

INTRODUCTION

I never thought I'd be a freelancer.

To be honest, when I left education, I didn't really know what a freelancer was.

Working remotely for big brands around the world didn't enter my thinking as being in the realms of possibility.

After applying for a local web development role and narrowly missing out, I pondered what my future held.

I decided to offer my services on a freelance basis, landed my first client and the rest, as they say, was history.

More than a decade later, I consistently make a great living from my freelancing business year on year.

All with the freedom to enjoy quality time with my family, have an active social life, travel at my leisure and take care of my health.

But I didn't always have great clients who pay well, a flexible work routine and control of my day-to-day life.

It's taken years of work to build a successful freelancing career and find a healthy work/life balance alongside it.

Deeper into my career now, I'd love to share what I have learned with you so that you can apply it to your circumstances and improve them.

CONTENTS

1. Hold Yourself Accountable.....	5
2. Refine Your Position	8
3. Profile Your Ideal Client.....	13
4. Make Yourself Known	16
5. Understand Pricing Deeply	20
Hourly Billing.....	20
Daily Billing	23
Retainer	24
Fixed Price	26
Value Based	28
Pricing Summary	32
6. Become A Negotiator	35
7. Introduce Structure	41
8. Automate and Outsource	47
Automation.....	47
Outsourcing.....	52
9. Do A Good Job, Hone Your Skills and Stay Relevant	55
Doing A Good Job.....	55
Honing Your Skills	56
Staying Relevant	58
10. Seek Balance	60

- Pushing beyond the fear of picking up the phone to call clients, instead of sending an email.
- Setting aside time to put in place the theory within this book, instead of staying in the comfort zone.

Without hard work, focus and commitment, you'll not become a better freelancer.

You'll have to take the tough route sometimes and you'll always have to put the work in.

I only started making a proper living as a freelancer when I introduced structure into my life.

Structure that I enforce by holding myself to account.

To keep my mind and body healthy I hold myself to account to 3-4 gym sessions per week.

This goal is rarely missed.

When I noticed the web development market shifting towards JavaScript, I put a plan in place to get better at it.

Now it's one of the main programming languages that I get hired for.

In an attempt to find a fulfilling route into helping others get ahead by sharing my expertise, I made a promise to myself that I'd start a mentorship programme.

I launched it within a month.

2. REFINE YOUR POSITION

Now that you're engaged on your journey to becoming a better freelancer, it's time to look at your position on the marketplace.

Being aware of your positioning is vital.

It's imperative to get this right as it will form the basis of your entire freelance offering moving forward.

To help you understand how your target audience sees you currently and how this could be better refined, here's an exercise to try out.

Firstly, answer this question:

How do you describe yourself professionally?

I'll hazard a guess that the outcome is quite broad.

It's a common mistake that many freelancers make.

The hard facts are that you'll need to be super remarkable to stand out using general positioning.

Now answer this question:

What does the ideal service you'd like to offer look like?

To help you come up with something, think about these items:

- What is your most saleable skill?

- Connect with freelancers who are already operating within a similar niche.
- Test cheap marketing techniques before you go the whole hog.

Always perform the required due diligence on a position before you commit to it entirely.

As it's best to offer specialised services (as we will cover in more detail later), the market does not have to be huge.

But it has to be there.

If your research turns up potential clients that you're confident you can service, you can start moving forward.

Based on your now refined position, let's say the professional description of yourself has changed from “Web Developer” to “Headless WordPress Developer for tech startups”.

This is far less general, which can be scary.

It's easy to think that by narrowing down your offering you're cutting out much of the population.

It's easy to think that because that's exactly what you're trying to achieve.

A well refined position is far more targeted.

It should be as concise as, “I help X achieve Y with Z”.

I'll close this chapter with a quote that seems apt to remember when thinking about positioning:

“You can't please all of the people all of the time.”

A huge advantage to a freelancer focusing on a specific sector is that your value within it increases after each engagement.

Deliver results and your position as an expert in the field will be further firmed up.

Businesses within similar industries talk.

In my experience, it's a misconception that people withhold information on which freelancers they work with in fear of improving their competitors.

Depending on the size of the overall market, many people in it will have worked between companies too.

Do a good job for one major player and in addition to having the perfect case study to present to another business in the niche; you have opportunities via existing contacts when staff turnover occurs.

Profiling your ideal client should be a habitual process.

Things should not necessarily have to change regarding your service or the marketplace.

You should regularly set time aside to research your customers so that you can better tailor your market efforts towards them.

With that being said, any change in the sector that could effect your clients buying power, you need to be aware of.

4. MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN

One measure of success on your pursuit to becoming a better freelancer is how much of an expert you're perceived as when pitching your ideal service to your ideal client.

An expert has unique knowledge.

An expert has specific experience.

An expert is not a commodity.

Thus an expert can charge more for their services.

The best way to build your expertise within an industry community is to produce regular, quality, targeted content.

This might seem like a lot of effort. I agree; it takes a great amount of hard work and commitment. But it works.

If you don't tell people what you do, how will they know?

High quality freelancing projects are not just going to fall into your lap.

Especially your first freelance project — you have no traction via word of mouth at this stage. You're not known.

You should be actively raising your profile as an expert freelancer at all times.

And this is exactly what you need to strive for to obtain greater success as a freelancer.

Here are some actionable ideas that can help to make you known as an expert freelancer within an industry:

- Have a high quality web presence that's well branded.
- Write in-depth, knowledgeable articles for your blog.
- Guest post on well known blogs in the sector.
- Write case studies that show how you delivered results.
- Make true connections with people you find interesting on social media and offer them value and encouragement.
- Collaborate with other freelancers working on similar things.
- Speak at industry relevant meet ups and events.
- Talk about what you do day-to-day. Everywhere.

Once you've made yourself known, the aim is to keep yourself known.

Being the first person someone associates with a service when they need it requires you to be consistently visible.

Sure, retaining a prominent profile is easier for someone who has been in the game for a few years.

But your profile can diminish over time as quickly as you've built it up.

5. UNDERSTAND PRICING DEEPLY

A common stumbling block for freelancers is knowing how to price their work.

What we first need to talk about is the different types of pricing.

The following are all relevant methods of pricing freelancing projects:

- Hourly billing
- Daily billing
- Retainer
- Fixed price
- Value based

HOURLY BILLING

Generally, billing by the hour is hellish for a freelancer.

I'll explain why.

Providing an hourly rate for your services often leads to smaller engagements.

Smaller engagements are hard to manage for a solo-business owner.

Concerning time sheets, billing by the hour, comes with it a necessity to log every task you perform.

Let us say you work on a project for a few hours. You now have to spend additional time, that you may or may not get paid for, logging these hours to justify the time spent.

Even if you do get paid for it, this is not the best use of your time or talents.

I have never understood the thought process of a client hiring a skilled freelancer only to pay them to do admin.

Finally, here's the most important reason why freelancers should avoid billing work by the hour.

The more times you perform a task, the quicker you'll get.

This does not alter the value of the final result of the work.

However, when charging out your time by the hour, your payment for the same task will become less and less over time.

Hourly billing does not work in the favour of experienced and efficient freelancers.

Avoid it where possible.

These engagements can often be agreed through trust via your proceeding reputation. Or, once you've worked with someone for a while, their first hand experience of you delivering results.

It's not a measurable amount of time worked in a day that you're selling here, but the overall outcome of that day.

If your client is happy with that outcome, then you've done a good job.

Plus, paramountly, you've retained your flexibility and balance.

The flexibility you need to improve your freelancing business and the balance you need to make the most of life alongside this.

RETAINER

Another pricing methodology for freelancers is the retainer.

Here's how a freelancing retainer often looks:

A client “retains” X amount of hours from you per month that they guarantee to pay you your hourly rate for.

Whether they fill the time with work or not, you get paid.

Hours usually have to be “spent” during the current month and can't be rolled over to the next.

This commonly feels like a good deal to freelancers.

Are you looking to move your personal brand forward while continuing to servicing clients? You may need more agility at this time.

In my experience, the best type of retainer agreements are advisory based and separated from selling hours.

Such as, a guarantee of availability (within reason) for consultancy services spanning the current month at a fixed price.

With engagements like this, you can retain greater parity between security and freedom.

You gain a regular income stream without having to commit to a precise amount of time worked or a specific schedule.

Place importance on this kind of retainer where possible.

FIXED PRICE

On the opposite end of pricing freelance projects, you have the fixed price model.

An example of a fixed price freelancing project would be, a clearly defined scope of work that you guarantee to complete for a set figure.

You might even offer packages to clients, in which they can choose a set of outcomes for a clearly displayed price.

You choose a career in freelancing for the autonomy, not to have to justify every extra hour you need to work on something.

Fixed pricing completely removes this headache from your client interaction.

“I’ll deliver project X for the price of £Y and it will take as long as it takes”.

It can be as simple as that.

If required, suggest a loose timeline for completion. For instance, “Within 3 months” should nothing change scope wise.

You could even pick a hard date in the future. Just make sure there's plenty of contingency factored in.

The key is to keep your client happy and retain your freedom at the same time.

Again, this is a realistic goal when your relationship is founded on trust and/or you’ve previously proven your worth.

VALUE BASED

Finally, we have value based pricing.

This holds many benefits of the fixed pricing approach, with some differences.

3 options is often the best route to take when quoting the service based projects that freelancers undertake.

You can think of this as, “Good, Better and Best”, “Bronze, Silver and Gold” or any other common tiering terminology.

The 10% (Good/Bronze) price from our example, would typically be the “DIY” option.

A freelancer would build the website with the client also having some work to do alongside. This could be setting up the hosting package and writing the content for their new website in house.

The 25% (Better/Silver) option would include everything from the 10% (Good/Bronze) offer, but the freelancer takes care of the DIY work too.

The 50% (Best/Gold) option would include everything from the 10% (Good/Bronze) offer and everything from the 25% (Better/Silver) offer, plus plenty of bells and whistles to further increase value delivered.

This could be, sourcing and managing other freelancers to create assets or provide services to compliment the website, adding an additional feature that you think would be of benefit, or an inclusion of monthly reviews for the website after it has gone live.

What percentages you choose is down to the pricing theory you want to follow.

Value based prices are often substantially higher.

Unique research is required when using value based pricing as businesses and projects will differ.

You can mitigate sticker shock by pricing as appropriately as possible based on your aforementioned analysis.

However, in my experience, you'll lose more pitches using this technique.

With that being said, as a consequence of the higher value engagements often gained via value based pricing, you don't need the same number of wins anyway.

Successfully executing value based pricing is easier when you're further along in your freelancing career.

Particularly when you're well known within a sector and when your reputation for providing a specific, expert-level service proceeds you.

That's not to say that you can't try it out earlier if you have the confidence to do so.

PRICING SUMMARY

The main thing I have learned in over a decade of pricing freelancing projects is that it's a highly individualistic process.

- To suit your current circumstances.
- To use pricing terms as an olive branch during negotiation.
- Because the scope of work suits a particular pricing style.

Be aware of your current position:

- Are you new to freelancing?
- Are you established as a specialist provider?
- Are your living costs increased at the moment?
- Do you need a cash flow injection?
- Do you have more/less work time available right now?

Taking into consideration these metrics when pricing projects will give you the best chance of being effective.

Pricing is difficult. Place importance in the deep understanding of it to become a better freelancer.

They might be a brilliant designer, developer or writer, yet totally inexperienced in terms of direct client contact.

In truth, having a solid core skill is not enough to maximise your freelancing potential.

You need to hone your business skills in equal measure to give yourself the best chance of getting paid what you're worth.

You need to hone your negotiation skills particularly.

There are a number of negotiation techniques that have helped me get ahead during my freelancing career.

First things first, being likeable is supremely important.

This can be harder to convey for remote workers, which many freelancers are, however it's still possible.

Be attentive, courteous and punctual during all contact.

Whether this be in a face to face meeting, during a video call or via text based communication.

Add your business connections on social media to build trust.

You can also build rapport by discussing non-work topics, providing it's genuine and respectful of the other person's time.

Being likeable comes from showing your human side.

This brings me to the next negotiation tactic; bargain on terms not price where plausible.

Being quick to reduce your price, especially by a generous amount, often leaves a bad taste.

Largely because your prospect feels as if they were being taken for a ride initially.

To avoid this scenario, look to accept a concession on payment terms as opposed to the project price itself.

For example:

If you ask for a 100% payment up front initially, you can fall back to terms of 50% up front with 50% on completion.

That way you appear reasonable while retaining your value.

It's crucial to be aware of your market rate at all times.

Ask yourself, “What are other freelancers with my skill set commanding?”.

Also, “What is a common full-time salary for someone at my level of proficiency?”.

Keep on top of your research in this area to prevent yourself from being too cheap or too expensive.

Hitting the sweet spot with your pricing during negotiation will improve your prospect conversion rate.

- Save more than you spend.
- Keep marketing even when you're booked up with work.
- Look to gain more leads than you can cater for.
- Become indispensable to your clients.
- Raise your rates regularly.

Future negotiation will prove easier as a result.

Ultimately, routines and structure allow you to get more things done in less time.

This is an imperative trait of a successful freelancer.

You might ask, “How does one take advantage of these positives while holding on to the agility self-employment provides?”.

This is where a semi-flexible routine comes into play.

The best way to explain this is to show you an example of what yours could look like.

Firstly, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my current daily and weekly commitments?
- How many hours do I want (or need) to work each week?
- How does my family and social life look?
- Are there any other factors I need to consider when planning work?

Be frank and honest with your answers. They will lay the foundations of a realistic schedule for you.

Find below example answers to these questions:

Commitments

- I do the school run every week day at 08:00 and 15:00.
- I walk the dog every day for 30 minutes.

	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
06:00	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	—	—
06:30 - 07:30	Exercise	Exercise	—	Exercise	Exercise	—	—
08:00	School run	School run	School run	School run	School run	Alarm	Alarm
08:30	Start work	Start work	Start work	Start work	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog
12:00 - 12:30	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog	—	—	—
15:00	School run	School run	School run	School run	School run	—	—
17:00	Finish work	Finish work	Finish work	Finish work	—	—	—
17:00 - 18:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	—	Dinner
18:00 - 22:00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
22:00	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed

With structure in place like this, you have predefined slots for all your non-negotiable commitments coupled with space throughout the week to adapt on the fly if and when needed.

Scenarios and solutions when you need to pivot on your schedule could include:

A major turning point for me was doing away with the all-nighters and turning myself into a morning person.

The performance increase I get from consistently waking up at 06:00 after 6-8 hours sleep is incredible.

I accredit a large amount of my success in freelancing to this.

Earlier in my career, I used to think that all-nighters were the holy grail for getting more done.

After starting to wake up earlier, I realised that a consistent sleep pattern is the true key to clarity and productivity.

Using a routine that has ample time for rest factored in will offer a direct benefit to your business achievements.

All things considered, your routine should be an iterative project in its own right.

After setting this up, it could take a few weeks or months to perfect.

Don't be afraid to tweak your routine by moving things around to best suit your current situation.

What is most important is that you have *some* structure.

Have your days outlined by the week, with fail safes for the unexpected and contingency for the commonly foreseen.

A semi-flexible routine will help you tame procrastination, maximise your output and promote balance.

- Client communications
- Social media management
- Quoting
- Invoicing
- Banking
- Bookkeeping
- Marketing

Many tasks and subtasks within these areas can be automated.

The solutions don't have to be particularly advanced.

Although you can come up with custom workflows, many tools are already available to assist you.

Real world examples that you can put into place within your freelancing business include:

Setting up keyboard shortcuts for the repetitive tasks that you perform on your computer.

“Launcher” software like Alfred for MacOS and Wox for Windows allow you to do this.

Freelancers will often send many similar emails.

Email is a low-cost and personal marketing avenue, which makes it a worthwhile investment for freelancers.

You can automate your email advertising with marketing platforms like Mailchimp, Convertkit and Drip.

Examples of automated emails freelancers can send include:

- Notifying your mailing list each time you publish a new blog post.
- Onboarding new clients with detail about how you can best work together.
- Checking in with old clients to see how their project is going, ask for a testimonial or check whether they have any new projects they require assistance with.
- Provide an instant response to enquirers that request work to be completed within a timeframe or budget that does not fit in with your current lead time or rate.

A freelancer's social media marketing efforts can be automated too.

In line with the “Make Yourself Known” chapter of this book, it's important for a freelancer to be sharing their knowledge on a consistent basis to be seen as an expert within their field.

Social media is a great platform to do this.

However, keeping up with posting on multiple platforms will take a lot of time out of a freelancers' day.

OUTSOURCING

The best use of a freelancers time in terms of direct profit is to perform your most valuable and saleable skill for the maximum amount of time feasible.

Let's say you have taken on a fixed price project.

The faster you can complete the project (*always* retaining quality), the more profitable it becomes, because you're then free to work on something else.

The best way to get quality projects out quickly is through medium to long periods of deep work.

A full day of focus on a specific task will do more for productivity than short stints of work.

So with this in mind, what can you do to make this a possibility?

You can look to outsource tasks that deter your focus.

These two things are often overlooked by freelancers as they see them as not being available. But that could not be farer from the truth.

I encourage freelancers to use other freelancers and service providers regularly.

Even though you're used to being the one hired, you can still hire people yourself when it makes sense to do so.

Think about tasks that:

Building your own portfolio website might mean you get to learn more about programming and I know people who enjoy gardening as an escape from the office to clear their head.

From a personal perspective, although the gardening is not for me, I like to walk my dog myself as this forms a vital part of my exercise routine.

With this considered, if you don't like performing a task that falls into one (or both) of the aforementioned categories, and/or you get nothing from it, outsource the work.

Aside from freeing up your time, the main benefit of delegating business tasks to other professionals is that you'll probably get a better end result.

A perfect example of this is through hiring an accountant.

Your books will be in better shape having a trained eye cast over them and a good accountant will save you far more than they cost you.

Concerning life based tasks, I completely understand the benefits people may attain from doing these themselves.

However, I'd evaluate whether these tasks are the best use of your time in regard to working smarter as a freelancer.

You can't do everything yourself and you don't have to. Prioritise what you're best at.

You gain a portfolio of happy clients by consistently delivering quality in a professional manner.

A client who sees a return on investment, as a direct result of your services, will be a pleased one.

While hitting key performance indicators might be the easiest route to a successful client engagement, don't forget the basics too. No matter how good your service offering is.

Doing a good job also means being punctual, professional, communicative, respectful and humble at all times.

Do a good job and more work will come your way.

Do a bad job and that's all you'll be known for.

HONING YOUR SKILLS

Always have an eye on your personal development.

Some industries move faster than others, but there's always more to master, whatever your talent.

You should encourage self initiated learning and make time for it within your schedule.

Look to further existing skills through new techniques, software and systems. Study new skills that supplement your core skill.

STAYING RELEVANT

When you're full to capacity with work it can be easy to rest on your laurels.

I advise against this at all costs.

There's a fragility to freelancing that can trip you up if you don't mitigate it.

Projects can dry up and a client can call time on your engagement whenever they feel like it, no matter how sure it might seem.

That's why it's super important to stay relevant within the eyes of your target audience. Even during the busy times.

You should still be posting on social media, writing articles and sending out emails. Every day you don't, your notoriety slips a little.

Protect yourself from this scenario by being proactive as opposed to reactive when work dries up.

Another way to stay relevant is to follow industry demand.

Assuming work has taken a down turn and your service offering is not being taken up as often as it once was.

Ask yourself, “Have things have changed or moved on?”.

Here's an example from the programming industry that I'm familiar with:

10. SEEK BALANCE

You can't become a better freelancer if you're not balanced.

Health should trump all if you want to be successful.

Think about how your computer performs when it has been left turned on all week.

It gets sluggish.

The same happens to us.

Our performance dwindles when we are overloaded.

Both your computer and your mind need to be switched off every once in a while.

This is where achieving a balanced lifestyle will help you become a better freelancer.

A mantra that will stand you in good stead is to work hard and smart in the time you've set aside to do so.

To make a great living as freelancer you're going to have to work hard.

The ideology that you can earn six-figures from the beach working one day per week is fictitious.

Reaching your freelancing goals will take time and consistent effort.

The smart way forward would be to take as much time away from work as you need to recharge your batteries.

As soon as you feel burnout coming, you need to nip it in the bud by taking a break and prioritising your time for the things that have a direct benefit to your mental health.

Your business can wait.

Managing my health takes the highest precedent throughout my weeks and this improved my freelancing fortunes tenfold.

Two areas that I identified were causing me trouble during my early career were my sleep pattern and my lack of exercise.

I'm here to tell you right now that pulling all-nighters and skipping exercise to work more is not the route to a successful career in freelancing. Or a well rounded life for that matter.

Everyone manages their mental health differently. The 5 changes I made that benefited me the most were:

1. Aiming for 6-8 hours of sleep every night.
2. Waking up early every morning at around 06:00.
3. Working out in the gym 3-4 times per week.
4. Ensuring I take a walk every day.
5. Prevent myself working weekends, unless absolutely necessary, then this time would be limited to 2-3 hours.

Your friends will drop in expecting you to be available for a coffee or lunch when you're working from home.

Plus, it will always be tempting to answer those late-evening emails.

The key is to not let freelancing be to the detriment of other areas of your life, but to use freelancing as supplement to them.

You can do this by setting boundaries with others and placing them on yourself too.

If you're at home working, use a dedicated workspace and make it's purpose clear to everyone in the household.

When you're in the office you're working and equally, try not to bring work into the leisure areas of your house.

Always be fully present when spending quality time with your family.

Don't be afraid to put off the friend that wants to play golf with you on their day off until you're off too.

Remind yourself that the world won't end if you don't reply to an email as soon as you receive it.

Balance is found by working hard and smart in the time you've allocated to do so while actively engaging in regular, non-business activities alongside this time.

Most importantly, balance can only authentically be achieved when unproductivity guilt does not creep in to these activities.

CONCLUSION

I hope you found 10 Steps To Becoming A Better Freelancer valuable.

Furthermore, I hope that you can start taking action on these principles today.

If you have a colleague, friend or family member that you think would like this book, I'd love it if you could tell them about it.

I love helping others through sharing my experiences in freelancing and I do this actively on Twitter. Follow me to pick up more tips.

The ideas and concepts within 10 Steps To Becoming A Better Freelancer are precisely what have lead me to a well-paid, 10+ year career in freelancing.

I expand on all of this theory within my mentorship programme for freelancers, in which I help people get further ahead faster through tailored direction and support.

You can partner with me directly to improve your freelancing game by [clicking here](#).

It could be the difference between your journey to being a better freelancer starting now, or never.

Thanks for reading!