

webflow

The
Freelance
web designer's guide

Edited by
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INTRO

The freelance web designer's guide

The missing guide to becoming — and making a living as — a freelance web designer.

The revolution has begun, and if you haven't noticed, you're missing out on an enormous opportunity.

Freelancing has always been a common “hobby” for creative professionals like designers and writers, but in the last decade or so, creative pros have started leaving the nine-to-five life in droves.

Now, this post isn't meant to lure you to the “dark side” of freelancing, but to explain why it's become the fastest growing professional group of our time (and will continue to be).

But if you've even *thought about* taking the leap, now may be the best time in history to do so.

Why has freelancing become so popular?



This could be you. But, you know, younger.

Surprise! The answer is: tech.

Every aspect of workplace logistics now has an app that lets you join up and chime in from anywhere.

And if you *can* work from a laptop anywhere in the world, why bother spending time at a desk?

To add fuel to the fire, much of the work traditionally done by creative professionals (like web design), has been greatly sped up by similar technological advancements.

I know that personally, before [Webflow](#), it would take me weeks (or months) to complete a website project. After Webflow, that same project sometimes take hours.

This gives freelancers an all-new ability to take on more than one project at a time. Leading many creative professionals wondering: Why work for one person/company/project, when I can now work on many at the same time?

These shifts in tech have led to a similar shift in attitude. Years ago, the idea of leaving a stable job to pursue your “craft” was *cough* stupid. Freelancing was something you did at night before bed, like a hobby or after-school project — not a career.

Yet more and more people are taking the leap into the unknown. Leaving their nine-to-five cubical cells for the freedom of becoming a digital nomad.

And freelancers aren't the only ones who find the freelancing life seductive. Companies are following suit.

Companies are driving the shift to freelancing

In an interview by PBS, author Richard Greenwald stated that companies as large and prestigious as NASA and IBM have been turning to freelancers at an accelerated rate. And they aren't alone, with the likes of Pinterest, OpenTable, Panasonic, Unilever, NBC, and many (many) more right beside them.

But why?

I've found that there are 3 core reasons why freelancers make sense for business:

1. Cost / affordability

Although many freelancers charge a premium rate, the vast majority undercharge for their work (stop it!). These low rates make it extremely attractive for companies to hire freelance workers.

2. Flexibility

Many freelancers enjoy their flexible lifestyle, and companies are no different. The cost of hiring a full-time employee stretches beyond salary and insurance, including time and commitment in training, culture, etc. With contract workers, companies can cut these costs and gain the flexibility to hire/fire at any time.

3. Speed

Having both freelanced and hired contractors for a company, I can say that freelancers work faster. Maybe it's the freelancer's sense of urgency about completing the project and moving on. Maybe it's the fact that the business can skip traditional onboarding/training. Maybe it's that freelancers can skip meetings and internal politicking. But whatever the cause, freelance projects often move much faster than in-house jobs.

All of which means that freelancers can now blend their flexible lifestyle with the opportunity to work with some of the largest and most respected companies in the world.

It's not all roses

I've spent plenty of time on both sides of the fence, being a full-time freelancer and a full-time desk jockey. Both have their pros and cons, but here are a few things you should know before jumping in to the freelance world.

Taxes suck

They suck no matter what, but they suck harder for contract workers. As a self-employed contractor, you're not only responsible for paying your own income taxes, but also self-employment taxes.



We know, Zoe. Taxes suck.

To make it more complicated, you must also be prepared to track all money going in and out of your business to prove it. You can't count on HR to handle your monies. You *are* HR.

Cashflow

This problem is typically a symptom of early-day freelancing, but you will overcome it. Not necessarily because you'll always have work lined up (although you might), but because you'll start to charge enough to keep you floating (happily) between projects.



Stacks of cash not guaranteed.

Still, it's a bit harder to manage ongoing expenses like rent, utilities, food, etc. without a consistent paycheck. This is why I recommend starting your freelance career as a side project.

When you aren't worried about basic living expenses, you'll be more likely to take on better projects (as opposed to whoever's willing to give you money).

It's lonely...

Most freelancers who've been doing it awhile will agree: Freelancing can be lonely.

At first it's nice not having to leave your house or see another human being for days at a time, but eventually, you begin to miss the team environment of your office.



Unfortunately, obsessive Dorito eating has not been shown to help with loneliness.

I learned that the best way to combat this was to simply put yourself in additional social situations. Instead of meeting clients over the phone, offer to meet in person or at least over video chat. Instead of working from home every day, head down to your favorite coffee shop, or better yet, a local coworking space.

Is it worth it?

Yes. There's nothing more empowering than knowing that every dollar you make is an exact reflection of the work you put in. If you work a few extra hours over the weekend, that's more money going into your bank account — you can't say that for your typical salaried job.

Plus, many of the pitfalls of freelancing can be resolved by simple preparation and planning. Yes, there will be hurdles, but when aren't there?

Ready to take the leap? Sweet. Let's do this.

How to find freelance design work

Discover seven sure-fire ways to find more freelance design clients, and build your brand on the side.

“Neal, how do you keep finding high-paying freelance work?”

That’s the most common question I hear — aside from, “What is wrong with you, Neal?!” Unfortunately, there isn’t a simple answer to either question, but since this is a web design blog, and not a psychiatrist’s office, let’s focus on the first one.

Now, I don’t want to mislead you, so I want to be clear: there’s no one path to freelancer Mecca. In reality, there are many different paths, and only some will work for you. I’ll walk you through the seven best methods I’ve found (and throw in a bonus).

I strongly recommend testing all seven. Dismissing any of these out of hand could set you back on the road to successfully freelancing. I’ve made each one work wonderfully for me, and there’s no reason they won’t work for you too.

Just keep in mind that the beginning is always the hardest part. Once you’ve proven yourself to a couple clients, you’ll be continuously turning down work, and you’ll be able to increase your contracting rates higher than you originally thought possible. Think I’m exaggerating? Ask any truly successful freelancer you know.

Here are the strategies and media I'll walk you through:

- **Your portfolio:** Personal website, Behance, and Dribbble.
- **Freelance marketplaces:** Upwork, Angellist, Toptal.
- **Blogging:** Whether on Medium, your own site, or here on Webflow's blog, blogging can be an amazingly effective way to establish yourself as an expert in your field. Share your thoughts and engage in online conversations.
- **Template marketplaces:** [Webflow](#), CreativeMarket, and ThemeForest, and the [Webflow Showcase](#)
- **Networking:** Go where your customers are and talk to them one-on-one.
- **Word of mouth:** Make it easier on yourself... stay in and have people do the talking for you.
- **Hustling:** Hack together solutions to get your name out into the wild.

I'll be going into detail on each one, giving you the information you need to start finding clients today. The goal is to give you a sufficient starting customer base that allows you to either quit your job (if that's what you want) or grow your already-established freelancing business.

Ready? Let's do this.

(Oh, and be sure to bookmark this page — it's a living guide. We'll update it with new information as it comes our way through emails, tweets, and in the comments section below.)

7 ways to find freelance design work

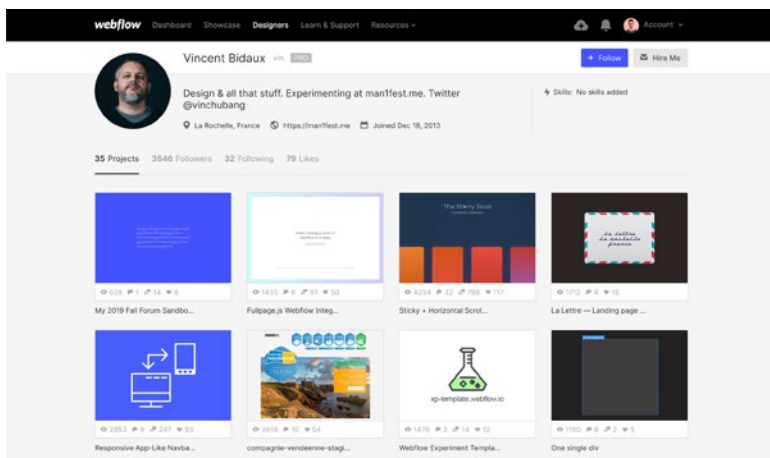
1. Build and update your portfolio website

If you're a web designer, and you don't have your own personal website, with a portfolio, then you have some self-examination to do.

Your portfolio website is step one. You can't lazily email prospective clients a list of links to sites you've worked on. Your personal site should be the crown jewel of your portfolio. You have to prove yourself as a design professional if you want to be taken seriously and secure high pay. Your portfolio is your cred.

None of the rest of this post will hold true if you're lacking a portfolio. If you don't take the time to do this, the next designer will. This is a crowded space, so don't expect cutting corners to work out well.

Once you have a portfolio built, link to it everywhere — even where it doesn't seem relevant: in your email signature, on your social media channels, and on business cards if you have them (yes, cards are old school, but they're still useful for random social encounters ... someone's always looking for a website).



Example of a Webflow portfolio

2. Create social profiles on design websites

You should also create accounts on sites like [Dribbble](#) and [Behance](#). These sites have well-established SEO (search engine optimization), so they often show up on the first page of Google. Almost certainly more often than your own portfolio does! Use their SEO advantage to drive more search traffic to your work and site — even if you don't bother engaging on those platforms.

Dribbble and Behance were built for designers who want to share their work and get feedback from other professionals. That makes them *excellent* ways to get your designs seen by potentially thousands of people who may eventually refer you. You might even get really helpful feedback to improve your skills.

(Never design in a vacuum! Even the best designers continually seek and listen closely to feedback from peers, colleagues, and others. You can *always* grow as a designer.)

Of course, building a portfolio requires detailed, time-consuming work. So when you sign up for Webflow, be sure to fill your public portfolio with your best work. It's low-effort, and has already brought many designers a wealth of job inquiries. Other designers, companies, and would-be clients can follow you and message you about contracts.

Remember, don't just wait for people to come to you — make it easy for them to stumble upon your work in so many different places that they'll have no choice but to reach out. Seriously — this can have a significant impact on the volume of work you get.

Why? Because once you have even a couple contracts in place, it's much easier to get more. Freelancing is a career path built on referrals. Good designers who reliably produce quality work always get referred, especially if they're easy to work with.

(In fact, being an enjoyable person to work with matters more than how good your portfolio is. Life is short, and people want to work with good people.)

If you're looking for inspiration for your portfolio site, we have a [list of some of the best sources of web design inspiration on the web](#), or if you want help getting started, you can check out the [portfolio templates on Webflow](#).

If there's one secret to freelance design and development, it's that you only have to put serious energy into securing your first few contracts. The rest will come more naturally.

3. Freelance job marketplaces

Upwork

[Upwork](#) is an online marketplace designed to connect freelance designers with prospective clients. Create a profile, upload your portfolio, and start bidding on design projects. You can even apply for jobs you might not feel totally qualified for yet — that's how you grow and become an even better designer.

One thing to note before you join Upwork: You'll probably notice a lot of bids far below a rate you'd be comfortable working for.

Don't let this discourage you. I consistently won over 50% of my bids on Upwork, even when I was vying against 30 other people asking for significantly less.

Why? Because employers don't want to waste their time. They generally prefer to work with freelancers that have great design skills and are good communicators who don't come with the baggage of a 16-hour time difference. In other words, no, clients on these platforms don't just care about how much they're paying. They want quality. Massive companies like GoDaddy and Fortune 500's rely on these platforms. Don't dismiss them.

If you're not comfortable with written communication, honing your English and your writing will be more important than improving your portfolio. That's priority number one. Otherwise, international work (or work in the biggest markets) will often be hard to find — or disproportionately low-paying.

Two quick tips for Upwork:

1. Complete your profile ASAP — their algorithms will rank you higher in search results!
2. Work toward Top Rated status so you can get priority access to the best-paying jobs

AngelList

The combined startup/employment directory [AngelList](#) provides another fantastic place to find freelance work. Companies searching for skilled employees there range from “dude in a basement” to booming enterprises like Uber and Stripe, so it’s an excellent place to secure contract work with a well-funded startup.

Just create a profile, search for jobs, and — if your portfolio is up to par — expect quite a few to come looking for you. A junior developer friend I recently visited had a Skype call with a new company from AngelList every day I was there — so believe me, it works.

If the position excites you, and there’s a great fit with the startup, you could even consider joining the team full-time, and gain serious equity in the process! Welcome to startupland.

Toptal

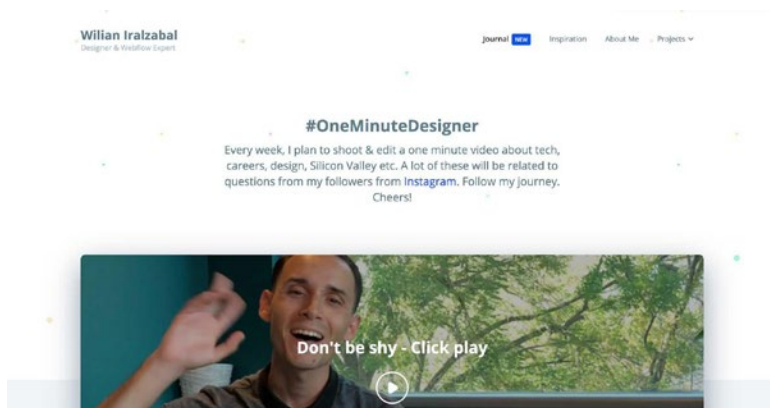
[Toptal](#) is a freelance marketplace I’ve seen getting some attention on Twitter (on both the designer and the client side).

They advertise themselves as having the top 3% of freelance talent out there. They’re able to do this by taking applicants through [a screening process](#) to make sure that design free-

lancers are a good fit for their network. This makes sure their clients, like Airbnb, Thumbtack, and even Zendesk, receive the best freelancer designers out there.

While it may be a little harder to get into Toptal, compared to something like Upwork, you can be assured that you'll be working with quality clients.

4. Create content and start blogging



Create content and share it with the world like [Wilian Iralzabal](#)

Product Hunt's [Ryan Hoover](#) recently wrote about how building an audience is the best first step to recruiting a great cofounder or startup team, and the same goes for finding clients when freelancing.

Writing intelligently about the topics you're most passionate about can position you as an expert in your field. It's the quickest way to garner credibility, awareness, and — if you take the time to thoughtfully share your posts with the right people — some much needed traffic to your [design portfolio](#).

Start your blog on your personal site, and repost to Medium a few days later. Write useful and relevant industry content. Make sure to let your personality shine through your posts. Remember, clients want to work with good, interesting people, and your writing can show that you're exactly that.

So show your prospects that you have impressive insights and opinions, and the desire to help others by sharing them. This is all about building your personal brand. It'll undoubtedly turn some people away, but those people would be terrible clients for you anyway. Be yourself and you'll attract people who will wind up loving working with you.

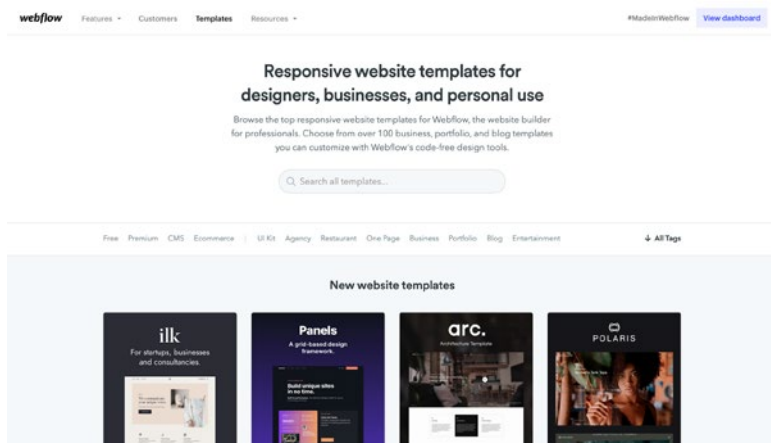
Don't expect a monsoon of visits to start with. Like all things that matter, building an audience takes time, patience, consistency, and some marketing. Do not get discouraged. A blog is a long-term investment in yourself. You'll always get some value out of it, even if it's not in the form of paying clients. A few views from the right people can mean infinitely more than a million views that lead nowhere. Numbers aren't

everything. Create as many opportunities as possible for inbound serendipity.

Just know that the work doesn't end after you hit Publish. Promote your blog by posting it on social media platforms, Hacker News, Reddit, and contacting newsletters, article curators, and other bloggers/tweeters in the industry who might find your post useful and share-worthy.

Just don't be spammy about it. The purpose is to educate, not self-promote.

5. Template marketplaces



Designing website templates and releasing them is not only an excellent way to earn passive income — i.e., get paid even

while you sleep — but it's also an excellent way to get publicity and experience. If people see and buy your templates on Webflow, Creative Market, or Themeforest, then they're seeing — and even better, experiencing — living, breathing examples of your work.

These individuals will be likely to contact you with a request to fully customize the design of their pre-existing site, and that could pay very well.

It gets even cooler though: Having your own portfolio of templates will speed up future client work by giving you a base of readymade designs to work from! Plus, templates are a great excuse to add content to your portfolio. See why it's so important to have a portfolio?

The Webflow Template Marketplace

The Webflow template marketplace is the newest of the three but still has the potential to bring in a nice stream of passive income. The great part about making your templates in Webflow is that you can still sell them on Themeforest and Creative Market as well. And for selling templates, distribution is the name of the game.

Creative Market

Creative Market is another great marketplace, not just for templates but for anything design-related, from fonts to photos and even design patterns, you can monetize all your work.

ThemeForest

ThemeForest is definitely one of the most well-known out there. Just know that they have one of the largest audiences and inventories on the web, so you'll need to do more promotion to make that channel work for you.

6. Networking and word of mouth

The number-one way to find quality clients is to get out and meet people (figuratively and literally) at *non-design* events.

Once up a time, I'd spend all day at home, applying for mechanical engineering jobs in isolation. I was unsuccessful for months.

I did, however, make serious headway on my Netflix backlog. Serious progress, people.

Eventually, I gave up and focussed on pursuing a career in web design and development (which I was much more passionate about), and started getting out and socializing.

Within weeks, I had job offers coming in from my loose-knit network of new acquaintances. It's not rocket science: People prefer to hire people they already know and like — not the faceless folks clogging their inbox with links.

Notice how I didn't specifically describe who the people I met were? That's because you need to meet all kinds of people. You have no idea who your next client will be.

But they probably *won't* be at a web design meetup — those are filled with jobless designers.

All of this is worth repeating: Go to any and every meetup that matches your interests, and simply tell people you're a web designer.

Watch what happens. Everyone needs a website, or knows someone who does. That's what's so great about freelancing in this industry.



Get outside. Talk to the humans you meet there. Repeat.

Some places to start meeting people:

- Meetups
- Sports events and classes
- Cafes
- Abroad (for some reason, people are a lot more open to talking to strangers while travelling)
- Parties
- Twitter
- Slack groups
- Conferences and conventions

Just keep in mind that, no matter the event type or place, you have to actually talk to people you don't already know.

Tip: Don't be the typical "business networker." Don't bounce from person to person shaking hands, fake-smiling, repeating first names every sentence, and handing out business cards. Be legitimate. Make real connections.

The other side of the networking coin — word of mouth — comes from building up a client base, having lots of contacts, and building your personal brand (with your blog, portfolios, and templates). This takes time. Do great work, treat your clients with respect, keep in touch with past clients, and follow the rest of the advice in this article, and you'll absolutely be fine.

With networking and word of mouth, you can easily reach a state of having more work offers than you can sustain — without ever actually working for it. When this happens, you can increase your rates. Ka-ching.

Personally, I turn down contract offers on a weekly basis. And they're all the result of word of mouth and networking I did months ago.

It honestly doesn't take long to get to this point if you produce quality work and put yourself out there.

7. Hustle

Hustling is the art of working extremely hard and extremely smart. In the context of freelancing, hustling involves going out and finding work directly. For example: finding websites or businesses that desperately need your services.

Does your favourite pub have a terrible site? Why not talk to the owners and convince them they need you to fix it?

If you have the right personality, and the drive, this can be an extremely effective way to whip up some initial work. It just isn't particularly glamorous. It also requires your repeated, hands-on time and energy. (In contrast, writing blog posts or setting up a portfolio one time can attract customers for years to come.) The success rate of in-person contact, however, is much higher. The trade-off is lower volume.

Bonus: Freelance.tv

It's a series of 10-minute interviews with freelancers that explores how they find, work with, and keep clients (and much more).

As you may have noticed from reading this post (or maybe not), hearing from other freelancers about their experiences can be extremely helpful. Check out his new episodes and also his upcoming documentary, [Freelanced](#).

Now get out there and find your next gig

If you're sitting at home, desperately hoping clients will come to you, I have news for you: They won't.

You have to put yourself out there to start, and show prospective clients that you have tangible, valuable skills to offer.

Luckily, this is an industry where skill and contacts trump all — education is irrelevant. So take advantage of that.

So to summarize, here are your next steps for getting clients and building your freelancing business:

1. **Build your portfolio.** Make it gorgeous. Share it everywhere. You can use Webflow to do it yourself without coding.
2. **Create profiles on Behance, Dribbble, and Webflow to connect with other designers and potential clients.** Use their SEO advantage to drive more traffic to your website.
3. **Create a profile on Upwork and Design Inc, and bid on contracts.** Be confident, and don't be scared by inexpensive competitors. Also use Angellist to find contracts with promising or established startups.
4. **Start meeting people.** Get out, meet, and befriend as many non-designers / developers as possible. Be legitimate.

5. **Start a blog to complement your portfolio.** Write thoughtful, useful content to establish yourself as an expert in your discipline. Let your personality shine through.
6. **Convert your websites designs to templates,** and release them on sites like Webflow, CreativeMarket, and ThemeForest to earn passive income and awareness.
7. **If it's your style, start hustling.** Find people who legitimately need your services and tell them why.

But most of all:

"Do something! Even if it's wrong."

— My friend's dad

When you're starting out, it can be better to do the wrong thing than nothing at all. In the process, you'll learn, and you might just stumble into something that works beautifully.

Just try to not to be so wrong nobody will ever work with you again. Ever.

Now, stop reading, and get out there and land some clients!

Oh — and If you're a freelancer, how do you find clients? Is there anything I missed?

How to price your freelance design services

Find out how to put a price tag on your work — and why you're probably selling yourself short.

Pricing your design work right is one of the hardest things a freelancer has to do.

I really struggled with this early in my freelance career, and I still find myself wondering what a fair price is for new projects.

But over the years, I've gotten *much* better at pricing, and charging rates that feel comfortable to me and my clients. Here's how.

You charge too little



Don't make Dr. Who sad.

And I can say without a doubt in my mind.

Which is funny, because we freelancers hear the opposite (“You’re too expensive!”) all the time.

But this is all the more reason to stand your ground. You need to get better at passing on clients who want your talent at a discount.

In the end, you'll not only be making less than you're worth, but you'll probably dislike working on the project itself. Which leads to subpar work, which leads to subpar referrals, which starts the whole process over again.

The reason I'm so confident that you, dear reader, are undercharging for your services is simple: You undervalue your work.

After all, it's hard to charge a lot for something that comes fairly easy to you.

The big mental shift hit me when a mentor of mine caught me saying this:

"Why would I charge somebody so much for something that's so easy for me to do?"

The answer is simple: Because it's not easy for *them*.

Clients want your services because they can't do it themselves.

They can't just buy what you offer at a store.

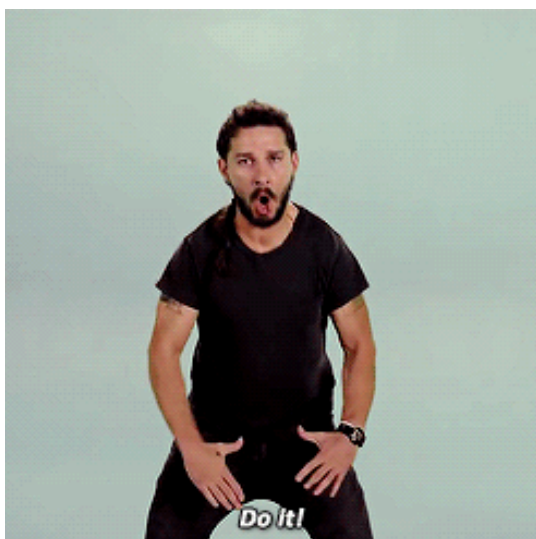
But it goes even deeper than that.

Because they aren't looking for just any designer, or writer, or developer: They're looking for ***you specifically***. They like your previous work. It fits with what they want. There's tremendous value in that.

What I've realized, and still have to remind myself, is this: When what you do comes easy, your rate should be much higher than your gut is telling you.

Which brings me to my next point.

For the love of all things design, please double your rate



Just see what happens! Worst-case scenario: you pass on a project that you would've been doing at a discount. Best case: you've now entered a whole new realm of clients, experience, and confidence.

The best part is, you only have to do it once. Because once you do it, you'll feel more comfortable charging what you're worth for every project.

That's not even the best part

The best part isn't even that you're now making twice as much on this project. The *best* part is that you're now much more likely to make the same amount on your *next* project.



You too could be like Peggy.

Why? Because \$10,000 projects attract other \$10,000 projects. Just as \$500 projects attract other \$500 projects.

Once you make the leap to charging more, you'll attract other projects of the same or greater value.

So take the leap already.

Kill the hourly rate

Stop. Just stop.



Just say no to working hourly.

If you're charging by the hour, you're leaving money on the table, and making it harder to take on multiple projects at the same time.

I get the idea: Hourly rates mean you literally get paid an agreed amount for the work you do. It's a direct correlation.

But this billing method predates tools like Webflow and Sketch. Tools that make the web design process much faster and easier. And hourly rates simply haven't been able to keep up.

For example: It took me a single morning to design, build, and launch the Webflow Blog. 5 hours, tops.

Even if my hourly rate was \$300/hr (which it's not), I would've designed and built a powerful, well-designed, fully responsive

website for just \$1,500. Way too little for a blog that gets tens of thousands of views every week.

How many of you charge \$300/hr? I'm guessing not many. And not many clients would feel comfortable with that hourly rate.

Charging on a project basis — what I like to call *value basis* — makes it much easier to find a rate that accurately reflects the value you provide.

But I think I've found an even better way.

How I price projects

I changed the way I price about a year ago, and I'll never go back. Now, instead of thinking about hours or value, I think about project pricing in terms of headspace.

Because, let's face it, even when we're not working directly on a project, it's still taking up headspace. Whether we're in the shower or making dinner, we're still *thinking* about it. But it's hard to charge our clients for this time.

So I decided to think of each project in terms of *how much* headspace I'd devote to the project, and then *how long* I'd be devoting this headspace for.

In my experience, it's best to think of this in terms of weeks. So for each new project, I ask myself two questions:

1. How long, in weeks, will this take for me to complete?
2. How much dedicated headspace will I need for it?

It's important to remember that your headspace is limited (and it will vary by person). You can only give so much thought to any given thing in any given week. If you spread your headspace too thin, your projects will suffer.

So, assuming you begin with a max headspace capacity of 100%, figure out how much attention the project will need for the duration. Some projects will demand 100% of your headspace, and that's fine (and maybe even preferred). Others may only take about 20%, letting you take on additional projects (provided they take 80% or less).

What's your headspace worth?

Defining project headspace is only the first step. Next, you have to figure out how much your total headspace is worth.

How do you do that? Ask yourself one simple question: How much do I want to make each week?

If you were to devote 100% of your total headspace (total amount of professional time, effort and thoughts), what value would that be?

You can also approach this from an annual perspective, and instead ask yourself how much you want to make each year, then divide by 52.

Example

Let's say that your weekly value is \$2,000.

If a client came to you with a project, and you estimate that it'll take you a full month, at 100% headspace, then the price starts at \$8,000 ($\$2,000 \times 4$).

The benefits of headspace pricing

Pricing this way will help you:

1. Decide if you can take on multiple projects
2. Make the money you want to be making, instead of what you can get

How a design contract can help you manage clients

Discover the key to happier, healthier client relationships.

Good client relationships brim with lively banter, crazy stories, and friendship. Bad ones bring headaches and stress. You know the kind. Clients who take ages to pay (or never do), make unreasonable demands, expect endless rounds of revisions, or keep trying to expand the scope of the project.

Then there's the wafflers, who'll turn a quick project into a multi-month affair with their indecision.

Thankfully, a good contract can make even the most difficult client reasonable to deal with. For the most part, it's all about setting the *right expectations*, and sticking to them. Let's see how.

Put it in writing



First and foremost, you have to put it in writing. Yes, it's nowhere near as fun as getting to work on your ideas, but it is a lot more fun than wasting your time and losing a client.

A well-written contract protects both you and your client in case there's a disagreement, a speed bump, or a major problem. It also lays everything out on paper so both sides can weigh in and make sure what's most important to them is understood and addressed. We're not going to give you legal advice here, but we are going to cover the high-level bullet points and why they're so important.

(Pro tip: Never reinvent the wheel. Find and customize a contract template to keep things simple.)

Here's what you need to consider before starting a project:

- **Timeline and milestones:** Define how long the project should take and when specific elements are due. If there's wiggle room, make sure to spell that out too.
- **Scope of work:** Clearly detail what you're making so it'll be obvious if/when the client tries to expand scope.
- **Compensation:** Be clear about what you're charging and when you expect to get paid.
- **Late payment penalties:** Prevent late payments before they happen by defining the consequences.
- **Conditions for additional work:** Lay out what happens if you agree to expand scope, including how much notice you'll need, and how to handle revisions to your timeline and compensation.

- **Possible conditions for unforeseen circumstances:** Speed bumps and roadblocks happen, so plan ahead for possible changes.
- **Maintenance:** Define how you'll handle small changes and updates once the project is delivered, including how much you'll charge, if anything.
- **Your business hours:** Let the client know when they should expect you to be working and when it's okay for them to reach out.

A few of those warrant expansion, so let's dig deeper.

Scope of work

This section of the contract should detail exactly what you're doing for the client. This can vary widely, but here's an example based on a client who needs a restaurant website:

- All pages (or features) of the site: landing page, about page, contact page, menu page
- Additional versions for devices: tablets, phones, etc.
- Number of design revision rounds: note that additional rounds will require a contract extension, and consider defining what the terms of that extension will be
- Graphic/visual design work: logos, icons, or graphics

- How designs will be converted into a functioning site — if you're working from mockups (but we always suggest prototypes)
- Hosting — how's this site getting online. Do they expect you to keep it up for them?
- Maintenance, if any

Be *very explicit* when defining the scope — for both you and the client's sake. It's all about managing expectations.

Proposed timeline and milestones

Detail how long you expect the project to take, and define milestones along the way. This adds transparency, gives the client something to look forward to, and helps keep you organized and motivated.

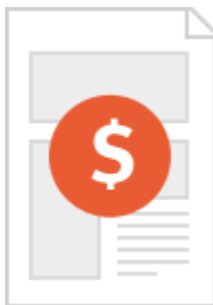
Be honest with yourself when setting a deadline. It's all too easy to let your desire to please your client override all other concerns and deadlines. Just remember that you have a life outside work, and don't forget Murphy's Law: anything that *can* go wrong, *will* go wrong.

It's worth remembering that you're the expert here. You know how long it takes to build an entire website — your client probably doesn't.

So add some buffer time to your estimates. It could save you some embarrassment, and it will definitely help your client set realistic expectations.

Note: This isn't an opportunity to quote low and promise high to try to outbid other designers. Dishonesty will only lead to arguments and animosity later on.

Compensation and payment schedule



Before I wised up (a little), and started using contracts and implementing late fees, my clients often took months to pay me — despite me sending over a new invoice every two weeks. To prevent this, always detail your payment terms: how much, when it's due, and how to pay you.

First, you'll need to choose how to bill them. You have a few options:

- **Hourly:** Ideal for short-term or infrequent work. Even if you opt to charge a flat rate, it's easiest to base that rate on your desired hourly income.
- **Flat weekly rate:** You charge a fixed rate based on the number of hours you're able to work per week and your hourly rate. This can help keep you honest — i.e. working — but beware of overtime.
- **Flat rate per milestone or project:** You charge for completed chunks of work, based either on your hourly rate or an industry standard. Clients often prefer this since it's easier to budget.

Don't forget to specify *how you want to get paid*, whether it's by check, PayPal, Venmo, or Starbucks gift cards. Keep in mind that some payment methods charge the receiver (you) a fee, so ask your clients to use low-fee options with lower fees (wire transfer, check, PayPal without a credit card), or build the fee into your rate.

You need a retainer

Don't worry — I'm not taking a jab at your pearly whites. A *retainer* is just a non-refundable down payment. It reserves your time, and helps you cover any non-refundable expenses that might crop up, such as design assets. It also covers you

in case your client changes their mind, vanishes, or refuses to pay you. They're most common for flat-rate projects.

Late payment penalties

Defined due dates and late payment penalties are the best way to ensure you get your money on time, or at all. I usually add these two payment conditions to my contracts:

- Payment is due within 14 days from the billing date
- For every week past the due date, there will be a late-payment fee of 10% (or more, though 50% is the usual maximum)

These stipulations will often get clients to pay within a couple days of getting an invoice — sometimes even instantly.

If even these methods don't work, you may be forced to sue. But that's an expensive, stressful, and unreliable option.

Thankfully, having late-payment penalties in place can give you a way to avoid litigation altogether **by offering to drop the penalties if they pay now.**

Note: Just because someone is slow to pay you doesn't mean they're vindictive. They might just be forgetful, or under financial pressure. Try polite and respectful reminders first, and only pull out the big guns if you *really* need to.

Conditions for additional work



As the project chugs along, you and your client might discover needs that weren't written into the contract. No big deal.

Just estimate the time it'll take to complete, and give them a quote. If they approve, add an addendum to the contract and get to work! If your client pushes back at the additional charges, politely remind them of the original scope you both agreed to. If that doesn't help, you might offer a small discount to soften the blow. Just try to keep your client happy — after all, extending a current job is easier than finding new work.

Negotiating the price for additional work at the beginning of the project can help a lot. Just be *very clear* as to what counts as a full design revision. Swapping out a photo shouldn't count.

Set your hours

If your clients are anything like mine, they're dedicated and excited (stressed) entrepreneurs. That's awesome. You want to work with people who are truly invested in their work. But this can also mean change requests coming in at 11:59 p.m. on a Saturday ... on Christmas Eve.

Remember: You don't need to accommodate every request as soon as it comes in. Every business has operating hours, and yours should be no different — even if you're a freelancer.

Be explicit about your availability from day one. Include your hours in the contract. It's your time. Don't let work consume your life.

Also, be sure to keep clients in the loop if you're going away for a few days. Give them a significant heads up!

Treat your clients respectfully

All of this advice goes both ways — you need to treat your clients very respectfully as well. A happy client will be more cooperative, forgiving, and understanding, and will keep coming back. They'll also spread the word to their friends.

Find the clients who make you smile

Remember that *you choose your clients*.

Instead of battling with a client who stresses you out, spend your time and effort on the clients who put a smile on your face. A great client can be a friend — and a source of work for years to come. Even if they pay a bit less than the next person, it's worth it for your peace of mind.

Ever had a client relationship go sour? How did you deal with them? How do you prevent the same problems now? I'd love to hear about your experiences in the comments below.

Kicking off a new freelance project

Discover the 3 most vital steps you need to take before you start designing a thing.

Starting a new freelance project is exciting! But tread lightly.

This is the second installment of our 4-part freelancer's guide.

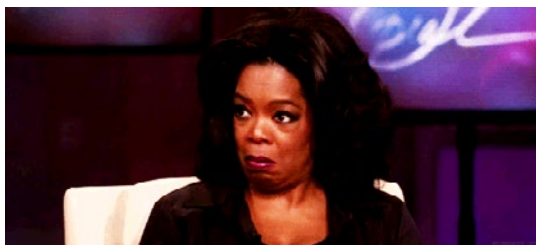
Since we've already covered the art of finding new freelance clients, this article walks through the process of starting a new project from scratch, covering both what you need to know, and what you should prepare for.

This process will be broken up into 3 sections:

1. Accepting the client
2. Finalizing the contract
3. Starting the project

Accepting the client

Guess what? You and **only** you can choose to accept the client's work.



No one has a gun to your head. (We hope.) You hold the power, so think long and hard before you start a new project. Be sure it's something you want to do.

Some red flags I look for include: Am I taking this for the money? Do I feel guilted into taking this project (i.e., is this charity work for a family member or friend)? You may have other red flags, but the point is: Don't take projects for the wrong reasons.

In a previous post, I highlighted 5 important questions that can help you decide whether to take on a project. If you haven't answered those questions yet, do it now. You'll thank yourself.

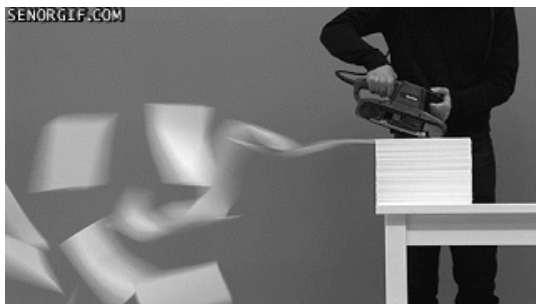
I can't stress enough how bad working with bad clients can be.

Bad clients lead to bad work. Bad work leads to fewer clients, which leads to less business, which leads to no more freelancing. It's a vicious cycle.

So, assuming you've found the right client, let's move to step two!

Finalizing the contract

Yes. You *will* need a contract, and it *must* be signed before you start any project.



It's one of the most frequently missed steps in the freelancing process, which is a real shame, because it's one of the most important. It's not the first time we've stressed the value of freelance design contracts, and it won't be the last. That's how important it is.

So what needs to be established in a contract? A lot. But you'll always want to define (in writing) three things:

1. Timeline
2. Deliverables
3. Budget

For more on this, check out three things you need to know before starting a new freelance project.

Timeline

How long is the project going to take? Without an answer to that question, you can't accurately allocate your time, or set a price.

You *can* do this in terms of total hours you plan to commit, but I'd urge you to think of your freelance projects in terms of days or weeks instead. This part of the contract should define a detailed calendar complete with deadlines (and consequences for not meeting them). A shared Google Calendar can help a lot here.

You should also define *your client's availability* throughout the project. They need to know that a website project demands their time too. So schedule exact due dates for specific deliverables (the first mock of the website, or first draft of the new logo design), and set time limits for the delivery of feedback. Include a note that late feedback will set the project back.

Deliverables

Deliverables vary wildly across projects, but they should always be clearly defined in terms that both you and your client understand.

So be as specific as possible. Never list "Website" as a deliverable.

Website

- 1 mobile-friendly/responsive page with 4 to 6 sections of content
- 1 signup form that will add submitted email addresses to MailChimp
- 1 content editor

Without that level of specificity, you'll end up going back and forth about what "a landing page" means. And ain't nobody got time for that.

Budget

Your budget is the most important piece of this puzzle (you are running a business, after all).



Now that you have both a timeline and a shared understanding of the deliverables, you should be able to create a budget that makes sense for both you and your client.

Need more help in deciding what this amount might be? See [how to price your freelance design services](#).

The contract should also include *when* you expect to be paid. I strongly recommend charging 50% of the estimated total as a down payment, and getting the rest on project completion. This helps cut your losses if the project goes down the tubes.

Sign the contract

Please don't forget to sign the contract. It holds no value if it isn't signed by everyone involved.

Starting the project

You did it! You found a client, signed a foolproof contract, and can begin the project.

But before you dive into Webflow, get some of the simple things planned and/or out of the way.

As a web designer, I can only speak to what I do for web and brand-related projects, but freelancers of all kinds should take this step.

Here's what I cover before I start design work:

Pick a host

You can include this in the contract or handle it later, but either way, I like to have a host nailed down before I start designing.

These days, I only host with Webflow, so this part's pretty easy.

Get that domain

Hopefully, your client already has a domain, but that's not always the case. Either way, if the client has a name for their site, the domain should come next.

There's nothing worse than finishing a branding or web project, only to learn that the domain isn't available. (True story.)

Set up accounts

Get your client off on the right track by signing up for the 3rd-party accounts they'll need before launching the website. The first one I nail down is email, since most (if not all) of the other accounts will require an email to register.

I strongly recommend **not** using the email provided by your registrar, but instead encouraging your client to suck it up and pay for the premium Google Apps account (which includes Gmail, Drive, and Google Apps for Business).

Other accounts to set up may include:

- Google Analytics
- A/B testing software (like Optimizely)
- Email marketing tools (like MailChimp)
- CRM

Setting up these accounts early makes it that much easier to hook everything up in the design phase.

Get design assets ready

This step is less important, but I find it **much** easier to have assets ready to go before I start design.

This includes thing like:

- **Stock photos.** I like to put together a dozen or so stock photos that are on-brand, and that I can easily include throughout the site (sometimes as placeholders, but they often end up sticking around).
- **Iconography.** Another asset I like to have ready are icons that may be used during the design process. Common icons may include social media and contact icons, but I also like to find and use other icons that I could see playing a role in the site itself. Having them ready keeps you in the flow.

- **Fonts.** I like to know which fonts I'll be using going into the design process, so I can be sure to buy/download/add to Typekit.

What do you think?

This phase is meant to prepare you for your freelance project, and I hope that by following these steps you'll be on your way to achieving project success. Our next article will cover the optimal design process when working with clients.

5 questions to ask yourself before your next freelance project

And why you should never say yes to
a project without knowing the answers.

I've had the privilege of working on dozens (maybe hundreds) of different freelance projects over the years.

Some were simple landing pages. Others were sprawling, multi-page wonders. Some focused on branding, from simple logo designs to brand-defining marketing assets and strategies.

And while every project differs, the factors that help me decide to take on a project tend to stay the same.

The struggle to say “no”

Early in my career, it was very hard to say no. To *any* project that came my way. Turning down work meant turning down revenue — which most new freelancers just can't afford. But as time goes on, and you take on more projects, you'll find yourself saying *no* to many projects, allowing you to only take on clients that you enjoy working with.

But how do you find clients you want to work with?

How do you know what a client is like *before* you work with them?

Of course, you may never know until *after* you work with them (and the damage is already done). This is what led me to create the following list of questions.

This list is just for me, and helps me remember what I value most in a client. The more positive I feel about the answers to these question, the more likely I'll enjoy the project as a whole.

I usually ask myself these questions after I've gotten the project details, so it acts as the *final* step before I say “yes.”

Questions to ask yourself

These questions work like a set of guidelines for accepting new work. I need to feel good about most of them before I take on a project.

1. Have you worked with this client before?

If I enjoyed working with this client, I add one point. If I haven't, I leave it blank.

If I *have* worked with the client and *didn't* enjoy working with them, I stop this process and respond with a polite, “No.”

Working with repeat clients you like is pretty much as good as it gets. That's why building long-term relationships as a freelancer is so crucial.

2. Did a previous client refer this client?

In my experience, if a client you enjoyed working with refers you to a new client, the new client is more likely to be pleasant than someone who randomly filled out a form on your site.

I always prioritize new work passed along from previous (successful) clients.

3. Have you confirmed the timeline for the project? Are there protections in place if the client causes delays?

Projects that you can't complete by their deadline can lead to a domino effect of bad freelance outcomes.

If the project goes over, there's a chance you won't get paid! So be sure to add securities in the contract that account for projects going over (unless you caused the delay).

Plus, when projects miss their deadlines, they can bleed into your next project(s). That's a no-win scenario. Splitting your attention between two projects can negatively affect both, hurting your chances of getting future referrals.

As I discussed in our post regarding the three things you need to know before you start a freelance project, being firm with your clients about project deadlines is a crucial factor in project success.

4. Do you fully understand the scope of this project?

What this really means is, “Do you know *exactly* what the deliverables are for this project?” If this is even *slightly* unclear, immediately set up a call with the client to confirm.

The scope of the project should be crystal clear before you agree to any work.

5. Does the client’s budget work for you?

This is the most important question to ask yourself.

Way too many freelancers are too quick to compromise their rates to get work. If you’ve thought long and hard about your rates, and they feel comfortable for you, then your clients should feel the same. If your client asks for a lower rate, seriously consider dropping the project immediately.

I know this is easier said than done, but I promise you that undervaluing yourself will destroy your freelance work. It just gives clients who shouldn’t be working with you access to your talents and skill set. Which causes a ripple effect from the work you’ll end up producing (“I’m worth more than this”), to the clients that you attract in the future.

Stick to your rates.

The freelancer's guide to the design process

Discover the best ways to work with your clients throughout the design process.

For the 3rd installment in our 4-part freelancer's guide, we're going to focus on the design process. Specifically, how to manage the design process with your client — without going crazy.

The first two articles covered [how to get new freelance design clients](#), and [what to do before you kick off a new design project](#). So it's time to get to the good stuff.

Now that you're neck-deep in a project, you've probably realized it isn't all roses. Problems arise and things *rarely* go as planned. But there are ways to prepare for these hiccups.



Let's find out how.

Get the ball rolling

If you've been following along with this series, you should have a [good understanding of project deliverables](#) by now. Which means your next step is to jump in to the design iteration phase!

I've worked on enough projects to know that the slower you are to start a project, the slower the entire project will go. So start fast.



Typically, I get started with a moodboard (though you might try a style tile or element collage). How you create your moodboard may vary, but for me it typically involves putting together a wide variety of images, colors, fonts, and designs to see which resonate most with the client.

Feel free to use our free moodboard and style tile template to get the ball rolling!

At this point, I also often assign clients homework of their own: to review and comment on the moodboards I put together.

Why? Because in many cases, a client already knows what they want — even if they don't know it, or they're unwilling to

tell you — and it's your job to help your client communicate what they want.

Even when the client knows what they want, there's usually a language barrier in the way. Because most clients don't know how to express their ideas in ways that easily translate into a design system. Creating a moodboard for them to review helps in this translation process and will get you to the next phase that much faster.

Skip the mockups. Proceed directly to prototypes.

Over several years of freelancing, I've found that there's no better way to present design ideas to clients than showing them in context.

This is where Webflow comes in *very* handy for me. It allows me to put together amazing sites exceptionally quickly.

Now, these rapid prototypes don't *need* to represent the final iteration (in fact, they usually don't). But taking what you learned from your client's moodboard review and applying it to something very much like the final deliverable — a website — allows you to skip a lot of pointless back-and-forth.

Why?

Because if you're slow to translate idea to prototype, you risk clients changing their minds or becoming impatient.



Most clients don't understand Kerning . Or care much about color theory . So don't waste their time presenting these things as "options" early on, or you'll end up drastically slowing down the entire process.

From my experience, clients would rather jump ahead and iterate toward the final product than spend time tweaking small things that don't make much sense out of context. As the designer, you find fiddling with the small stuff useful, but most clients won't. So jump ahead to the good stuff.

For website projects, this is where I'll build/design all of the pages (i.e., 90% of the site) and put my best foot forward in hopes that it's a home run.

Iterate until it's great

Now, you're most likely not going to nail the design in your first prototype. And that's alright — in fact, you should probably expect it.

But if you were careful with your moodboards and listened closely to your client, hopefully you weren't too far off.

If you're way off, repeat the moodboard process and see where things went wrong.

If you're close, let the iterate-until-it's-great process commence!

Iteration is where I spend the bulk of my time on freelancing projects — and I love it. With Webflow, this process is a breeze. I'll just share screens with a client (using Screenhero, UberConference, or — if I have to — GoToMeeting) or demo the site in person, and make changes right on the canvas, in real time.

"How do you feel about this font? Too big? Let's see what it looks like a bit smaller."

"This image looks a little too busy? Let's swap in a few more to see if we can get it closer."

With Webflow, you can make these changes incredibly quickly. I've even found myself finishing a website with clients over a few one-hour screen-sharing sessions.

Don't be afraid to publish



Launching a client website usually takes longer than it needs to. And that's often because you and/or your client fear that you've missed something important — without having even the slightest clue what that “important” thing is.

That's why I typically encourage clients to launch the website *before* they think it's ready. Why? Because when the site's live, things that seemed really important suddenly seem ... less so.

Designer's fears about publishing

Because the real fear isn't that your site's imperfect. It's that you're afraid to share it with the world.

On the designer's side, it's usually fear that the work isn't good enough. That others both within and without the design community will judge it.

To be honest, I don't think this fear of sharing your work ever completely disappears. It's just part of being a creative: you expect great things of yourself, and it's hard to feel like your work *ever* meets your high standards.

But even if your work doesn't meet the highest standards, there's no way you'll grow as a designer without sharing your work and gathering feedback on it. So share your work, and talk about your work, until it does meet your standards. Then adjust your standards again.

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Client's fears about publishing

For clients, there's a similar fear at work: now that their website is ready, the work of pushing it out into the world becomes a reality.

I've seen many website and branding projects bog down into a prolonged procrastination, where the client (usually subconsciously) slows the project down in fear that once it's over, the real work begins. They're now entering the world in a new way — and that can be a scary feeling.

This is where a good design-side manner comes in handy. Reassure them that the site is ready (and so are they) and that ongoing changes are still possible — provided you've agreed to this in your contract.

The beauty of the web is that it's never finished. Websites can be changed and iterated on even *after* the website goes live. This simple fact is often the only reassurance you and your client need to take the next step.

The beauty of the web is that it's never finished. Websites can be changed and iterated on even after the website goes live. This simple fact is often the only reassurance you and your client need to take the next step.

What's next?

With the website live, you're done, right? Right?!

Usually, no. You're not out of the woods yet.



In some cases the real work *has* just begun. That's why, in 4 ways freelance designers can create ongoing revenue, we'll dive into some of the most common ongoing maintenance and support tasks that come up after a project is launched.

4 ways freelance designers can create ongoing revenue

Find out how you can turn completed freelance design projects into sources of recurring revenue.

If you've ever done freelance design work, you know that the majority of the work seems to come after the project is complete.

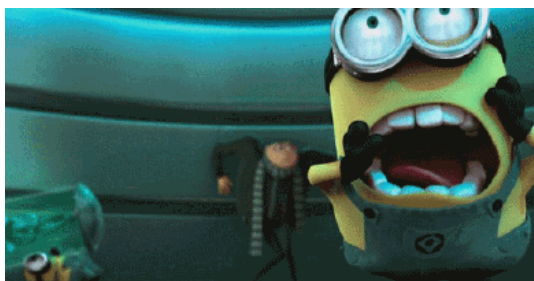
Yup. After. And all too often, that post-launch work gets done ... for free.

Why? I think it's a mix of things, but it's mostly due to the fact that freelancers don't create a contract that defines how to handle additional post-launch work.

This is one of the reasons we stress the value of a rock-solid design contract. Because if your design contract doesn't cover this scenario, what do you do when, a month after launch, a client sends you an email like this:

Subject: URGENT WEBSITE ISSUE

Hi. It looks like the website isn't working properly on some phones. We made some changes to the text on the homepage and now it looks weird. Seems like an easy fix, can you take a look?



You may have gotten emails like this. The client needs changes made to a site you finished days, weeks, or maybe months earlier that may (and often, *may not*) be your fault. But without a strong contract to fall back on, it's hard to say with confidence:

“Sorry, our contractual agreement doesn’t cover any additional changes to the website that were not included in our original project scope. I’m happy to send a new proposal for these changes to happen, and can send our previous contract for reference, if needed.”

More often than not, the client’s more than happy to pay for the additional work, even if on the surface it feels like “an easy fix.”

(Aside: never hesitate to correct assumptions underlying the phrase “easy fix.” If it’s not, the client needs to know that.)

It’s much easier when you don’t have to be the bad guy — and can instead point them to your *legally binding* contract.

(Note: If you have clients try to pull a “could you do this just for us?”, it’s vital that you stand your ground. It’s a slippery slope to start taking on “easy fixes” for free. Pretty soon you’ll be spending hours a week doing “easy fixes” for free.)

It’s also not fair to your other clients who *are* willing to pay. Nor is it fair for you to sell your services for free, so unless

you did create the issue (by including a bug in your code, for example), stick to your guns.

Don't. Work. For. Free.

But there's another important point to take note of:

There's money to be made here.



The opportunities that come after the project ends

Like icebergs, projects often hide below the surface. That's true for both the amount of work to be done during the project *and* the opportunities to generate more revenue afterwards.

This always seems to come as a surprise to freelancers I talk to.

“Wait...You're saying I can make *more* money *after* the project is complete?”



Yes. And sometimes *a lot* more.

Agencies large and small discovered this a long time ago.

Most of my first clients came my way because of my pricing. At first I thought this was my project-based pricing (which was way too low), but learned quickly it was my *ongoing pricing* that was such a bargain.

Many of my clients got bids from agencies for not only much more money, but also more ongoing maintenance and hosting fees.

Wait — “ongoing maintenance and fees”? What are those?

Well, for an agency, these make perfect sense. Employee salaries, health benefits, office costs, and more mean that an ongoing source of cash flow is crucial for any agency.

Hence, maintenance fees.

What drove me crazy was that this was *normal*. Companies were *agreeing* to pay these ongoing costs. (Granted, most clients going to an agency are much larger, and this cash isn't necessarily burning a hole in their pocket.)

So I borrowed this method for myself, and began to think of ways that I too could provide a continuing service that would warrant ongoing, monthly payments. I wasn't going to charge as much as these agencies were charging, but even a little would add up as I added more and more clients to my portfolio.

What I learned was that these "small fixes" can become great sources of ongoing revenue. Twenty hours of little fixes every week can impart a lot of piece of mind when it comes to recurring cashflow.

The important thing is to set these up in advance, or offer them as a package post-project. Some examples might include a retainer, hosting services, or ongoing project work.

4 ways to make more money after the project's done

Opportunity 1: Retainer

A retainer is a great way to build a consistent revenue source while also building a long-term relationship with the client.

A retainer is an agreement in which a client will pay you for a set amount of hours per week, month, or year — regardless of whether you end up working at all.

What the client is doing is paying for your guaranteed time. They may not *need* you all the time, but when they do, you already have a contract in place to immediately step in.

Typically I set this up with a monthly, recurring payment in exchange for which I promise to set aside a certain amount of time each week for the client.

For example, I might set up a 5 hour a week contract, paid monthly. Meaning I'd set aside 5 hours every week just to be available for the client. These hours don't roll over: i.e., if the client doesn't need you one week, next week still has a 5-hour cap, not 10. This helps you plan your time, and even take on multiple retainers each week

I know plenty of freelancers who have 10+ retainers at any given time — though that's hardly standard.

I also *strongly* recommend setting boundaries on this in your contract. I've had clients try to fill these hours with things like picking up office supplies or cleaning the office. (Seriously.)

Opportunity 2: Hosting revenue

In some cases, hosting services can be more valuable to your client than what you pay for them.

For example, hosting a website with Webflow CMS on your Pro plan and adding 3 collaborators would cost you \$22 a month. But some clients are more than willing to pay more (sometimes much more) than that for the ability to maintain, manage, update, and take control of their website.

This difference between hosting cost and hosting revenue can add up to a recurring revenue source that grows with each new client. That's why we built [Client Billing](#), which allows you to set your clients' monthly charges (*including* whatever profit margin you want), and charge them directly, instead of wasting time with manual invoices — all right inside Webflow.

Opportunity 3: Set up a payment plan

I've only recently seen (and used) this model as a way to generate recurring revenue.

The idea's simple: Instead of taking your full project fee up-front, work with your client to set up a plan to pay it off over time.

Why this works

Clients don't always have the funds to pay for the project upfront. So rather than losing the business, I've opted for a small down payment, and a schedule for the rest.

The best thing about this model is that it can actually let you raise your rate, while also making it easier for your client to get started.

For example, instead of charging \$5,000 for a project, set up a payment plan for \$600/mo for 12 months. Now you not only have recurring revenue (which will come in handy during slow months), but you've also raised your rate by \$2,200 — all while making it easier for your client to get the project started.

Opportunity 4: Ongoing projects

Sometimes, creating opportunities isn't about establishing a contract. It's about you taking the initiative to remind clients that you're always available for ongoing work.

Websites are living things. They're constantly moving, changing, and evolving into something new — or should be, anyway. Whether it's building a new landing page or strategizing a new marketing campaign, opportunities for new work with old clients abound.

Remember: No one's better suited to update, revamp, or re-design a website than the designer/developer who created it. In other words: you.

How do you make recurring revenue?



Never forget that, just because a project ends, doesn't mean that it's done for good. Find ways to keep it going in a way that doesn't become a chore, but an ongoing source of opportunity and revenue.

37 must-have tools and apps for freelance designers

From time management to billing to collaboration, these are the tools you need to succeed as a freelancer designer.

The freelancer's life comes with more ups and downs than your average roller coaster. These tools will help you manage it all — with a modicum of screaming.

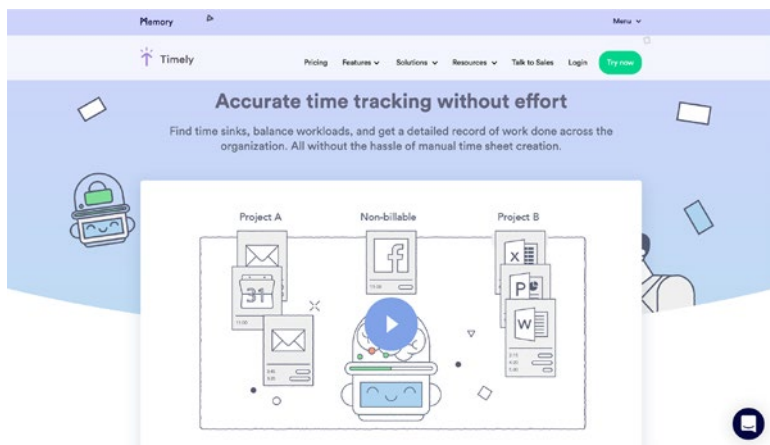
Best time-management tools

As a freelancer, time's your most valuable asset. So a toolset that makes managing and tracking your time easy is crucial.



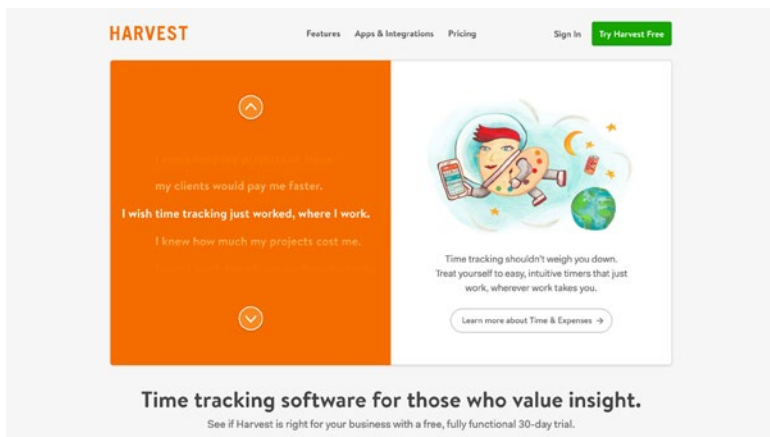
In “[4 time management tools for teams and designers](#),” we discussed how different time management tools can solve different problems, and how these tools can make you a better freelancer and designer. The tools below will help you accomplish both.

Timely



Timely is a scheduling and time-tracking tool. It lets you plan your weeks in advance, plus track time (and hourly rates) for your current projects. I always turn to Timely for ongoing projects that require time-tracking, in part because it gives me a better sense of where I spent my time in previous weeks.

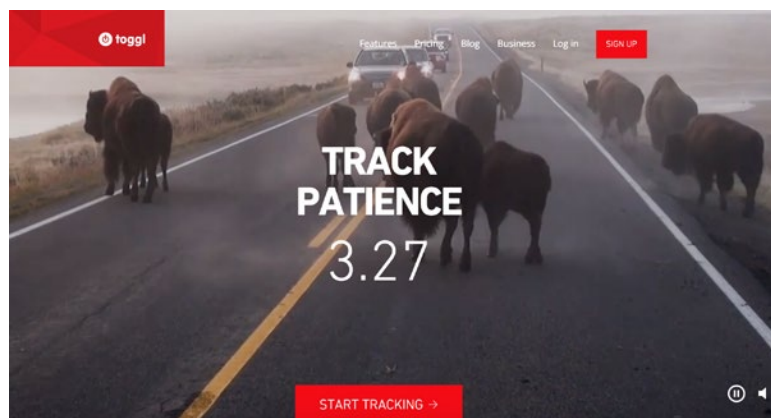
Harvest



One of the most reliable time-tracking tools I've found is Harvest. The easy-to-use UI lets you send invoices to clients right from the app. But one of its biggest advantages is its integrations with popular apps like Asana, Trello, Basecamp, QuickBooks, and more.

Of course, with Webflow you can bill your clients automatically with Client Billing, lessening the need for another tool like this.

Toggl



Though a little too simple for my taste, Toggl is one of the simplest time-trackers around. If you don't want to bother with too much setup, or just need an easy-to-access timer, this might be your tool.

Best finance and tax tools

Just like any other business, freelancers have to track their income, cash flow, and prepare their taxes (quarterly!) — all without the help of a friendly HR department.



Luckily, you'll find plenty of tools to help you manage your finances, bill clients, and easily keep up with your taxes. While some of these tools work beautifully together, and others are just for billing and/or taxes, any of them can make managing your money much easier!

QuickBooks Self Employed

[QuickBooks Self-Employed](#) [Pricing](#) [Features](#) [See plans](#)

Keep more of what you earn

QuickBooks Self-Employed customers find on average **\$4,628 in tax savings** per year.*

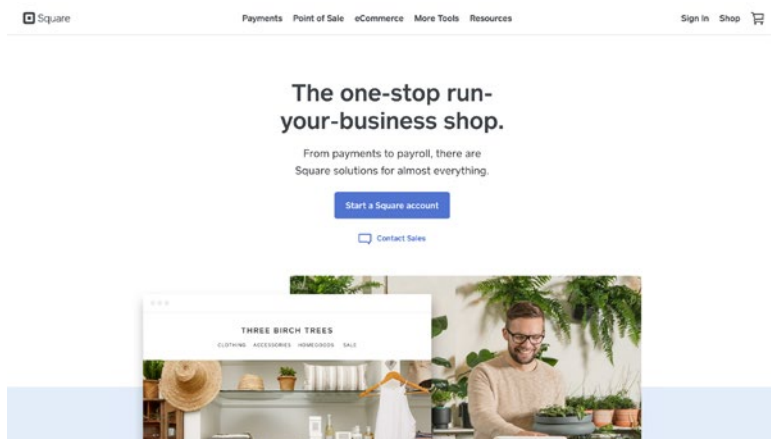
[Buy now & save 50%](#) [Watch how it works \(59s\)](#)

Flexible plans for independent contractors and freelancers

Self-Employed \$15	Self-Employed Tax Bundle with turbotax \$25	Self-Employed Live Tax Bundle with turbotaxlive \$35
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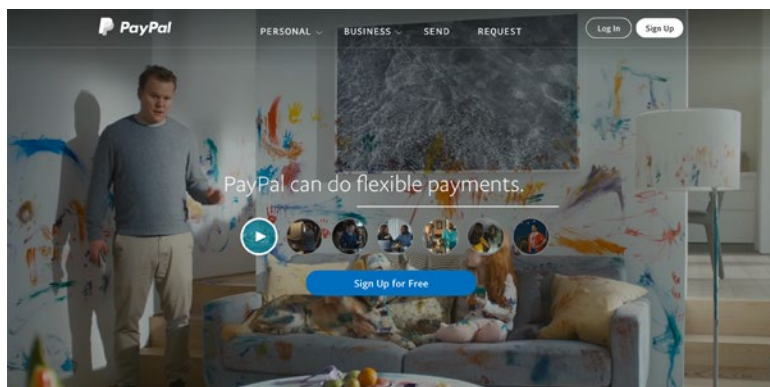
A personal favorite — and the one I rely on most come tax time — is QuickBooks Self-Employed. It lets you not only easily track income and expenses by connecting directly to your bank accounts, but also makes it incredibly easy to stay on top of quarterly taxes.

Square



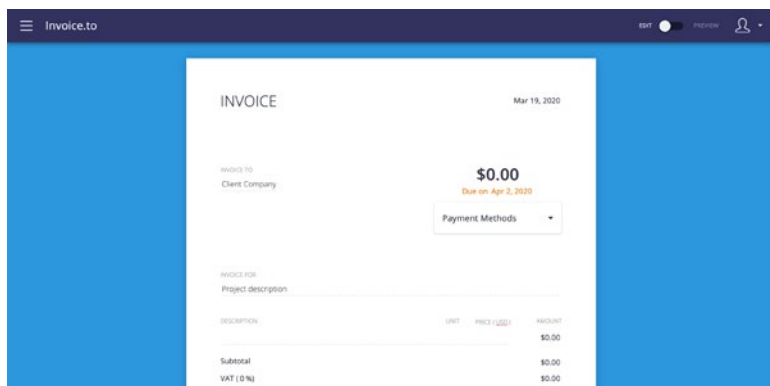
Another personal favorite, and how I typically collect payment from clients, Square makes it easy to create, send, and collect payments both in person and online with a credit or debit card. There are more robust tools to manage your income, but few that make it so simple for clients to pay you (always the hardest part).

PayPal



Another long-time favorite, PayPal lets you collect payments in just about any way (in person, by credit card, via ACH, or with PayPal Credit). PayPal's less-than-stellar user experience design has proven the only reason I choose other platforms.

Invoice.to (with Stripe)



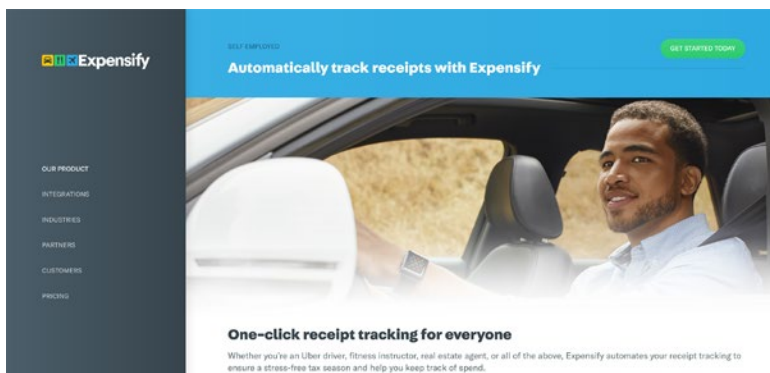
Invoice.to may be fairly new to the invoice game, but it's an incredibly easy invoice generator that you can link to your Stripe account to collect payments. I'd argue that there's no simpler or better-designed invoicing tool on the web, so if you already rely on Stripe, it may be a clear winner.

FreshBooks

The screenshot shows the FreshBooks website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the FreshBooks logo (tagline: 'cloud accounting'), links for 'How it Works', 'Who it's For', 'More', and 'Blog', and a 'CONTACT US' link with a phone number. A green 'Try It Free' button and a 'Login' link are also present. The main content area features the headline 'Valuable Business Tools for Self-Employed Pros' and a sub-headline: 'From invoicing and expenses to tax time prep and online payments, FreshBooks is an all-in-one bookkeeping and accounting solution that saves you up to 200 hours a year.' Below this is an email sign-up form with a 'Start a Free Trial' button. A background image shows a woman with blonde hair and glasses sitting on a blue sofa, working on a laptop. A small potted plant and a white mug are on the coffee table in front of her. At the bottom, there's a rating section showing 'Excellent' with five green stars and a note '(Based on 3,145 GetApp reviews)'.

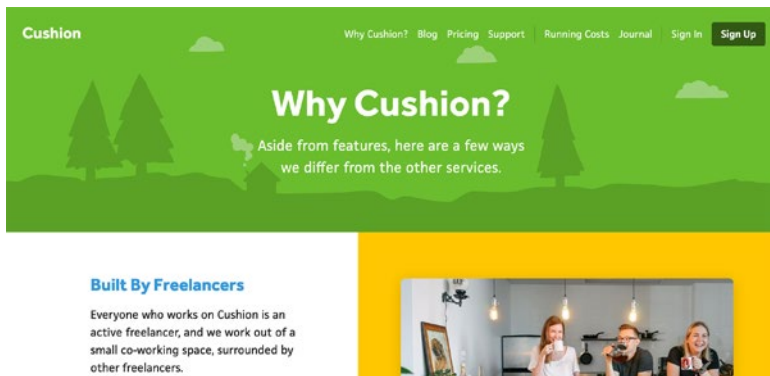
While the above tools make collecting payments easy, FreshBooks does a whole lot more. This full suite of accounting tools lets you manage every aspect of freelancer finance. Collect payments, manage expenses (including payments to other employees), and track time all in one place. With all that in one place, its sole drawback may be that it's more than what most freelancers need.

Expensify



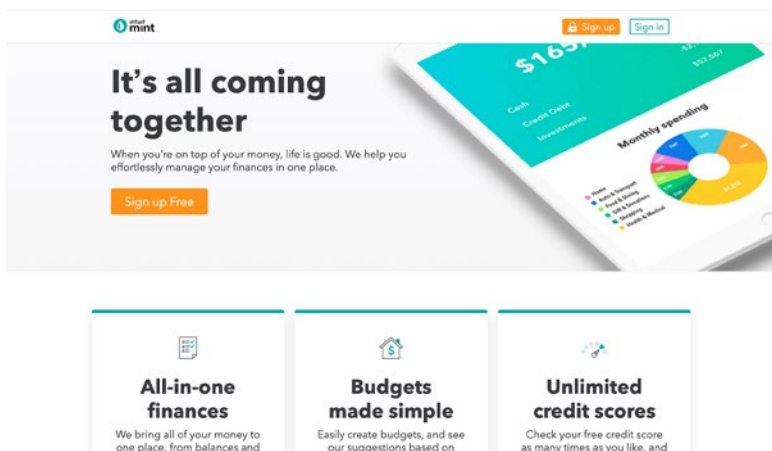
If your work involves lots of travel, business purchases, or a lot of expense tracking, then Expensify could be your go-to. Expensify makes it easy to track all sorts of expenses, and bring that data into 3rd-party services like QuickBooks for easy reporting come tax time.

Cushion



The most stressful part of freelancing is keeping on top of cashflow and planning future projects. Cushion is a great tool for projecting future income, seeing where you have cash gaps (so you can schedule new projects), and managing projects to minimize overlap.

Mint



Though most people use Mint for personal money management, it works just as well for managing businesses expenses. See where you're spending, what you're saving, and set savings goals all in the app.

Webflow Client Billing

Billing info

Monthly Profit

We'll add this amount to your client's monthly hosting bill and deposit it right into your account.

Services description

*Your client will see this on the screen where they enter their credit card info, so be clear what they're paying for.

Credit card statement description

We'll appear on your client's credit card statement. This can be your creative business name or a short description of your services.

Charge summary

CLIENT CHARGES		SUBSCRIPTIONS CHARGES		YOUR PROFIT
\$26.00/MO	-	\$6.00/MO	=	\$20.00/MO
The amount your client will be charged on a monthly basis.		How much is owed to Webflow for hosting subscription fees and <i>platform fees</i> .		What we'll transfer to your account 2 days after your client pays.

If you use Webflow, Client Billing can make getting paid, and life in general, *so much* easier. I can set up recurring payments from my client, at any price point I sell my client on, without having to worry about sending invoices, chasing down accounting departments, or any of the other hassles you're (unfortunately) all too familiar with.

The best part is that it's free for any Webflow-using designer. Check out [how Client Billing works](#).

Best communication and project management tools

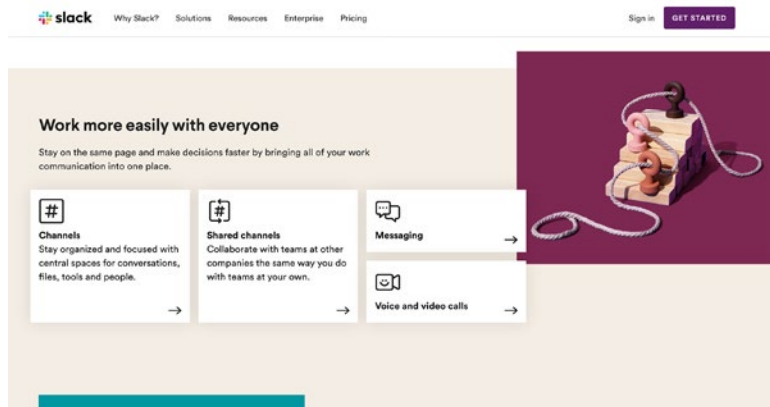
Communication is key, especially when you're working on multiple projects at the same time.

Project management tools help you stay organized and keep clients in the know. And while nothing beats proactive communication (something a tool *can't* do for you), the right tool can make all the difference between project bliss or utter disaster.

So ditch the emails, and get yourself (and clients) on one of these great tools. You'll be best friends in no time.



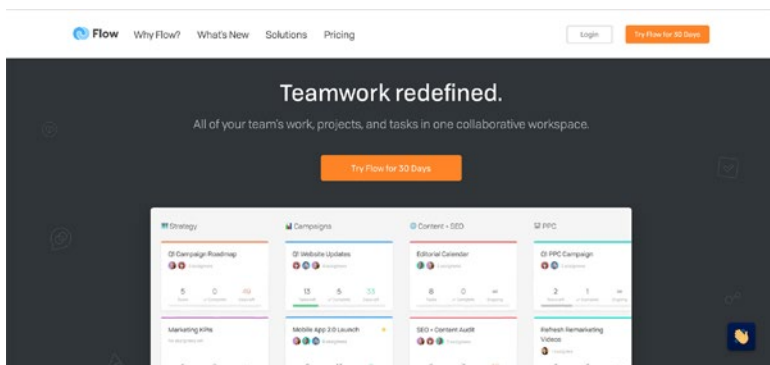
Slack



Do we even need to explain Slack?

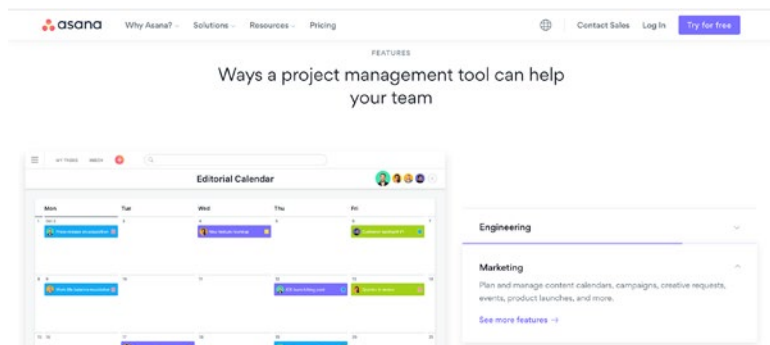
Ok, in case you somehow haven't heard of it yet: Slack's incredible chat application will let you and your clients ditch the back-and-forth emails and upgrade to real-time communication. I set up a new private Slack group for every new client, making it much easier for us to collaborate and get to the final product much quicker.

Flow



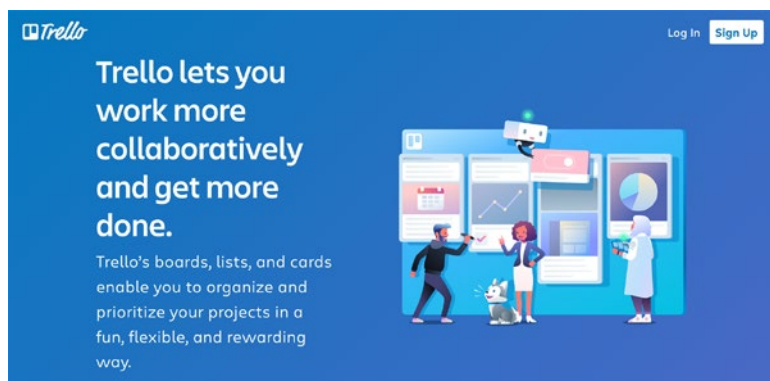
Flow combines project management and chat in one multi-device app. I'd argue that Flow is much simpler than other project management tools on this list, without skimping on features.

Asana



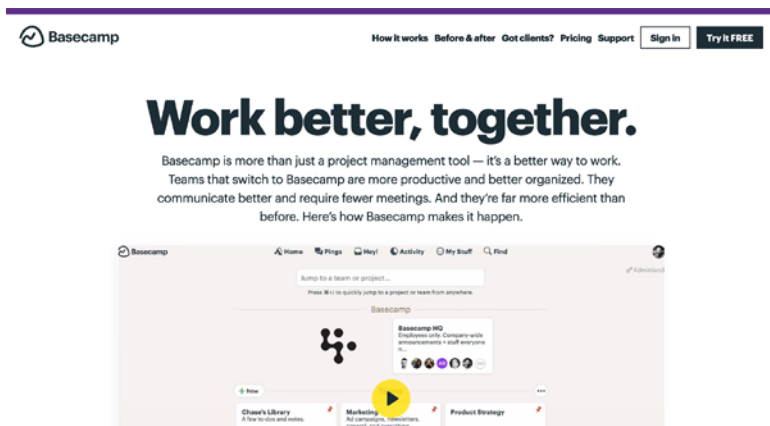
If you're looking for a robust and beautifully designed project management solution, you may not need to look any further than [Asana](#). While it sometimes feels like too much, you'll be hard-pressed to find a project management tool with more bells and whistles.

Trello



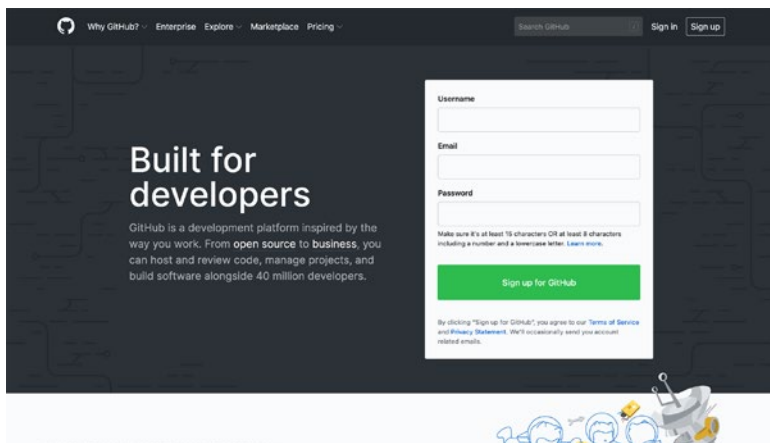
[Trello](#) has long been a favorite for designers and project managers alike. If you're looking for a flexible and visual solution, then Trello might be your go-to. I use it for everything from my daily chore list to client project management to vacation planning.

Basecamp



Another venerable favorite for project management (and rightfully so) is Basecamp. Basecamp brings clean, considered design to a powerful tool you can use with coworkers and clients alike. It also has tons of integrations that make connecting it to tools you already use a breeze.

GitHub



I know a lot of you probably don't see GitHub as the ideal tool for managing tasks as a freelancer — but hear me out.



Many of you probably work closely with an engineering team on freelance projects. And most engineering teams run their project management in GitHub. Something I've experimented

with is having all my personal tasks *and* tasks for freelance projects all in the same tool – GitHub.

And after a few months, I've really grown to love it. It has most, if not all, of the functionality of the other tools I used for personal tasks, and it helps me avoid managing things in multiple places, because let's face it, when you're freelancing, your personal and work lives tend to overlap quite a bit.

Though you'll have to pay to have private repositories, I'd say it's well worth the \$7 a month for the amount of time and effort I save in project management.

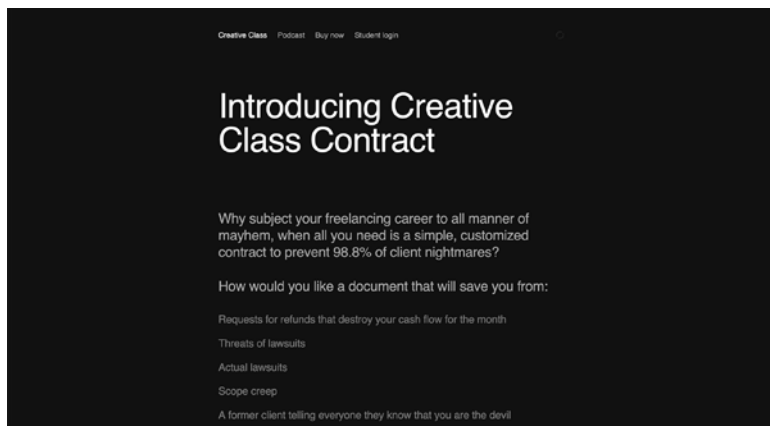
Best contract and proposal tools and resources

We could've covered these under finance tools, but contracts and proposals play such a huge part in the freelancing process, they deserve their own section.

The right contract will literally make or break a project. It's the single most important part of any project, yet so many freelancers pass it off as no big deal.

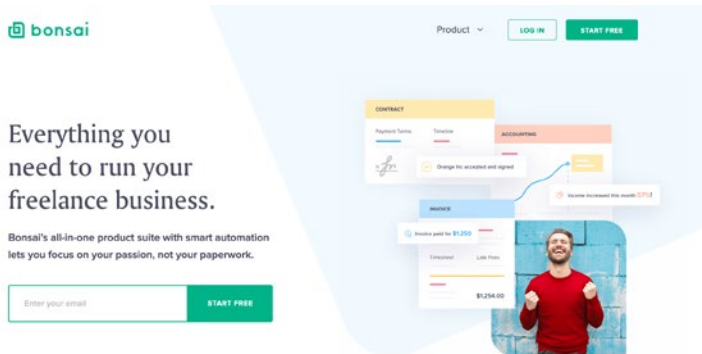
This isn't the first time we've spoken about the importance of freelance design contracts, and it won't be the last, but some of these tools and resources below will get you off on the right track.

Creative Class Contract Course



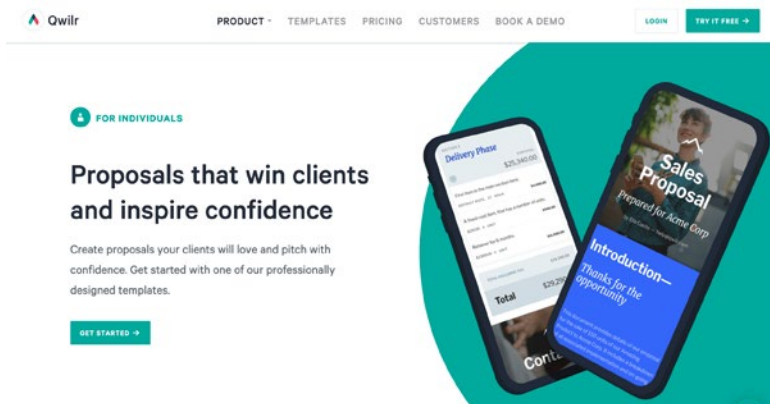
Although it's the priciest item on the list, it's worth its file size in gold. The Creative Class contract course will guide you through building a bulletproof contract that will not only make you a better freelancer, but also make you even more money.

Bonsai



Bonsai makes it super easy to create a contract, review it with a client (and make changes), and then sign it. It's the all-in-one contract tool I use every time.

Qwilr



If you don't want to create proposals or other customer-facing documents from the ground up, or don't know where to begin, [Qwilr](#) is a great place to start. Their templates are easy to use, and will help you and your clients better prepare for projects.

Web Design Proposal Generator

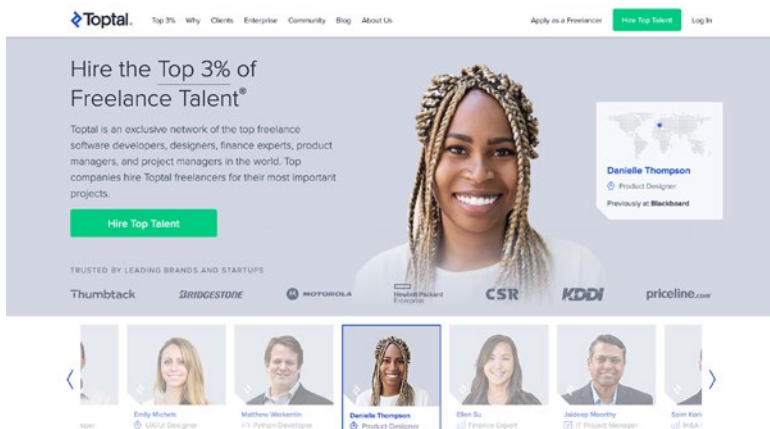


We're especially fond of [Web Design Proposal Generator](#) as it was made in Webflow CMS by Spreadshare cofounder Sidney Ottelohe. But all product bias aside, it's a smart use of a content management system to generate and stylishly present your proposals to freelance clients — and you can customize *every* bit of it, without coding, so it reflects your brand perfectly.

Best platforms for finding freelance work

While I will *always* stand by referrals being the best way to find new clients, there are definitely some tools out there that can help you kickstart your client base, and continually add to it, if you so choose.

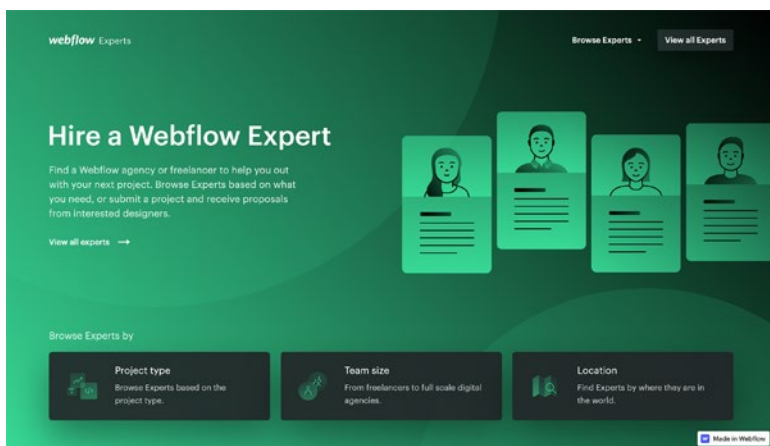
Toptal



I've been hearing Toptal pop up in conversation a lot more as of late. They pride themselves on having *only the best* of the best freelance talent, which is why they have an application and screening process.

Having that high quality bar set also helps them attract some of the best companies in the world when they're looking for freelancer help. And with great companies comes better compensation, so there's no race to the bottom here.

Webflow Experts



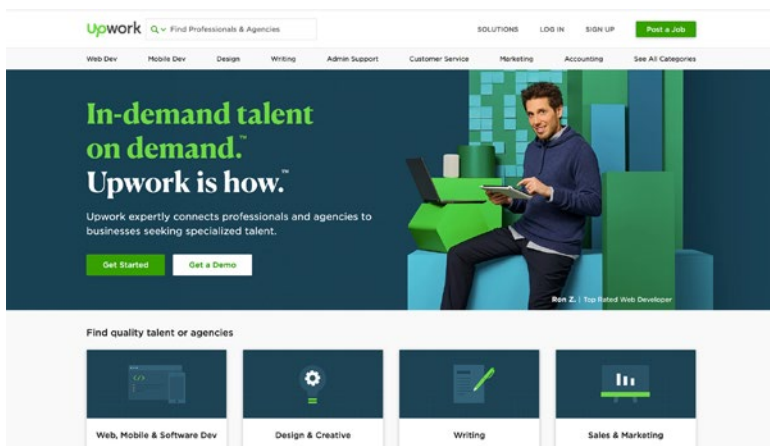
New to the block is Webflow Experts, a freelancer marketplace specializing in Webflow-based projects. Like Toptal, Webflow Experts has an application and screening process before you can start working on projects.

The Webflow Experts profiles emphasize your work and skillset, and the site lets clients find you based on their needs. That

helps match clients with just the right person — and keeps the noise down to a dull roar for the designers.

The site also strikes a careful balance for both sides of the marketplace, keeping a consistent stream of project proposals (and work) coming in.

Upwork



Unless you've been living under a rock (or are new to freelancing), I'm sure you've heard of Upwork. Upwork can be invaluable in filling in the gaps between larger projects that I'm more passionate about. They've become so large that it's just a reliable place to go for consistent, last-minute work.

The not-so-great part of Upwork is the bidding contests, which attract a certain kind of client – usually one looking for quick turnaround at bargain-basement prices. Given the large volume of requests on the platform, you can still sometimes find those clients who put more of a premium on quality than thrift, but in the end, it's your call as to whether or not to give the platform a swing.

Design tools

Figma



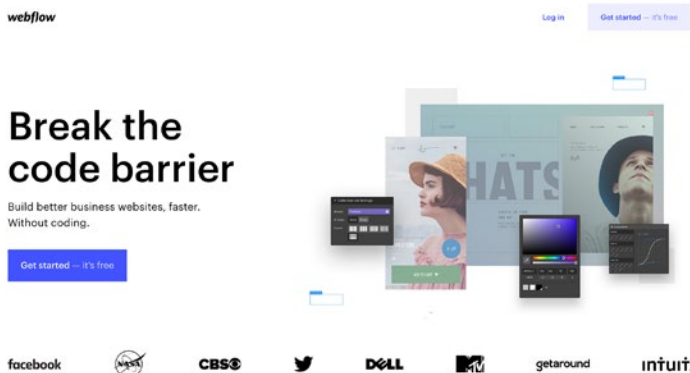
A newer, but increasingly popular design tool these days is Figma. Some even believe it's going to supplant Sketch as the industry's go-to UI design tool, including former Sketch

fan Tom Johnson, who recently published the piece, You are going to switch to Figma.

People love it for a number of reasons, but one of the top reasons has to be its real-time collaboration feature, which allows several people to work simultaneously on the *same* design. And that isn't just handy for working with your fellow designers — copywriters and content strategists can also jump in and update content! (Oh, and you Windows-using designers will be happy to hear that, unlike Sketch, you can use it on a Windows machine.)

Depending on the type of design you do, Figma may not be your cup of tea, but I'll let you make the call, since they have a free plan.

Webflow



Alright, time for a shameless plug: but I promise that as a freelancer, I really do love Webflow more than any other design tool. Primarily because I can manage my entire business through Webflow.

To start, designing in Webflow saves me *tons* of time and money. First, because Webflow writes production-ready code for me while I design, I don't have to rely on a developer's help to bring my design to life. I was sold on that alone when i first found Webflow (so much so I decided to come work here).

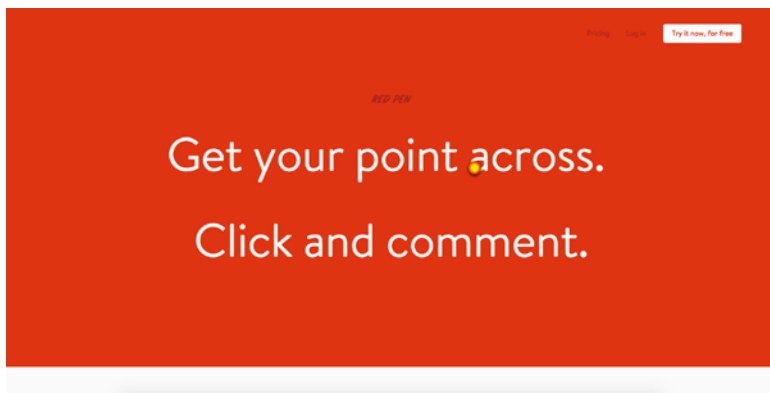
Second is the flexibility of the CMS. I have yet to find a CMS that's easier or faster to customize, which is a huge factor when you have a wide range of clients. And I've *definitely* not seen a CMS that offers so much visual design flexibility without relying on templates.

Last is Client Billing. We all know that it can be hard at times to get paid as a freelancer. But with Client Billing, I just define a recurring fee, and Webflow handles the rest, so I don't have to worry about invoicing and all that other baggage.

If you haven't yet, definitely give Webflow a try. there's a free version, but I think you'll find the paid plans are more than worth it.

Design collaboration tools

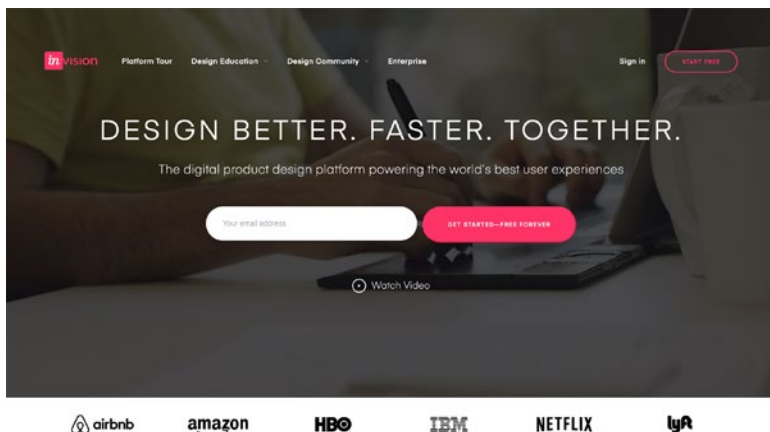
Redpen



Redpen allows you to get feedback on your designs, from as many people as you want, as annotations pinned to your designs. And if you can't tell already, that makes it a solid alternative to InVision, only with more focus on speed and less on features.

I haven't used Redpen a lot on my own design work, but I've given a ton of feedback through Redpen. My favorite part about it, is (as my colleague John Moore Williams mentions in a more in-depth post about design feedback tools) is just the feeling of being able to *show* people how your product works, rather than just telling them.

InVision

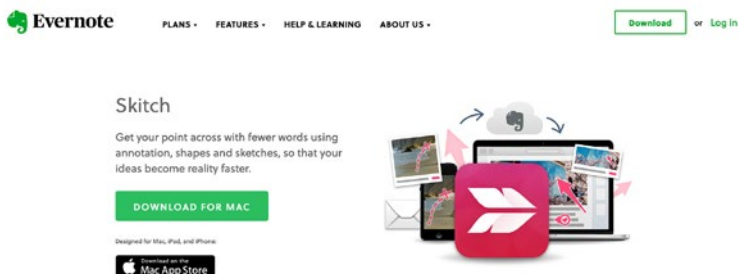


A rising star in the same space as Redpen, InVision fills the same need for asynchronous design feedback, but bolts on a whole host of other features. InVision is what I've been using lately for my design work, and I love it.

Like Redpen, it gives you the feeling of presenting your product by showing rather than telling. But it also works seamlessly with other applications, like Sketch, Dropbox, and Drive, which can really help take the pain out of managing file versions.

There's a free plan for you to try it out, but it's limited to one prototype.

Skitch

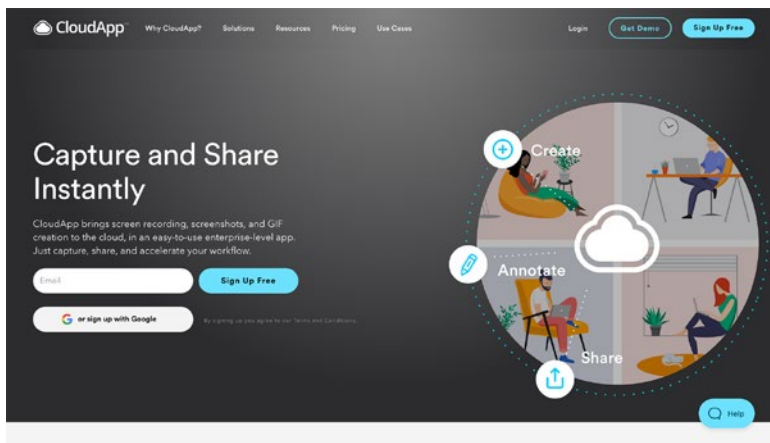


Skitch is one of those tools that can quickly become such a go-to that, if you're just learning about it from me, I can confidently say, "You're welcome."

It's a simple way to take, annotate, and send screenshots, saving time for everyone involved in your feedback loops.

Though there are countless uses for this tool, it can be helpful to think of it as an InVision for sites that are already in production. Use it to send feedback on production designs, take notes for redesigns, or just to call attention to bugs. I can also say that the Webflow Support team relied on it for the creation of Help Center screenshots for quite some time.

CloudApp



My main alternative to Sketch is CloudApp. While it does much the same thing at base — i.e., create screenshots you can then annotate — it also simplifies sharing by letting you distribute your screenshots via a URL.

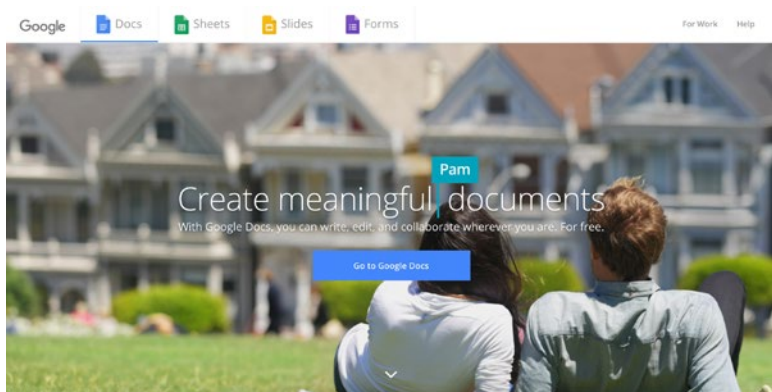
Though Sketch has many great features, I find CloudApp more robust, as it allows me to capture screen recordings, create GIFs, and integrate with the host of other file management and sharing apps I use.

The free plan lets you create and share 10 files per day, which may be enough for many — but know that you'll *probably* lean on this one enough that you'll quickly need more.

Content design tools

Whether you're in the early information architecture (IA) planning stages or jamming on final copy, you'll find a host of content design tools out there to streamline your collaboration with freelance clients. Here are a few of my faves.

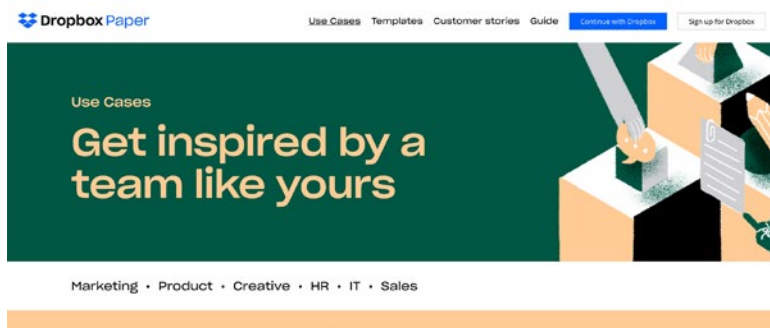
Google Docs



While many designers and content strategists have made the leap to Dropbox Paper, I stand by Google Docs for content creation and collaboration.

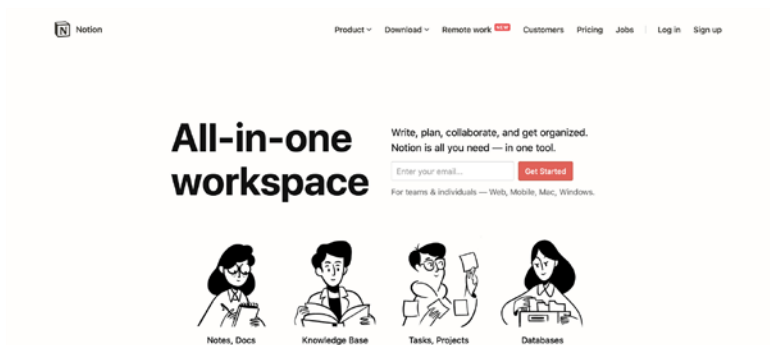
With solid change tracking, a great automatic outline generator, the ability to turn comments into task assignments, and a host of formatting options you won't find in Paper, it's my go-to tool for writing — especially collaborative writing.

Dropbox Paper



If you prefer a default-beautiful design to a highly customizable one, but still want all the collaborative bells and whistles, Paper could be your jam. Especially if you're already living the Dropbox life for your other file management needs.

Notion



You know that feeling you get when you stumble across a new app and *really want to use it* but just don't have a task it fits perfectly? Yeah — that's exactly what I've been feeling for months now about Notion.

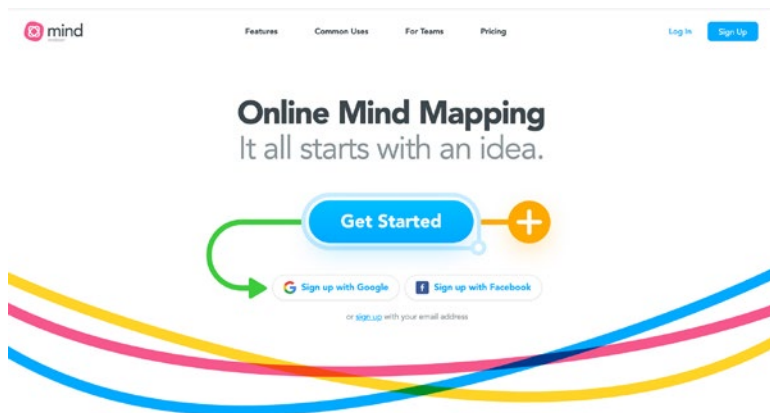
The folks at Notion made the genius move of unifying a writing app, wiki, and task management tool into one nicely designed space, making it *ideal* for those looking to centralize their team management and productivity tools. If our head of content hadn't already built our content guidelines out in Webflow CMS, I *might've* bugged him to use Notion instead.

Bear



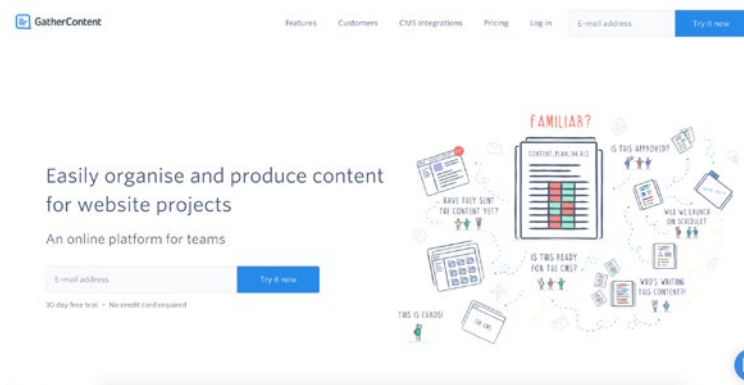
If you're a fan of beautiful, multi-device, Markdown-driven writing apps, Bear's for you. The cross-note linking and use of hashtags to organize and categorize your content are particularly handy for larger projects. Just keep in mind that it might not be the friendliest tool to collaborate with clients in — unless they're fans of Markdown, that is.

MindMeister



When you're brainstorming, designing a content strategy, defining a brand, or conceiving your next sitemap, there's nothing like a beautiful, easy-to-use mindmapping tool. And MindMeister is a great example of the type. It's free for your first three maps, so give it a spin!

GatherContent



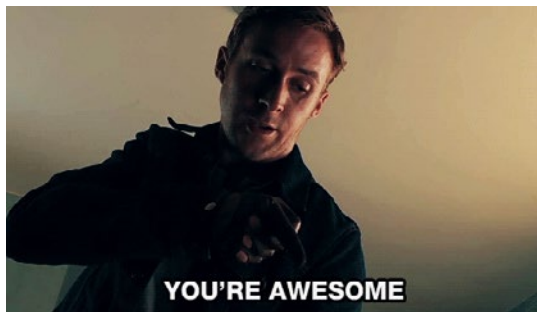
If any tool has ever been built *specifically* for content strategists, it's GatherContent. As the name suggests, it's built to help you handle the intake and management of content from a variety of sources with ease. It allows you to structure content to align with your CMS, build a sitemap and content inventory, and even integrates with several popular CMSs to streamline publishing.

Just remember: you are greater than your tools

Tools and resources can help alleviate the stress of freelancing, but they'll only take you so far.

Your work ethic, dedication to finding new clients, and design skills will *always* be your most important assets. All these apps do is help you deliver all three.

And remember:



webflow

Break the code barrier

WEBFLOW.COM