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Title:

Working At Home: What Options Are Available?

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Summary:

If you've just begun your work-at-home search, you are likely feeling confused and overwhelmed by all the options out there. How do you know what's legitimate? How do you avoid the scams? Are there really jobs you can do from home? Yes!

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Article Body:

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So many people are happily working from home, and you can too. You just have to know where to look. This article will explain the types of work you can do at home, which basically fall into four categories:

Working for an Employer - (This is often called "telecommuting.") There are many legitimate companies that hire people to work from their home offices, and that number is growing every day. Employers are seeing the benefits of having employees work remotely, and many more will join these ranks in the future. (See our list of companies that hire telecommuters.) Some companies will hire you as an actual employee; you will fill out tax forms and the employer will take taxes out of your paycheck, just like if you worked on location. Other companies will hire you as an independent contractor. They will send you a 1099 form at the end of the year, and you are responsible for paying your own taxes. The employer may require you to work certain hours every day, or a set number of hours per week. Pay may be hourly, weekly, bi-weekly, or per piece (as with data entry type jobs). Some telephone jobs will pay you per "talk minute" - in other words, you will be paid only for the time you are actively speaking with customers.

Freelancing - A "freelancer" is someone who hires out their skills to various companies for a specific project. The skills are usually those of a professional nature, such as writing, computer programming, web design and graphic arts, secretarial/administrative and virtual assisting. Some popular freelance websites are http://Guru.com and http://eLance.com. You can browse the jobs available and bid on them. If your bid wins, you get the job. Note that these jobs are usually temporary, for one project only. However, if you build a reputation for good work and meeting deadlines, you will often get offered other jobs.

Home Business Opportunity - You can also start your own business as a representative for an existing company. Most of these companies are Direct Sales or Network Marketing/MLM (Multi-Level Marketing). You've probably heard of many such companies, like Tupperware, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Avon, and Pampered Chef. There are thousands to choose from. (See our list of home business opportunities.) There are many benefits to this type of work at home. You are your own boss, you set your own hours, and you are in complete control of how much income you earn (as opposed to earning a set amount of money each week from an employer). There are also some great tax breaks for home-based businesses.

Create Your Own Business - The final option is to build your own company. The possibilities are endless. Just about any skills you have can be turned into a home business. Dog walking/pet sitting, virtual assisting, catering, bicycle repair, childcare, crafts and artwork, etc. The most important thing to consider: is there a market for what you can do? Would people pay for the products or services you can supply? If you set your mind to it, I bet you could come up with dozens of great ideas for businesses you can do.

Avoid the Scams

The number one thing to remember about scammers is that they want either your money, or your personal information. Never, ever pay a "fee" to begin working for a company. (Business opportunities do frequently require you to purchase a start-up kit, however I am referring to actual telecommuting jobs here.) No matter how great they make a job sound, do NOT pull out your credit card and send them money. It is a scam. Rarely, some legitimate companies might charge you for training, but more often they will deduct this from your first few paychecks. If you're really not sure if a company is legitimate, ask around! Visit work at home message forums and ask about the company. Chances are people have heard of them, or can tell you whether it's a genuiune job or not. Unfortunately, new scammers pop up every day, so even if you can't find anything negative about them, proceed cautiously.

Likewise, if you are unsure whether a company is legitimate, do NOT give them your social security number, home address, or any banking information (for direct deposit). An employer will not need this information unless they are actually hiring you. I recommend people to leave those fields blank when applying for a job. If the employer likes your qualifications and wants to hire you (and you are absolutely certain they are legitimate) then you can supply that information. Real employers will understand your caution.

The best way to avoid scams is to listen to your gut. There are always warning signs. Even if everything seems on the up and up, and your gut is giving you a signal that something doesn't seem right, LISTEN to that. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "I had a bad feeling but I wanted it to be for real, so I took a chance." Don't do that. You have a great built-in warning system. We all do. It's called Intuition. Use it. Outsmart the scammers.

Professionalism, Patience and Persistence

Finally, remember that work at home positions have a tremendous amount of demand. Thousands and thousands of people are applying for the very same positions that you are. Make sure your resume is in top form and clearly details your experience and qualifications for the job you are applying for. Consider investing in a professionally done resume and cover letter. It is well worth the money if it lands you the job!

If you haven't heard back after a week or two, why not follow up with the company and check on the status of your application? Send a nice email inquiring, or call them. (Only if the company hasn't requested that you not do that.) Don't whine or beg, be professional about it. Express your genuine interest in working for them. Persistence can pay off, as long as you're not annoying your potential employer.

Patience is important, as finding a work at home position can take many months. If you can't wait, why not consider starting your own business? Don't let lack of experience stop you. You can learn anything you don't know. Talk to other business owners who do what you are considering. Ask them how they got started. There are a lot of great people out there who would be willing to help guide you in the right direction.

Think about what you really want in a home based career. Do you prefer to be your own boss, or work for someone else? Do you need flexible hours, or would you rather have a set schedule? Do you like telephone work, or internet based? Make a definite list of what you do want, and what you don't want. That will make your search much quicker.

Believe in yourself. You can create the perfect career for yourself. Many others have done it, so why not you too?