BUILD A BUSINESS YOU LOVE

Freelancing Tips from the Pros

upwork™

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The time is right

There's never been a better time to freelance. Currently more than 35% of the U.S. workforce is freelancing in some capacity. And that number is growing. Estimates indicate that by the year 2020, up to 50% of the U.S. workforce will be freelancing (Source: *Freelancers Union*). And this growth trend isn't limited to the United States.

When you add the EU-15 to the U.S., independent workers account for an estimated 20-30% of the working-age population, representing up to 162 million people. (Source: *McKinsey Global Institute survey 2016*)

If you're seriously considering becoming a part-time freelancer or running your freelancing business full-time, Upwork can help you achieve your goal, easier and faster. As the world's leading freelancing website, Upwork is the place top freelancers go to find more clients, run their businesses, and grow their incomes.

Why choose freelancing

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There are many compelling reasons freelancing is gaining traction today. These include:

Freedom and flexibility

With freelancing, you choose your projects, control your rate, and maintain your own schedule. You determine what hours, days, and even months you're "on the clock." And you're free to work from wherever you want: at home, a park, a coffee shop or other mobile hot spot… it's up to you. Want to work in your pajamas? Go for it. Dread Monday mornings? Skip them. If you need to take time off, you have only yourself and your client obligations to answer to. Freelancing provides you the freedom and flexibility to find great work-life balance.

More control over your career

The prospect of starting and ending your career with the same company is a thing of the past. Today "workforce reductions" are a common response to cyclical corporate budget cuts. And switching jobs and employers every few years has become an accepted strategy for career advancement. The solution: Go freelance, be your own boss, and take control of your career.

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Freelancing has given me the freedom to work from any location I choose. Without my freelance career, I never would have been able to swim with dolphins in Brazil, explore Angkor Wat in Cambodia, go camping in the Outback in Australia, and check numerous other items off my bucket list.

Kelly D.
Travel writer and digital nomad

Financial independence

Unlike with traditional employment, with freelancing your ability to earn is limited only by the number of clients you take on and business you generate. Your freelance earning potential is virtually unlimited.

Variety and challenges

As a freelancer, you choose which projects appeal to you. Tired of the same old types of jobs? Want to break out of your comfort zone and "stretch" your skills? Target only those jobs you find creatively challenging and fulfilling. And with a freelancing website like Upwork, you're not limited by geographical constraints. Your next client could be just around the corner or on the far side of the planet.
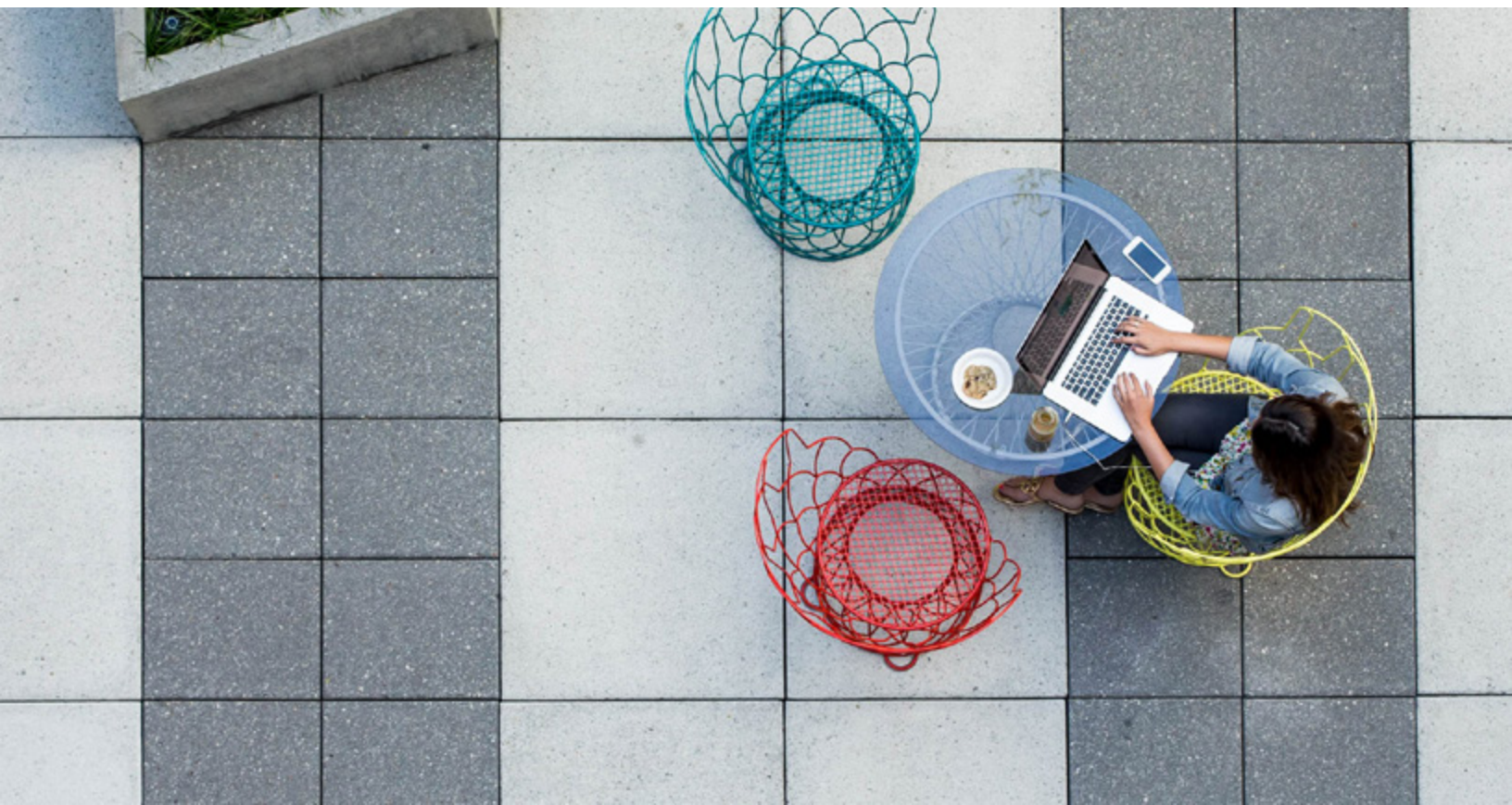
Building and managing your brand

Building and managing your brand

The global pool of freelance talent is getting more crowded every day. It's important to stand out from the rest so that prospective clients can find you. Your personal brand leads the way and represents the cornerstone in establishing and cultivating a successful freelancing business.

Brand definition

What exactly defines a personal brand? Think of it as the lasting impression you leave behind. It's what people think and say about you after you leave the room or end a phone call. It's the image you project: the unique aspects of your personality, capabilities, and performance that set you apart.

"A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another." — **Seth Godin**

Defining your brand

How do you determine and articulate your personal brand? Here are some tips:

Focus on your expertise

Start with what you do exceptionally, or better or differently than most. Then focus on those areas in which you have the most experience. In communicating your areas of expertise, it's important not to overstate your capabilities. Don't try to be too many things to too many people. Better to underpromise and overdeliver than the other way around.

Identify your target market

Looking back over your work history, start with the types of businesses and industries with which you have the most experience and greatest level of comfort. These represent your target customers—the potential clients you know and understand best. You'll want to position your brand and messaging to address their specific wants and needs. As you gain competencies and confidence, you can expand your target to include markets you'd like to explore and grow into.

Pro Tip

When defining your brand, stick to what you do best. Most clients are looking for experts, not generalists. Think from the client's perspective: if you were seeking a graphic designer, which freelancer would you choose?

- A freelancer whose skill set includes basic accounting and customer service along with graphic design.

- A candidate whose profile clearly demonstrates expertise with a variety of specific graphic design programs and freelancer websites and includes a list of advanced training certificates and a strong portfolio of examples.

Differentiate

It's important to establish and communicate a competitive advantage through differentiation. Ask yourself what skills and attributes set you apart from others. If you're having difficulty identifying them, ask your friends and business associates for their feedback.

Branding online and offline

It's critical that you cast the widest net and brand yourself across a spectrum of electronic and traditional communication channels.

Online

Online branding includes all those places where you have an electronic presence.

Online branding sources include:

- Your freelancer profile (on Upwork)

- Industry-specific portfolios and forums (Dribbble, Stack Overflow, Behance)

Establish yourself as an expert online via:

- A personal blog

- Posts on blog platforms (Medium and Blogger)

- Contributed articles (Premier Author on Upwork)

- Submissions to trade publications

Pro Tip

Browse profiles on freelancing websites such as Upwork to learn what makes you different from your competition.

Generate online leads through:

- Submitting proposals via Upwork

- Advertising strategies (SEM for related keywords)

- Email marketing (newsletter to blog subscribers)

- SEO on your website content

Offline

Offline branding refers to traditional printed advertising such as business cards and marketing brochures, as well as telephone and face-to-face communications. Keep in mind that in this age of digital, global communication—and the advent of freelancing websites such as Upwork—offline promotion strategies have become less relevant and effective on their own. However, offline brand-building can still help support your overall branding strategy. For example, in-person networking can help you communicate your brand and promote your online business.

Offline strategies include:

- Networking/word of mouth

- Conferences and trade shows

- Cold-calling

Pro Tip

Lines of distinction between personal/social and professional/ business posted content are becoming increasingly blurred. What you post on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and YouTube isn't necessarily invisible or off-limits to current or potential business clients.

Branding best practices

Follow these proven, expert tips to get the most out of your personal brand:

- Regularly update your profile (every three months minimum).

- Avoid copying and pasting "boilerplate" proposals. Propsals are a first-impression opportunity to establish interactive, individualized communication with clients.

- Showcase your past work samples and project summaries for prospective clients to see.

- You can add portfolio items to your online profile and reference them in your cover letter. Just be sure to secure permission before posting your work product for a previous client. Learn more about creating a successful portfolio on Upwork.

- Seek out and complete relevant online educational courses, and include professional certifications, licenses, awards, and special recognition in your online profile. View a list of available skills tests on Upwork.

- Create an introduction video to supplement traditional proposals. It will help you stand out, build rapport, and make a personal connection with prospective clients. Learn more about creating an introduction video and adding it to your profile on Upwork.

Pro Tip

Take the time to personalize each proposal: Think custom, not cookie-cutter.

Managing your online brand presence

Successful branding isn't a "set it and forget it" exercise. As an extension and direct reflection of your personality and reputation, branding represents a dynamic, ongoing effort. It's critical to stay on top of it.

Keep in mind that clients—and their perceptions and feedback—play an important role in your brand development. When you demonstrate consistency and excellence, it strengthens your brand and leads to customer satisfaction and repeat business.

> *"A good reputation is more valuable than money."*
> **— Publilius Syrus**

Here's a checklist of tips for managing your brand online:

✓ **Is your list of skills up-to-date?**

Ensure your personal "story" is consistent and updated across all channels.

✓ **Do you keep an eye on emerging industry topics and trends?**

Make sure to evolve and refresh your brand as opportunity arises.

✓ **Have you asked for feedback after your last completed contract?**

Make it a standard procedure to request feedback at the successful completion of each contract.

Pro Tip

Client feedback is a dual-purpose branding tool: When it's positive, it reinforces your best practices and can serve as a powerful marketing device. Conversely, constructive criticism helps you identify and work on areas of opportunity and develop new strengths.

✔ Does your brand reflect your most current work and status?

Delete any work samples older than three years and refresh your profile and portfolio regularly.

✔ Have you searched for yourself online recently?

Monitor your brand regularly by checking what others are saying about you.

✔ Are you responding to invitations and offers within 24 hours?

To increase your business success, make sure to stay active, communicate like a pro, and show reliability to your clients.

Pricing your services

Pricing your services

Every freelancer faces the challenge of how much to charge clients for services rendered. On one hand, you don't want to charge too little and shortchange yourself. On the other, you don't want to overprice yourself out of potential jobs. You ultimately want to get paid what you're worth while staying competitive. It's a difficult balance to strike, and there is no single right formula.

Fortunately, Upwork has some useful resources to help you navigate your way to pricing success for your freelance services:

Getting started

This blog provides tips for establishing your first competitive freelance rate, starting with up-front market research and taking into account your experience, skill set, and income needs.

Raising your rates and negotiations

This article outlines six ways to raise your rates and keep your clients while you increase your profits and strengthen your business relationships.

From $5 per piece to $130 an hour

A freelancer chronicles her journey from charging bargain prices and struggling to get ahead to realizing her true worth and prospering as a freelancer.

Best practices: Danny Margulies

"Start small. Go after simple jobs that can be done in a few hours or less, and build from there." A freelance writer shares his secrets and tells the story of going from unemployed to earning a six-figure annual income in less than a year on Upwork.

PART 4

Landing your first project

Landing your first project

Once you've established your brand and determined your freelance rate, you're ready to tackle the next step: bidding on and being selected for your first freelance contract. It's natural to feel a little nervous and uncertain. But there's no need to be intimidated. Upwork provides resources that can give you confidence and help you prepare for success in landing that critical first freelance contract.

Client acquisition techniques

Finding that first client can seem like a huge hurdle. There's no one right way to go about it or that guarantees success. Fortunately for you, the Upwork freelancing website makes it easier. Upwork includes powerful search features for pinpointing the jobs and clients that match your specific needs. And with more than 10 million clients worldwide seeking freelance services, chances are good you'll find a match.

Additionally, you can promote your brand and expand your reach through the following online and offline strategies.

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When starting out, develop a mindset of strength: Don't just take any freelance job you can GET (a position of weakness), but focus on what you can GIVE (a position of strength).

Danny Margulies
Freelance copywriter and prolific blogger

Online options:

- Online job boards

- Social media and business networking websites

- Association websites for your industry/area of expertise

- Creating a personal website and using SEO to help prospective clients easily find you in a web search

- Starting a blog on your professional specialty

Offline options:

- Referrals from former clients and peers

- Face-to-face networking opportunities including association meetings, and business gatherings, and community service events

Pro Tip

Uncover "hidden" client needs for extra income. Well-published freelance copywriter Danny Margulies has identified four services that most clients could use—they just might not realize it. Many freelancers have the skills required to deliver them, and doing so is a great way to make more money while demonstrating you understand your clients' needs:

1. Conducting customer interviews to uncover buying motivators

2. Writing customer case studies (clients can never have enough)

3. Doing keyword searches to improve search engine rankings

4. Performing image searches

Select jobs that match your skill set

To help ensure success in your first freelance projects, you'll want to identify projects that most closely match your work experience and capabilities. Pay particular attention to the work description. It can help you quickly determine:

- If the project requirements are within your skill set

- If the budget meets your pricing estimate and pay requirements

Evaluate each post

The language and level of thoroughness in a job posting reflects how the client thinks, operates, and approaches work assignments. Pay close attention to them.

Reach out to potential clients

The most successful freelancers tailor each proposal to a specific job posting. Taking that extra up-front time and effort demonstrates your sincerity, enthusiasm, and professionalism. And that can equate to both short-term and long-term success.

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I go after jobs that have clear and detailed job descriptions with realistic deadlines and budgets. The more research the client has done and the better he or she understands what they need, the more likely they are to understand the true value a freelancer can bring to the job.

Richard A.

Freelance mobile developer

Consider these steps to make a positive first impression with potential clients:

1. Start by writing a personal and professional greeting.

2. Next, write a short paragraph outlining your relevant experience, including your areas of expertise, education, and skills.

3. Note any past projects you worked on that were similar to the client's project. Outline how you personally would approach and complete the project based on the work description.

4. Address and answer any screening questions included in the job posting.

5. State your interview availability and express your interest in discussing the project further.

6. End with a personal closing message, reinforcing your enthusiasm for the project.

Pro Tip

It's a two-way street: Remember that while clients are trying to identify the right freelancers for their projects, you should also be screening clients to find the best fit for your services.

Managing your projects and building long-term client relationships

Managing your projects and building long-term client relationships

As previously noted, the quality of your services, communication, and client relationships all play a role in your overall brand management. You might be highly skilled at your particular discipline, whether it's computer programming, graphic design, or language translation. But to thrive as a top freelancer, you'll also want to demonstrate effective communication and project management skills, as well as establish and cultivate strong, long-term relationships with your clients.

Multiple-project management

Freelancers who successfully manage multiple projects effectively split their time, resources, and energy across a range of priorities. And they often do this while balancing a number of operational responsibilities at the same time. It's as much an art as it is a science, and it requires a cool head. Start small and work your way up. Practice prioritizing and juggling multiple tasks at home. Here are some tips to boost your productivity.

Top tips for building excellent client relationships

Building strong client relationships in today's global, electronic age poses its own set of challenges to freelancers, especially when they're working remotely. There's a possibility you might never meet some of your clients face-to-face. However, you can still make a personal impression and reinforce your brand. You achieve this through effective communication and collaboration and by consistently exceeding expectations. These characteristics form the basis of strong client relationships.

Pro Tip

Many freelancers are task-oriented by nature and would prefer not to deal with the associated administrative responsibilities. If this describes you, an agency setting might offer a better fit.

Here are some tips to consider:

Manage client expectations up front

You can't deliver what you don't know or fully understand. Make sure expectations are clear and realistic at the onset. If they're not, ask for clarification and resolve any issues before you move forward.

Account for and adapt to differences in time zones

Ask the clients when their team is available to ask and answer questions.

Practice transparency

Update your clients periodically to let them know the project is on track.

Be proactive

Assume nothing, and take initiative. Ask questions, share ideas, provide feedback, and offer your professional opinions. Go-getters stand the best chance of attaining their goals.

Be clear, precise, and thorough in your communication

This not only demonstrates your competency and professionalism, but it also minimizes the chance of miscommunication and project errors.

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The success of your [client relationships] will help you get the best reviews and expand your portfolio with quality projects, paving the way for you to build the business you want.

Richard A.

Freelance mobile developer

Practice discipline in your communications

Be careful not to fall into casual conversation, and limit your use of texting shorthand, jargon, slang, and acronyms (follow the client's lead on these).

Use all the electronic tools at your disposal

Chat, email, video conferencing, and file-sharing through technologies such as Upwork Messages keep communication lines open with your client. They're the next-best thing to being there.

Sing the praise, share the victories

Demonstrating a team focus goes a long way toward building strong client relationships. Be quick to compliment team members and share credit for any accomplishments.

Post-completion follow-up

You increase your odds of repeat engagements and referrals when you demonstrate genuine, long-term interest in your clients. After you've successfully completed a project, send a thank-you note congratulating the client and expressing your pleasure in and appreciation for the work opportunity. Depending on the situation and client, you also might consider adding value by identifying future project opportunities and suggesting logical next steps.

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Saying thank you is a small way to show clients you appreciate their business but—like good communication—it's a simple act that's often overlooked.

Tim H.

Business developer, marketing strategist, and content writer

Transitioning to full-time freelancing

After you've completed a few small projects and become more comfortable in your role, you might be ready to run your freelancing business on a full-time basis. Making the move can be an extremely liberating experience. It also can be uncomfortable. Planning ahead, getting organized, and equipping yourself with the right information and resources will smooth your transition. The following suggestions may help:

Prepare mentally

Running your freelancing business on a full-time basis might not be easy, and it may bring uncertainty and long hours. You'll likely encounter some missteps and headaches along the way. But as they say: No pain, no gain. Brace yourself mentally, expect the unexpected, and you'll be better equipped to handle challenges as they arise.

Prepare financially

For some freelancers, month-to-month income can vary significantly. Consider maintaining an emergency savings cushion just in case. It's also wise to have a retirement plan in place, even if you don't contribute a lot at first. If you don't have the luxury of a spouse whose healthcare plan also covers you, you might need to find your own health insurance. Disability insurance also is a good option.

Pro Tip

Helpful online calculators such as this one can help you determine your optimal hourly freelance rate.

Optimize your work area

Now's the time to get your home office and workstation squared away for work. Think ergonomics. If your chair isn't comfortable over long stretches of sitting, buy one that is. Make sure you have plenty of desk space to spread out your work—if you don't, purchase a small folding table. Remove or disable potential distractions in your home office, including televisions and gaming devices. Stock up on supplies you'll need to get busy, such as printer paper, notebooks, small and large envelopes and mailers, pens and pencils, paper clips, and USB flash drives.

Cover monthly expenses to start

Calculate how much income you'll need to cover monthly expenses. Generate enough business to keep your head above water to begin with. As you gain projects and client contacts, you can start to quickly grow your profits.

Business processes for freelancers

When you're ready to start your freelancing business, you should address some legal and administrative requirements. Freelancing websites such as Upwork make a few key business processes easier. But here are a few additional things to keep in mind.*

Freelancers are self-employed and run their own businesses. Here are some ideas for how you can set up your business properly and increase your credibility:

Registered business name

The default business form for freelancers is a sole proprietorship. Consider registering a business entity as either a corporation or a limited liability company (LLC). Each has different tax and legal implications. And if you want to name your business something other than your given name, you'll typically need to register a fictitious business name (often referred to as a DBA, or "doing business as") with your local government. You also may need to pay for a name search to ensure that nobody else in your

Note: Be sure to speak to your own advisers for requirements in your local area for your particular situation.

jurisdiction already registered the name. [Learn more about the various types of business entities here.](#)

Licenses and registrations

Businesses sometimes need a license or a tax registration to operate in their state, county, or city. If you plan to operate your freelance business out of your home, you may need a home occupancy permit and a [general business license](#).

Get an EIN

In the U.S., having an Employer Identification Number helps you to establish your business as separate from your personal identity. Among other benefits, it's needed in case you plan on hiring employees and helps to protect your privacy. You can register for an EIN directly from the [IRS website](#).

Open a separate business bank account

Establishing separate savings and checking accounts and a credit card dedicated to your business expenses can make your life a lot easier when it comes time to calculate taxes or if you need to track an expense. Avoid commingling your business funds with your personal accounts to protect

yourself from personal liability. You can learn more about reducing your risk as a U.S.-based freelancer here.

The following tools will help you generate and manage your engagements. Many of these are available through freelancing websites including Upwork:

Cost estimation and proposal documents

These are used for project quotes and job proposals.

Statement of Work

This document is sometimes required by the client as part of a services contract. The agreement spells out in detail the project price, the scope of work, the time frame for its completion, expectations, and deliverables, among other things.

Invoicing and payment systems

To streamline the process, save time, and prevent potential headaches, you may want to look into online and software programs for billing your clients and accepting payments for your work.

It's time to get busy

Freelancing has become an important part of today's global workforce landscape. The "freelance economy" is on the rise and here to stay. Whether you're just starting out or looking to expand to full-time freelancing, remember:

- There's no time like the present

- There's no substitute for experience

If you're looking to gain freedom, flexibility, and increased income potential, start realizing the benefits of freelancing today.

To learn how Upwork's powerful freelancer technology and resources can help you take control of your career and income, check out our free online course.

Get more tips from our pros:

- Tim H.: "How to Set and Raise Your First Rate on Upwork"

- Tim H.: "Four Ways to Get the Rate You Want: Tips From a Six-Figure Freelancer"

- Kelly D.: "Kelly: The Digital Nomad Journey Itself Is Unique"

- Danny Margulies: "Power Proposal Tips to Help You Get Noticed"

- Danny Margulies: "Mistakes Freelancers Make When Setting Their Rates—and Ideas to Fix Them"

- Richard A: "How to Grow Your Freelance Business From Small Jobs to Bigger, Repeat Projects"