

6 pieces of advice on going from employee to freelancer

Are you an entrepreneur? Maddy Ness has compiled a toolkit to help you create, grow, and even sell your own startup. From recruiting a team and protecting your brand to financing your innovation, you will find tips, tools and advice to help you navigate the entrepreneurship labyrinth. Becoming independent after being an employee has never been simpler, but it could scare you. Here are some recommendations to help you make the leap.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Today, when we think of freelancing (outside of the demands of the economy), we automatically think about IT skills: web developer, graphic designer, etc. However, you may be surprised by the number of careers that can hold freelancer status. A lot of people dream about becoming a freelancer but think that their job isn't compatible. A lot of times that is not true, within my group of friends, a handful of them have jobs that are not commonly known for having freelance status (an HR supervisor for example) and it works very well for them!

In order to convince you that your skills are coveted, do some research; for example, on websites like Upwork or Freelancer. You'll see that you can find just about everything. The most difficult thing is finding work that will last, and understanding all the advantages and disadvantages that the freelance status carries with it when compared to being an employee. One year ago, after three and a half years working in start-ups (at BlaBlaCar and PayFit), I branched out on my own as a Project Manager and UX Designer. I was part of Mozza which was created a year ago. Here

are some tips that helped make this transition easier.

Identify which skill(s) you want to sell

The way in which you sell your skills will guide the types of projects that you will be assigned. For example, a web developer can sell themselves in several different ways:

- If they sell themselves as a “web developer,” they will be offered projects where they will purely be writing lines of code.
- They could sell themselves as a “technical consultant” where they could eventually code, but their role would mostly consist of advising their client on the structure and the technical solutions to put into place.
- Given the lack of resources on the market, certain developers decide to temporarily sell themselves as a “Chief Technical Officer” (CTO). Certain founders look for these profiles in order to help recruit their first developers, to put into place the first foundations of their technical structure, and eventually to code their first prototype.

This diversity of skills is applicable in all sectors. If you type in “HR” on Upwork, you will see that you can find wage experts, “heads of talent,” “professional coaches,” and “administrative managers” with a variety of project lengths and salaries.

Through being an employee in your profession, you have certainly gained many skills. Identify which ones seem to be booming (ones with high demand and relatively few bids) by consulting different freelancer platforms.

Check that it's right for you, right from the beginning

It can be scary becoming a freelancer: there are less guarantees and more risks. To reassure and convince yourself that you are making the right choice, here are several things that worked well for me in the beginning:

Take on one (or several) "test" projects while still working as a full-time employee if your schedule allows it (or for example on weekends or in the evenings). This could be rather intense, but it will allow you to:

- Make sure that this format of project works for you
- Start to secure clients and a network that will be useful when you take the plunge.

Gain a long-term project that will allow you some time to find your rhythm. Make sure that you are getting paid regularly, for example, you can ask for payments for milestones. Personally, I generally do shorter projects that last two to four weeks. My first project, however, which I found on the website *Crème de la Crème* [a French freelance site], lasted three months. It allowed me to get used to being a full-time freelancer.

Find good ways to land projects

To find clients, there are different options out there:

Use a platform that links freelancers to companies. There are dozens and dozens. It's up to you to find which one you like using the best:

- general ones like Upwork, Freelancer, Malt, Creme de la Creme, etc
- specialized ones like Comet, Coder.com (for developers), Creads (for graphic designers), Smylingua (for editors/translators), etc.

Use your network. This usually allows you to find the most interesting projects. Don't hesitate to use LinkedIn to reconnect with your old clients, old employer, and all LinkedIn connections who would be interested in your services.

Establish partners. For example, at Mozza, we are in contact with several IT developing agencies. We recommend these ones to our clients according to their needs in development, and inversely these agencies recommend us to their clients if they are having problems in product design.

Cleverly target the strongest potential clients. For example, at Mozza, we sell services in product and design strategy for mobile apps for B2C start-ups. We started to watch websites that listed companies raising funds from venture capital, like AngelList for example. Generally, a business with less than 20 employees who fundraised more than a million dollars has a good chance of needing help in their product design. That's why we contact these businesses ourselves in order to spontaneously offer our services.



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Change from outbound marketing to inbound marketing

At the heart of Mozza, my friends Adrien and Maxime, who are in the same group of UX that I am a part of, found an interesting way to attract prospective clients. Instead of reaching out to prospective clients in an “outbound” manner, i.e. to proactively contact them to offer our services, they found a way to make several prospective clients contact us by their own accord. This is called “inbound” marketing. How did they do it? They based it on the content and the brand:

- The content: for five years at Mozza we have created a lot of content (presentations, SlideShare, Medium articles, videos, interviews of designers) which contain great recommendations on subjects that we dominate (project management, UX design, growth hacking). This allows us to gain credibility. Many clients have contacted Mozza after having read our presentations because this content convinced them that we could bring them added value.
- The brand: as more projects ended with satisfied clients, Mozza became a recognised brand. Certain prospective clients have contacted us after hearing good things about our services from our past clients. Make sure your website contributes to the notoriety of your brand. We regularly put a lot of energy into making our website look better, which showcases some of our projects and introduces our team and content. In the same way, many freelancers have their own websites which showcase their resume and portfolio, which is a great type of online CV. Among some of my favourites are those of Mathieu

Grac and Thomas Chrétien.

Demystify the freelancer administrative pressure

At the administrative level, you will have the impression that you have a pretty high “entry cost.” You are going to have to carry out quite a few tasks that were once managed by HR when you were an employee. For example, paying social benefits charges or enrolling in a mutual fund. Even so, it is a lot easier than it seems; the number of administrative formalities that you are going to have to settle in the beginning can be counted on one hand.

- Create your micro-entrepreneur status (very simple, and if you opt for the pro-Shine bank, for example, they will do it for you)
- Sign up for independent social security (and eventually for supplementary health insurance)
- Create an account on Net-Entreprises (to declare social benefits charges).
- Adhere to Inland Revenue tax withholdings, which allows you to pay your taxes at the same time as your social benefits charges.

These steps are things you only have to do one time.

Next, you will have several regular tasks that you will have to do in order to remain legal:

- Manage your receipts well, especially for numbering. The app Shine is great for this!
- Don't forget to pay your social benefits charges three times a year. It only takes three minutes on the website Net-Entreprises.
- If you pass the VAT ceiling, you should think about billing VAT to your

clients and not spending it! Because later on, you will have to declare it to the state.

Adapt to a new work format

Time and space aren't the same when you become independent. First of all, space: there is a big chance that you won't have a fixed office. Working alone can be confusing. Personally, my productivity is low when I am working at home. I am a lot more efficient when I am surrounded by others who are also working. This is why my friends at Mozza and I decided to rent out some offices in Paris so that we could work with each other regularly. Of course, you could have the option to work at your client's office, which has its advantages and disadvantages. However, working at a distance has a lot of advantages, like the possibility to live where you want to (a couple of members of Mozza live in Lisbon or Kiev), to travel as much as you want, and even avoid peak times when you leave for the weekend. Just be aware that the more you travel, the more you have to be able to manage unexpected things (too many distractions, bad Wi-Fi connections, etc.). You get to find the setting that works for you!

In addition, managing your time whilst working can be confusing when you are used to working normal office hours. As a freelancer, you won't have to work 9 to 7 like in an average Parisian start-up. You will be the "master" of your own time. This could lead you to be more efficient than you thought and allow you more time to do other things, or it could be the opposite and take you more time so that you have to finish a project on the weekend. If you aren't disciplined with your time, it could quickly get out of control. I advise you to use a tool that counts the time it takes you to work (for example, TimeCamp) so that you can bill your clients correctly. You also have to decide if you want to bill by the hour or by a

flat rate.

Independent work is really taking off at the moment. We can see a lot of freelance jobs today that we wouldn't have imagined being outside of a salaried worker's realm a couple of years ago. The same thing goes for the channels for finding work (platforms like Upwork, Freelancer) which are multiplying, tools (online banking and administrative aids like Shine) are getting better every day, and mentalities about them are changing. More and more businesses are ready to trust certain key aspects of their company to freelancers. Trust is getting stronger and stronger, which allows the status of self-employment to become more normal in different professions. Becoming independent after being an employee has never been simpler!



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