

OUTSOURCING ONLINE

How To **Grow Your Online Business**
Free Up Time And Make Your Life
Easier By Hiring Virtual Workers



Outsourcing Online

How To Grow Your Online Business, Free
Up Time And Make Your Life Easier By
Hiring Virtual Workers

Written by Yaro Starak and Laura Maya

www.entrepreneurs-journey.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, or sold in whole or in part in
any form, without the prior written consent of the author

Table Of Contents

The Legal Section	4
Introduction	5
Part 1: Outsourcing Online	7
What Is Outsourcing Exactly?.....	7
Is Outsourcing Exploitation?	9
Do People Think Outsourcing Is Wrong?	10
When Is The Right Time To Begin?	16
What Are Your Goals?.....	16
Break Down Your Business and Project Goals To Find The Gaps	16
Cash-flow: How To Pay For Your First Contractor	21
Say No To Full Time Work.....	22
Create New Income Sources.....	23
Sell Assets	24
Government Grants	24
From One Man Show To Team Of 8 (And Growing!)	26
My First Hire	28
What I Would Do Differently	30
My Business Today...	31
Part 2: How To Find, Recruit and Retain A-Players For Your Team	33
Finding The Right Person For The Job.....	34
Go Overboard	35
Get Clear oN What You Want	35
You Need A Freelancer, Not A Superhero	37
CVs, Cover Letters and Curly Questions.....	38
Automating The Application Process For Big Recruitment Drives.....	39
Start Small	40

Finding The Elusive A-Player	42
Look Around You	42
Use Social Media	43
Outsourcing Websites.....	44
Should I Advertise Jobs To My Email List?	47
Interviewing and Testing Applicants	48
Start Chatting With Your Shortlist	48
Designing The Perfect Test	49
The Testing Phase.....	51
The Evaluation Phase.....	52
Hiring A Contractor	53
The Trial Period	54
On The Internet, Nobody Knows You're A Dog	55
Online Communication	57
Communication Tools Of The Trade.....	59
Paying Contractors	60
Case Study – Roshan Perera	62
Your Outsourcing Checklist	66
The World Is Waiting For You... In Pyjamas.....	67
Part 3: How To Manage Customer Service As A One Person Enterprise	69
Inside My Business: The Mechanics Of A Customer Support System	72
Don't Just Outsource... Automate!	74
Start By Outsourcing One Task	75

The Legal Section

For the sake of clarity and brevity here are the two most important legal considerations regarding this book, in plain English:

- You can't publish the content in this book unless I grant permission.
- I'm not responsible for anything that happens to you as a result of your interpretation of the contents of this book.

I don't mind if you quote small sections, a paragraph or two, within your own writing, and appreciate a link back as credit if you feel appropriate. Here is the slightly more complicated way of saying the same thing:

Copyright Notice: Any unauthorized reproduction or transmission of any aspect of this book is prohibited. You may not resale, repackage or give away any part of this book by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission from the author, Yaro Starak. This is NOT a free book and should not be freely distributed. You can only purchase this book from the websites www.entrepreneurs-journey.com or www.ejinsider.com. If you purchased or downloaded this book elsewhere please contact me immediately.

Legal Notice: This book is not intended as legal, business, financial or investment advice. The purchaser of this book assumes all responsibility for their outcomes as a result of following any advice or interpreting the content. Yaro Starak and the Blog Mastermind Partnership assume no responsibility or liability for the actions of any reader of this book. [Click here for full disclaimer.](#)

Introduction

At some point during the course of growing your online business you will hear some advice:

If you want leverage, you need to hire people, it's the only way to really make significant money online.

I agree with this advice, however I like to think about outsourcing to other people as a way to make my life **less stressful** more than anything else. It's not just about the money.

Primarily, I hire people to do the jobs that I personally don't want to do, I am not good at, or most importantly, to remove the jobs that are in the way of me doing what I love.

At the beginning of this report there is a hefty discussion about whether outsourcing overseas for cheap labor is exploitation. You don't have to read it, however I include it because a lot of people are concerned that outsourcing overseas is slave labor, and that we are farming all our jobs overseas, potentially hurting our local economies.

The main outcomes I want you to have as a result of reading this report are –

- You identify the first task you will outsource to someone else
- You take an action to find a person to complete that task

This report has three main sections. The first and third sections discuss how I went about very slowly dipping my toes into the outsourcing pool, and then once I became comfortable with it, what main jobs I hired other people to do and how I manage my customer service today.

The second part of this report is written by my Project Manager, Laura, and discusses the steps she takes for recruiting freelancers, outsourcing various tasks and communicating with colleagues you may never meet.

Money is also a big deal when it comes to outsourcing, as you need some to pay people. That is why I include a section on **how you can pay for your first contractors** and an explanation of how I funded my helpers before I was making much money online.

I wish you luck in your outsourcing endeavors. Enjoy this guide and if you have any feedback, please pass it on.

Yaro Starak

yaro@entrepreneurs-journey.com

Part 1: Outsourcing Online

What Is Outsourcing Exactly?

Simply put, outsourcing is the act of hiring another person or business, on a contract basis, to perform different jobs and tasks that help you or your business. These contractors, also known as freelancers, can be hired for a one-off job or ongoing work, depending on your needs.

While they may become instrumental to your business and an important part of your team, **freelancers are not employees**. You are not responsible for paying their taxes, retirement contributions or organizing their healthcare. They are self-employed contractors who bill you at an hourly or project rate and they take care of their own tax and financial obligations in their home country.

Like most people, when I started out in this business I was a one-man band. If there was something that needed to be done in my business, I did it. I wore all the hats. Now, at the time of updating this report, I have 7 permanent part-time contractors on my team and several short-term freelancers.

Outsourcing, which comes from the term "outside resourcing", might seem like a relatively new concept - a result of globalization and the internet explosion - but that's not actually the case. The first "freelancers" were around in the 1820s, soldiers for hire to foreign armies who were literally a "free lance" on the battlefield



The idea of outsourcing work to freelancers has been around for centuries, but the internet has definitely given it new life. Now when you need a job done you don't just have the workforce in your local area to draw on, but an entire global marketplace of talented, eager, motivated and affordable workers who want to work with you.

There are a few different options you can choose for outsourcing:

- Hiring a permanent, ongoing contractor to join your team, paid at an hourly or monthly rate
- Hiring short-term contractors to work on a specific task or project, paid at either an hourly or fixed project rate. This could be a one day project or six month project, depending on your needs.
- Hiring someone for a "gig" on sites like Fiverr. This is for outsourcing quick jobs to people who specialize in one particular area. For example, if you need a financial spreadsheet created, a logo designed or a musical intro for your podcast, you can "buy a gig" on Fiverr for \$5 and the task is completed within a set timeframe. The price of the gig goes up if you need extra work done or you need it completed faster than the proposed deadline.

Today, you don't have to take on full time employees and all the responsibilities and overheads that come with it. You can hire someone for 20 hours a week or even just 20 minutes!

Whatever you don't know how to do in business, or don't *enjoy* doing, there is someone out there on the other side of an internet connection just waiting to take that job off your hands.

Is Outsourcing Exploitation?

Let's start by tackling the elephant in the room.

For a long time I was comfortable with my stance on outsourcing, comfortable enough to recommend it and promote outsourcing-related products, and profit from the affiliate commissions.

But over time I've received blog comments, emails, and queries from friends that have all challenged my views on this topic. I have to thank these people for prompting me to scrutinize my own attitudes more closely, because I am better off for it.

When people think of outsourcing as exploitation, this is based on the premise that you are hiring people from low-income countries where labor is cheaper than hiring from your local country. It is worth noting here that at the time of writing, six of the seven permanent freelancers on my team are from Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK, while one is from India. I also regularly hire short-term contractors from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Outsourcing to people in low-income countries is one option, but you are the only one who can decide if it is the right thing for your business.

When I first heard about the concept of overseas outsourcing many years ago it sounded like a great opportunity for me, as an Australian, earning money online in US or Australian dollars. I could see the potential for people residing in countries with a strong currency (Europe, the USA etc) to capitalize on the huge number of skilled individuals in lower income nations who were willing to work for a fraction of the cost of hiring locally.

However I was challenged by people with different viewpoints on the matter and I realized it didn't make sense to me that people could be paid only a few dollars an hour without it being considered slave labor. I started to wonder myself if this was a form of exploitation.

Do People Think Outsourcing Is Wrong?

When my old business partner Gideon Shalwick hired a full time contractor in the Philippines at around \$400 US a month, I had a long discussion with him trying to understand why it's okay to do this and why it's not exploitation. When you broke it down, he was only paying \$2-3 per hour. At the time, we agreed that the inequalities between different countries are not ideal, but on an individual basis, we are helping the people we outsource to.

I spoke to some of my other friends to get their opinion on the issue, and have interviewed successful entrepreneurs who rely heavily on overseas outsourcing. I also have the feedback emails I've received from people in response to my articles and emails about outsourcing, as well as feedback in the form of blog comments, including comments from several Filipinos who explain what it is like being a freelancer living in their country.

After all of this I can see that clearly the issue is not simple. So let's look at both sides of the argument, beginning with the arguments against it...

Firstly there are issues related to nationalism:

- Outsourcing overseas means you **are not hiring locally**, which results in fewer jobs, or even lost jobs in your country.
- Outsourcing results in a **flow of cash out of your country** into another, potentially having a detrimental impact on your economy, causing local businesses (who employ locally), to lose business to cheaper overseas groups and possibly even close up shop completely.

This nationalism comes from a sense of separation of peoples based on geographical borders (the "us" versus "them" mentality). This is a belief that if you give to one nation (in this case hire people overseas), you are causing a loss to another nation (your country, because you don't hire locally).

The second issue is fair pay for fair work:

- Paying \$5 an hour (or similar) is **slave labor**, even if workers are happy with their pay. People should be paid a fair wage based on the benefit you gain from them, not what the fair wage is based on the standards in their economy.
- If people work for you at pennies on the dollar, and you reap massive profits because of that (in other words, they do the work and you keep the money) it's simply **not fair**. Why should one group do most of the work for enough money to survive, while another group becomes stinking rich?

This issue is subjective and exists within every country, because we "value" certain roles greater than other roles. Sometimes this value is justified, perhaps because of a requirement for specialized knowledge (which could take years of study and practice to accumulate - e.g. doctors) or because the role is responsible for large and important outcomes and therefore worthy of higher remuneration (e.g. the extreme salaries of CEOs compared to their employees).

Other times it's the value society as a whole has decided to attach to certain roles, even if the justification seem out of whack. Often debated examples include the earnings of movie stars and sports stars compared to teachers and nurses.

Counter Arguments

Nationalism

There are a bunch of reasons why outsourcing to another country might not be such a bad thing:

If outsourcing helps you to earn profits, then there is likely more money coming in to your country (to you) than going out to your contractor. This is particularly true of online businesses, which can have customers all over the world.

Outsourcing can help a business to grow into a larger company, which is in turn more able to afford local employees and investment in the infrastructure (offices etc) required by larger businesses.

Fair Pay For Fair Work

Even though \$400 USD a month may not seem like much to someone living in a higher income country, at the time of writing it's above the average wage in the Philippines, Pakistan and India where many freelancers live. It is also more than three times greater than the minimum wage of each of these countries. To put this in perspective, India's minimum wage is roughly \$65 USD per month while the average wage is around \$295 per month.

This money affords the worker a quality lifestyle in their homeland. If you throw in a few bonuses, some extra incentives for good work, then you have a situation where you feel like you are empowering someone and helping them choose their own path life.

That's great right? You can't argue against improving the quality of someone's life, and in exchange you get a skilled, dedicated worker for your company?

So in isolation, no, I don't think you can argue there is anything wrong with helping people in a relationship where everyone benefits.



Here's How I See The Problem

I look at it like this: On a micro level, outsourcing is helping the individual and those around him or her. It improves their lives, which is great.

On a macro level however, what we are looking at is one group of people who live in a richer country taking advantage of a situation that exists only because another country is poorer.

This begs the question – **does outsourcing help a country move away from developing world status and raise the standards for everyone in that country?**

I think the answer is yes it does, in the long term. But this kind of progress is slow.

If enough money flows from one country into another, then the country receiving the money becomes wealthier. As it becomes wealthier the value of its currency becomes stronger, wages increase, and outsourcing becomes less viable because it's no longer "cheap labor" – it starts to move towards parity with developed countries.

This outcome may be a pipe dream, or even if it is not, we are not going to get there *quickly*.

Why? **Greed.**

If people and companies prefer to hoard profits (which don't forget is the purpose of a publicly owned company – to maximize profits for shareholders, most of whom live in developed countries) and this profit is made off the back of transactions based on inequality such as outsourcing to low-income countries, then in the short term change is slow and one group benefits exceedingly more than the other.

Make Your Own Decision

You have options, and you are the only person who can decide your ethical stance on the matter of outsourcing and whether it is right for you and your business.

Remember, you can outsource to people in low-income countries, or someone who lives around the corner from you.

You choose how much you're prepared to pay for a service and it is up to you to make sure it's fair. Yes, it is shameful there are people posting jobs online offering to pay writers 50 cents for a 500 word article, or \$20 to spend 20 hours building a website. But you don't have to be one of those people. You decide if you want to be part of the problem, or part of the solution.

In my case, outsourcing to lower income countries at the beginning of my journey helped grow my business to the point where I employ workers from all corners of the world, including my two home bases, Australia and Canada. Through services like Kiva, I now also commit to contributing a larger chunk of the profits I make (in part thanks to outsourcing), to directly support the countries I outsource to. I want to do more than just

offer employment to a few people in that country, I want to help on a larger scale thanks to the benefits I gain.

I realize many reading this might be struggling to get by in the first place, and even finding \$400 a month to outsource to just one full time contractor is challenging enough. My intention is not to discourage you to outsource. On the contrary, whatever you can do to get yourself more quickly into a situation to help others is a good thing.

The point of this section is to remind you why you are able to source labor at a low cost in the first place. If you share my belief in giving back, make the choice to help people when you reap significant profits.

How much you give back is up to you and there is no right or wrong amount. The important point is that you are putting the welfare of people before your profits. This might mean increasing how much you pay to your outsourcers, or perhaps supporting aid groups in their country, or just investing some of your profits into a charity organization like Oxfam that works in the countries you employ from. It's entirely up to you.

Just remember why you are in the situation you are in. You can afford to hire people to work full time overseas for a fraction of the cost of hiring someone full time in your country, because their country is not as rich as yours. This is inequality that you reap rewards from, but can also help to change by making a point of giving back when you can.

Are Some Nationalities Better At Freelancing Than Others?

The short answer is: No. You can find talented and dedicated freelancers anywhere. That said, in my experience I have found freelancers from certain countries may be more suitable for certain tasks.

- The Philippines is known for high quality workers, with solid English and fantastic demeanour. They have a lot of diverse skills, however tasks that require good communication, like customer service and administration, seem to be their strong points.

- If you want to develop software, Eastern European countries like Ukraine and Romania seem to be a good spot, while India and Pakistan are often good for web development tasks.
- What India does do particularly well is organization. Rather than hiring one individual, you can hire an entire Indian outsourcing service and deal with your own project manager, who will then coordinate the work for you with other members of his team. This has also become a popular option in the Philippines.

Bear in mind, these are broad generalizations. Every country has great people who are skilled at pretty much every job you can think of. You just have to take the time to find the good apples.

Note also that for some roles, like customer service and admin, you can find people for \$500 USD a month full time. For a good software developer you could also pay about \$1,000 USD per month for a full time worker (40 hours a week).

When Is The Right Time To Begin?

You understand that outsourcing is an important key to success in online business, but you don't really have cash flow to afford it just yet. Should you outsource now or wait?

What Are Your Goals?

Start by considering what your goals are and which jobs or tasks you want to outsource first. For people just starting a business, the very first projects are focused almost entirely on establishing **cash flow**. Cash flow is the blood of your business, granting you freedoms that are critical for success.

Cash flow can give you the power to:

- Quit your job
- Make outsourcing decisions that grow your business faster
- Enjoy many personal life freedoms (how about not worrying about where the money will come from next time you plan a trip overseas?)

Break Down Your Business and Project Goals To Find The Gaps

Take some time to ask yourself the following questions. Jot down some notes in the space below to help you gain a better understanding of what help you need.

What are your business goals for this month? What about for this year?

What jobs and tasks do you need to get done to achieve these goals?

What are you good at? What are the jobs you enjoy doing in your business?

What do you struggle with? What tasks are you doing in your business that you really don't enjoy?

Think of an average work day. What tasks (both business and non-business related) are taking up most of your time?

Which of the tasks listed above can you hire someone else to do?

What role, if filled, will help you generate the the most cash flow?

Really take some time to think about these questions. Once you know what your priority projects and goals are, you can look at the components that go into that project and decide what needs to be done immediately in order take the next step towards completion.

For those new entrepreneurs reading this, your first goal could be to create a blog that generates \$3,000 a month and part of that process (certainly an early part!) is to install WordPress with a partially customized theme, which is what you can outsource first. In fact, this is a service you can outsource to a member of our community for just \$99 through [our Blog Setup Services partnership with Kerry The Blog Mechanic.](#)



That's a fairly simple outsourcing process.

However, it is not always so straightforward.

First you have to identify where there are gaps and needs in your business that are taking too much time or holding you back. Then decide which tasks you can outsource so you can free up your time and drive your business forward.

If you're drowning in unanswered emails from potential customers and spending time on order processing and admin tasks, maybe your first hire should be a Virtual Assistant who specializes in customer service and managing databases. If you just have some tech jobs to do that would take you a day or two to figure out but just a few hours for a web developer, you can hire someone on a "per gig" or short term basis. If your needs are too diverse to outsource to just one person, consider taking on an online business manager or project manager who can coordinate outsourcing to other contractors to achieve your goals.

I find it effective to review what I do during a working day given normal conditions, and consider how much of my output was relevant to finishing a project. During my pre-outsourcing days, I would spend whole days just dealing with emails and tweaking elements of my website design, which would not take me a single step forward. I had to remove these two tasks from sucking my time in order to be able to focus on completing tasks for new projects.

Don't forget outsourcing can help with your personal life too. You can hire people to help mind your kids, or clean your house or plan holidays or parties for you. Outsourcing these tasks frees up time to work on projects that move your business forward.

Take Action

With the clarity that hopefully comes from answering these questions and reviewing your present typical working day - and your entire life if necessary - you will begin to see tasks that need to be outsourced immediately.

Now it is time to take action and begin the outsourcing process. This should set off a chain reaction where you use the free time you now have to drive your business forward, which will generate more cash flow and enable you to hire more people to help you grow further.

You might be thinking it is impossible to outsource without having some kind of income to begin with. I couldn't agree more, and the next section is all about establishing an income stream to make it happen.

Cash-flow: How To Pay For Your First Contractor

Got \$5 In Your Pocket?

Then you can hire your first contractor.

Ok, so maybe that's a little optimistic but it's not untrue. Outsourcing has evolved a lot in the last few years so you don't necessarily have to take on the financial responsibility of hiring someone on a project or ongoing basis. Today, you can buy a "gig" or service for \$5 USD in the same way you might buy a book on Amazon.

With sites like Fiverr, you can start outsourcing immediately some standard tasks you don't have time for, or don't know how to do. This might be installing plugins, boosting your SEO, transcribing your audio, designing your business cards, creating a video - you name it!

Look back at your list at some of the tasks you said you struggle with or don't enjoy. Now go look at Fiverr.com and see if you can find someone selling some of those services for a reasonable price. Have a read through the seller's profile, check their reviews, and if you're ready to dive in then create an account and start a conversation with them. If you're new to outsourcing, this is an easy and affordable way to get started.

But what if you need more than just a few odd jobs done here and there?

You Need Cash

The one major problem that faces new start-up businesses, especially small enterprises launched by solo entrepreneurs, is a lack of **cash flow**.

It's a vicious circle. Many entrepreneurs need to take jobs so they can "earn a living", which drastically reduces the amount of time available to work on their new business. They need to outsource jobs in order to grow and become successful, but they don't have an income to pay for it. And around and around we go.

How can you turn your new start-up into an income stream if you are too busy working a job to pay the bills that prevents you from working on your business?

Unfortunately there is no easy answer to this question. Every person reading this guide is in a unique situation. All I can do is explain how I made money during the times when my business was not able to support me.

Say No To Full Time Work

While at university, I landed a part-time job at the campus library. That part time job at the help desk would become an income stream I relied upon for many years. I used it as the foundation for moving out of my family home and renting for the first time, and I also relied on the income from that job to pay for the very first requirements an Internet entrepreneur has — a connection to the Internet and a place to host your website.

There were a lot of reasons I didn't take a full time job, but the key point was that I knew I wanted to run my own business and be my own boss, I just wasn't sure how that would work out. To figure out how to manage your new business, you need time. I was content to keep casual work while I worked out which business would be my ticket to independence.



I was only prepared to work for someone else for the hours I needed to, making sure I said no to extra work that might get in the way of me starting a successful business. You might have a family, or commitments that demand more than 15 hours a week of casual labor income, but many of us can downsize in some shape or form. It is also possible to find ways to get more work done in less time, like working your job from home for a few days each week which saves you the time you usually spend getting ready and commuting. Maybe you can work four days instead of five or start work earlier so you can finish earlier and have the late afternoons and evenings to work on your business.

Whatever your situation, you need to find a balance between earning a living from a job and managing your time so you can build the business that will afford you the freedom you're looking for.

Create New Income Sources

Although it was never enough to live off, I did establish a *cash-cow* income source online, my very first successful project. I've talked about it a lot on my blog, so I won't go into too much detail, but the income source was a community website called MTGParadise.com, a site dedicated to the tournament playing scene in Australia of the [Magic: The Gathering](#) card game.



Eventually, I made anywhere from **\$300 to \$1,000 a month** from the site. The income fluctuated dramatically and never became a stable income, but the cash further helped me to stay out of full-time employment.

There are countless opportunities for creating new income sources using the internet. You could rent out a spare room or caravan on [AirBnB](#), turn your home into an [indie restaurant](#), become an [Uber driver](#), [rent your backyard to campers](#) or even [teach your native language](#) to students around the world.

Sell Assets

It was one day while catching a train to the city that I had the idea of selling MTGParadise.com. Although the sale did not occur until many months later, I walked away with **\$13,500**, which was about how much I was earning per year at the time from my part time job.

Although I lost my reliable cash cow income source, I did gain enough money to live off for a year, assuming I didn't change lifestyle habits. Most of us are surrounded by possessions and material items we don't need or no longer use. Look around your home right now and see if you can find five things you can sell. What about your TV? If you sold it, not only would you have an injection of cash, you might also find you have a lot more time on your hands!

Government Grants

I took advantage of an Australian government funded support service for small businesses, called the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, and after completing an application process that included writing a business plan and attending a panel interview, I qualified for a full 12 months of income support

This income – about \$200 a week – was certainly helpful and became another dependable income stream. Have you looked into any programs supporting new businesses in your country?

What Does This Mean For You?

Becoming an entrepreneur demands that you find creative solutions for the problems you come up against, including how to manage your time and improve your cash flow. It may also require making sacrifices, selling items that are more luxuries than necessities or cutting down on monthly expenses.

When you have a cushion of cash to draw on you can start thinking about outsourcing the tasks that will help grow your business. This was a difficult step for me because I didn't like paying someone else to do something I could probably do myself. But hiring

someone to free up my time or complete a crucial component of a new project then led to injections of new cash flow sources. I found that with practice you start to enjoy the benefits and become comfortable with **spending money to make money**.

Here are a few points you should take away from all of this:

When the situation requires stability of income and you have no money and no people to support you, a job is the answer. Just be careful you don't turn that job into a career or worse – a trap. You should view it merely as a temporary cash flow source, a stepping stone, to help fuel your business growth or give you the stability to test business ideas if you don't have one.

Capital is a powerful thing. Many people are sitting on assets right now and until you see them as something you can sell, you don't realize you have a source of untapped capital. For years I looked at my first website as a hobby that made a few hundred dollars a month. Then one day it dawned on me that **something that makes money can be sold**, and a few months later I had made as much money as I usually made in a year in one big injection of cash. What assets are you sitting on right now that you could sell?

The time to hire help is usually earlier than you think. Us misers tend to look at our cash flow and would prefer to see it go into the bank account and just keep working our butts off to grow. But a much smarter and profitable path is to take that money and hire people, even if it drops your business profit to zero temporarily. It won't be like that for long and very soon your cash flow will be exponentially greater than the money it cost to hire help.

What you eventually want out of this process is a real business with real scale and big profits, but not every project is going to get you there. If something is making money but it's not the big dream you want to follow, let it carry you forward to create some time freedom and use that time to work on the next project.

From One Man Show To Team Of Eight (And Growing!)

I spent 5 years doing pretty much everything myself for my businesses.

That's why it took about 7 years to get to the point where I felt I was financially making at least enough money to survive.

That's A LONG TIME. Too long.

To fully put this into perspective we have to take a trip down memory lane way back to the beginning of my [Internet business timeline](#).

My Business Journey

My first true success online was my popular Magic card game site, MTGParadise.com started in the late nineties. I created that site as a true newbie. I learned how to FTP, code HTML, create basic graphics and spent countless nights changing my website. To start with I wrote content for the website myself and learned some basic Internet marketing techniques to bring in traffic, which pretty much amounted to link exchanges and regular participation in popular Magic newsgroups.

My site grew slowly, but with no benchmarks to really compare against I was happy enough with my few hundred daily visitors, adding another ten or twenty new readers per month, treating the project purely as a hobby.

Eventually I started to receive guest articles from other people who played the card game, which helped reduce my writing load. I spent most of my time back then

struggling to make HTML do what I wanted it to do and did not write nearly as much as I do now as a blogger and information product creator.

My First Taste of Success

Within a few months the forums began to really take off thanks to the increasingly active card trading community.

If you can create a site that is based on user generated content fueled by a strong **hook** – a reason for people to come back to the site every day — then you have struck gold in Internet business terms. Many multi-million dollar web businesses today are based on this principle (think eBay, Facebook, YouTube).

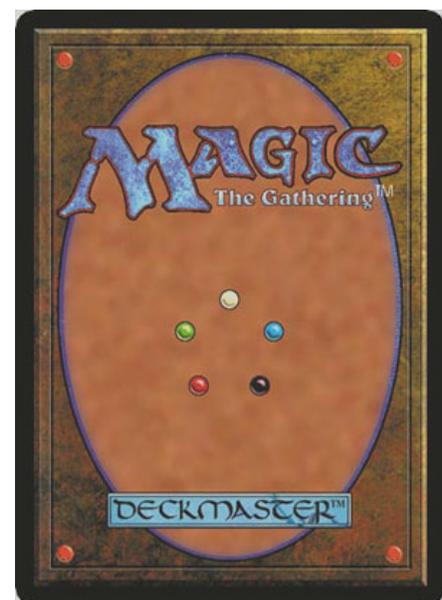
My Magic site did not become a multi-million dollar business, but it did carve out it's own little corner in a very specific niche. As a result my traffic grew to over a thousand visitors a day, and I made my first real online income thanks to advertising sponsors on MTGParadise.com.

The Empire Starts To Grow

Once my forum began to take off I suddenly found myself in charge of a little business. As a result of my site's success I found myself for the first time, running out of time when it came to dealing with all the demands placed on me online.

I wore "all the hats" when it came to my early web projects. I couldn't justify the financial cost of hiring help – to be honest, even when I could I still didn't – it took a while to learn the value of hiring help. So I was upgrading scripts, writing content, marketing, handling sponsors, moderating forums, replying to emails – basically doing everything myself.

This became an impossible range of activities for one person to do and for the very first time I realized that my Internet business was not really a business – **it was a job** – and something had to change.



A concept I learned around this time had a profound impact and started me down the path towards the customer service and overall business structure I use today – The 80/20 rule. It was thanks to grasping this principle that I realized I had to find ways to free up my time to do what I did best. This made sense to me not just because it could help my business grow so I could make more money, but also because what I really wanted was to spend less time on jobs I didn't like. The 80/20 rule could deliver both outcomes.

If you have never heard of the 80/20 Rule, please read my primer here – [What Is The 80/20 Rule And Why It Will Change Your Life](#)

A Fundamental Business Strategy

As discussed already, outsourcing is simply the act of having other people do things for you.

The first time I did this was when I recruited writers (and later forum moderators) for my Magic site. This was an unpaid exchange - I needed content, they wanted a little fame from writing about a subject they loved. Outsourcing these two tasks made my life a little easier.

It was because of this experience, my newly formed 80/20 attitude, my ongoing study of what made for a successful online business (one that granted the owner certain freedoms), that I looked for new projects based on a business model that leveraged outsourcing.

As a result, my next successful project, [BetterEdit.com](#), was structured to rely on outsourcing. My proofreading business delivered a service entirely provided by other people - academics who could edit student papers.

My First Hire

BetterEdit, although built on the skills of a team of professional editors, still depended on me to provide **customer support**. Although I was becoming better at outsourcing and freeing up my time to focus on my core strengths and tasks that I enjoyed, I still

invested a lot of time communicating with my clients and providing superior customer service.

By this stage I probably should have begun some outsourcing, at the very least have someone else handle website creation and maintenance, but I didn't. I was (and still am in many ways) addicted to saving money and preferred to work harder and watch my bank balance inch up slowly, rather than work smarter and get leverage from the money I had by using it to hire help.

Eventually I discontinued many projects, including an offline English school, and community websites focused on trading items and social activism. All of these projects were commercial failures. I would also frequently start pay per click marketing projects after being lured by new information products promising quick riches, but would give up shortly after because I didn't enjoy the process.

I ended up narrowing in on BetterEdit.com as it was the only project making money at the time. This focus meant my cash flow became more stable and **my business grew**.

It would take many years before I finally bit the bullet and invited a good friend, Angela, to work with me and take over the customer service role at BetterEdit. Angela was trained in my systems and slowly over a period of months replaced me as the main source of customer support and continued to do a great job until I sold the business.

This experience was a real revelation for me. Seeing that someone could actually replace me and perform as good and sometimes better customer service than I did was a quantum leap in my attitude to business outsourcing.

Seven Years Later...

This one change eventually led to a period of rapid business growth as I began to take on people to help me with all aspects of my Internet empire. From installing scripts to designing graphics, managing servers and creating templates, to writing copy – I had people helping with everything.

This did not happen all at once of course, but with each contractor I brought on, although I took a hit in my profit margin to pay the fees, my business growth skyrocketed because I was able to get more done of what I was good at.

One of the main reasons I hired Angela to help with BetterEdit was so I could devote myself even more to blogging. Then, as my blog grew in exposure I found myself unable to keep up with all the people emailing me asking for help or a link to their website. Some queries were left unanswered as I busied myself creating my next post (actually I'm doing this right now – I've always had the philosophy of "create new content" before doing anything else).

Around this time I also began buying websites, starting with a second blog called SmallBusinessBranding.com, and later two forum based websites on miniature motorcycles.

Throughout this period everything I was working on was growing and bringing me into contact with more and more people. By then I had well and truly lost my ability to respond to every person who contacted me and my customer service performance suffered at the hands of my business success.

Eventually, I sold BetterEdit.com and decided to focus entirely on my blog. I now understood the value of outsourcing and I was determined not to make the same mistake of trying to do everything myself as I developed Blog Mastermind and Entrepreneurs-Journey.com.

What I Would Do Differently

It took me seven years to become an "overnight success" and I don't want it to take that long for you. To help you avoid my mistake of doing everything yourself, here are some of the things I should have hired people to do for me right from the start, even as one off jobs.

Most of these things could have been done for under \$100, which I could have paid for myself, but I was just very tight with my money (another mistake!). As I said, I always preferred to keep that money in the bank and struggle to do it all by myself.

If I had the chance to do it all again, here are some of the jobs I would outsource:

- Logo design
- WordPress installation
- Blog theme installation
- Email list optin form installation
- Hire a professional photographer so I had some presentable shots of myself
- Cover graphics on free reports
- Cover graphics for all social media accounts
- Format/layout editor for my free reports
- Customer service email person (1 hour a day to start with)
- Intro/Outro for videos and audios
- Copywriter for most important headlines like optin forms and landing pages
- Tech helper for installing and configuring plugins, forum software, and other tools I came across and spent hours trying to get to work myself!

Then as my budget got a bit bigger, I wish I hired help with these sorts of tasks...

- Copywriting across all sales pages on my website
- Designer for layout of my sales pages
- Researcher and writer to help me put together new products
- Slide designer to design all my presentations
- Tech person to setup all my optin form related split tests
- Content manager to help me repurpose all my content across multiple channels

My Business Today...

These days I outsource almost everything on the list above and more. At the time of writing, I have no employees, but I have a team of seven permanent part-time contractors who are working with me on growing my business, and several regular overseas freelancers:

I have three web designers located in Australia, the USA and India who have varying skill sets and build and maintain my websites, design page layouts, landing pages and checkouts, and provide tech support.

Our two customer care VAs living in Canada and Spain provide client support via email, chat, Skype and through our Facebook community and Laptop Lifestyle Academy membership site.

All my design needs, including branding, slideshow presentations, PDF creation and social media ads and banners, are outsourced to graphic designers in Canada and Pakistan.

In 2015, I decided to create a new role and hired a Project Manager, Laura. I needed someone who could coordinate the creation of new products and take over the responsibility of recruiting, interviewing and hiring contractors. Although I'm a huge advocate for outsourcing, it can be a tricky and often time consuming process - especially when I needed to hire so many different contractors. At this stage, I was ready to outsource my outsourcing!

In Laura's first year at EJ she read hundreds of CVs, interviewed and tested more than 50 candidates, hired 12 permanent and short-term contractors and completely overhauled EJ's recruitment system. I'll hand over to her for the second section of Outsourcing Online so she can walk you through our system for recruiting A-players and show you how you can use this process to outsource parts of your own business.

Part 2: How To Find, Recruit and Retain A-Players For Your Team

Hi Laptop Lifestylers!

I'm Laura, Yaro's Project Manager. When I joined EJ in 2015, outsourcing online was relatively new to me. After many years running a non-profit organization and wandering around the world working on different projects, I had plenty of project management experience. But I had never hired a perfect stranger online, sight unseen, and paid them to do a job for me. Quite frankly, **I had no idea where to start or how to go about it.**

As you would expect, I made a lot of mistakes in the beginning. My first hire was a total disaster whose work was of such a low standard I ended up spending an entire month completing the job myself. It was a time consuming and costly mistake I was determined never to repeat.

From that experience I learned I needed to be *much* clearer from the beginning about our project goals and what kind of person I needed *before* I started hiring. I should have taken a lot more time to



This is me "working hard" to find freelancers to create bonuses for the Blog Money Finder

screen candidates, interview them and make sure the person I chose was right person for the job. Then when I finally hired a contractor, I now understood I needed to overcommunicate in the beginning to get the result I needed in the end.

Over the first few months Yaro and I worked together through a process of trial, error and innovation to fine tune our hiring processes and give EJ's recruitment system a makeover. Today, the process of finding motivated, reliable and top-notch freelancers is relatively straightforward and I can't remember a time when this wasn't second nature to me.

I hope by walking you through our tried-and-tested methods for recruiting A-players, I can take some of the fear and confusion out of the process for you, too.

Finding The Right Person For The Job

In theory, outsourcing is simple. You need a copywriter to write a sales page. You login to any of the countless outsourcing sites where copywriters are ready and waiting for your business. You advertise a job, people apply and you find someone you like so you hire them. Boom. Done, right?

Maybe in an ideal world.

On the world's biggest outsourcing platform, Upwork, there are more than 10 million freelancers registered and looking for work. Whatever role you're trying to fill, you can easily find someone to do it for you. The challenge is finding the *right* someone for the job.

You want to find someone productive and motivated who prioritizes your project and their role within your business. You want them to be effective communicators so you always know where you stand with each other. They should be reliable and trustworthy so you know when you send them a message they won't leave you hanging, waiting on a response.

You want them to be able to think and solve problems with creativity, to work autonomously but not be shy about asking questions so they can get really clear about

what you expect from them. You want people in your business who are determined to do well for you and who see the bigger picture of your business, not just the role they play within it.

And no, these people are not quite so easy to find...

Go Overboard

As you read through our guide to outsourcing you might think our hiring process is a bit cut throat, or that we go completely overboard. I would have thought so too in the beginning.

When I first started out I couldn't believe there would be freelancers who would accept a job then disappear off the face of the earth, never to be heard from again. I never imagined two people could send a quote to complete exactly the same project and charge a difference of \$8000, or that someone would start a project at an agreed price and put their fees up halfway through.

There are a lot of fabulous freelancers out there but there are also people who are more focused on money than providing a quality service. If you spend a bit more time in the recruitment and screening stage to find the right person for the job, you'll save yourself a ton of cash, time and anxiety down the track.

Get Clear On What Your Want

The first and most important thing you need to do is get clear on what you're hiring for, why and who you want. The best way to do this is to write a job brief *and* a job description.

These two documents are similar but not quite the same thing.

The job brief outlines the actual job the person is expected to do and the kind of tasks they will need to perform. Normally this brief is detailed in a project management software like Asana so it can be referred back to throughout the hiring process.

If you are recruiting for an ongoing role, like a virtual assistant or web designer, you need to list all the tasks the person is expected to perform and the gaps you hope they will fill in your business. It is expected that this job brief will evolve and change over time, but it's important to have an idea of the core skills and experience the successful candidate will have as well as other factors that might be important.

Should they be in a particular timezone? What software or programs should they already know how to operate? How many hours per week do you need them to work and how much can you afford to pay? Work out what you want and record it all in the job brief.

If you are recruiting for a short-term project, you need to outline your goals and what steps the person will need to take to achieve them. What do you want the result of this project to look like? It's helpful to write the job brief as a set of instructions for the contractor so, if they read it, they could get working straight away.

This is particularly important for projects because you need to be clear before you start hiring what is involved in completing the project, what skills are required, how much time it will take and therefore how much money you should budget.

When you've got a clear idea of what the job will entail, then it's time to write a job description.

The job description is how you advertise your position to potential candidates. It gives a brief overview of your business, the role they are applying for, the skills and experience they should have and the tasks they will be expected to perform. Provide information about selection criteria, including what skills they must have and other skills that are desired but not essential.

It's up to you whether you feel comfortable discussing hourly rates or project budgets at this stage. I don't usually include this information in the job description, but discuss it in the first round of emails with shortlisted candidates.

Here is a basic formula for creating a job description. Just open your word processor and answer these questions in order:

- How would you summarize in one or two sentences the job you are hiring for?
- What does your business do?
- How will this role fit within or benefit your business?
- What are the key tasks the contractor will perform?
- What are the desired skills and experience the contractor should have?
- What are some of the personal attributes that are important for this role?
- How should they apply?

The section detailing how they should apply is very important. **This is their first test.**

If I tell candidates to address their application to Laura and they address it Yaro or Sir/Madam then they haven't read the job ad clearly. If you ask them to complete an online application form and they send their CV via email, then they haven't followed the instructions. These are all red flags that seem small but actually speak volumes about the applicant and whether they're A-players or not.

You Need A Freelancer, Not A Superhero

Look at the list of tasks you don't know how to do or don't enjoy. The chances of you finding one person who can do ALL of those tasks are very slim. If you're struggling to do all of them, it might be because they require different skill sets and you might need to hire a few people on a contract or casual basis to cover them all.

Sometimes I see people posting ads looking for a VA and the job description asks them to be proficient



performing every single task required to run an online business, from customer service to graphic design, online marketing, creating landing pages, balancing the finances and developing sales funnels. These ads crack me up! Anyone proficient in such a diverse set of skills is probably out there running their own business, not looking for work!

Have realistic expectations and hire people who are motivated, smart, reliable and creative problem solvers. Don't expect them to tick all the boxes or wear all of the hats.

Depending on your needs, many new business owners prefer to first hire someone to help with their customer service or web design and development so it frees up their time to work on other projects. If your needs are really so diverse that you can't hire one or two people to take care of them, then hire someone like me whose job is to outsource work to other people.

CVs, Cover Letters and Curly Questions

Most jobs I have applied for throughout my life have asked for two things: a CV and a cover letter. So when I first joined EJ and started recruiting people, that's what I asked applicants for, too. It seemed logical. The CV provides information about every relevant job they've ever done and the cover letter is the personal touch that tells you why they believe they are the perfect fit for the job.

During my first few months at EJ, we rarely had large numbers of applicants applying for positions and, for the most part, the CV and cover letter told me everything I needed to know to compile a shortlist. In the job advertisement, I always asked them to answer certain screening questions in their cover letter. Sometimes I'll throw them a "curly question" - something a bit challenging that requires them to demonstrate creative or critical thinking. Depending on the job I was hiring for, I might also request samples of their work.

For example, when recruiting a web designer we asked candidates to look at the home page of Entrepreneurs-Journey.com and tell us how we could speed up its loading time. We also asked for links to live websites that the applicant built from scratch. The applicant might look great "on paper" with a well-written cover letter and a CV full of

relevant experience, but if they can't answer the question or send samples of their work, they probably don't have what it takes to do the job.

When you first start out this is a perfectly good application process for ongoing positions or big projects. For shorter projects or quick jobs, like hiring a web designer to build a one off landing page, you might just ask for a brief cover letter and a link to their portfolio. If you're just hiring someone on Fiverr for a \$5 gig, checking out their portfolio and reviews and having a quick chat with them is more than enough.

You decide how difficult the application process should be depending on the importance and difficulty of the job.

Automating The Application Process For Big Recruitment Drives

When your recruitment drives start to get a bit bigger - maybe you've got a few thousand subscribers or you decide to advertise the role on a public platform - suddenly CVs and cover letters become more of a hassle than a help.

The first time I encountered this was when Yaro sent an email to his entire mailing list advertising three positions available for ongoing, part-time roles with EJ. Within a few hours I was overwhelmed by *hundreds* of CVs and cover letters flooding in from around the world.

It was exciting to have such a huge amount of interest but **here's the problem: no two CVs or cover letters look alike**. They are all formatted differently, some with the person's education at the top while others put it at the bottom, some layout information as a story while others used dot points, some addressed the selection criteria in the cover letter while others highlighted it throughout their CV.

It took not hours, but weeks just to sort through the CVs and cover letters and extract the key information I needed to identify if someone was suitable for the job or not. It felt like a huge waste of time and I am sure some great applicants were overlooked just because I couldn't find what I needed from their application documents quickly.

I knew there had to be a better way.

When that recruitment drive was over we decided to give our hiring process a complete makeover. I spent a couple of hours teaching myself how to create surveys with [Google Forms](#) and I got to work building job application questionnaires. It was surprisingly easy to learn. Here is an example of a questionnaire built for an [application to join our team as a web designer](#).

With these questionnaires, candidates responded to more in depth questions that gave me ample information to make an informed decision about their application. I also included a number of questions to test their skill and ability in relation to the job they're applying for so it made it easier to narrow down a shortlist. There was not an option to send me an email or upload a CV or other documents.

I made every question compulsory so the applicants couldn't forget or omit anything, which made the application process easier and more efficient for them as well. Every candidate answered the same questions in the same order and their details were delivered to me on a spreadsheet. That meant I had all the important information present in neat, matching little columns and boxes. Now, comparing applicants based on skill, experience, available hours and salary expectations was as easy as scrolling up and down.

The other great thing about the questionnaire is that it sends an automatic response to all applicants thanking them for their interest and advising they will only be contacted if they make the shortlist. This cut down on huge amounts of time I used to spend responding to people to say "thank you but no thank you" or confirming we had received their application.

I also created a new [recruitment page](#) on EJ's website designed to "sell" the benefits of working with Yaro so we attracted more A-players. The page provided information that answered the most common questions I was asked throughout the hiring process, which also cut down on time spent playing email tennis.

Start Small

Remember, if your business is still small or you're still running the show on your own, automating your recruitment process to this extent is probably overkill. Bookmark this page and come back to it when your outsourcing needs go to the next level.

For now, start small and follow these simple steps:

Step #1: Create a job brief

Step #2: Write the job description

Step #3: Decide how you want candidates to apply. Do you want them to send a CV and Cover Letter or will you create a questionnaire? What additional screening or "curly" questions do you want to ask them? Would it be helpful if they sent samples of their work?

Step #4: Add the information on how to apply to the job description

That's it! Now you're ready to start your search...

Finding The Elusive A-Player

Look Around You

The first place to start looking for contractors is within your networks. A-players usually keep good company and they can spot another A-player a mile away. **Who do you know who has the kind of attitude, outlook and work ethic as you do?** Send them a message telling them what you're looking for, attach the job description and ask if they have any recommendations. Also ask them to forward your email to anyone in their networks who could be a good match for the job.

I know this works because that's how I joined EJ. Yaro mentioned to his web designer, an A-player who had worked with him for years, that he was looking for a VA. That web designer happened to be my good friend, Carly, who sent me an email with Yaro's contact details. I had just returned to Australia from Nepal and was looking for work. The timing was perfect.

Yaro and I arranged an interview on Skype and he hired me on the spot for a one month trial. We bypassed the entire recruitment process and I assure you, it was not because my CV and cover letter were particularly dazzling. It's because he trusted Carly and knew she would only recommend someone who could play at her level.

Getting referrals from people you trust and respect is definitely the most effective and efficient way to find the right people for your team. However, the challenge is that a lot of the best people are already taken. So sometimes you have to cast your net a little wider...

Use Social Media

If you can't get recommendations from people you know, try social media. Whatever thing you're looking for, there is a Facebook group somewhere with people who do that thing for a living, and they're all sitting around chatting about how to do that thing better.

There are also community groups set up for online entrepreneurs, like the Laptop Lifestyle, Freedom Hackers and Screw The 9 - 5. These groups are full of people on a similar journey to you and who have probably, at some stage, needed whatever you're looking for. If you do a shout out for referrals the people in those groups will start tagging professionals who can help.

Here are some other ways you can use social media to reach potential candidates:

- **Post to your business and personal social media accounts** to advertise the position and ask for referrals
- **Post in university alumni and student groups** if you're looking for an affordable option and you're prepared to coach someone at the start of their career.
- **Use LinkedIn to tap into the networks of your friends and colleagues.** If you want a wider pool to draw from you can pay to become a Premium member and advertise your job to LinkedIn users around the world

Whenever you get a referral or come across someone who might match the job description, follow their trail to their social media accounts and websites. Check out their work and their online presence, and if you like what you see then drop them a line.

Try to be objective and discerning throughout this process. If you're hiring someone to manage your Facebook growth and a friend recommends someone who runs a social media management business that only has 57 likes on Facebook, that's probably not a good sign. Be courteous about acknowledging the referrals people make, but don't feel you have to follow them all up.

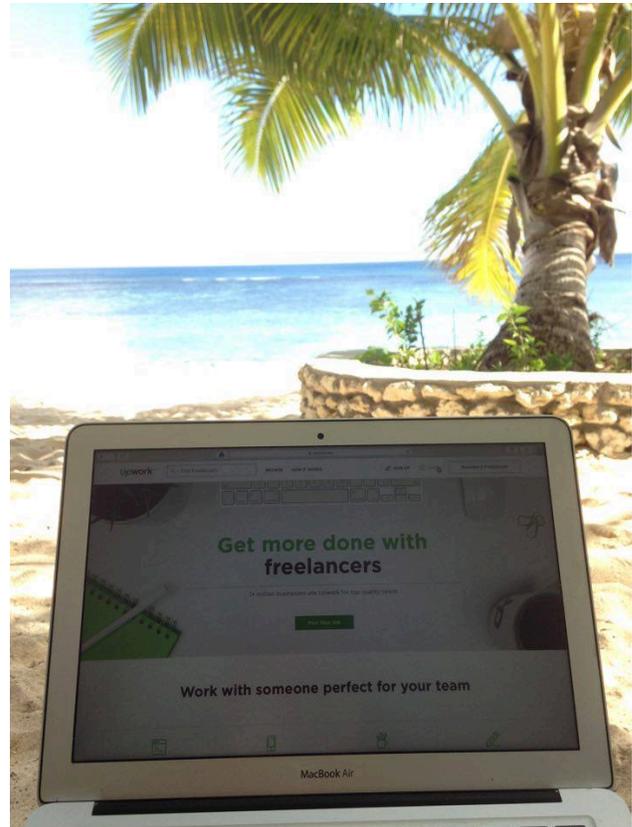
Outsourcing Websites

As I mentioned before, **there are literally millions of people registered on a growing number of outsourcing sites, looking for their next perfect job.** These outsourcing websites all work on the same basic principle of connecting freelancers and clients and providing a platform for them to communicate about their projects.

Outsourcing sites are basically a middleman between you and your freelancer and they take the stress out of negotiating conditions and arranging payment. Some sites, like Upwork, also provide extra protection by monitoring what your freelancer is working on and sending screenshots from their computer so you can track their progress.

Each freelancing site works on a different financial model (charging either the client, the freelancer or both) and has their own specialty or niche. Some are focused more on tech skills like web development, while others are focused on content writing or design. There are also sites like Upwork and Freelancer which are more general and bring together every kind of freelancer and job you can imagine.

Depending on the outsourcing platform you can hire a freelancer on an hourly basis (which you can limit to a certain number of hours each week), a fixed project rate or a monthly rate for a set number of full time or part time hours.



This is an actual photo I took "at work" one day, sitting on a tropical island using the outsourcing site Upwork to communicate with one of our talented, reliable A-player freelancers in Pakistan

Generally, you have three options when you are searching for freelancers:

1. **Advertising:** You post your job on the site publicly so it is open for all freelancers to view and apply
2. **Headhunting:** You search for freelancers using job-related keywords (eg. "Logo design" or "SEO expert") then send the stand-out people a private message inviting them to apply for the job
3. **Competition:** You launch a competition where different freelancers pitch to you or complete a project for you, and you hire the winner.

In my experience, the best way to find good quality freelancers is to headhunt.

"Headhunting" (in the recruitment world) has nothing to do with collecting the heads of enemies as trophies. It just means identifying quality candidates and approaching them to fill a position within a business. Headhunting takes a bit longer because you actually have to go out and search for potential candidates, rather than posting a job and waiting for people to apply.

On many outsourcing websites, you can browse through freelancer profiles and find people who have good reviews, impressive portfolios and a bio that demonstrates a high level of English. Even if they asked someone to edit their bio so it reads like a native speaker would write, that still shows a level of initiative and attention to detail. **If a freelancer's profile has poor reviews, no samples of their work and their bio is riddled with obvious spelling and grammar errors, keep scrolling.**

That said, there are some cases when freelancers have a low level of English but they have 5 star reviews. If their area of expertise is something technical like web development or graphic design, they don't

100% Job Success

 **TOP RATED** 

Work History
333 hours worked
18 jobs

Availability
Available
As Needed - Open to Offers
24 hrs response time 

Look for top rated freelancers with good reviews and a high rate of job success

need to speak perfect English. As long as they have the vocabulary to understand and communicate about the tasks they need to perform, that's often enough.

When you find a freelancer profile that ticks all your boxes, send them a private message inviting them to apply for the job. This means when you start receiving applications, they are from contractors you have already semi-screened and handpicked. If you advertise a job you will probably be inundated with responses, but only one or two might actually be suitable for the role. If you want to have a larger pool to choose from, do both - advertise *and* headhunt.

Check out these popular outsourcing sites to get the ball rolling. Take the time to browse through their services, become familiar with their platform and understand their fee structure:



Should I Advertise Jobs To My Email List?

This is a tricky one, and you're the only person who can decide if it's the right thing to do.

The “Pros” of advertising to your email list is that the people who apply will be aligned with your vision. They know your business and your products, they're interested in what you're doing and will feel invested in your mission. They may have similar or complimentary skills that can be applied to your business.

The “Cons” of advertising to your email list is that you already have a business relationship with these people that may be damaged if they apply and are not selected. If people have been following your work for a while they probably look up to you so applicants who come from your email list need to be nurtured. You have a reputation and relationship to preserve so you need to respond to the applicant/subscriber in a way that makes them feel seen and heard. This requires a level of diplomacy and attention that can be a drain on time and resources.

Applications Are Coming In... Now What?

If you use any or all of these methods for recruitment, there's a big chance applications are starting to flood in. You may find you get more than you feel you can handle. Try not to be overwhelmed by the process. You're not committing to hiring anyone at this stage. You're just window shopping. And when you're shopping there's a crucial step that comes between browsing and making a purchase...

Interviewing and Testing Applicants

If you want a new car, you'll always take it for a test drive first, right? Even when you go to those fancy Italian gelato stores they let you taste test a spoonful of a few different flavors before you commit to eating an entire scoop. Outsourcing is no different. **Before you can even think of hiring someone, you need to test them first to make sure they're the right person for the job.**

Start Chatting With Your Shortlist

Once you've got some applications coming in, decide how many (if any) are good enough to make the shortlist. Now is the time to get in touch with those people and get a dialogue going. **You can find out a lot about people just by exchanging a few messages so a bit of email tennis can narrow down your shortlist further.**

Send them a few questions, clarify information from their application and ask if they have any questions for you. This is also a good time to discuss project budget and salary expectations. If you can afford to pay \$20 per hour and they're asking for \$60, then you probably can't work together. It's better to know that now than down the track. **Conversations about money make a lot of people really uncomfortable, but it's important to make sure you're on the same page from the beginning.**

Usually I offer information about our rough budget and work conditions in the first email. I then ask the candidate if they would be interested in participating in a paid "practical interview" or test job, which involves completing a number of job-related tasks to check their suitability for the role. Once they send me confirmation that they're still interested in the role, ok with the budget and keen to move to the next stage, it's time to send them the test.

Designing The Perfect Test

Before you design the test, take a look at the job description and job brief. **What are the three most important things on the list of tasks this person will need to perform in order to do their job effectively? Now set one small test job that relates to each task.**

Wherever possible, use the test as an opportunity to drive your projects forward. If you're testing a graphic designer and you have a pressing need for a new logo or Facebook banner, make that one of the test tasks. Yaro needed an important landing page survey built while I was in the process of trying to hire a web designer. I gave that landing page job to four different web designers over two months and the one who eventually nailed it landed the job.

If you're hiring for a customer service position or a role that is a bit more ambiguous, then design a test that evaluates basic skill. For example, this was one of the tasks in the test for our Customer Service role:

Task #1

- Watch this video on YouTube:
<https://youtu.be/7hiW4yRsfrk>
- Start a free blog on Wordpress.com around the video's theme
- Create a new post titled Coconut Oil Healthy?
- Write a 100 word blog post summarizing the video
- Insert the YouTube video into the post
- Copy the post's URL and paste it in the space below.



This is a good test to evaluate their WordPress and tech skills, as well as how they process and reproduce information. When assessing their work, you should make note of whether they exceed the word count limit or if they put a sneaky “Is” in front of “Coconut Oil Healthy?” These are all good tests to measure their attention to detail and see how they read and follow instructions.

Here are some general tasks you can use on any test:

- Ask the candidate to respond to a fabricated email from a pretend client. Some examples might be a customer having technical issues with your site (web developer role), a member wanting a refund (customer service role) or someone commenting on inappropriate behaviour in a Facebook group (social media manager role). This demonstrates the candidates written communication skills, compassion and customer retention strategies.
- Ask the candidate to handwrite a letter answering an important question, then tell them to find the most efficient way to send it to you. This is a great test of problem solving skills and you would be surprised by all the different ways you can receive a handwritten letter these days!
- Ask the candidate to take an online typing test and send the results, including typing speed and errors. If you’re going to communicate with each other exclusively via text based mediums like Slack, Skype etc. then someone who only types 20 words per minute and makes 5 mistakes is not ideal.

There are not many blanket tests you can give to every candidate to test their suitability for any role. First look at what you need them to do for your business, then come up with one or a few things they can do to demonstrate they've got what it takes. Before you invite applicants to test, **work out how much you can afford to spend on the process and make sure you keep the test under three hours long** so it’s short, sweet and you don't blow your testing budget.

It may seem counter-intuitive and even wasteful to pay people to interview for you but it's worth it. High quality candidates will be too busy to agree to complete a test job for nothing, and the money you spend on this process you will save almost immediately by not hiring the wrong person. There have been several times I've tested three people

for a job and put my (metaphorical) money down on a clear frontrunner... only to hire the underdog when the test results come in.

The Testing Phase

Once the candidate has confirmed they are happy with the project budget or hourly rate, I send them the test job as an attached document. In the email I tell them to respond with:

1. A quote for the test, either as an hourly or fixed rate
2. The number of hours it will take them to complete it.
3. A timeframe of when they are aiming to submit it.

I then advise they should not start the test until I have given them the green light.

They don't realize it, but their email response is actually part of the test. As I mentioned before, I design a test that will take less than three hours to complete. However you would be surprised how much timeframes can vary from one freelancer to the next. Once I had two candidates quote for the same test and one said 3 hours while the other quoted 38 hours! True story!

Asking them to **set a timeframe and deadline before they start testing** is a good way to evaluate how fast they work and to make sure you're on the same page about how much they will bill you for the job. Asking them to choose their own submission date also allows them to fit the test job around their commitments so they should have no excuses for missing their self-imposed deadline.

Once you're happy with the quote and the conditions, give them the green light. Be



available to answer questions throughout the process but otherwise you don't need to get in touch with them until they submit their results.

The Evaluation Phase

Once the freelancer submits their test, let them know there are still other candidates testing and you can't reach a decision until all submissions are in. Let them know you will be in touch as soon as you have news.

Make some notes about each candidate, not just based on their test submissions but also how they interacted with you throughout the process:

- Did they ask intelligent questions?
- Did they submit by their self-imposed deadline or advise if there would be a delay?
- Are there any red flags?
- Is their English level appropriate for the job they're applying for?
- Has communication been easy?
- Did they have internet problems or drop off the radar?
- It may sound hippy dippy, but did you get a good vibe from them?

Weigh all of these things up against the results of their test and make plenty of notes.

The final stage is to invite the standout candidates for a Skype interview and check their references. After all that, you've got SO much information to make a decision. You've got their original application, the email dialogue between you, a sample of their work, you've had a chat with them on Skype and gotten kudos from their former colleagues to paint a picture of who they are and how they can fit into your business.

By now, there should be a clear favorite you're ready to hire. If there's not, then go back to the beginning and start from scratch. The right person is still out there somewhere, waiting to be found.

Hiring A Contractor

The best part of the whole process is when you get to offer the successful candidate the job on a one-month trial period. They're happy to win the job, you're happy you've found someone who can help you, it's a happy moment...

The much less happy part is telling the other candidate(s) you will not be moving forward with their application. By this stage, you've been through the testing process, there have been a few emails back and forth and you have perhaps built up a bit of a rapport with them. No one likes to be the bearer of bad news...

When I email to tell people they've been unsuccessful I usually:

- **Thank them again** for participating in the practical interview
- **Give them an honest reason the other candidate was selected.** This might be because the other candidate already had experience using a complicated piece of software that meant you wouldn't need to spend time training them, or it could be because their timezone was more compatible with the people they would be working with. Be diplomatic but be honest. People usually want to know where their application or job performance came up short.
- **Congratulate them on making it this far** in the selection process and thank them for their interest in joining your team
- **Ask if they would be open to being contacted if another job becomes available** that matches their skills and experience in the future. It is reassuring for people that although you didn't hire them this time, you might consider them for something down the track.

Generally, people respond very well to emails with this format, even if they're disappointed. When people don't respond well, it just confirms you made the right choice!

The Trial Period

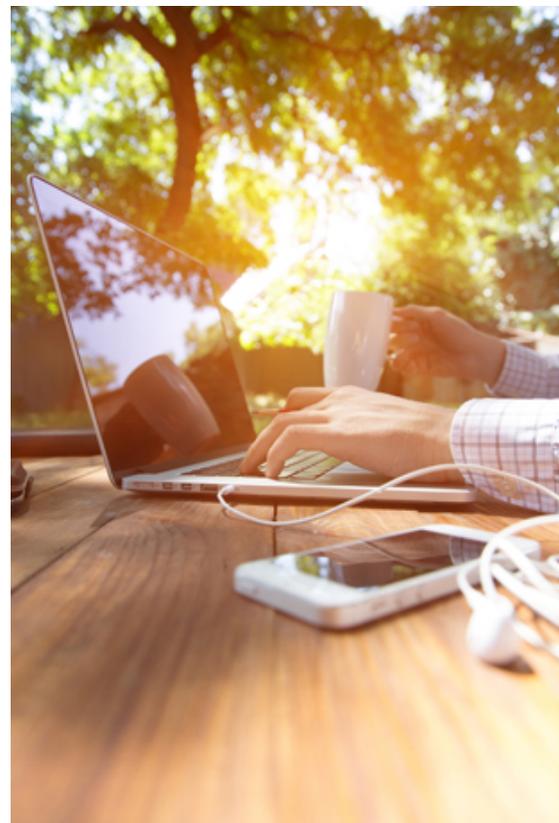
When you hire someone for an ongoing role, start by offering a one-month trial period. This gives you both a “get out of jail free” card if, for whatever reason, things aren't working out.

It is a bit harder to allocate a trial period on a short-term project, particularly if you have agreed on a fixed project rate. If you want to give yourself the option of terminating the agreement because you aren't happy with their work, you can break the project down into milestones.

Let's say you hired someone for \$500 to produce a report or eBook on a certain subject. You can break the report into five parts and pay \$100 to complete each section. However, I usually arrange to pay a fixed price upon completion of the project so the contractor doesn't disappear halfway through. If I've already been through the interview and testing phase with them, I feel like I have enough information to determine if they will do a good job or not.

Regardless of the length of the project, **there is going to be a steep learning curve in the beginning as the contractor learns about your business and you establish effective ways of working together.** Remember: You know your business inside out and back to front. It is all second nature to you. There may be things that seem obvious to you that you forget to explain or don't realize might be confusing for a new person coming on board. Be approachable and patient while they settle in and encourage them to ask lots of questions.

Never, ever assume they understand what is expected of them or know how to do something. In the early stages, break tasks down into smaller steps, state the obvious and



overcommunicate. Tell them that you'll do that in the beginning but you expect them to become more autonomous and confident to take their own initiative as time goes by.

This short-term micromanaging helps the contractor understand how you work and what you expect of them right from the beginning. As the weeks and months pass, and your trust and working relationship develops, you can back off and let them get on with it.

Finally, **it is important to find out about a contractor's other commitments, particularly when working with freelancers on short-term projects or gigs.** This should actually be discussed in the interview stage but then needs to be revisited when they first start working with you. Find out what other work they have on and when is the best time to contact them. Also ask if there are days or times they will be unavailable.

Never assume you are their only client and they are available for you 24/7. Most freelancers don't know where their next job is coming from so they take on more work now in case opportunities dry up down the track. Respect their work and commitments and try to reach an agreement about how you will work together, deadlines, timeframes, timezones, payment etc. from the beginning. Manage expectations from the start to avoid disappointment and frustration down the track.

On The Internet, Nobody Knows You're A Dog

In 1993, when the internet was gaining traction, a cartoonist created a comic for the New Yorker poking fun at the anonymity of online interactions. The caption reads: *On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog.*

I have thought about this a lot since working with freelancers, when I hired people and they disappeared without a trace, or they submitted work well below the standard I expected. This behavior happens a lot less in the real



world where people can't hide behind their screens, power down when things get difficult or hit delete if they change their minds.

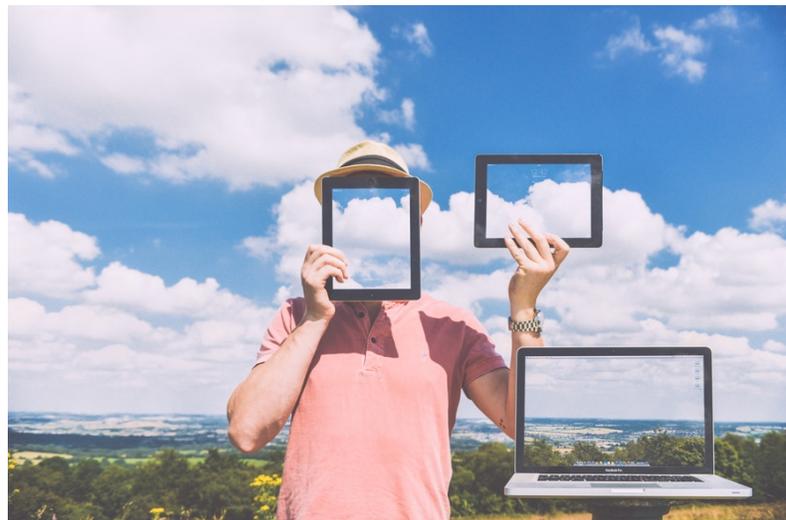
There can be a real disconnect between the client and freelancer because they never meet face-to-face and therefore may not feel a sense of responsibility or loyalty to each other. I know this because while my job is all about hiring freelancers, I *am* a freelancer as well.

Confession Time

I would consider myself an A-player and when you hand me a job, I'll give it everything I've got. I'm available, reliable and I overcommunicate so everyone knows what they can expect from me. I work weekends and nights when it's called for and worry myself sick about hitting deadlines and getting the job done well. Nothing feels worse to me than knowing I've let someone down and I only come on board a project or company if I am 100% invested.

So I was pretty shocked when I started working for EJ and discovered I felt a lot less pressure to perform than I have at bricks-and-mortar jobs in the past. Working with EJ was my first ongoing, online job where I was hired to work with someone I had never met. Of course I still brought my A-game, but in the beginning I had this sensation that if it didn't work out, nothing was lost. I had never met Yaro and wouldn't have to face him if it didn't work out. He wouldn't recognise me if he ran into me in the street. He didn't know if I was a dog.

Compared to “real world” jobs, it took longer to feel connected to the company, my role and my colleagues because in the beginning, they were only words on a screen and there had been no actual human interaction. This was a revelation for me because if I could feel like that – someone who prides herself on being



loyal, dedicated and invested in whatever she takes on – then how would it feel for the freelancers coming on for short-term and one-off projects?

Think about every job you've ever had and how much your relationship with your co-workers impacted on your experience in that role. **Social capital can be an incredibly powerful motivator in the workplace.** When you're only communicating via text and online, it takes much longer to build the kind of rapport and mutual trust that will make contractors feel invested in your business.

Always keep that in mind when you're working with freelancers. Remember they work alone in their little bubble and that can be quite isolating. **Find out what motivates them and always take the time to interact with them on a personal level.** You wouldn't arrive at the office on a Monday morning, walk up to a colleague and start a conversation with "Can you get me that report finished by tomorrow". While it may not seem like a priority when the work is piling up, a little bit of small talk goes a long way. Take the time to ask how they're doing, enquire about their families or what they have planned for the weekend. **If they feel like you care about them, they'll care about you and your business.**

Online Communication

Think back to the last time you got an email or text message where you could read the words but not the tone. Maybe there was an ambiguous sentence that stood out and made you think "Hang on, are they angry with me?" Or how about that feeling you get when you send a long, detailed message only to get an "Ok" or "Noted" in response.

So much can get lost in text exchanges because there's no voice, facial expressions or gestures to convey tone. A



Designed by Vecteezy

2005 study by New York University called "[Egocentrism Over Email](#)" discovered only 56% of recipients were correctly able to identify sarcasm, seriousness and other emotions in emails. The study found recipient often misunderstood emails because they didn't have a full appreciation of the sender's personality and filled in the gaps with stereotypes and assumptions. And the real kicker is that most senders in the experiment were sure at least 80% of their messages would be understood.

Now imagine what happens when your entire business is operating via text, whether it is through Slack, Skype, email, Asana, or whatever app you're using. Then on top of that you are working with contractors who may not have English as a first language and who come from cultures that have different concepts of humor and ways of expressing emotion. Emojis have certainly helped us express tone via text but they can only take us so far!

It's important to keep this in mind when working with contractors, particularly in cross-cultural situations. It doesn't mean you can't have a joke with them - on the contrary - but it is important to be conscious of not only what you're saying, but how that message will be understood. Remember: the quality of the result is directly related to the quality of the communication.

Here are some tips for communicating clearly:

Use simple, proper English until you have assessed how well the contractor communicates. When you open a conversation, don't say "How's it going?". They might wonder how is what going? Going where? Instead, say "How are you today?"

Don't write long paragraphs of text. Use your Enter key to put each new sentence on a new line so the information is laid out more clearly and is easier to absorb.

Make clear statements and avoid unnecessary words. Say exactly what you want in a clear and concise manner and remove words that muddy the message.

To a colleague you are familiar with who has English as a first language, you might write "*I was thinking it might be a good idea if you make that image just a little bit bigger on the page*". To a contractor with English as a second language, you should say "*Please make the main image bigger. Try 120%*"

Use numbered lists to allocate tasks. When you are communicating about lots of different subjects it is easy for messages to get muddled and confused. By allocating each point to a different number it helps both parties to follow the conversation. For example, when I send a message to Yaro and need to talk about different subjects it looks like this:

1. I've uploaded the statistics you requested about blogging trends to Google Drive. Here's the link. Let me know what you think
2. John has started work researching for the report and needs some guidance about how to structure X chapter. Here is the draft outline we worked on, please review and comment.
3. We've had nine applications for the web designer role and I'd like to test two candidates. Is it ok if I set a testing budget of \$X for two candidates doing tests capped at 3 hours each?

Then Yaro will write the corresponding number next to his responses so I understand exactly what he's talking about. This is one of Yaro's favorite communications tools - very simple but effective!

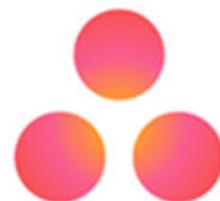
Communication Tools Of The Trade

Here's a list of the key tools our team uses for communicating with each other.



Slack - This is the EJ Team's HQ. All communication happens in Slack, with different "channels" set up for various parts of the business like web design, graphics, projects and customer care. We can send private messages direct to other team members if we need to but otherwise all communication is out in the open and searchable. There is also a *#general* chat which is like the office water cooler and a place to broadcast team-wide messages.

Asana - This is a project management tool that helps keep track of everything our team is working on, deadlines, timeframes and projects we have waiting in the wing for the future.





Skype - We use Skype for monthly catch-ups with each other and group calling for team meetings.

Paying Contractors

As mentioned earlier, be up front from the very first interaction about money. Tell contractors what your budget is, allow them to provide a quote for an hourly or project rate and make sure these conversations are recorded in writing. You may need to refer back to them down the track.

Think and plan ahead so payment arrangements are decided on from the very beginning.

Here are some things you need to think about:

- Will contractors invoice you independently or will you use an outsourcing site to record their hours and process payment?
- Will you pay contractors weekly or monthly?
- If you agreed on a fixed project rate, is it payable at the end of the project or at certain milestones along the way?
- Will you pay via PayPal, credit card, bank transfer or some other method?
- Who will absorb the cost of any fees for transferring money?
- What currency are you using? Remember the dollar sign \$ can mean USD, CAD, AUD or NZD and if you don't emphasize which one you are using, people will probably assume its USD.

The last thing you want are disagreements around money a week or month into the trial period, or worse at the end of the project, when you've already invested so much time, cash and energy into finding the contractor and bringing them into your business. Have

the difficult conversations around money in the beginning so you all know where you stand from day one.

Remember: the contractor is responsible for recording their hours and invoicing you for the agreed amount. It's ok to ask contractors to report their hours as they go, tell you what they've been working on and how much time it has taken.

We provide Yaro with a recap, explaining what we've worked on at the end of every day. We also notify him once we hit the 20 hour mark each week then we send an invoice at the end of every month. This works for the EJ Team but you might prefer to pay every two weeks, or get a weekly run down of what your contractor is working on. Take some time to figure out what works best for you.

Case Study: Roshan Perera

In 2015, we were searching for a technical writer to produce a beginner's report on how to use WordPress and other tech tools to build a blog and start an online business. I wrote a job brief to get clear on what we wanted, loaded the job description on Upwork and looked for freelancers whose profiles were well written, had good reviews from past clients and whose hourly rate was within our project budget.

I sent 20 or so private messages to freelancers inviting them to apply. Several responded, but the one who stood out was Roshan Perera, a 26 year old tech blogger from Colombo, Sri Lanka. He had good reviews from past clients on Upwork and I could tell from the writing style on his blog that he could write about technology for beginners in a casual and easy to absorb style.

We sent a few emails back and forth and we agreed on a fixed project rate for the job, should he be selected.

The paid test job I set for him was to complete the first chapter of the report: Introduction To Web Hosting. As there were ten chapters planned for the final report, he billed me at 1/10 of the agreed rate for the entire report. This was not deducted from the fixed project rate as we understood there would be a lot of revisions required and the money was allocated from the testing budget.



Roshan Perera, Freelancer and Tech Writer from Sri Lanka

Roshan completed the chapter and of course, it wasn't exactly what we wanted. It rarely is on the first go! But I could see that he was a good writer, he understood technology, he followed instructions, he showed initiative, he asked intelligent questions and he communicated well.

I hired him and he completed the 128 page report within six weeks. He communicated with me every day, updated me on his progress and always took feedback on board, making revisions whenever requested. Sometimes he didn't agree with us and he stated his case for why it should be done another way. I respected that, because I was confident he knew the technology and industry better than I did.

If he didn't, I wouldn't have hired him.

What blew me away most about Roshan was in our last week working together, he told me he had learnt so much from researching and writing for EJ that while he was working on this project, he spent his spare time building a new blog, email course and sales funnel using Yaro's business model! Roshan packaged up his knowledge and delivered it to the world in the form of [Freelancing Hacks](#) - a blog for people who want the freedom of a freelance career but don't know where to start.

Roshan put in a lot of work and far more hours than he billed us for so Yaro rewarded him for his effort by inviting him to be a student of Blog Mastermind. On the house.

This is just one example of the valuable exchange that can take place when the freelance-client relationship is done right.

In 2016, we hired Roshan to produce two more reports and while he was working with us again, he gave us some insight on outsourcing from his perspective.

How did you get into freelancing?

I worked at several day jobs building websites and doing graphic design for other companies before getting into freelancing. I always felt miserable working those jobs and getting ordered around. I kept jumping from one job to another until I finally found a job at a locally published tech magazine as a freelance writer.

It was a low-paying job but I enjoyed writing and getting paid for doing what I loved. Then I found out that I could earn more for doing the same job if I offered my services online. So I decided to quit my full time writing job and started freelancing online.

What are some of the positive and negative aspects of being a freelancer?

As a freelancer, I now earn a lot more than I could ever make working for a local company. I get to choose who I work for and I only accept jobs I enjoy doing. It's not just a job, I have been able to establish a great career at the same time. It's really a dream come true.

The only downside is that I now work longer hours and, as a result, I have to cut down on my social life. But as I'm an introvert, it wasn't too hard to make that sacrifice.

If I wasn't freelancing, I'd probably be working at the same miserable day job where I used to work, worrying about overdue bills and feeling sorry for myself. I will never go back to that life again.

As a freelancer, what do you need from your clients?

Clients should be clear about their job descriptions, be open to suggestions, and, more importantly, they shouldn't ask for discounts or haggle for a lower rate.

What are some common traits of "good" clients?

A good client is always patient with the freelancer. When the freelancer makes a mistake, the client should be able to stay calm and be kind when explaining where they went wrong.

A good client treats the freelancer as an equal. It's important to remember that there's a real person behind the computer working on their job, often someone who has more experience and knowledge in some areas than the client. So treat that person with respect. A good client also pays the freelancer on time. The freelancer shouldn't have to chase clients for outstanding invoices.

What are some problems or issues you've had working with clients in the past?

The biggest problem I've had working with clients is that a lot of the time clients don't provide specific instructions or guidelines on how to approach the job. As a result, I've had to revise and redo a lot of my work to meet their requirements.

If the client could take a moment to write specific guidelines and provide the freelancer with more detailed instructions, it would save both the freelancer and the client a lot of time.

This is an issue which can be easily fixed if the client makes sure the freelancer they're hiring is the right fit for the job. Before hiring a freelancer you should ask for examples of their work or do a trial run, so you won't waste your time and end up with a disappointing result.

Do you think it is exploitation for people in higher income countries to outsource to lower income countries where they can pay lower wages?

It really depends on how certain freelancers price their services and the quality of their work. But, in general, I don't see anything wrong with someone in the US outsourcing a job to a freelancer in India or any other country for that matter. If the client has a limited budget for their project they will look for a way to get the job done at an affordable price. And a freelancer from India could make that a possibility.

If the freelancer is happy with how much they get paid compared to the amount of work they put in, then there is no exploitation involved

To find more information and resources in relation to outsourcing from the freelancer's perspective, check out Roshan's blog, [Freelancing Hacks](#).



Your Outsourcing Checklist

Ok so let's recap!

Step 1 Write a job brief.

Get clear on the role or project you're hiring for before you start looking for someone.

Step 2 Write a job description.

Provide an outline of the role/project, your business and the application process.

Step 3 Headhunt, advertise and share the job with your networks

Use outsourcing sites, your networks and social media to reach out to prospective candidates.

Step 4 Narrow down a shortlist

Select the best two or three candidates who stand out in the application process

Step 5 Create a test job

Devise a test job relevant to the position or project you're recruiting for

Step 6 **Pay the top applicants to complete a test job**

Agree on an hourly rate and timeframe for the test and give candidates the green light

Step 7 **Evaluate the test result and all interactions with the freelancer**

Evaluate the test job results and outcomes once all candidates have submitted their work

Step 8 **Interview over Skype**

Have a chat with them on the phone to make sure you're on the same page and to ask any other questions

Step 9 **Check references**

For ongoing roles, it is a good idea to check with their past clients or employers that they were truly A-players

Step 10 **Offer the freelancer a one month trial**

Hooray! You hired a freelancer who will take on a job that will free up your time so you can grow your business in other ways.

The World Is Waiting For You... In Pyjamas.

There has never been another time in human history when we can be connected to so many people beyond the boundaries of space and time. There are hundreds of potential A-players around the world who dream of becoming part of your team - people who, like you, want to live the Laptop Lifestyle. Maybe they don't want to launch their own business and make squillions of dollars, but they're happy to find a regular job with a reliable income stream doing something they're good at.

Being a freelancer can be stressful without ongoing work because no one knows where the next paycheck is coming from. But freelancers choose this lifestyle because it provides enormous flexibility and opportunity compared to a "real" job... and they can go to work in their pyjamas.

The freelance market is competitive and contractors have to work hard to stand out, prove themselves and shine above the rest. Sure, you might hire a few duds and people might let you down along the way. That's all part of the journey. Don't let it stop you from reaching back out to find someone else. Online business owners and freelancers need each other. Freelancers need clients like you so they can live *their* dream lifestyle and you need freelancers so you can bring your dream business to life.

Remember, if you have any questions about outsourcing, you can reach out to us in the Laptop Lifestyle Academy.

Happy Hiring!

Laura

Laura is EJ's Project Manager, HR lady and "Whatever Yaro Needs Done" kind of person. Since 2015, she has helped launch the [Blog Money Finder](#), [Power Podcasting](#) and hired a bunch of A-players to join the team. Laura is a French-Australian digital nomad who has been globetrotting for more than a decade, runs a non-profit organization in Nepal and is an enthusiastic (but not very talented) ukulele player.



Part 3: How To Manage Customer Service As A One Person Enterprise

For a small business with a limited marketing budget, good customer service that results in an above average reputation in the market leads to acquiring new customers through client referrals – in other words, people like you so much they recommend you to their friends. This is a "free" form of marketing.

During the start-up phase you have limited funds and one of the best strategies to *survive* this period of business growth is to use your existing clients as a marketing tool to bring in new clients (this is a good strategy at *any* stage of business growth).

The cornerstone of achieving that outcome is good customer service. Your existing clients will not be willing to help you, nor will they feel compelled to talk about you and refer you to others, unless they are very impressed by their interaction with your business.

Good customer service combined with a superior product can evoke a sense of reciprocity from your customers. They genuinely want your business to succeed, so much so that they go out of their way to endorse you. People like to spread things they consider valuable because in turn they enjoy the perception of being valuable as well. If you can loop your business into this motivation you have tapped the secret of word of mouth marketing.

If you need any convincing that this is the case, take the following example of an experience I had at Starbucks a few years ago in downtown Toronto Canada:

I ordered a tea and an oat brownie from Starbucks, and the brownie was delivered instantly, but the tea wasn't, so I walked over to the delivery end of the cafe and waited.

The customers just before me received their order and I expected mine next. The customers who ordered after me then walked up and collected their coffees. Then the next customer received their drink. Clearly my tea wasn't coming.

I walked back around to the cashier section and spoke to the barista who took my order. He immediately realized that he had forgotten about the tea and in two seconds flat, I had my tea, a verbal apology, a written apology, an

A free beverage might not be much to get excited about, but I only waited an extra minute longer for my tea than I should have, and certainly not long enough for me to get angry. Plus I was served very quickly once I notified them that my tea was missing. I walked away impressed not because of the beverage itself, I was impressed with the customer service policy I just witnessed.



Starbucks did not diminish in my eyes as a result of this incident. In fact they impressed me, so much so that I went away and wrote a blog post (that is read by thousands of people) proclaiming good things about Starbucks service (that's some good word of mouth).

Growing Pains As A Solo Business Owner or Blogger

Any time you interact with a prospect, reader, client or customer is an opportunity to deliver good customer service and enhance your public reputation.

When you start out, you don't have contact with many people, but assuming you do something right (land your first client or make your first product sale) then you begin to interact with customers.

Over time, what begins as something exciting and new, becomes a daily occurrence. Suddenly you find it takes several hours a day just to respond to email and moderate and reply to blog comments. Eventually, if you excel at what you do, there will come a time where you simply cannot keep up with the communication you are required to do every day to just respond to people who contact your business.

It's at this point customer service problems tend to happen.

The solo entrepreneur, who used to love talking to his or her readers and customers, suddenly hates the idea of looking at the inbox. There's too many emails, too many blog comments to reply to and moderate, social media comments to respond to - everyone is vying for his or her attention!

Simply put – everything magnifies in volume yet you don't get any more **time** to handle it. You have to try and maintain good customer service with an ever increasing pool of people **demanding your attention**.

When this happens the first thing that usually suffers is email replies. Response times drop, you start ignoring anything but the most critical emails (and even that can be difficult at times). You certainly do not have time to reply to comments made to your blog, or respond to forum posts, or Facebook messages, or Twitter tweets or people just asking basic questions via your help desk or public email.

In short – you have lost your ability to provide **good customer service** at all points of contact with your business.

So what can you do?

Can You Still Deliver Personal Service When You Can't Personally Do It All Yourself?

I can vouch for the scenario I just painted because I've been there.

I started small with a part time business, then added a blog. The blog became a business itself and I added more blogs to it. I created a membership site, bought and sold websites, started an email newsletter, attended events, travelled and began new projects as quickly as I dropped or sold others.

It all just got out of hand and naturally as expected, I wasn't able to keep communicating like I had when my business was smaller. What made it worse, I stopped enjoying the process of communicating with people online, which is not a good thing.

It is important for good customer service that you keep it as **personal** as you can. People want to feel the *person-to-person* connection, not "corporate outsourced robot" or "automatic email response" communication that is so prevalent in the corporate world.

If, like me, your business brand is your name and face, people especially appreciate it if you personally make yourself available. Close contact with customers also gives you intelligence direct from your market, which is something that is fundamental to successful entrepreneurship and business growth. You don't want to lose touch with the group of people that matter most.

Inside My Business: The Mechanics Of A Customer Support System

Here's a summary of how my customer support system currently operates.

- All general public messages and **customer service queries are directed to a Gmail account through a dedicated support email** as a first point of contact. This includes people contacting me as a result of reading my blog, one of my email newsletters, or any content I have published online. In some places, such as inside my membership sites, members are directed to the customer support email account.
- I have two part-time customer service VAs working in two different timezones so there is someone available to respond to urgent customer inquiries almost around the clock. They each have access to and manage the Gmail account that is the central support area for all customer queries. Messages in Gmail are flagged for my attention when appropriate, which I log in and respond to about

once a week. We also use the Gmail labelling system to manage and file common queries.

- **We use Live Chat Inc to chat with potential and existing customers in real time.** Our customer care team login to chat whenever they are "at work". This is used to support Yaro's customers if they need guidance with the course materials or tech help, and also provides a platform to engage people who are browsing the website and considering making a purchase. Live chat is an important sales tool for converting visitors to customers.
- Any general questions asking for advice related to blogging or Internet business are directed to my blog articles.
- Feedback comments that do not require a reply are sent thank you notices and saved for possible testimonial use later in a folder (after asking for permission of course).
- **The customer care team use Yesware to respond to common queries with a custom template.** This enables them to provide a personalised response to the questions we get asked regularly with just two clicks of the mouse
- Emails sent to me personally are directed to the support email for the customer service team to divert to the appropriate resources. I respond personally only when the message demands my personal attention.

I still personally reply to a lot of email, especially when it's important that it's me sending the message (for example certain customer issues and to maintain relationships with key people).

What this system does well is filter away people who are time wasters and allows the more common and system related queries (e.g. Where's this resource? My download link didn't work, etc) to be quickly dealt with without involving me.

As a result, I receive only about **50 new emails per day, most of which are Internet marketing newsletters or spam, which do not require a reply.** I only receive about two to five emails I have to respond to each day. Most of the time (unless timing is critical), I do not reply until the end of the week, when I batch process them.

This system has helped free up time so I can comfortably write blog posts, create product content and support my paying students, without worrying about everything else falling apart. I would definitely not be able to travel as much as I have, if it was not for this system.

Gmail really is a powerful tool for customer support. It's simple, cloud based so you can access it anywhere and on your mobile device, and it is free. The customer service team and I access the same account and there is no greater feeling every day than just watching all my email disappear without me responding to any of it – they filter it all for me.

I personally have run my entire business fine without a help desk or anything more than a Gmail account for years. I have tested other customer service platforms such as Intercom in the past, but I always tend to revert back to Gmail. You might want more tools, but I believe simplicity is best. It definitely helps to reduce my stress.

It all comes down to prioritization and the 80/20 rule in the end. My system is not perfect, but it has granted me the most important thing – freedom of choice and the option to spend most of my time doing what I like and still build a solid Internet business at the same time. I hope you can use parts of my strategy to help you achieve the same thing.

Don't Just Outsource... Automate!

Technology is always evolving to make our lives "easier" and to automate jobs we used to do manually. Always remember you have countless tools at your disposal to take the hassle out of processing sales, taking payment, sending emails, scheduling social media posts and much more.

To get a better understanding of the basic options out there for you, download [Blog Tech 101](#). This guide (which, incidentally, was researched, written



and designed by two freelancers) walks you through the basic tools every blogger needs to setup their website and automate many standard processes. And if those products and services seem too complicated for you to set up then you know what to do... hire a freelancer to help you!

Start By Outsourcing One Task

As you begin the process of outsourcing parts of your business, it's so important you do not get discouraged when a person doesn't perform well. Chances are you will have to go through a few "bad apples" to find the person who fits your business well. Once you do though, you will be amazed by the difference it makes. You will wonder how you could previously run your business without them.

I suggest you keep things simple to start with and just contract one job or one task. Dip your toe in the water and purchase a \$5 gig on [Fiverr](#) or its British counterpart, [Five Squid](#). As you're feeling more confident you can start outsourcing larger chunks of your business.

I hope this report has given you a few insights into when and why you would consider outsourcing, and guided you to a few places where you can find your first contractor. You can run your entire business yourself, but that will limit your ability to scale and gain time freedom.

My business was created to be something fun to do and also as an income stream to fuel my life. It is not meant to be a source of high stress because I'm overwhelmed by needing to do too many tasks.

I believe at the very least every online entrepreneur should outsource customer support/email and technical tasks like web design if you are not technical yourself. You can obviously go a lot further than this and build an entire company around yourself made up of virtual workers.

I personally still prefer as few moving parts as possible, so I'll keep my team relatively small. This really depends on how big you want your company to get, and I will leave that up to you.

Good luck with your business and I hope you find the right people to help you. If you have a particularly good outsourcing tip or case study, please get in touch via email yaro@blogmastermind.com

Yaro Starak

Yaro Starak [Entrepreneurs-](#)

[Journey.com](#)

