loses.”**

– Seth Godin, marketing author

CHAPTER 6

LIFE AFTER FREELANCING

I'm a pretty practical planner, so I wrote this as a practical guide.

But at some point into your freelancing career (for me it's about 18 months in), you might start asking yourself some bigger questions.

Like, can you freelance forever?

Being promiscuous and flirting around is fun. But at some point, do you need a stable relationship?

As you can see, I have more questions than answers.

Freelancing doesn't fulfil you long term. The novelty rusts, faster for some than others. And then you're left with lots of short deadlines and small wins. There aren't many big hairy audacious goals. And increasingly you find yourself asking what are you working toward?

Mark Pollard, strategist, sums it up nicely: "Think about why and for how long you'll freelance and what your life's work is. The zombie freelance life is limbo."

Having a freelance deadline might not be a bad idea. If you set out to recalibrate your career, you'll need to come back down to earth at some point and implement once you've found what you're looking for.

I've been offered full time jobs. Some of them were even tempting. One included equity in the agency. At the time I felt I had more to learn, about advertising and myself. But slowly into your freelancing career you might find this attitude changing. I think I'm starting to consider these conversations more seriously. Especially if they let me do four days a week.

Perhaps the answer to this problem is starting your own shop.

I've played in this space a little, nothing too formalised. And I'm still interested in exploring further – but you need the right people to do it with. And the hunger for hard work. I'm not sure I want that right now, which even writing makes me feel a bit guilty because I'm probably too young to be saying that.

I'm still working on this one. Come back some time and maybe I'll have an update.

THE UPDATE (AUGUST 2019)

Well, it happened. A few months after publishing this, I took a permanent role.

I'm back in a big agency, working on big brands with big budgets. And it's four days a week.

The process of writing this, particularly the previous page, got my head turning on what I was doing and where I was at in my career. I became more open to conversations about permanent roles, and after freelancing at Ogilvy Melbourne for a few months the stars aligned and I jumped at them.

That's the great thing about freelancing - whether you're two weeks in, or two years, you can decide to hang up the boots and get a real job at any time. Just another reason to give it a shot.

Since publishing the response has been incredible. It's been downloaded more than 5,000 times from 65 countries. People from all over the world have reached out saying it helped them take the leap, sort their finances, or ask for more money.

People really responded to how open and honest the guide has been. So here's one final piece of transparency.

After two years of freelancing, the difference between my last permanent role and my current one is an 80% increase in salary. An explosion in future earning potential is just another reason to try your hand at freelancing.

CHAPTER 7

FURTHER READING

Some people more articulate than I have written great pieces on freelancing.

[Am I depressed or am I just a freelancer?](#)

Nada Alic, freelance editor, writer and content strategist

[7 things creative freelancers like me never talk about \(but should\)](#)

Ben Keenan, freelance creative director

[The psychological trap of freelancing](#)

Charlotte Cowles, freelance writer

[Freelance strategy for life. Or is it?](#)

Sweathead podcast by Mark Pollard with guest Camilla Grey Petty

[How to price your your creative work](#)

YouTube playlist by Chris Do, creative entrepreneur coach

Seen, heard or written something killer? Shoot me a link and I'll include in future versions.

CHAPTER 8

GO GET 'EM TIGER

I'm surprised more people don't freelance. Maybe not forever, but at least once in their career.

The main excuse tends to be "Oh, it wouldn't be possible for my job." But there's pretty much no role in advertising or marketing where freelancing wouldn't work. If you're in Account Management, your excuse might be that having good relationships with clients is critical, yet I know many freelance Account Managers who are in constant demand and kicking goals. No excuses apply for strategists, creatives, producers, and anyone in production or studio.

It's a good time to jump in too. Agencies are increasingly under pressure to offer more, creating a need for specialist skills they can't afford permanently. Consolidation by the big guys means staff cuts and hiring freezes – increasing demand for freelancers.

And despite the 'gig economy', there's still not many doing it. Freelancing is definitely on trend, but it's by no means saturated.

Everyone has imposter syndrome. So much so it's becoming a cliché to write about. It's time to put that shit aside. I can't find the source of this quote, but it's one to live by: "The difference between being nervous and excited is one deep breath."

Good luck. You got this. Take the leap.

And if you do, let me know.

Likewise if you have any questions, hit me up. I'm happy to help and would love to include more content in future updates. Or, if you've got any advice or war stories yourself, please share. If it's pithy I'd love to quote you. And if there's something you disagree with, tell me why – I'm open to presenting more balanced views.

Thanks for making it to the last page. If you enjoyed or found it helpful, please share somewhere for others to find:

pigsdontfly.com/how-to-freelance



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