THE FINDING CLIENTS GUIDE

> **The biggest questions I get from aspiring freelancers are, "where do you find clients?" and "how did you find your first few clients?"**

This resource is dedicated to reviewing all available options to finding clients both online and in person.

A lot of students place their well-made personal portfolios, profiles and written biographies on online freelancer platforms like peopleforhour.com or upwork.com and are discouraged by the lack of action.

Tumbleweeds roll across the desert and disappointment runs high. **The lack of clients contacting them for work can make them feel like they did something wrong,** their portfolio was not good enough or the pricing was too high.

I want to be honest before this section starts and say that **finding clients online is H-A-R-D.** It is not because of lack of talent on your part, but an oversaturation of people wanting to be freelancers in this new freelancing/gig economy and also the high competition on each one of these websites.

GETTING STARTED

It is not impossible to do very well online. There are freelancers making a good living off working on these online freelancer platforms, but it is not for everyone.

I still recommend trying all sorts of different methods for finding clients, both online and off, but we need to do as much as we can to put ourselves on top of the stack by having a killer portfolio, profile and bio, headshot and being able to set the right pricing for ourselves.

While finding clients is the hardest part of starting a freelance business, the good news is, after you have found those first few clients, **future clients are not as hard to grab as referrals start to take over** and you have established yourself with social proof like reviews and testimonials.

My first year freelancing was mostly locating new work, while my last 15 years were spent actually doing the client work, with little time needed to find new clients.

The following two pages feature selected quotes from students. I asked the question "Where did you find your first client" and these were the results... →

Finding your first client
INSPIRATION BOARD

VOLUNTEERING

"Through a 2 year volunteer position at college."
@raneem_wael

"I was voluntarily making posters for my church, then those with small businesses reached out."
@the_mambz

"I was volunteering in a charity shop. One of the other volunteers heard I was studying a graphic design course and asked me to design the cover of his band's first CD album sleeve!"
@angdevaal

"Offered free work to a non-profit. That helped me practice in real life scenarios, used it for tax deductions and got me work. The board members saw my work and several of them had their own businesses. 10 yrs later I still have some of those customers! Free goes a long way sometimes."
Doris Molina Ramos

COMMUNITY WEBSITES

"Craigslist!!"
@studioguerassio

OTHER/MISC

"A band asked for a t-shirt design…"
@joncarrillocreative

SCHOOL

"I got my first client in University. Master of Computer science's students hire me for developing websites for their final year projects."
@ubink.official

FRIENDS

"For me in university, while I was studying, a friend had a DJ duo and he needed a logo."
@thejeremymura

"Word of mouth and personal marketing led to a family friend reaching out."
@_ericpaonehurd

"A friend referred them to me."
@cassandrabdesign

"Through a friend."
@ayotimz

"A friend of mine asked my web dev partner for help to salvage her broken website. It came to transpire she had no branding and her logo needed a revamp."
Rebecca McLoughlin

"I asked a friend if she knew anyone that was hiring for an admin assistant. I ended up getting a friend request on FB, then a message about doing websites, which was an unexpected surprise.
Tiffany Rolle

"I started doing flyers for my Mom and others liked my work and asked what I charged and it's been trickling along with referrals."
Calista Mollie Branch

"A family friend I have. And when his dad, who's a proprietor of a school needed to change their school's logo, he recommended me.
Kwaku Nsia

"My first client was a good friend. Then referrals through that friend. Then referrals from those clients, and people I talked to at events or reached out to with an inquiry. I had my website up right after. The website was important, all my other clients after my first reviewed my website before proceeding."
Penny O'Halloran

"My first client was my cousin who is an entrepreneur. After making a few logos for a few of his companies he gave me a part time job. I posted the work I made for him on social media and a lot other friends got to know that I do design, who then referred me to clients."
محمد يوسف

"I started designing birthday invitations for my niece and nephews' birthdays. This gave me practice with Photoshop and Illustrator and executing a themed concept. From there, my family and friends recognized my work and asked for other design services like a book cover for my Dad's book and marketing posters, website, etc. for my best friend's children's book. My Instagram account has helped a ton to find clients from afar."
Jason Blank

"I started by working for a friend's startup for almost free. But that was before I knew I wanted to go freelance. When I decided to go that direction, I started an Instagram for logos, and an acquaintance contacted me about a logo and other work, then referred me to another client."
Rachel Buchen

IT PAYS TO HAVE FRIENDS

INSTAGRAM

"I got my first client on Instagram."

@designernishat

I got my first real client on Instagram. I did a design test with them, gave me a chance and I am still working with them 3 years later!

@chareeyah

"I got my first client on Instagram. However, I'm pretty niche so maybe that had something to do with it."

@cattlebrandsig

FACEBOOK

"In a Facebook group!"

@pualena.co

"I got my first client from Facebook."

Raja Shan

"I got a bit frustrated by not finding any design jobs so I answered a post on FB about a PowerPoint presentation. That was something I knew I aced, and it turned out that she needed much more including actual graphic design, plus she referred me to my second client."

Ana Firuti

"I got my first logo and branding clients by posting about my new business on my personal Facebook page."

M.K. Jacobi Pascoe

WHATSAPP

"I did a flyer advertising my services and put it as my Whatsapp status. Someone saw it and I designed a logo for them."

Shanelle Ri

UPWORK

"Through Upwork, by giving them a link to website with lots of case studies and personal projects."

@iamshikhersrivastava

"I got my first client on Upwork, then I got 2nd from Facebook after posting a marketing post then 3rd from 2nd client referral, so the main thing is to provide the best so that you get so many referrals and use LinkedIn for searching clients."

Prabhjot Singh

"I got my first paid project on Upwork. It did not pay much, but it was a big confidence booster because I did not apply for the gig, the client invited me."

Charmaine Fernandes

BEHANCE.COM

"Actually they found me:)) I've been contacted on Behance, and from there it was easy. What I want to tell you guys is that you need to be present with your own portfolio on the sites were you are visible. And patience! Much patience and the offers will come."

Anca Pirtea

WORD OF MOUTH OR REFERRALS

"All in all, my clientele grew from word of mouth and referrals. Til this day, I have not marketed my freelance business at all, but I am still getting word of mouth referrals."

Crystal Lloyd

"

A first client can lead to your second, which can lead to your third. If that is the case, than all the energy you have should be put into finding the right first."

Lindsay Marsh

THE MANY WAYS TO FIND CLIENTS

There is no magic bullet, but there are a few effective ways to find clients.

You will likely use at least three of the folowing client-finding methods covered in this guide in your freelance career.
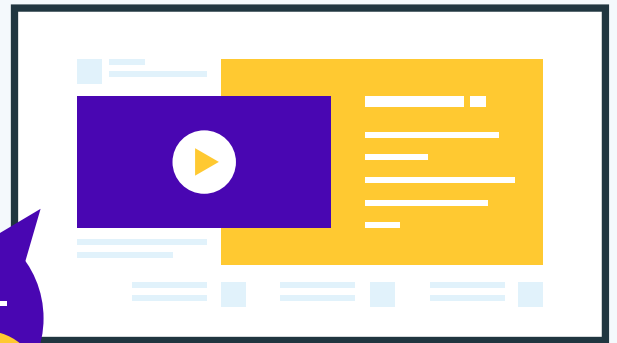
Which way is better?

Well, as always, it depends on what you feel most comfortable with. Some hate talking to people in person, but as we will talk about later, this does not have to be so overwhelming.

Others may find their niche on freelancer websites and dominate the space. I have seen all five of these used successfully by different students and fellow designers.

ON THIRD-PARTY
FREELANCING WEBSITES

WWW

→ **EXAMPLES**

upwork.com
freelancer.com
99designs.com
fivver.com

PROS

+ It gives you access to **warm leads**

+ Great for those who do not feel comfortable talking **face to face** with clients

+ Provides a platform to **give and receive payments** that protects both the client and the freelancer

+ Allows you to set **payment milestones** with clients

CONS

+ Super **competitive**

+ Can be hard to get your **profile approved**

+ 3-10 percent of your total proceeds go toward **fees** for the platform to operate

+ Some platforms like Upwork.com require the purchase of a premium membership to access all the platform has to offer

Freelancing websites like UpWork and fivver (the two biggest) allow you access to a large pool of potential clients who are actively looking for freelancers.

Most of my students start here when it comes to finding their first client because it is easy to create an account or profile.

Because of recent world events there has been a huge uptick in freelancers looking for work. These freelancing websites do all of the hard work for you by placing ads to locate and find clients. Because of these factors it makes it a really competitive landscape.

There are only so many jobs placed on these websites but so many qualified freelancers looking for those spots.

In the case of Upwork.com, freelancers are finding it hard to get their accounts approved, simply because they have been overwhelmed by freelance applications.

I recommend trying for an account with a solid portfolio and nicely written bio. All of these websites operate a little differently. Upwork allows you to apply for freelance job postings while fivver is more of an open marketplace where you can post a job you can do for a client.

Basically, on Upwork you find the client and apply, while on fivver you post a job and the client selects you. In both cases you need an ultra sleek and professional presentation (both visual and written) to be successful and land the rare opportunities. There are many other ways to find clients, which may feel less daunting. Many of my students get frustrated because they put their perfect profile out there and get zero bites. This is why trying multiple client finding strategies is essential.

UPWORK.COM

Simply build a profile, and once you are approved you will be searchable by thousands of potential clients.

You can also apply to freelance jobs by submitting proposals which will include specific things the client requests like portfolio pieces, a written cover letter or other types of requests.

It is still worth the effort to build a profile here, but this heavy competition will make finding those first few clients a bit tough. Here are a few tips creating a solid UpWork profile.
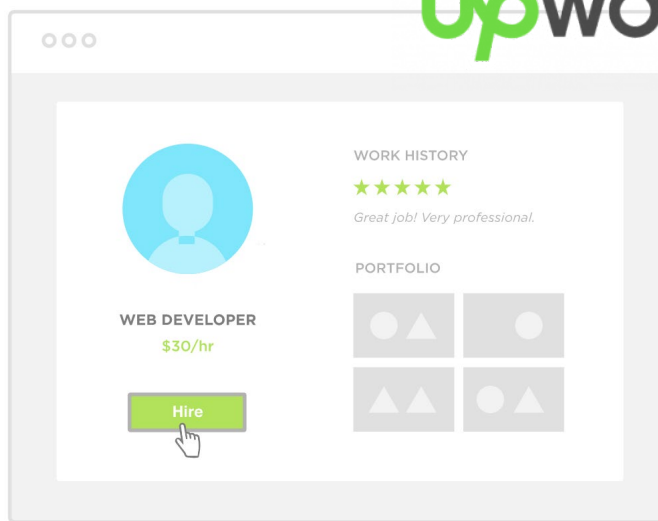
Image source: Upwork.com

THE ANATOMY OF A WELL WRITTEN PROFILE

Includes a professional headshot. Smiles work better than netural poses.

The headline highlights their most important accomplishments.

Odd numbered pricing works better than perfectly even pricing.

The profile bio leads with your unique selling point.

Includes education, skills and other important information.

Features at least three detailed case studies.

Lindsay M.
Richmond, Va, United States – 3:49 pm local time

View profile

Graphic Design

All work

Availability

Available
More than 30 hrs/week

Languages

English: Fluent

Education

Parsons at The New School
Other, Visual Design
2011-2011

Charlotte University
Bachelor's degree, Marketing and Advertising
2001-2006

20 Years of Creating Effective Visuals That Convert
$67.50/hr

Specializes in **Graphic Design**

Portfolio (3)

Elemental Brand Design Project

Pacific Calm Logo Design Project

Brand Design Project for a Contemporary Sushi Restaurant

I combine both marketing experience and creativity to create effective visuals and designs that can drive sales, clicks and engagement with your audience. I have over 20 years of experience as a graphic designer and have worked for small business and large corporations (with employees exceeding 10,000+).

I have worked in leadership roles that required team management as a marketing coordinator and as an art director. I have also completed complex brand design projects as a solo designer and took on many different roles.

I expand the traditional graphic designer role by incorporating marketing strategies and deeper

FIVERR.COM

LOW-COST

fiverr

Freelancers either hate fivver or love it, but most freelancers have not found huge success on fivver, although a small percentage do.

This site, with an insane amount of competition, gives you the ability to post a "gig" on their website allowing others to purchase your offer and purchase "add-ons". These add-ons can increase the total price you receive as a freelancer.

These add-ons can be things like decreasing the time in delivering the project or it could be sending extra file types. Not all projects are priced at $5, although that is the standard rate. The key is offering premium services in hopes of gaining much higher rates.

Basic	Standard	Premium

Premium $160

3 logo version, jpeg and png in high resolution, vector source file, mock up, 9 revisions.

🕐 2 Days Delivery   🔄 9 Revisions

What's Included   ⌄
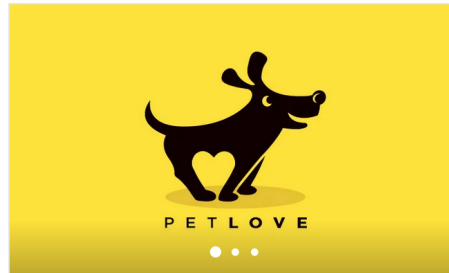
Continue ($160)

Compare Packages

Contact Seller

---

aceofpixels
Top Rated Seller

I will design your social media graphic

⭐ **5.0** (32)

♡   STARTING AT **$25**

---

bossdesigners
Top Rated Seller

I will do a flat modern minimalist business logo design

⭐ **4.8** (1k+)

♡   STARTING AT **$35**

---

drinidesign
Top Rated Seller

I will design heraldic and luxury vintage logo

⭐ **5.0** (719)

♡   STARTING AT **$60**

FACES ARE GOOD

You have one thumbnail to compel the user to check out more of your work. You can build trust with users by including yourself in the shot along with a highly polished headline in your style.

A CLEAR SPECIFIC GOAL

All gigs must start with the two words "I will...". This gig title is very specific, detailed, direct and clear. Gigs that are more specific in nature do better than broad based gigs like "graphic design". In this case, they focused on one specific style and job withen the graphic design realm.

SHOW OFF

This gig has been really sucessful. They included four different versions of the final product so the user can really see the specific style they use to create the logos.

This type of layout works well for gigs that have different variations or for gigs that may be hard to represent using only one photo.

fiverr Pro

fiverr.com/pro

There is something called fivver Pro that requires you to apply to get accepted as a vendor. If you have a great portfolio and some experience there might be a good chance of being accepted there.

Fivver Pro gives freelancers the ability to **charge much higher prices** and have access to a different network of people. Some gigs can exceed $2,000. The key hurdle here is getting accepted into their program. It is worth the try!

Treat fiverr Pro gigs like you would your professional portfolio. Write a thoughtful gig description that walks through your process. You can see below for a great solid example. The premium level for this gig is $4,200. This is a far cry from the $5 fivver gigs you are used to seeing.

Basic	Standard	Premium

FULL BRANDING PACK $4,200

Full branding pack. Standard package + brand guide + stationery design + logo marks + patterns

🕑 45 Days Delivery   🔄 3 Revisions

Continue ($4,200)

Compare Packages

Contact Seller

anamarijaleljak

I will design a bold and authentic brand identity fo...

⭐ 5.0 (6)   *Pro* VERIFIED

♡   STARTING AT $1,800

About This Gig
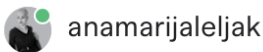
- **About my approach:**

My passion is to get to know you and your brand through **careful and insightful communication** and reflect your authentic brand core into brand identity visuals. With this gig, **you will be provided a dreamed brand identity**, where our process will be managed step by step with open communication which results in a brand identity **crafted to fulfill all your needs and stand out on the market.**

- **About the process:**

After reviewing your questionnaire I will contact you if I will need more information from you. At the beginning **I will deliver you the 2 mood-boards**, so we can narrow and established the exact brand direction. Once we have a clear foundation, I will deliver you x logo concepts (depending on the package) to choose from. We will then refine and finalize the concept of your choice. Once we have a final logo concept defined, I will deliver you the rest of the brand identity visuals. **We work on the project until you have a dreamed brand identity in front of you.**

You are welcome to check my portfolio here on Fiverr, and also on Behance, Instagram and my site :)

Have a question? Feel free to ask me, you are always welcome!

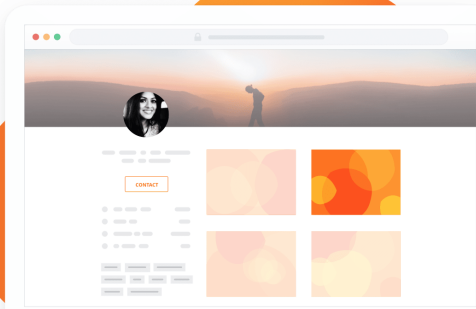*Step up your case study presentation by adding mock-ups and story driven presentations. Show your concept development process.*

peopleperhour.com

Peopleperhour is similar to Upwork in the fact that you create a profile and are able to seek out jobs by sending proposals but also clients can find your profile listed on the website. There are three aspects that make Peopleperhour a bit different than Upwork, however.

First, there is less competition on Peopleperhour as it is a newer platform. Second, they offer the ability to have a portfolio type profile which contains more photos than the Upwork profiles. Lastly, they have something called offers.

Offers give you the ability to post an offer that will be seen on the website for potential clients to see. This can be anything from "I can build a 5-page Wordpress website" to "I can create a social media post in less than 24 hours". If you are familiar with fivver it is a very similar concept. Peopleperhour is not as popular as fivver so it doesn't receive as much organic traffic.

REVIEWS ARE EVERYTHING

On almost any third-party freelancing website, high review scores are needed to rank high in organic search.

For your first job opportunities, make sure to go above and beyond not only for client satisfaction but for the **hope of a positive 5 star review.**

Never be afraid after a job well done to ask for a review.

This is where you sacrifice a few extra hours even if your pay is fixed, to make sure you have not only a strong review but a nice case study to feature using real client work.

Reviews (1332)

4:13AM

Steve C.   ⚲ HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, UNITED KINGDOM   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Superb, fast efficient. Will be using a lot more in the future

SUN 7:01AM

Grigory R.   ⚲ MOSCOW, RUSSIAN FEDERATION   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
thank you for the work

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ANDOVER, UNITED KINGDOM   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

y recommended.   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
nication and provided four great design options to choose
for other projects.

Design Anything You Want (Website Design, Logo, Banner, Vectors)

editing   banner   graphics design

logo   background removal   ...

by Primediart Technolo...
★ 4.8 (1500) $10

delivered in 1 day

OTHER FREELANCING PLATFORMS

freelancer.com

guru.com

toptal.com

WRITING PROPOSALS
FOR THIRD-PARTY WEBSITES

great proposal responses...

Are simple and concise

Personal not generic

Have a touch of personality

Favors experience over empty words

Custom tailored to each client

Address possible client concerns

Graphic designer needed to create a small magazine

Graphic Design
Posted 16 minutes ago

📍 Only freelancers located in the U.S. may apply. ❓

Graphic designer needed to create a small magazine - all the content has already been drafted - need help adding visualization to the content. Timeline - 4-6 weeks.

🕐 **Less than 30 hrs/week**
Hourly

📅 **1 to 3 months**
Project Length

🧠 **Intermediate**
I am looking for a mix of experience and value

🕐 **$25.00-$125.00**
Hourly

RESPONSE

I am a designer who has a PASSION for layout design and I have created over twenty full magazine layouts for high circulation publications.

I noticed you had a timeline of 4-6 weeks, that is a very respectable deadline that I can more than meet.

You will see attached to this proposal a pdf for a recent editorial desgin project so you can see a sample of my work. I was responsible for the layout for the entire magazine, including any advertising pages and the front cover.

I look forward to having a conversation about this project and how we can get started immediately.

HEART + EXPERIENCE
Strong written proposals start off with a personal touch. Quickly bring up your most valued attribute that pertains to this project. In this case the prior experience creating the exact project requested.

LETTING THEM KNOW YOU ARE UP FOR THE TASK
Here I addressed the timeline for the project. In editorial publishing, deadlines are so critical, I reassured them that this deadline is attainable.

PROVIDING THE PERFECT SAMPLE
Attached a project that most closley matches with the job request. If this was for a logo desgin, attach just a handful of your favorite samples.

CALL TO ACTION
Always end a proposal by putting the ball in their court. Remind them that you are open, available and ready to start.

LOCAL NETWORKING

EXAMPLES

Meetup.com
Local small business groups
Your Local Chamber of
Commerce
Religious gatherings
Friends and Family
Classmates

PROS

+ **This tends to produce the best quality clients**

+ **It gives you close proximity to your client**

CONS

+ **Can be hard if you have a fear of meeting new people**

+ **Tough on introverts**

+ **It can take more time to find a connection**

Humans love what is familiar and that is why local connections make great first clients.

After interviewing hundreds of students about their experience with finding their first client and my own experience, I have come to the conclusion that local networking is the single best way to find clients. But why is this?

You already have so much in common with local clients. Local clients can be family or friends who may already be warm leads.

Imagine having to hire an accountant to handle a complex financial matter. I know I would feel a lot more comfortable hiring someone in my town than I would across the globe. Humans love what is familiar and that is why local connections make great first clients.

In my research, over 50 percent of those surveyed said they found their first client from family or friends, with some through friends of friends.

The most powerful network is your own. Every friend needs to know you are actively looking for freelance design work. This could also be connecting with friends or acquaintances you have not talked to for awhile. If they do not have work for you they could run into someone they know who does need work.

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION?

It is the idea that we are all only 6 connections away from each other. So, if I have 100 connections, and those 100 connections each have 100 connections, and those connections each have 100 connections and so on, I could easily find a way to connect to you.

This means the friend of a friend idea can be incredibly monumental in finding possible client connections. Sometimes it can just be local meetings with people in the elevator, at a baseball game or at the bank.

My own story of how I found my first client was a local networking connection. I happened to be at my husband's graduate school waiting for him to get out of class. In the hallway I happened to strike up a conversation with the woman who was standing outside her office. One thing lead to another and I mentioned how I was learning graphic design and I was looking for opportunities to practice what I had been learning.

She happened to be the marketing director for the school and decided to give me a small job. She loved the work I produced and quickly found several other smaller jobs to do. **That ended up being a 10 year client relationship.**
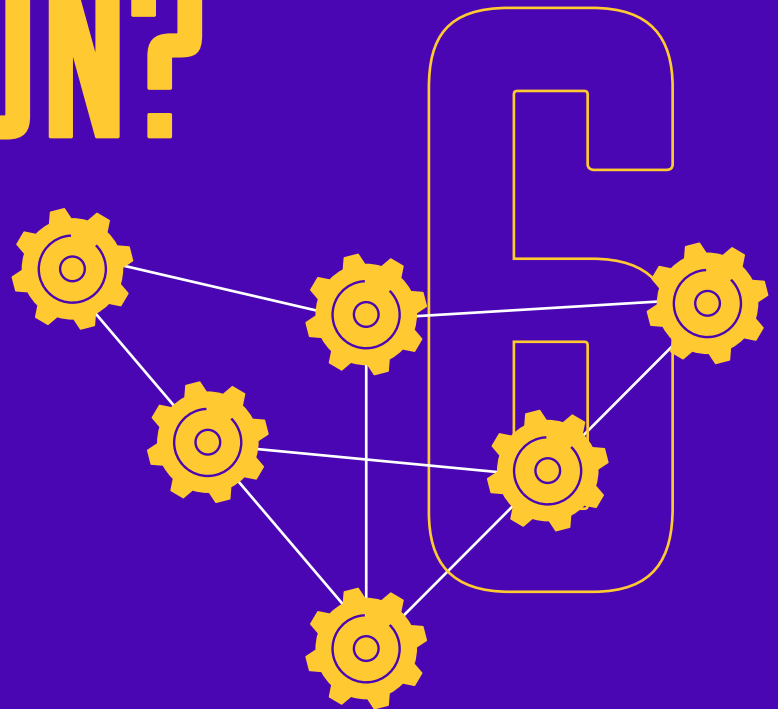
> **She loved the work I produced and quickly found several other smaller jobs to do. That ended up being a 10 year client relationship.**

MAKING LOCAL CONNECTIONS THAT LAST!

My favorite and most recommended step in finding clients is connecting with local small or medium-sized business owners. You can do this online by finding **local Facebook business groups.**

You can do this in person by connecting with your chamber of commerce or local small business body/group or gathering. Perhaps serving on the board of directors or volunteering for a local non-profit to make connections. **Asking to speak or teach at a local small business seminar or workshop, etc. about marketing, branding or design. This allows you to present yourself as an industry expert, which can draw in lots of potential client work.**

It may sound old school, but visiting local business with a business card or something else in your hand can help land you those first few clients. **Great clients tend to refer you to other clients,** and local ones tend to do that more because of the personal relationship you build with them.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER FREELANCERS

Connecting with other freelancers is a great idea, but not for the reason you might think. Being with other freelancers is a healthy thing to do, to network, to get out of the house and to share experiences. **But a big benefit to connecting with certain freelancers is to share and swap clients.**

Let's say you are visual designer who specializes in web design and graphic design. You are not comfortable coding but can turn any rough idea into something beautiful. One thing you can do is seek out a freelancer who has an excellent coding and web development background but may not have a strong visual design background. With the two of you now connected, **you can share client work and give the client not only the visual side but the development/coding side as well.**

Early on, I was able to find, through a client's connection, a local programmer who sent me several clients. I did the web design and they did the back-end coding and adapted it to a CMS or content management system like WordPress.

Another example of this in action would be, if you are an illustrator, how about finding and teaming up with a T-shirt entrepreneur? They are bound to need more custom hand drawn illustrations for their t-shirts.

Finally, if you are a photographer, teaming up with other event planners can help you land future wedding photography gigs. If you are a copywriter or editor, there are many freelancers that need your skills like editorial designers, web designers and anyone who works with written type.

You can find people online or offline. The great thing about connecting with someone locally is finding and serving local clients together and being able to meet face to face to discuss plans and build that long-term relationship.

WHERE TO FIND LOCAL CONNECTIONS

MeetUp.com
LinkedIn.com
Facebook.com
(search for a local small business group in the groups section)

Your Local Chamber of Commerce
Serving in Voluntary Capacities
Connect with those needing your skills
(Website Coder/Developer may need a Graphic Designer for client projects!)

ONLINE NETWORKING

EXAMPLES

Behance.com
Facebook Groups
Instagram
TikTok
YouTube
Clubhouse
Linked-In Groups
Reddit
Other Social Networks

"

The trick to finding connections through social networks is solidifying yourself as trustworthy.

This is a bit different from freelancing websites because the clients are not brought to the website for you. People on social networking websites can be anyone, those looking or not looking for freelancers. The trick to finding connections through social networks is solidifying yourself as trustworthy.

Facebook groups is a popular way to connect with potential clients. **Creating a post on a group that advertises your fivver gig or website without much context can quickly get you kicked out of high quality groups (mine included).** If groups do allow self promotion then your post will join hundreds of others that get almost **zero attention in the sea of spam.**

Finding quality clients on Facebook or other social media groups is a bit of a long game. It takes weeks or even months of having real conversations with those in their group to gain trust with them. This goes for all social media networks. **Create posts that are helpful to others, not just self promotion.**

Also, make sure you are joining the right groups to be a part of. Make sure to find groups that would need your services, like small business groups. Advertising your services to a group of fellow designers could be pointless, when everyone else in that group is also looking for the same work you are.

PROS

+ **Easy to setup a profile and start networking**

+ **It can be absolutely free**

CONS

+ **Being on multiple platforms can be hard to manage**

+ **It can take a lot of time to build an audience and find organic traffic**

+ **It takes time to build trust with people**

Try finding online groups that are local if possible first, before branching out to large groups where you can easily get lost. Behance.com is a portfolio website that I encourage every student to be a part of. **I have heard design agencies constantly look for work on these websites.** You can also use it as a way to showcase your work (portfolio) if you do not have access to an individual website or do not want to pay a monthly hosting fee for one.

A great way to get noticed by clients or larger companies looking for designers is to become an authority on the subject. This means creating videos or posts that contain helpful information about design or freelancing.

This can be a learn-as-you-go situation and you can post what you learn that day. This is why we become lifelong learners, so we can pass that information along. This method takes a lot of time investment but can be something that pays off big after a year of building that authority.

For example, you are a calligrapher, who does custom stationary design. Why not host a calligraphy style livestream that shows off different calligraphy lettering styles?

Or you are a UX/UI designer and you host a free webinar to small business owners looking for tips and tricks to building a great e-commerce website.

BEHANCE.COM
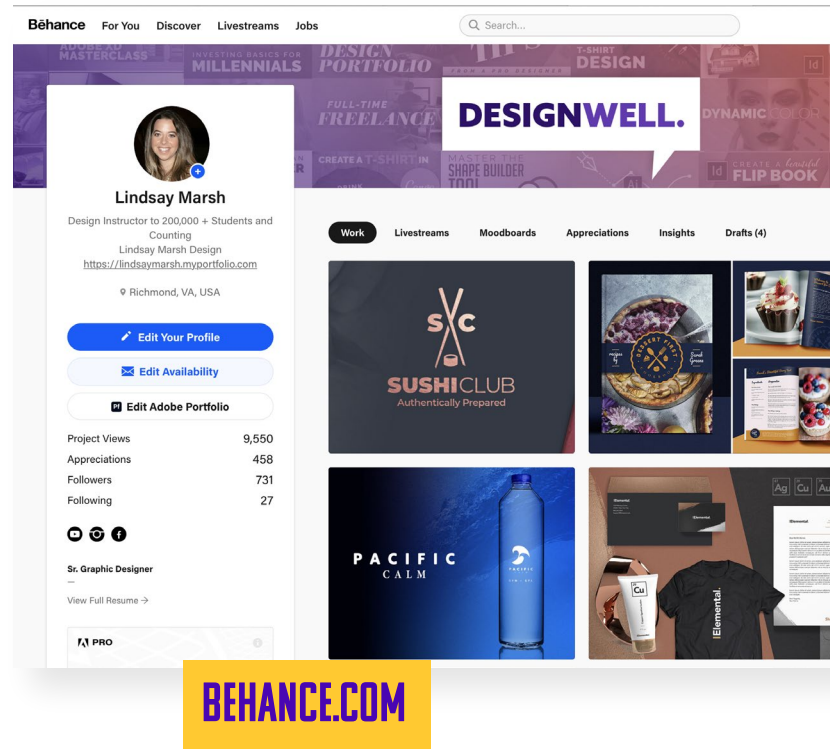
INSTAGRAM.COM

There have been many of my students who have posted their work and ideas on their Instagram profiles to later receive private messages from potential clients looking for design work. It never hurts to gain wide exposure on multiple social media platforms by giving advice, helping others and being genuine.

I receive multiple client prospects every month from Instagram by posting three times a week on my account.
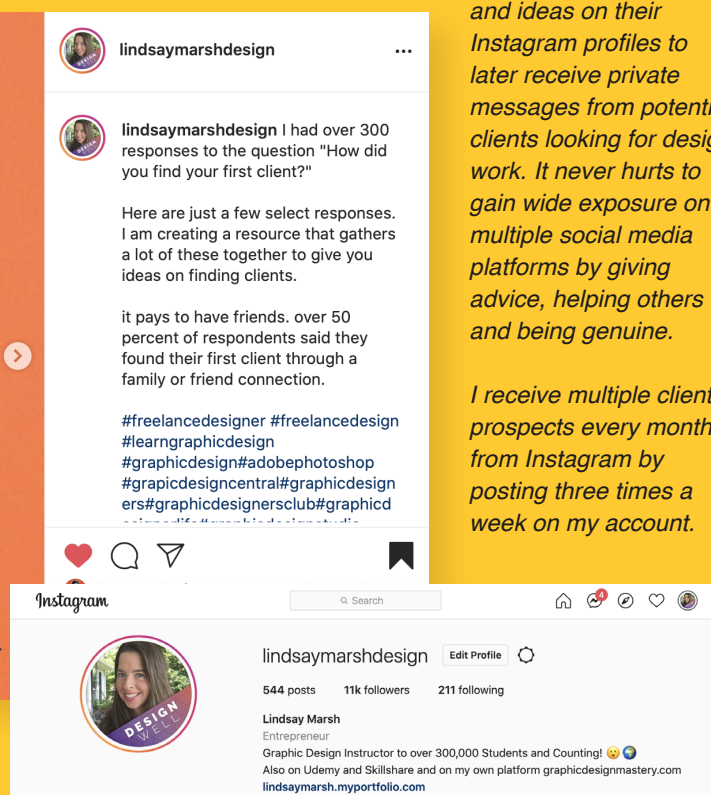
CLIENT REFERRALS

PROS

+ **Requires little marketing after finding the first few clients**

CONS

+ **You must have clients who are willing to refer you**

> **Blow your client out of the water. Also, be upfront about referrals after you finish the job.**

The referral system is amazing. If your first client refers you to your second and your second refers you to your third you can easily see how most of your clients can come from word of mouth. What gets even more incredible is if your first refers you to another client and so on, this creates a large web of contacts that are doing the hard marketing work for you.

How do you get clients to refer you? First of all, do amazing work. Go above and beyond to make it brilliant. Get feedback from fellow colleagues, friends and family to really make sure what you are sending to your client is top notch. Sometimes, it's just about being available to the client, and responding back to them quickly.

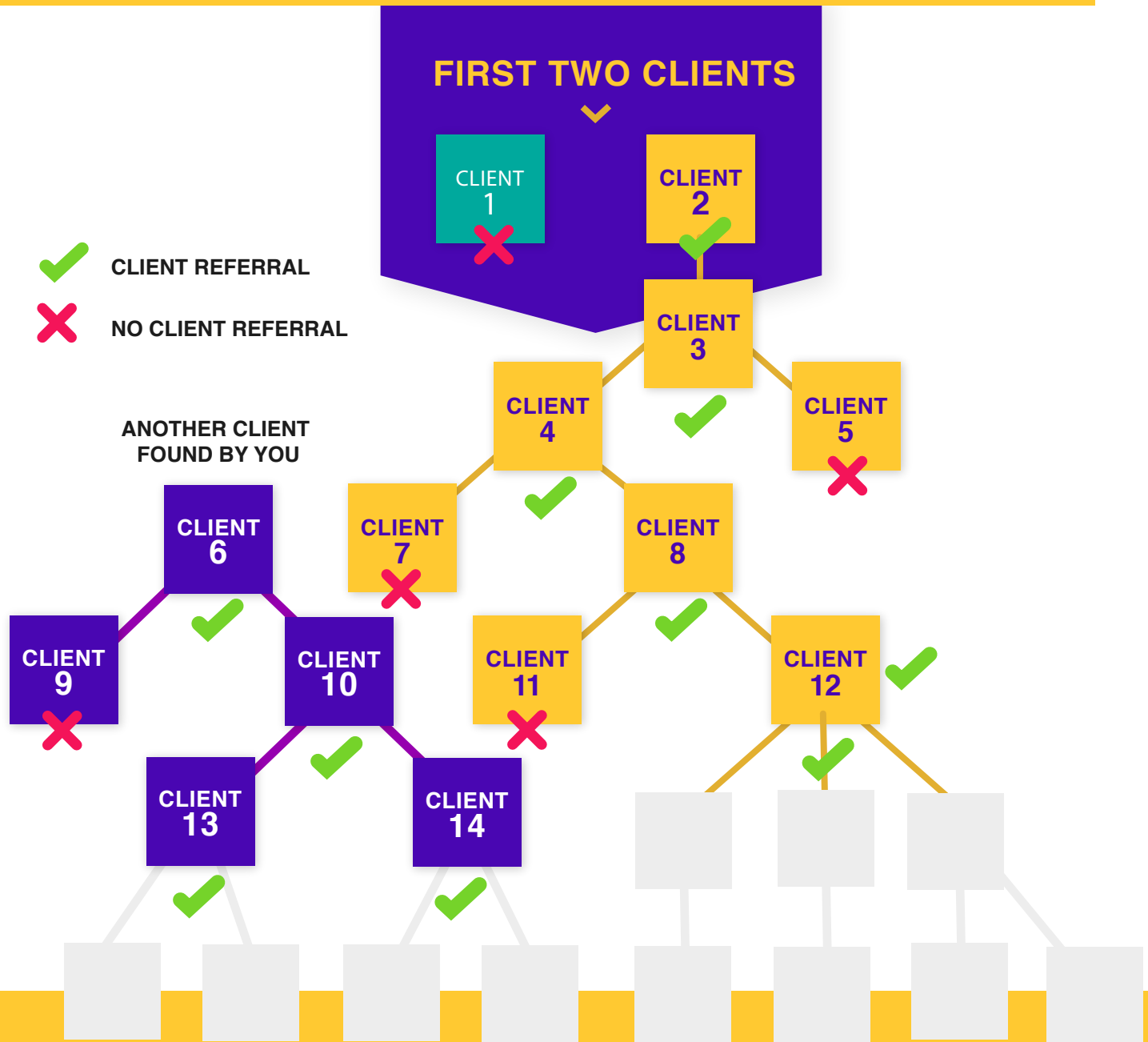Overall, it is about providing a solid customer experience. I know of a friend who bakes birthday cakes as her side business. She baked a cake for a good friend and later ran into that friend at a large party. This friend preceded to tell everyone in the room what she did and that she makes the most amazing cakes. **Later that week she was contacted by 8 families all wanting cakes for special events.** From there she continued to get referrals from those 8 jobs all because she did such an amazing job for her first client.

It is hard to find good, dependable people. It is even harder to find people who do things in a timely manner, are professional and prompt. Blow your client out of the water. Also, be upfront about referrals after you finish the job. Writing a quick e-mail (like the sample I provide a couple pages ahead) can be helpful in encouraging them to do just that.

THE REFERRAL SYSTEM

FIRST TWO CLIENTS

CLIENT 1 ✕

CLIENT 2 ✓

✓ CLIENT REFERRAL

✕ NO CLIENT REFERRAL

ANOTHER CLIENT FOUND BY YOU

CLIENT 3 ✓

CLIENT 4 ✓

CLIENT 5 ✕

CLIENT 6 ✓

CLIENT 7 ✕

CLIENT 8 ✓

CLIENT 9 ✕

CLIENT 10 ✓

CLIENT 11 ✕

CLIENT 12 ✓

CLIENT 13 ✓

CLIENT 14 ✓

Let's say client one never refers you to anyone else, but client two does. You complete work for the second client's referral and that referral gives you another referral. You can start to see this web of relationships that start to develop as your name gets passed around to different contacts.

LONG-TERM & SHORT-TERM CLIENTS

There are also two types of clients. Long-term steady clients that give you constant work each month, week or day and short-term clients that have a one-time project. Long-term clients that give you steady work are the most valuable clients around. **Sometimes it is even worth charging a little less for those clients to establish that longer-term relationship over taking short-term projects that pay more.**

"It only takes several long-term steady clients to fill up your weekly work schedule, which of course is a good thing if finding clients is a huge chore to you."

So, take heart, this is the hardest aspect of freelancing and it will not be your main task forever. **Doing great work with the first few clients can pay huge dividends for your future freelancing career.**

Once you build up a nice combination of long-term clients and a few short-term clients and continue to get that referral system going, you can see how finding clients will be just a temporary battle.

Try having a nice mix of both long-term and short-term client work to keep your cash flow steady

LONG-TERM CLIENTS (Steady Work)

SHORT-TERM CLIENTS (Bursts of Work)

ASKING FOR A
CLIENT REFERRAL

Dear Client (insert name here),

I am so glad you enjoyed the overall process and that you are happy with the outcome of our project. I wanted to let you know I am continuing to grow my business further and would appreciate you passing my name along to anyone who may also need design services. Once again, thank you for the opportunity and I look forward to continued collaboration on further projects.

Best Wishes,
Your Name

FEEL FREE TO BORROW THIS ↑

PAID OR SPONSORED POSTS

PROS

+ **It could put you in front of thousands of potential clients**

CONS

+ **Costs money to run ads without a guarantee the ad spend will gain you new clients**

This is rare but the higher your price and the larger your team the more targeted paid ads can help you target more specific clients.

Let's say you are offering $200 logo design packages. You might land a client after a $100 ad spend, but that only leaves you with a $100 profit afterwards, hardly worth the expense.

If you charge $5,000 for a brand design package and it takes $1,000 worth of ads to locate a paying client, than that leaves you with $4,000 in profit leftover.

This is can be hard for those just starting out and it is rare for freelancers to run their own paid ads, unless they are selling a digital product like a book, course or digital assets, but I wanted to mention this as an option for higher dollar projects.

> **If you charge $5,000 for a brand design package and it takes $1,000 worth of ads to locate a paying client, than that leaves you with $4,000 in profit leftover.**

PAID ADS INTRODUCTION

This gets a little bit into marketing your freelance business, but I wanted to talk about your options when it comes to paying for exposure through boosted posts and paid online ads.

Sometimes, to get a business started, there needs to be a little bit of financial investment in terms of marketing. Not everyone will need to pay for ads, as some of the other free networking and client finding activities mentioned in this course can land you those first few vital clients. **For those who struggle, even after trying out all free avenues, it might be time to consider a small investment and test out some paid ads to see how they convert.**

There are several types of online paid ads. First off, all there are display ads, which can be purchased from online news websites and other local websites for a monthly fee. I find these more effective for larger companies and less so for freelancers, but I prefer doing display ads in local networks in your nearby town, as display ads for national or international websites can be just too costly for a new freelancer.

PAID FACEBOOK ADS

Next there are paid Facebook ads. You can set up a Facebook ad account in just a few minutes and craft your first ad. You can do either a Facebook post ad which shows up in your targeted users news feed or you can do boosted posts which expose one of your normal Facebook business page posts to a broader targeted audience.

Facebook changed how their search algorithm worked back in 2016 to favor paid and boosted business posts over organic posts, so it is hard to grow organically on Facebook without trying to bring users in through other sources.

I prefer boosted posts because they can feel more natural for a freelance business. The key to creating a great Facebook boosted post or paid ad is to define your target audience well. We have already worked on that a bit earlier in the class and there is a good reason why!

I would start off with a very small budget for your first boosted post or ad. That way you can see if small changes in your campaign, whether it be the image you use, the headline or tweaking the audience has any changes in conversions or new clients in your case.

Rarely can you create the perfect ad right away. This is because it takes a few ads running to find out which ones are more effective as you are still getting to know your target audience.

DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE

Image source: Facebook.com

PAID INSTAGRAM ADS/POSTS

Instagram is another option for boosting your posts. **First of all, you will need to convert your Instagram account into a business profile** by going to account settings and ticking "switch over to business profile". Once that is complete you will notice new "promote" buttons on all of your posted content.

This acts just like a boosted post. You can define your audience and budget and you can do a small test to see if it boosts any of your numbers.

Once you sign up for a business account (which is free by the way), you now have access to more stats about each post including profile visits, your reach, where each view came from, likes, your hashtags, home page or from your followers. This extra detailed information about each post is so vital in helping you define your target audience but also find out what content tends to give a bigger response.

I have found that posting helpful guides for my target audience works better than more promotional style posts where I show off my work. For example: if you are a web developer, you can do a series of posts that gives advice to small businesses about proper website layout and structure.

♥ 47	● 0	◥ 0	🔖 7

Interactions ⓘ

4
Actions taken from this post

Profile Visits	4

Discovery ⓘ

328
Accounts reached
17% weren't following you

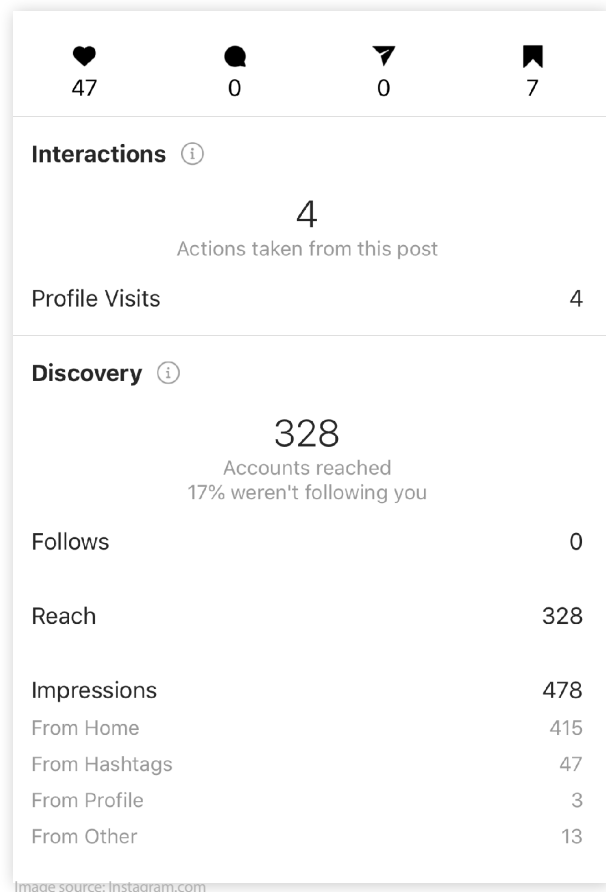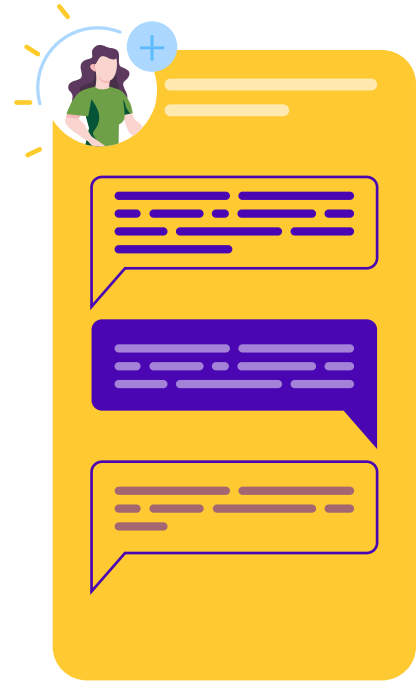| Follows	0
Reach	328
Impressions	478
From Home	415
From Hashtags	47
From Profile	3
From Other	13

Image source: Instagram.com

DIRECT
MESSAGING

EXAMPLES

Facebook Messager
Instagram Direct Messages
WhatsApp
Linked-In

PROS

+ **Offers one-on-one direct access to a stakeholder of a company**

CONS

+ **It can be hard for those who do not enjoy direct sales**

+ **Direct messaging, when done too much can lead to being banned from a social media platform.**

As a recent example, I was contacted on Facebook messenger by someone who was offering their social media marketing plan, essentially they wanted to run my Facebook ad campaign for me. I have previously been contacted by several marketing agencies with similar direct messages. What made this different is he really **customized his message to me.**

I could tell it was not a "copy and paste" message as there was very specific information about my product in the message. **He also sent a two minute sales pitch video** that talked specifically about my product and why he was interested in working with me. I was

I was very impressed, so much so that I had a Zoom call with his company and gave him the job.

very impressed, so much so that I had a Zoom call with his company and gave him the job.

Most business owners get several hundred of these direct messages from people selling some sort of service. **They most likely read the first sentence of each one so they can determine if it is spam or not.**

You have to have something in that first sentence that shows that it is not just a copy and paste message, it is a tailored message for their eyes only. This proves to the business owner that you took the time to research their company and can **offer a solution that is not generic but custom**.

Do not start a message with "my name is..." and I offer this "service". This is instantly seen as a generic sales pitch.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ONE COULD MESSAGE A POTENTIAL BUSINESS OWNER ABOUT DESIGN SERVICES.

Hello (First name for casual conversations or last name for a more formal introduction),

I saw that you opened your new restaurant last month, congratulations! I noticed that you did not have a website that allowed customers to order online or check out the menu.

According to the Marsh Restaurant Study from 2019, it mentioned how restaurants that have visuals of their menu items available on a website had 20% more foot traffic than those who did not.

My name is (First and Last Name) and I have been creating custom websites for clients for over 4 years. Let's connect sometime soon and talk about creating a website for "name company here".

I think we can provide fantastic visuals that will convince those who are wary of checking out a new place to make a reservation.

I look forward to hearing from you and we can connect on zoom, Skype, the phone or just continue to chat a bit here in messenger.

Notice how the message was very custom to the needs of the client.

It addressed an issue with something they don't offer and you provide a **solution for their problem.**

This message also **sells your services toward the middle** of the message and not at the start.

It also ends the with a call to action for them to connect you in some way and is very specific about your availability.

The tone of the message is open and friendly.

Linked in®

LinkedIn.com is overlooked by a lot of young freelancers because they normally associate it with finding full-time jobs.

It provides a place to make connections with business owners and gives you a chance to connect with them personally through messages.

This is a great way for freelancers to connect with business owners directly.

It also helps if you fill out your profile completely and make as many connections and client testimonials as possible.

Finding the right person to message can require a little bit of research. You need to locate those who make decisions on hiring design work. **Some titles to look out for are: marketing coordinator, creative director, art director, social media manager, and (mostly for local small businesses) owner/operator.**

NON-PROFIT WORK

PROS

+ You can do work that is rewarding and helpful to others and it could lead to paid work at that same organization or others

CONS

+ There is no guarantee it will lead to paid work.

Working for non-profits is its own reward. You get to support a important cause and you can meet some wonderful people along the way.

Volunteer your services to those who need it most: small struggling non-profits. A simple e-mail to the director of an organization can open up doors for volunteer opportunities while also leaving that door open to possible paid work later on.

You can also e-mail a volunteer coordinator at larger organizations if you feel a direct e-mail or message to the director might be missed.

> **A simple e-mail to the director of an organization can open up doors for volunteer opportunities while also leaving that door open to possible paid work later on.**

→ **EXAMPLE E-MAIL**

Dear (put director's name),

Your organization and I share a lot of the same values. That is the care and proper treatment of shelter animals.

I am a young designer who is currently studying graphic design at (name college or course you are taking here) and I am looking for opportunities to use my new found design skills on tangible projects.

I am wondering if you had any small projects I could take off your hands so I can show you how I can help your organization. I can do lots of different graphic design related tasks including logo design, social media posts, flyers and brochures.

I noticed you had your annual event coming up in two months, is there something specific you need help with for that event?

In exchange, I would love the opportunity to use the design in my portfolio. I know this e-mail is out of the blue, but your cause really inspired me to get involved somehow and it also gives me a chance to hone my craft further.

I would love a chance to talk further by phone or zoom, I am excited about any possible collaboration now or in the future.

Blessings, (Your Name)

POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO "PRO BONO" OR VOLUNTEER WORK

This may or may not lead to paid work after completing projects for this non-profit. But, it can lead to several amazing things:

1 **A client testimonial** you can put on your portfolio and website

2 You can create a **case study** featuring the work you did for this non-profit

3 A **possible referral** to paid work from the director or other employees you work with

4 You get a chance to **practice** project work flow with a group or team

With so many benefits it can be easy to look past not getting paid, at first.

Be careful to not get taken advantage of. There may come a point where you do want to convert them to paid work or decide to focus on paid clients. Never do free work for anyone with any expectation that it will be paid work. That is the hope, and sometimes the case, but make sure your expectations are moderated.

NON-PROFIT IDEAS

Consider the list below for possible local entities that could use your services at either low cost or free to get your foot in the door.

This does not have to be free services, sometimes contacting a local school for example and letting them know you are giving them a "non-profit" discount by cutting your rates by a third can help motivate them to contact you.

You can find phone numbers and e-mails to administrators of the following below by visiting their websites. Preferably e-mail someone who would be making marketing decisions, like a marketing coordinator, principal or manager.

LIST OF NON-PROFIT LOCAL GROUPS

Your Local Public School System

Local Colleges and Universities

Local Charity Groups

Public Services

Government Institutions

Local YMCA

Civic Leagues

Your Local Chambers of Commerce

Recreational Clubs or Sports Teams

Example Letter/e-mail to a non-profit group

Dear _____

My name is _____ and I have provided _____ services in the local _____ area for several years. I am looking to expand my freelance business locally by connecting with local non-profits and offering my services at half the going rate in exchange for networking opportunities, referrals or testimonials.

Take a look at my portfolio here to see if my skill set or style matches any of your current needs. I would be happy to talk further on the phone or by e-mail at any time. Thank for your time and I look forward to creating great things together to benefit _____.

Catchafire matches skilled professional volunteers with nonprofits to help them increase their capacity and achieve their missions.

CATCHAFIRE.ORG

Who says working for free has to be unfulfilling?
There are several places to volunteer your services to clients in the non-profit space. There is a website called catchafire.org that lists non-profit companies needing work in a wide variety of fields.

This is great for getting your foot in the door at several smaller or even larger non-profit companies. There is also the possibility that the free services you offer them could turn into paid, if they really enjoyed your project or work and they possibly get funding for more projects.

Catchafire

Volunteers ⌄   Organizations ⌄   How It Works ⌄   SIGN IN   JOIN

Virtual **volunteer** projects that fit your schedule

FIND A PROJECT

We're on a mission to mobilize the world's talent for good

Catchafire strengthens the social good sector by matching professionals who want to donate their time with nonprofits who need their skills.

See our 2019 Impact Report

SPEC WORK

PROS

＋ **It gives you a chance to practice with client briefs**

CONS

＋ **Highly likely you will not get paid**

＋ **It can make you feel discouraged**

WARNING!

I believe freelancers should be *fairly compensated* for their work when they reach a certain skill level. I only recommend the websites above for those in the very beginning of their freelancing journey and do not recommend the following websites listed for *long term client work.*

AIGA or the American Institute of Graphic Arts has this stance on speculation work (spec work), "AIGA believes that professional designers should be **compensated fairly** for their work and should negotiate the ownership or use rights of their intellectual and creative property through an engagement with clients. To that end, AIGA strongly encourages designers to enter into client projects with full engagement to show the value of their creative endeavor, and to be aware of all potential risks before entering into speculative work."

99designs.com is an example of a spec work website. You notice a project posted on that website that requires a logo design. You complete the logo

design and post it for the world to see. The client also receives 50 other designs for the same project. The client picks a winner and only that winner is compensated. You were not the winner so your design remains on the website for others to see.

This design can be ripped off by other designers who saw your work. It also is hard to reuse because it was specific to the client company and brief. You may use this project in your portfolio and that is the benefit of spec work. There is also a chance you may win and I have had some students win a design contest on rare occasion.

I THINK SPEC WORK IS OK IF YOU REALIZE THREE THINGS ABOUT IT:

1 Do not expect to get paid (if you win that is just a bonus!) **But never expect it.**

2 It gives you **good practice** by working with real client briefs.

3 **It's a good portfolio builder** if you do not have one yet . This is great for those who are still learning and practicing, but never rely on it as a source of income or connection with others.

MY PERSONAL
FREELANCE STORY

I had a dream, like many of you have now, of not working for one employer, not having to get up and show up at the office at a specific minute of the day, not having to ask for time off hoping it would be approved and finally, not having to deal with office politics and drama.

After working in the financial industry, working at a job with a wonderful half sized cubical, I decided to quit my job.

I did not plan to quit my job that day but after a tough phone call with a customer, (I did customer phone support) I decided to walk over to my boss and quit. My husband and parents were not too happy as I had nothing lined up. I always had a passion for Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator; playing around with those programs and being creative were things I did for free in my spare time. I decided to slowly teach my self how to become a graphic designer by studying those who were successful online and taking video-based courses and watching YouTube videos.

During that time, I did need income, so I worked at a local daycare while I spend most of my evenings practicing design work.

My first client happened to be a local connection my husband had at his graduate school. I happened to be at the school with him and I started talking with the student admissions director. I started telling her what I was learning and even showed her some stuff online. Back then it was not impressive. But to her, I was exactly what she needed, someone who understood the school and its target audience but could also deliver some design work for branding and school marketing materials.

There it was, my first client! All because I talked about what I was passionate about. I did the BEST work I could do for them, going above and behind the call of duty or what I was getting paid. They ended up giving me over 20 hours of work per week! I thought, "I am half way to making this a full-time gig! This might actually happen for me! "

It took getting one strong client to change the direction of my business.

They referred me to a much bigger client, and then they referred me, and then the original client found another referral and soon enough you have little ambassadors sending work your way. I ended up with 4 long-term steady clients that gave me 80 percent of my work throughout the years, which freed me up to work on projects and less time finding clients. Fortunately, once you get a system going it tends to work better for you as time goes on.

I have found that locally sourced clients are the best. You can see them face to face (or at least via phone) and you know how to market to the local audience or know how to design for them. My first four clients were all local, and they referred me like crazy to clients further away, and the rest was history. I never had to seek out work again, they found me! I was able to build a portfolio from those first few clients to land larger more regional clients.

Then you get the attention of ad agencies and you can start doing consulting work or maybe even land a full-time agency job (if you are interested in a salaried position). It can be a slow build of your client base and portfolio, but over the years it can really start to turn into a full-time career, and very enjoyable one at that! It depends on how much you are willing to practice. It also comes down to making clients HAPPY. I mean giving them what they want but also providing them VALUE. I think a lot of designers think the trendy cool designs gets them jobs. I can tell you what gets you jobs.

I suggest attending some local small business meet ups, a connection you make there could change your life!

Of course, this is the happy ending story. There were many bumps along the way, like the time I got sued for using a stock photo without giving the proper credits or the time I did not get paid for a $500 web design project because I did not,

at the time, collect my 50 percent upfront deposit.

There was also the time where I had not paid enough in taxes and was hit with a big tax bill and also the many low cost projects I had to do when I was trying to find that first client, that ended badly because I still had no clue what I was doing.

I wanted to share my story because I think it helps to know that going freelance is not a steady journey and none of us will find our first big client in the same way.

There are many ways to create a successful freelance business and all you have to do is try several different methods until one works for you.

Fourteen years later, I still love freelancing and started a new business teaching what I learned all of those years, graphic design. I now have over 100,000 students and am happy to report I will never work for anyone again.

*Old client work
Lauren Hall Creative Services*
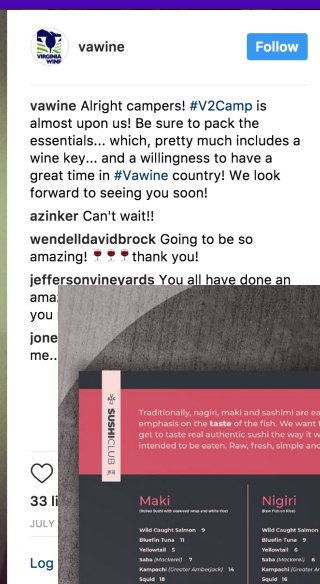
Brand Design Project from one of my recent Branding Masterclass courses

I HOPE YOU
ENJOYED THIS
RESOURCE!

If you would like to see something covered that was not talked about please feel free to reach out an make a suggestion!

https://lindsaymarsh.myportfolio.com/contact

The illustrations used throughout this guide were gathered from the Adobe Stock website at stock.adobe.com and modified.