

The perils of freelancing

 By [Marion Scher](#)

11 Apr 2013

With so many media companies battling right now and staff being laid off, one of the options for media people is to go freelance. After all this could be cool, right? No boss to answer to, no particular hours - get up when you like...

Well, that would be your first mistake. If you're going to make a success out of freelancing the first thing you have to learn is that you're likely to spend even more hours working than you did at your salaried job. There if you didn't work for a few hours, or even a day or more - no worries, your salary was in your account on the 26th of the month as always. Not so with freelancing. You don't work, you don't get paid.

Show me the money

And that's the second problem - getting the money out of clients. As someone who has been earning her living as a freelancer writer, media consultant and trainer for over 20 years I've learned the hard way about getting paid. One of the first things you have to do, whether writing for an established publication or a brand new start-up company, is to find out just how and when you're getting paid.

The ironic thing is it's often the very large, multi-national companies that you have to fight with to get your money. And don't get me started on government departments. I've now got to the point when I inform them that I won't step foot in the door without being paid first. And guess what, it works... Amazing how suddenly the accounts department can come to the party.

Specialise - and have a website

Much as you want to earn money from wherever it may come, rather try and earn your reputation in certain specialisations, such as health writing, editing or press release writing. That way you'll find yourself in smaller ponds of talent with a bigger chance of getting netted.

For people to find you though you need a great website - something that so many freelancers don't have. And I'm not talking about a good website but a great one. And here don't go to your friend's friend who knows someone who does great websites... You need someone with a proven track record of really understanding search engine optimisation and Google Ads. Otherwise you'll find your website on page 9,999 999 under your speciality.

Ultimately it comes down to doing really good work for each client, so that they spread the word and use you again and again.

Top tips for freelancing:

1. Treat it like any job - get up early each day, dress for work and hit the office
2. Make your presence known - website/blog/Twitter/Facebook
3. Specialise in what you're good at and enjoy doing
4. Make sure you are reliable and always be prepared to go the extra mile
5. Keep reinventing yourself - as trends change go with them
6. If you're a feature writer get out there and introduce yourself to editors

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.mediamentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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