

BE YOUR OWN BOSS

Marketing Yourself

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For one, for all

Marketing Yourself

Once you've set up your business, you need to be found by clients and customers. How do you do that?

Sales and marketing are core functions in any business – freelance businesses are no different. It is important to represent yourself well, learn to talk naturally about what you do, and continue to identify new opportunities.



Word-of-mouth

The phrase 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' always springs to mind when it comes to finding freelance business. The time-honoured way of finding new business is word-of-mouth. Tell everyone you know about what you're doing. Literally, everyone. You'd be surprised how far it can get you. As one freelancer pointed out: "I casually mentioned what I was doing to my mum and couldn't believe it when she introduced me to someone who later became an important client." To fuel this effect, try to describe what you do in simple terms that anyone can understand, even a child. That isn't always easy, particularly if what you do is quite complex. The key is to practice it on as many people as possible until you are able to hone a fluid introductory sentence. If the person you're speaking to shows interest, you can then follow up with the more technical stuff.



Building your network

Depending on how successful your immediate network is in finding business, you may need to widen your net. The idea of networking can be quite daunting, but opening yourself up to new groups of people can open business opportunities. Identify relevant events, local small business groups, work-hubs and online communities of freelancers to meet new people. People buy from people so it is hugely important to build relationships rather than just collecting business cards. Remember to always keep in touch, as you never know when someone knows someone who knows someone.





Work hubs

Work hubs, also known as co-working spaces, are shared working spaces used by freelancers and small businesses. They allow you to work surrounded by like-minded individuals. A chat over coffee in the kitchen could spark a prospective new opportunity. Many freelancers outsource aspects of their work to other freelancers, because they understand the importance of flexibility and the talent among other freelancers. Work hubs also often run events so they are great ways to meet new people and learn something new in the industry. Keep your eyes and ears open whilst you are working in co-work spaces.



Website

Having your own website can be a valuable tool when it comes to marketing yourself. This is often one of the first things that comes to mind when people want to find out more about you and your services. An ideal website should have a clear menu of your services, credible testimonials as well as a strong 'call to action' or contact button/page. Keeping your website updated frequently will maintain your professional image to prospective clients. With the world at your fingertips, you can leverage the internet using your website to reach as many customers as possible.



Social media

Some freelancers use their LinkedIn page instead of a website – it's a free, quick and easy way of creating an online profile that is always up to date. You can also set up a custom URL on LinkedIn so you can publish a personalised link to your profile. Crucially, this enables you to maintain contact with past clients and build your network. Asking for recommendations from past colleagues or clients is a good reason to get in touch and keeps you on their radar.

When selecting the right social media platforms for your business, it is better to choose a few that you can engage on frequently and keep up to date, rather than spreading yourself too thin. Make sure you keep each platform up to date and engage with those you are connected with to build relationships.

Remember that when you are freelancing you are the face of the business, so it is worth doing an audit and cleanse of your personal profiles to ensure you are happy with what prospective clients can find on you.





PR

Don't ignore the power of PR. Seek out opportunities where you can demonstrate yourself as an expert. Are there any opportunities for you to organise your own events, speak at an industry event or write an article to show your expertise? In PR the goal is to give useful information, not to sell. Being seen as an expert gives you professional recognition which can help to build your reputation.



Understanding your clients

Find out as much about each client as possible, understand their context, identify what their challenges are and how you can help solve them. Your understanding of their needs will be valued and will allow you to better tailor your skills to your clients' requirements. It is not always about telling them how good you are, but how you can resolve their challenges and focus on what they need.



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Online freelance job platforms

There are plenty of online jobs platforms out there that specialise in connecting clients with freelancers. It is important to identify which platforms are most effective for you and your industry. Freelancer.com, Upwork and Freelancer Club are just a few examples. Typically, when you register you will need to set up a profile including an introductory bio and offer examples of previous work. You then have the opportunity to be found by clients, and to bid for jobs that are posted to the site. After you complete a piece of work you are usually rated by your client, allowing you to build your professional standing. Many people use these platforms when starting out to grow their client base, if you do a good job you will often then receive referrals through word-of-mouth.



Using agencies

Alternatively, recruitment agencies specialising in freelancers or contractors can be a good way of outsourcing the task of finding clients – particularly when you're starting out. They are well placed to know where the opportunities are, and some large companies will only deal with freelancers via an agency. It's important to check the agency's credentials – ask for recommendations. Also, check the contracts they are using are based on sound business-to-business terms. Although agencies keep a chunk of the overall fee, they can be a source of steady income.





Take the time

It can be easy when you are busy working on client projects to rely heavily on your current project and not think about marketing. Always make sure you take time out of your week to work on your business admin including marketing. This will help you to line up new projects and opportunities for when your current project ends.



Mix it up

Every freelancer and business is different so no one method or combination is right for everyone. You don't have to rely on one method, and in most cases it is best to market yourself through different channels to maximise prospective opportunities.

It can take time to get the right balance and blend of marketing tools for your business. If you feel something isn't working, change it. The trick is to keep experimenting and refining your approach.

At the end of the day, you're the boss.

Don't forget we're here when you need us

IPSE, the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed, is the UK's only not-for-profit association dedicated to supporting, representing and protecting the freelance community.

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