get started *freelancing*

the first 6 steps to kick off your design career

DESIGNER *playbook*
BY ORIGAMI GRAPHICS

1 Get clear on your intentions

Do you actually want to do this? Why do you want to freelance? There are benefits – freedom, control, flexibility, a higher possible income – but there are serious drawbacks, including lack of stability, irregular paychecks and no sick leave. Are you happy to make this compromise? What if it means you don't make a full-time income for the first 3 years – are you still happy to take the plunge?

Hot tip – It's ok if it's not for you. It's not for everyone. Just make sure you really want to freelance, otherwise you're probably not going to be able to take it if things get really hard. Perseverance is gonna be required.

2 Get set up

Once you're set on your intentions and you know you want to freelance, it's time to get set up. You'll need to…

- Get an ABN (or other business registration for your country, if you're not Australian)
- Register your business name
- Write a contract you'll use for your projects going forward
- Get your own branding and website set up
- Make sure you're registered for taxes
- Decide how you'll be doing your bookkeeping
- Start marketing

*Hot tip – some people choose to write their own contracts or use a template, but whatever you do, ensure you've got a written agreement of your conditions of service that your clients **have to agree to in writing** before they proceed. Engaging a lawyer will help make sure your terms are watertight and give you peace of mind.*

Also, it's worth saying that I'm a designer, not a law expert, and that you should always consult legal advice if you're unsure or concerned! Finally, the above isn't an exhaustive list so make sure you do your own research and/or seek advice during the setup phase.

3 The Contract

So important that it needs its own section!

Make sure you have a Contract or at minimum a Terms and Conditions of Service that your clients have to agree to before they go ahead. This forms the written agreement that provides structure to the job and protects both of you if things go sour.

The amount of times I've heard a designer – personally or through the grapevine – get messed around by a client is crazy. The first question always asked of them… whether through Reddit or my own lips… is, "well… did you have a contract?"

If you don't have a contract, here are some things that could happen…

- Your client vanishes on you mid-job without paying a cent
- Your client doesn't pay for the project at the end, taking all the files for themselves (the best way to prevent this is probably to not deliver final files til payment is made - another thing to write into the contract!)
- Your client strings you through multiple rounds of concepts before deciding they don't like the work and cancelling, leaving you hours out of pocket
- Your client doesn't pay you an adequate deposit
- Your client gives your work to another designer to edit and change, taking the credit
- You're viewed as unprofessional because you didn't set any boundaries and it made the process confusing for them

The list goes on. A contract is non-negotiable.

Hot tip - The word "Contract" is scary, but you really should use it so that both parties know that they're entering into a proper agreement.

Hold up! What's in a contract?

I can't give you a watertight, exhaustive, legally-sound list, but here are the things I have in my contract to protect myself.

The fact that they're entering into a contract

At what point a project is considered booked in

Client and designer contact details

Project description

Project timeframes and deadline

Official statement of project fees

What format I'd like them to supply files in

How communication will be conducted (email)

A clause on how either party can terminate the contract and whether there's a cancellation fee for the client

I don't take responsibility for client-fault errors or illegal activity

Terms of licensing once the client gets their files

How we handle printing

The invoicing and payment process, including how clients can pay and when payment is due

Information on late fees if the client delays past deadline

Refund policy

Privacy policy

What happens if they don't agree to the terms of the contract

4 Marketing

Marketing! You'll need to get momentum built before your business starts really taking off, but everyone needs to start somewhere. Reach out to friends and family, attend networking events, join social media to start building a network, and look into what you can do with Google. Online courses are also a great way to learn how to market yourself – or you can outsource it instead, if you don't want to have to wear that hat.

Hot tip – don't give up. Marketing can feel like it's hopeless sometimes, and then out of the blue you'll get a lead. There are heaps of ways to get clients and the wider you cast your net, the more possibilities there are! Generally I find that the moment I panic that I'm not going to get enough work, an enquiry comes into my inbox the very next day :')

5 Consistent Service

Once you've got your first clients, you need to make sure you're doing great work for them. If you give your clients great service, they'll market for you by acting as a source of all-important referrals to new clients.

Take a moment to reflect: how can you provide the best service possible to your clients? If a project's gone well, what made it so good? If it's gone wrong, what could be improved next time?

Hot tip: Don't be embarrassed if a project didn't go well or if a client didn't like your service. Everyone has bad days and everyone has rude or dissatisfied clients.

The most important thing is to sit down afterwards and figure out how you can use that experience to learn, to make sure it doesn't happen again, and to make your business better. Often this will mean revising your contract to include new clauses which in hindsight would have protected you if you'd had them before.

6 Balance

Once you've got your work sorted out and you're on the way to a career freelancing, it's important to continuously evaluate how things are going to make sure you've got an ok work/life balance and that you're working with the kinds of people you want to.

Visualising your dream clients and writing in a journal are great ways to do this.

If you're more spiritual, you can incorporate some of those practices into your balancing routine or practice manifestation.

You do deserve to be making more than the bare minimum in money, and you do deserve to be working with people you like – and who like you in return.

my favourite

resources

In alphabetical order, no less

[The Adobe Creative Cloud](#)
If you want to be a pro, Canva is just not going to cut it... sorry :(

[Adobe Fonts](#)
Licensed fonts that you can sync directly to your Adobe CC applications

[Adobe Stock](#)
The site I use for my stock photography and vector illustrations

[Calendly](#)
Lets clients book calls/meetings at a time that suits them, and syncs with both of your calendars

[ColorPick Eyedropper](#)
A Chrome plugin that lets you identify the hex codes for colours you see on the web

[Creative Market](#)
A great place to discover new fonts, graphics and visual resources

[Elementor](#)
A drag and drop website builder for WordPress

[Flodesk](#)
Email subscription software that actually looks good

[Google Fonts](#)
Free open-source web fonts that are downloadable and embeddable into websites

[GoFullPage Screen Capture](#)
A Chrome plugin that lets you screenshot entire web pages and save as a PDF or PNG

[Marie Forleo](#)
A boss entrepreneur and educator who runs online classes for business and copywriting, with intakes once per year

[TeamTreehouse](#)
Learn coding languages, or brush up on your existing skills

[UberSuggest](#)
Great for measuring up your website's SEO

[Udemy](#)
You can learn a myriad of things in places like this – just pick and choose courses and make sure you commit to them, rather than buying heaps and not actually following through

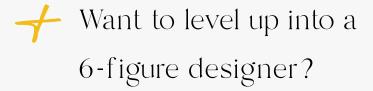[University/TAFE/College/That one night class you've been thinking about taking for 3 months](#)
You don't have to be a qualified designer to be a successful one, but it helps

[UpdraftPlus](#)
A super helpful WordPress plugin which makes backing up your site and client sites easy and stress-free

[WhatFont](#)
A Chrome plugin that lets you identify fonts you see on the web

Want to level up into a 6-figure designer?

I've got a wayyyyyy more detailed, fillable, interactive eBook mini-course that takes you through how to start pulling $10k months and crack that first $100k.

Grab your copy here: [6-Figure Freelancer: How To Make $100k+ as a Solo Graphic Designer](#)