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Guide to freelancing and freelance work

Find out how **you can find work** and plan your working year when you operate as a **contractor** or **freelancer**.

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Finding work as a contractor

Whether you want a seamless transition from one contract to another or a short break to recharge your batteries, getting the timing right is crucial when planning your working year.

Obviously, there's no way to guarantee that every contract will land exactly when you want it to. But there are ways to keep yourself visible and maximise your options when the time comes.

This is as true when you're busy as it is when you're looking for work. If you wait until you're out of work before looking for your next role, you could be between jobs for longer than you're comfortable with. So, even when you're in work, it's a good idea to keep your eyes and ears open and your name uppermost in people's minds.

It doesn't have to be expensive. Writing a solid CV may take a little time, but it will cost you nothing. The same applies to taking advantage of online opportunities such as job boards, CV databases, freelance websites and social media. And, for no more than the cost of transport, meeting well- connected recruitment consultants could pay for itself many times over.

You can also create your own website, attend live networking events and try your hand at email marketing.

There are many ways to promote your business. The trick is to experiment and find out which combination of activities works best for you.

Your CV

Your CV is arguably the most important weapon in your jobseeking armoury. When you apply for a new contract, this is the document most likely to influence how likely you are to get an interview. If you post your CV on job boards and CV databases, it'll certainly be your first introduction to many potential clients and recruiters.

As a contractor, your relationship with a client will be different to that between an employee and an employer. As they're not looking to fill permanent roles, employers will be focused on the immediate needs of specific projects. It's unlikely they'll be looking for a future senior manager - or be willing to offer training - when advertising for a fixed term contractor.

For this reason, your CV should home in on what you can do and show lots of proof that you've done it before with great results. Your long-term career goals will be largely irrelevant in this scenario, so save the space for hard evidence of your skills and experience.

CV checklist

Take plenty of time to draft, optimise and polish your CV. No matter how much experience you have and how many successes you've chalked up, keep your CV to two sides of A4. This may call for ruthless editing, however, your CV will stand a better chance of getting read if you stick to this limit.

Here's a step-by-step guide to creating your CV.

1 Start with the basics

Head up your CV with your full name, contact details, any qualifications, industry body memberships and accreditations.

2 Summarise your skills

Set out your expertise and experience. Make this section specific to each role you apply for, or the attributes the client has prioritised.

3 Summarise yourself

Sum yourself up in 50 words or less. Again, personalise this to each role. Focus on what you'll bring to your next role and say when you'll be available.

4 List your achievements

Tell your prospective clients about the results you've achieved or contributed to. Make them compelling and relevant.

5 Set out what you've done

Start with your current or most recent role and work backwards. Give dates and the number of renewals for each role. List any specialist technologies you can work with. Keep it brief when describing older roles. This will allow more space to enlarge on your most recent activity.

Boox tip

Avoid mentioning your fees in your CV. Wait until you've made a positive impression and found out exactly what any role entails before discussing money.

Dealing with recruitment agencies

However long your current or next assignment lasts, the nature of contracting is such that you'll need to find a new role at some point. This is where recruitment agencies can help.

Recruitment agencies come in all sizes – from specialist consultants to multinational businesses. Some work in specific industry sectors while others focus exclusively on contracting and freelance roles.

You'll need to narrow the field down and target the most appropriate recruitment agencies for the work you're looking for. You'll get a good idea who these are from job boards, press ads and word of mouth. Most recruitment agencies are also very active on social media, too, so a quick search on LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook will also give you a good starting point.

Meeting recruiters

Many recruiters like to meet candidates before putting them forward for roles. For this reason, they may invite you to an informal meeting. This is your opportunity to discuss your skills and the sort of contracts you're interested in. It's also important that you sell yourself to the recruiter at the meeting. If two or more candidates are evenly matched in terms of skills and experience, factors such as enthusiasm, credibility and even likeability could be decisive.

Presenting a well-crafted CV and an upbeat, convincing account of yourself to a recruitment consultant will increase your chances of landing the contracts you want.

Sell yourself first – then talk money

When dealing with recruitment consultants, leave the financial negotiations until you've met the client and been offered the contract or a second interview. You'll be in a stronger position to negotiate when a) you've sold yourself and b) know exactly what the role entails. It'll also show that you prioritise what you can put in to a contract over what you can take out.

Boox tip

Don't be afraid to negotiate. Do your own research to get an idea of the market rate for the job on offer and always know your own worth.

Job Boards

Today, there is almost as many job boards as there are different types of job. They're a rich source of opportunity for contractors and freelancers, so it's worth checking in regularly to see what openings are available in your area.

Types of job board

The different types of job board include:

Generic

Covering all industry sectors and all geographical areas. Roles are likely to be across all common commercial disciplines such as accounting, HR, sales, marketing etc.

Niche

Offering specialist roles and related content in specific industries or for uniquely qualified people. Examples include branches of IT, engineering, the legal profession and healthcare etc. Many niche job boards cater specifically to contractors.

Executive

Focusing on higher-paid senior management roles such as managing directors, CEOs, financial directors, etc.

Regional

With a wide range of roles, but within geographical areas such as cities, counties or countries.

Aggregator Sites

Providing job search results from a multitude of job boards.

Using job boards

Using job boards is simple. Most ask you to enter a keyword that describes the type of role you're looking for and the geographical area you want to work in. Their search engine then shows the relevant results. From here, many allow you to refine your search or access further information before applying for roles that interest you.

Major job boards

Because there are so many job boards, it may take you a little time to find those most relevant to you. If you've never used a job board before, follow the links at Quintessential Careers to get a feel for how they work.

Boox tip

Registering with your preferred job boards allows you to upload a CV and manage your applications in one place.

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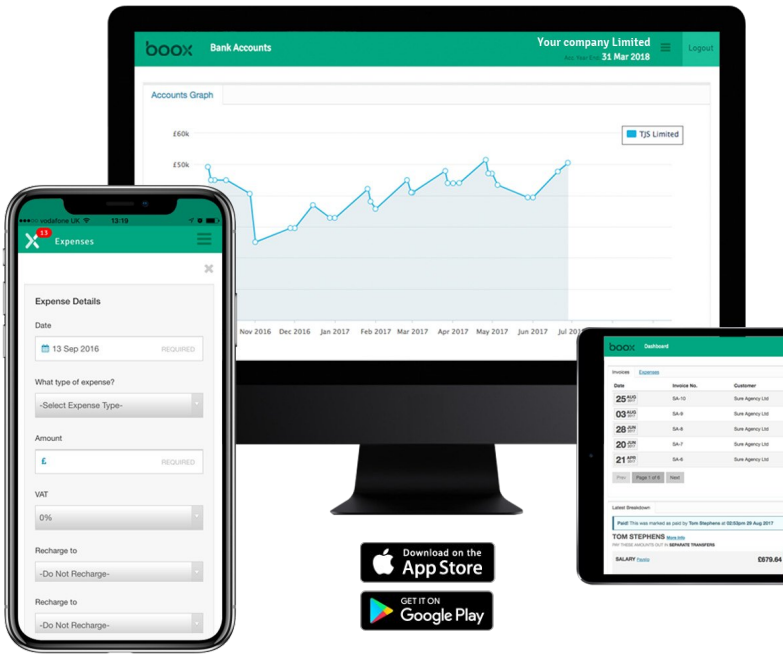

CV Databases

CV databases are slightly different to job boards. While job boards are used by candidates to find work opportunities, CV databases are used by recruiters to find candidates.

By posting your CV to a database relevant to your industry, you'll instantly make yourself visible to an unlimited number of people looking for the skills and experience you can offer. This is yet another reason to refine your CV for maximum impact.

Get creative

In terms of the format of your online CV, the checklist above still applies. However, some CV databases let you upload images, audio files and video as well. Go for it - post footage of yourself answering awkward questions or showing how you'd approach a particular type of problem. It'll help you stand out from the crowd and make a memorable impression.

Get listed

Registering at CV libraries is quick, easy and usually free. If they offer CV writing tips and interview techniques, be sure to take them on board.

Freelance websites

Another useful resource for freelancers is the increasing number of freelance websites. Essentially these are meeting places for businesses looking for freelance help, usually for a one-off project, and a suitable freelancer. The website acts as a go-between.

How freelance websites work

Typically, a client company will advertise its project on the site. Let's say it needs a graphic designer to produce artwork for a brochure. The advert will set out the scope of the project, the deadlines, the level of expertise it wants the candidate to have and the price it is willing to pay. To apply for the role, freelance graphic designers must be signed up with the site and have a profile.

Ideally, they'll have portfolio uploaded too, so the client can see examples of their work. From the applications it receives, the client decides which freelancer, if any, it wants to place the work with and the project gets started. When the freelancer's work is approved, the client pays the freelance website. The freelance website then pays the freelance graphic designer.

Which freelance website?

There are many freelance websites, each with their own strengths across different market sectors and geographical regions. Globally, the big names are Elance, PeoplePerHour, Guru, Freelancer and Upwork.

Boox tip

Your CV will contain personal information. Before uploading it over the internet, make sure you're happy with the data security measures in place at the websites in question.

Boox tip

By signing up to a freelance website, you'll be agreeing to its terms and conditions. As these will affect how you work and get paid by these sites, read the small print carefully before pitching for any work.

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Your Website

With cheap web hosting and free site building tools such as WordPress, getting a professional website up and running is now quicker and easier than ever. Your site is your opportunity to promote your skills, experience and services in your own words and structure. For many potential clients, it could be their first introduction to you and your business.

For others, it could reinforce the impression you create at networking events and other meetings. Use your website to encourage people to contact you directly and connect with you on social media.

Networking online - social media

It's far-reaching, it's fruitful and, in most cases, it's free. No wonder, then, that social media is, to varying extents, used by just about every business serious about networking.

For businesses, the key site is LinkedIn.

LinkedIn

As a business networking tool, LinkedIn is indispensable. Used by 300 million people, it's a place to promote your skills, experience, insights and achievements to a global audience. You can join industry groups, endorse your business associates, get endorsed for your own skills, follow industry news and search for people, companies and recruiters in your sector.

You'll also be able to track your contacts' career progression, as LinkedIn lets you know when they get promoted, move job and achieve other milestones. You can create a personal profile and/or company pages to promote your business and post blogs and other content that will be visible to your contacts.

If you only use one social network for your business, make it LinkedIn – and work it regularly. There's a free membership option as well as premium package, so it doesn't have to cost you money.

Consider also...

Facebook

Good for consumer-facing businesses, Facebook lets you advertise, publish updates about your business and engage with other users

Twitter

Build a following and post links to your blogs – or simply stand out from the crowd with incisive comments or observations on relevant events and developments

Google +

If you write regular blogs and articles, post them on Google+. This will give you search engine visibility not achievable on other social networks

Boox tip

Social media is as much about listening as telling. Use it to learn about your customers and engage with their concerns as well as talking about yourself.

Networking offline - Live Events

Conferences, exhibitions and events such as local chamber of commerce breakfasts are opportunities to network. If the idea of working a room terrifies you, don't worry – many people feel the same.

Network like a natural

Here are four tips to help you get the most from a networking event.

1 Use people's names

People like being addressed personally – within reason. It builds rapport and helps you remember their names too. It can be overdone, though, so use your judgment. When you constantly use the other person's name in a conversation, it sounds false.

2 Ask questions and show interest

People like to talk about their work and love an interested audience. By asking questions and being a good listener, you can develop a real rapport with a new contact. There's also a good chance that you'll find some common ground that could lead to new business for you.

3 Carry business cards

Where possible, exchange business cards when meeting new people in a business setting. As well as showing interest in them, it'll make it easier for you to make follow-up contact after the event.

4 Make follow-up contact after the event

Keep the rapport alive and the contact going. If you've had a conversation that needs following up, do it as soon as you can. And don't forget to connect with your new contacts on LinkedIn and follow them on Twitter.

Networking, both online and offline, gets easier with practice. If you keep at it, you will get results.

Email marketing

Another proven form of business promotion, email marketing is a highly cost effective way to open doors. The downside is that you'll have to spend a lot of time building – and maintaining – an email database and create relevant email communications on a timely basis. You'll also need to know how to avoid getting blocked by spam filters.

Boox tip

Promoting your business can help you avoid IR35 as it goes a long way to proving that you run an independent business and incur costs and risk.

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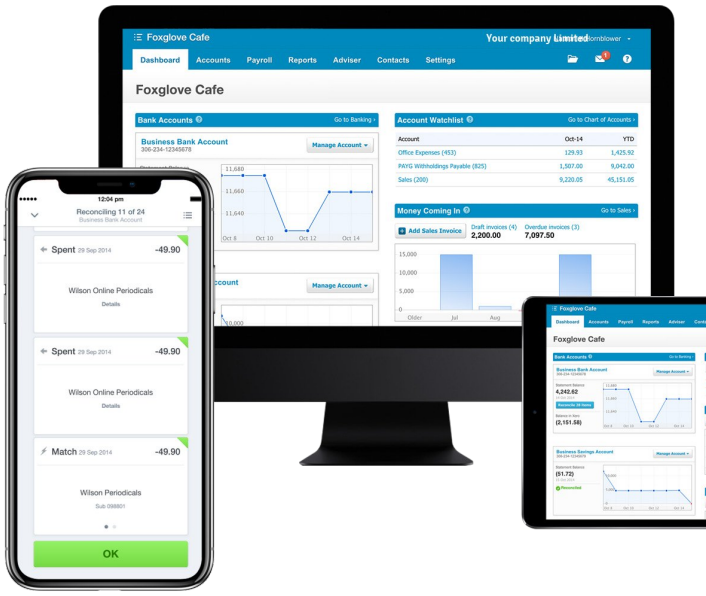

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