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GET FREELANCE CLIENTS!

WITHOUT UPWORK OR FIVERR

HOW TO GET FREELANCE CLIENTS WITHOUT UPWORK OR FIVERR

Introduction: You Don't Need Upwork or Fiverr to Find Freelance Clients

One of the biggest challenges for new freelancers is finding their first paying client. Learning a skill such as graphic design, video editing, web development, copywriting, SEO, or social media management is important, but having a valuable skill does not automatically bring customers.

Many beginners create profiles on Upwork and Fiverr, upload a few samples, and wait for orders. When nothing happens, they assume freelancing is too competitive or that clients are impossible to find.

The reality is different. Freelance marketplaces are only two ways to connect with potential customers. Thousands of businesses, entrepreneurs, startups, content creators, and professionals hire freelancers directly through other channels.

In fact, finding clients independently can help freelancers build stronger business relationships, avoid competing entirely on marketplace rankings, and develop their own reputation.

The key is to stop thinking only like someone searching for freelance jobs and start thinking like a service provider solving business problems.

Instead of saying, "I am a graphic designer looking for work," you can approach a business with a more valuable message: "I noticed your social media posts have inconsistent designs. I can help you create a professional visual style that makes your brand look more recognizable."

That small change makes your service more relevant to potential clients.

This guide explains practical methods for finding clients outside freelance marketplaces, creating a portfolio that builds trust, approaching businesses professionally, converting conversations into paid projects, and developing a repeatable client acquisition system.

By the end, you will have a clear strategy for finding clients even if you are starting with no professional experience, no large audience, and no existing customer network.

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1. UNDERSTAND WHO NEEDS YOUR FREELANCE SERVICE

different businesses have different problems, budgets, and expectations.
A better approach is to identify a specific target audience.
Choose a profitable target market
Start by identifying three things:

1. Your skill: What service can you deliver confidently?
2. Your ideal customer: Which businesses or individuals need this service?
3. Their problem: What problem can your service solve?

Here are some examples:
Freelance skill
Potential clients
Problem you solve
Graphic design
Small businesses
Poor visual branding
Video editing
YouTubers and creators
Time-consuming editing
SEO
Local businesses
Low visibility in search
Web development
Startups and stores
Outdated websites
Copywriting
Marketing agencies
Weak website messaging
Social media management
Restaurants and brands
Inconsistent social presence
Virtual assistance
Entrepreneurs
Administrative workload
You do not have to work in one industry forever. Starting with a defined audience simply makes it easier to find people who need your service.
Look for businesses with visible problems
Your ideal clients are not necessarily the biggest companies. They are businesses that have a problem you can identify and a reason to pay someone to solve it.
For example:

- A restaurant with an outdated website may need a redesign.
- A YouTuber publishing regularly may need editing support.
- An online store with poor product descriptions may need a copywriter.
- A local service provider with an incomplete Google Business Profile may need local SEO assistance.
- A startup with inconsistent social media content may need a designer.

The most effective client prospecting starts with identifying a problem rather than randomly sending service advertisements.
Practical exercise: Write down 20 businesses or creators that could benefit from your service. Identify one specific improvement you could offer each of them.

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2. BUILD A PORTFOLIO THAT ATTRACTS CLIENTS

Your portfolio is one of the most important tools for getting freelance clients without marketplaces.
Potential customers want evidence that you can deliver what you promise. They may not know your qualifications, background, or experience, but they can evaluate your work.
A professional portfolio reduces uncertainty and makes it easier for someone to trust you.
You don't need paying clients to build a portfolio
Many beginners delay creating a portfolio because they believe they need professional clients first.
That is not true.
You can create sample projects that demonstrate your abilities.
For example:

- Graphic designer: Create sample logos, brand identities, advertisements, and social media designs.
- Video editor: Edit sample YouTube videos, short-form videos, and promotional clips using footage you have permission to use.
- Web developer: Build demonstration websites for fictional businesses.
- SEO specialist: Prepare a sample website audit and keyword research report.
- Copywriter: Write sample landing pages, email campaigns, and product descriptions.

Always identify demonstration projects as samples or concept work. Never present fictional projects as paid client work.
What should your portfolio include?
A useful portfolio should contain:

1. A short introduction explaining what you do.
2. Your main freelance services.
3. Three to five strong work samples.
4. A short explanation of each project.
5. The problem each sample addresses.
6. Your contact details and a clear call to action.

For each project, explain the objective, your approach, and the final result or intended improvement.
For example:
Project: E-commerce Website Homepage Redesign

- Objective: Improve the appearance and navigation of an online store.
- Approach: Created a cleaner layout, clearer product categories, and more visible calls to action.
- Deliverable: A responsive homepage design concept.

This communicates more value than simply uploading an image without context.
Where can you create your portfolio?
Useful portfolio platforms

- Behance – Suitable for graphic designers, UI/UX designers, and creative professionals.
- Dribbble – Useful for showcasing visual design and interface concepts.
- Notion – An easy option for creating a simple portfolio page.
- Google Drive – Useful for organizing PDFs, writing samples, and project presentations.
- GitHub – Particularly useful for developers and technical freelancers.
- WordPress – Useful for building a personal portfolio website.

You do not need an expensive website when starting. A clean, organized portfolio with relevant examples is enough to begin approaching clients.
Important: Your portfolio should show the type of work you want to get paid for. If you want website development projects, make website examples your main focus rather than filling your portfolio with unrelated designs.

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3. FIND CLIENTS THROUGH LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is one of the most useful platforms for finding professional clients directly. Unlike freelance marketplaces, where customers browse service listings, LinkedIn allows you to identify business owners, founders, marketing managers, agency owners, and other decision-makers.

You do not need thousands of followers to find clients. You need a professional profile, a clear service offering, and consistent communication with relevant people.

Step 1: Optimize your LinkedIn profile

Your profile should immediately explain what you do and who you help.

Avoid generic headlines such as:

- Freelancer
- Looking for opportunities
- Professional designer
- Open to work

Instead, use a specific headline.

Examples:

- Helping Small Businesses Build Professional WordPress Websites
- Video Editor for YouTubers and Content Creators
- SEO Specialist Helping Businesses Improve Google Visibility
- Graphic Designer Creating Visual Content for Growing Brands

Your headline should communicate your service and the type of customer you serve.

Step 2: Find potential clients

Use LinkedIn search to identify people who may need your services.

Search for job titles such as:

- Founder
- CEO
- Marketing Manager
- Business Owner
- Agency Owner
- Content Manager
- E-commerce Manager

You can also search for specific industries, such as real estate, healthcare, fashion, technology, education, and digital marketing.

Once you find a potential client, review their profile and company. Look for signs that your service could solve a genuine problem.

Step 3: Build relationships before pitching

Do not immediately send a long sales message to every person you connect with.

Instead:

1. Visit their profile.
2. Read about their business.
3. Engage with relevant posts.
4. Send a personalized connection request.
5. Start a natural conversation.
6. Introduce your service when there is a relevant opportunity.

This makes your outreach more personal and less like automated advertising.

LinkedIn message template

Share useful content regularly

Your LinkedIn activity can demonstrate your knowledge before potential clients contact you.

Share content such as:

- Before-and-after project examples.
- Common mistakes in your industry.
- Short tutorials.
- Website or design improvement tips.
- Lessons from completed projects.
- Practical solutions to business problems.

You do not need to publish every day. Focus on creating useful, relevant content consistently.

Pro tip: Connect with people who can actually purchase or recommend your services, rather than collecting hundreds of connections who are also searching for freelance work.

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4. USE COLD EMAIL TO CONTACT BUSINESSES DIRECTLY

Cold emailing means contacting a business or professional you have not previously worked with to introduce a relevant service.
It can be an effective client acquisition method because you do not have to wait for someone to discover your portfolio or publish a job advertisement.
You can identify businesses that need your services and approach them directly.
However, successful cold emailing is not about sending hundreds of identical messages. It is about contacting the right person with a message that demonstrates genuine understanding of their business.
Step 1: Build a targeted prospect list
Start by choosing one industry.
For example, if you offer website development, you could target:

- Restaurants with outdated websites.
- Local service businesses without websites.
- Small e-commerce stores with poor navigation.
- Startups with incomplete landing pages.
- Professional firms with slow or difficult websites.

Find their official websites and business contact details.
You can discover potential prospects through:

- Google Search.
- LinkedIn.
- Company websites.
- Industry directories.
- Local business directories.
- Professional associations.

Create a spreadsheet with the following information:
Information
Example
Business name
ABC Clothing
Website
Company website
Contact person
Marketing Manager
Email
Business email
Identified problem
Outdated product pages
Suggested service
Website optimization
Outreach status
Not contacted
Collect only relevant professional contact information and follow applicable privacy and anti-spam laws.
Step 2: Write a personalized email
A strong cold email should be short, specific, and easy to understand.
Include four important elements:

1. Personalization: Show that you know something about their business.
2. Observation: Mention a genuine issue or opportunity.
3. Solution: Explain how your service could help.
4. Call to action: Ask one simple question.

Avoid introducing yourself with a long biography. The client is more interested in how you can help their business.
Cold email template for freelancers
Hi [Name],
I came across [Business Name] while researching businesses in the [industry] space.
I noticed [specific observation about their website, content, design, or marketing].
I help businesses improve [relevant service or outcome], and I believe there may be an opportunity to improve [specific area].
Would you be open to a brief conversation about a few ideas?
You can also view some examples of my work here: [Portfolio Link].
Best regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Website or Portfolio]
Step 3: Follow up professionally
Many freelancers send one email and stop when they receive no response.
However, a lack of response does not always mean rejection. The person might be busy, may have missed the message, or may not have an immediate need.
A reasonable follow-up sequence could look like this:

- Day 1: Send the initial email.
- Day 4–5: Send a short follow-up.
- Day 10–12: Send one final helpful message.

If the recipient declines or asks you not to contact them, respect that immediately.
Follow-up email template
Hi [Name],
Just following up on my previous message.
I had a few ideas about how [specific area] could be improved for [Business Name].
If this is something you're considering, I'd be happy to share a few suggestions.
No pressure if it's not a priority right now.
Best regards,
[Your Name]
What makes cold emails unsuccessful?
Avoid these common mistakes:

- Sending the same message to hundreds of businesses.
- Using misleading subject lines.
- Writing long introductions.
- Making unrealistic promises.
- Attaching unnecessarily large files.
- Pitching services without identifying a relevant need.
- Following up excessively.

Research-backed outreach guidance emphasizes relevance, personalization, and clear next steps rather than generic mass pitching.

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5. GET FREELANCE CLIENTS THROUGH REFERRALS AND YOUR EXISTING NETWORK

One of the most overlooked methods of finding freelance clients is using relationships you already have.
Many beginners assume referrals only work after they have completed dozens of paid projects. In reality, your professional and personal network can help you discover opportunities even before your freelance business becomes established.
Your network may include:

- Former classmates.
- Teachers and mentors.
- Previous employers.
- Friends and relatives.
- Business owners.
- Former colleagues.
- Social media connections.
- People you have worked with on personal projects.

These individuals may not need your service themselves, but they might know someone who does.
Tell people exactly what you offer
Simply announcing that you are a freelancer is not enough.
People need to understand what you do so they can recognize opportunities to recommend you.
For example, instead of saying:
"I'm looking for freelance work."
Say:
"I'm currently helping small businesses create professional websites and improve their online presence. If you know a business owner who needs website development or SEO support, I would appreciate an introduction."
This gives people a specific reason to remember you.
Ask previous clients for referrals
After successfully completing a project, ask the client whether they know another business that might benefit from your service.
A simple request can open doors to new opportunities.
Hi [Client Name],
I'm glad we had the opportunity to work together on [Project Name].
I'm currently accepting a few new projects and would appreciate it if you could recommend my services to anyone in your network who might need help with [Service].
If someone comes to mind, an introduction would mean a lot.
Thank you again for your support!
Turn one client into multiple opportunities
Imagine you complete a website project for a small business.
That business owner may know:

- Other business owners.
- Suppliers.
- Marketing professionals.
- Entrepreneurs.
- Local service providers.

A satisfied client can become a source of future introductions, repeat work, testimonials, and case studies.
Do excellent work, communicate professionally, and make referrals a natural part of your business process.

Upwork+1

6. Find Clients in Facebook Groups, Online Communities, and Industry Forums

- 7 B2B Facebook Group Examples & What You Can Learn From Them

- 6 Resources for Hiring Content Strategists, Writers, or Marketers | School of Content - Content strategy, management and marketing

- Colin and Samir Launched Discord Community for Creators - Los Angeles Tech + Startups

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Online communities can connect freelancers with people who are already discussing business challenges, looking for recommendations, or asking for professional assistance.
The important distinction is to join communities where your potential customers spend time, not only groups filled with other freelancers.
Facebook Groups
Search for groups related to:

- Small business owners.
- E-commerce entrepreneurs.
- Shopify store owners.
- Startup founders.
- YouTube creators.
- Real estate professionals.
- Digital marketing.
- Local business communities.

For example, a Shopify developer can join e-commerce communities where store owners discuss website problems.
A video editor can participate in creator communities where YouTubers discuss editing, publishing schedules, and content production.
How to attract clients in Facebook Groups
Follow this process:

1. Join relevant groups with active discussions.
2. Read the community rules.
3. Observe common questions and problems.
4. Answer questions with practical advice.
5. Share useful examples when appropriate.
6. Respond to people who explicitly request recommendations.
7. Build relationships instead of constantly promoting your services.

Do not spam groups with repeated advertisements. Many communities remove promotional posts, and aggressive selling can damage your reputation.
Slack and Discord communities
Professional communities on Slack and Discord can also provide networking opportunities.
Look for communities focused on your industry or the type of clients you serve.
For example:

- Developers can join software development communities.
- Designers can join creative communities.
- Writers can join content marketing groups.
- SEO specialists can join digital marketing communities.

The goal is to become a useful participant. People are more likely to consider someone they have seen providing valuable answers than someone who appears only when they want to sell a service.
Reddit and professional forums
Reddit contains communities where business owners, creators, and professionals discuss real problems.
You can learn what potential customers struggle with, identify common service needs, and participate in relevant discussions.
Always respect each community's self-promotion rules. Focus on answering questions and demonstrating expertise rather than sending unsolicited sales pitches.

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7. PARTNER WITH DIGITAL AGENCIES AND OTHER FREELANCERS

This is one of the most practical ways to find consistent freelance work without having to acquire every customer yourself.
Many digital agencies have more projects than their internal teams can handle. They sometimes outsource specific tasks to independent professionals.
For example:

- A marketing agency might need a freelance graphic designer.
- A web development company might need additional developers.
- An SEO agency might need content writers.
- A video production company might need video editors.
- A social media agency might need virtual assistants.

You can become the professional they contact when additional work is available.
Why agency partnerships work
Agencies already have customers, established business relationships, and ongoing projects.
Instead of finding individual business owners one by one, you can build relationships with a few agencies that regularly need your skills.
This can lead to:

- Repeat assignments.
- Long-term working relationships.
- Consistent project opportunities.
- Experience with different industries.
- Professional portfolio development.

How to approach agencies
First, identify agencies that offer services related to your skill.
For example, if you are a freelance video editor, research:

- Social media marketing agencies.
- YouTube management agencies.
- Video production studios.
- Influencer marketing companies.
- Advertising agencies.

Visit their websites and look for signs of active client work.
Then contact their founders, project managers, or relevant department heads.
Agency partnership email
Hi [Name],
I came across [Agency Name] and noticed that your team works with businesses on [relevant service].
I'm a freelance [Your Profession], specializing in [specific skill or deliverable].
I'd love to explore the possibility of supporting your team with overflow projects or ongoing freelance work whenever additional assistance is needed.
Here is my portfolio: [Portfolio Link].
Would you be open to discussing a potential collaboration?
Best regards,
[Your Name]
Build relationships with complementary freelancers
You can also partner with freelancers who offer different services.
For example:

- A graphic designer can partner with a website developer.
- A copywriter can partner with an SEO specialist.
- A video editor can partner with a social media manager.
- A web designer can partner with a digital marketing consultant.

When one professional receives a project outside their expertise, they can refer it to you.
This creates a mutually beneficial network where everyone can access more opportunities.

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8. FIND LOCAL BUSINESSES THAT NEED YOUR SERVICES

Website Design for Small Businesses | Web Design for Small Businesses | ETA Web Design

The Secret Behind Every Iconic Restaurant Brand A Killer Website | RocketPages

What Type of Business Loan Do I Need? | OneAZ Credit Union

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You do not always need international clients to build a successful freelance career. Local businesses can be an excellent starting point, particularly when you are new and want to develop your communication and client management skills.
Many small businesses need professional digital services but do not have full-time employees for every task.
Potential clients include:

- Restaurants and cafes.
- Clothing stores.
- Real estate agencies.
- Dental and healthcare practices.
- Educational institutions.
- Travel agencies.
- Gyms and fitness studios.
- Local e-commerce stores.
- Home improvement businesses.

Where to find local clients
Use Google Maps and Google Search to identify businesses in your target area.
Search phrases such as:

- Restaurants near me.
- Clothing stores in [City].
- Real estate agencies in [City].
- Small businesses in [City].
- Digital marketing agencies in [City].

Visit their websites and social media pages to identify opportunities.
For example, a restaurant may have excellent food but poor-quality promotional graphics. A clothing store may have an outdated website. A real estate agency may need better property listing designs.
These are opportunities to start a professional conversation.
Offer a specific improvement
Instead of saying, "I provide graphic design services," explain what you can improve.
For example:
"I noticed your restaurant regularly shares promotional posts. I can help create a consistent set of professional social media designs so your offers and menu items look more recognizable."
This approach makes your service easier to understand.
Start with a small project
A business may hesitate to hire an unfamiliar freelancer for a large project.
You can reduce that hesitation by proposing a smaller, clearly defined first assignment.
Examples:
Service
Starter project
Graphic design
Five social media posts
Website development
One landing page
SEO
Basic website audit
Video editing
One edited video
Copywriting
Homepage content rewrite
Social media
One-week content plan
A small project gives both parties an opportunity to evaluate the working relationship before committing to something larger.
Important: Never promise guaranteed sales, rankings, or business growth. Focus on the deliverables and improvements you can realistically control.

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9. USE INSTAGRAM AND OTHER SOCIAL PLATFORMS TO ATTRACT CLIENTS

Social media is not only for entertainment and personal branding. It can also help freelancers demonstrate their work, reach potential customers, and build professional relationships.
Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube can help you attract clients when you use them strategically.
Instagram for freelancers
Instagram works particularly well for visual services.
Graphic designers, photographers, video editors, fashion content creators, and social media managers can use it to showcase their work.
Create a professional account that clearly communicates:

- What service you offer.
- Who you help.
- Examples of your work.
- How clients can contact you.

What should you post?
Consider these content formats:
1. Before-and-after posts
Show how a design, website, or video changed after your work.
2. Educational posts
Explain useful concepts related to your service.
For example, an SEO specialist can share five common website SEO mistakes.
3. Project demonstrations
Showcase sample work and explain the process behind it.
4. Short tutorials
Create short videos demonstrating how to perform a task.
5. Client testimonials
Share genuine feedback from previous customers, with their permission.
Use targeted hashtags and search
Do not depend entirely on hashtags to find clients.
Search for businesses, creators, and entrepreneurs in your chosen industry. Study their content and identify where your service might help.
You can engage with their posts, respond to questions, and build relationships naturally.
YouTube as a long-term client source
YouTube is particularly useful for freelancers who can explain their skills through tutorials and educational videos.
For example:

- A WordPress developer can publish website-building tutorials.
- A video editor can demonstrate editing techniques.
- A graphic designer can explain branding principles.
- An SEO freelancer can review website optimization mistakes.

A useful tutorial can continue attracting potential customers long after publication.
The purpose is not to become a famous influencer. It is to establish enough credibility that a business feels comfortable contacting you.

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10. CREATE A PERSONAL WEBSITE THAT GENERATES FREELANCE LEADS

A personal website gives you a professional online presence that you control.
Unlike a social media profile, your website can organize your services, portfolio, case studies, testimonials, and contact information in one place.
When someone discovers you through LinkedIn, email, a referral, or a community, they can visit your website to understand your work.
Essential pages for a freelance website
1. Homepage
Explain what you do, who you help, and how potential customers can work with you.
2. Services
Describe your services in simple language.
For example, a web developer might offer:

- WordPress website development.
- E-commerce website development.
- Landing page design.
- Website maintenance.

3. Portfolio
Show relevant projects and explain what you contributed.
4. About
Introduce yourself, your professional background, and your approach to work.
5. Contact
Provide an easy way for clients to reach you through a contact form or professional email.
Write a customer-focused headline
Avoid headlines such as:
"Welcome to My Freelance Portfolio."
Use a message that communicates value.
Examples:

- Professional Websites for Growing Small Businesses.
- SEO Services That Help Businesses Improve Online Visibility.
- Creative Video Editing for YouTubers and Brands.
- Graphic Design That Helps Your Business Look Professional.

Optimize your website for search engines
Your website can attract potential clients through Google when you publish relevant content and create useful service pages.
For example, a freelance WordPress developer targeting businesses in London might create a page around a relevant phrase such as "WordPress Developer for Small Businesses in London."
You can also publish helpful articles:

- How Much Does a Business Website Cost?
- Five Signs Your Website Needs a Redesign.
- Why Small Businesses Need SEO.
- How to Improve an E-commerce Product Page.

Use relevant keywords naturally, provide useful information, and make it easy for visitors to contact you.
SEO takes time, so do not expect a new website to generate clients immediately. Treat it as a long-term asset that supports your other marketing channels.

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11. TURN CONVERSATIONS INTO PAYING FREELANCE PROJECTS

Finding a potential client is only the beginning. You also need to convert that opportunity into a paid project.
Some freelancers receive inquiries but struggle to close deals because they do not know how to discuss project requirements, pricing, or deliverables.
A professional sales process helps both you and the client understand whether a project is a good fit.
Step 1: Understand the client's requirements
Before suggesting a price, ask questions about the project.
Useful questions include:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- What problem are you currently facing?
- What work needs to be completed?
- Do you have examples or references?
- What is your expected timeline?
- Do you have an allocated budget?

Do not assume that every customer understands the technical details of your service.
Your job is to help them explain what they need.
Step 2: Recommend the right solution
After understanding the requirements, explain how you can help.
For example:
A client wants to improve an online store but does not know exactly what needs changing.
Instead of immediately offering a complete redesign, you might recommend:

1. Reviewing the current website.
2. Identifying navigation and product-page issues.
3. Prioritizing the most important improvements.
4. Implementing agreed changes.
5. Testing the updated website.

This demonstrates that you understand the problem rather than simply trying to sell the largest package.
Step 3: Present a professional proposal
A freelance proposal should explain the work in a way that both parties can understand.
Include:

- Client and project details.
- Project objectives.
- Scope of work.
- Deliverables.
- Timeline.
- Pricing.
- Payment schedule.
- Revision policy.
- Additional work charges.
- Acceptance terms.

Example freelance proposal structure
Freelance Project Proposal
Prepared for: [Client Name]
Prepared by: [Your Name]
1. Project Overview
The purpose of this project is to help [Client Business] improve [specific business area or problem].
2. Scope of Work
The project will include:

- [Deliverable 1]
- [Deliverable 2]
- [Deliverable 3]

3. Project Timeline
Estimated completion: [Number of Days/Weeks]
4. Project Investment
Total project fee: [Agreed Amount]
Payment schedule: [Deposit and remaining payment terms]
5. Revisions
The project includes [Number] rounds of revisions within the agreed scope.
6. Additional Work
Any work outside the agreed scope will be discussed and quoted separately.
7. Next Steps
Once the proposal is approved and the initial payment is received, work can begin according to the agreed schedule.
Prepared by: [Your Name]
Step 4: Make it easy to say yes
Avoid overwhelming potential clients with complicated packages or unnecessary technical details.
Explain exactly what they will receive, when they will receive it, and what you need from them to begin.
A clear proposal builds confidence and reduces misunderstandings.

12. Set Your Freelance Prices and Build Long-Term Client Relationships

One major challenge for freelancers is deciding how much to charge.
Beginners sometimes charge extremely low prices because they are afraid clients will reject their offers. Others set prices without considering project complexity, time, communication, or revision requirements.
Your pricing should reflect the value and effort involved in delivering the service.
Three common freelance pricing models
1. Hourly pricing
You charge according to the number of hours spent working.
This model can work for ongoing support, consulting, and projects where the workload is difficult to predict.
2. Fixed project pricing
You agree on one price for a clearly defined project.
For example, a designer might charge a fixed fee for a complete set of social media designs.
This model works well when the scope and deliverables are clear.
3. Monthly retainer pricing
The client pays a recurring fee for an agreed amount of ongoing work.
For example:

- Monthly SEO support.
- Social media management.
- Website maintenance.
- Regular video editing.
- Ongoing graphic design.

Retainers can create more predictable revenue, provided the workload, availability, and deliverables are clearly defined.
How to calculate your price
Consider these factors:

- Time required to complete the project.
- Difficulty and technical complexity.
- Tools or resources required.
- Number of revisions.
- Communication and project management time.
- Your experience and skill level.
- The value of the deliverables to the client.

Do not compete only on being the cheapest freelancer.
Businesses are often willing to pay more for reliable communication, quality work, clear deadlines, and professionals who understand their needs.
Turn one-time clients into recurring clients
Getting a new client requires time and effort. Keeping a satisfied client can create opportunities for more work without repeating the entire acquisition process.
You can build longer relationships by:

1. Delivering work on time.
2. Communicating project progress.
3. Responding professionally to feedback.
4. Maintaining consistent quality.
5. Suggesting relevant improvements.
6. Offering ongoing services when appropriate.
7. Asking for feedback and referrals.

For example, a client who hires you for one website may later need landing pages, website maintenance, SEO improvements, or content updates.

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13. PROTECT YOURSELF WHEN WORKING WITH DIRECT CLIENTS

Working outside Upwork and Fiverr gives you more control over client relationships, but it also means you must manage things that marketplaces often provide, including payment processes, project documentation, and dispute procedures.
Never assume that every person who contacts you is a genuine customer.
Important steps before starting a project
1. Verify the client
Check their business website, professional profile, and communication details. Be cautious when information is inconsistent or unverifiable.
2. Use a written agreement
Clearly define the scope, payment terms, deadlines, revisions, ownership rights, and cancellation conditions.
3. Request an advance payment
For new clients, consider a reasonable upfront deposit before starting work. The amount should be agreed upon in writing and suit the project.
4. Divide large projects into milestones
For larger assignments, connect payments to clearly defined stages of delivery.
5. Keep written records
Save important conversations, approved proposals, invoices, deliverables, and payment confirmations.
6. Use secure payment methods
Agree on a legitimate payment method that works in your country and the client's country. Confirm the actual receipt of funds rather than trusting screenshots or payment notifications sent by the client.
7. Set clear boundaries
Explain your working hours, communication channels, revision limits, and delivery schedule.
Watch out for freelance scams
Be careful if a potential client:

- Asks you to pay money to receive a project.
- Promises unusually high payments for very little work.
- Requests sensitive personal or banking information unnecessarily.
- Sends suspicious attachments or links.
- Wants you to purchase gift cards or transfer money.
- Sends a fake payment confirmation.
- Demands extensive unpaid work before agreeing to a contract.

A genuine professional relationship should have clear expectations, transparent payment arrangements, and respectful communication.

14. Follow a 30-Day Plan to Get Your First Direct Freelance Client

Knowing where to find clients is useful, but taking consistent action is what creates opportunities.
Instead of trying every marketing channel simultaneously, follow a structured 30-day plan.
Your 30-Day Freelance Client Challenge
A practical action plan for beginners and independent freelancers

1. Week 1: Build your foundation
   - Choose one freelance skill.
   - Identify your ideal customer.
   - Select one industry to target.
   - Create three portfolio samples.
   - Optimize your LinkedIn profile.
   - Prepare a simple portfolio page.
2. Week 2: Start finding potential clients
   - Research 30 relevant businesses.
   - Find their websites and professional contacts.
   - Connect with potential clients on LinkedIn.
   - Join three relevant business communities.
   - Contact people in your existing network.
   - Identify five agencies for possible partnerships.
3. Week 3: Begin direct outreach
   - Send personalized emails to suitable prospects.
   - Start professional conversations on LinkedIn.
   - Share two useful posts about your service.
   - Participate in relevant online discussions.
   - Follow up with previous contacts.
   - Offer a small, clearly defined starter project.
4. Week 4: Convert opportunities into projects
   - Follow up with interested prospects.
   - Arrange discovery calls where appropriate.
   - Understand client requirements.
   - Prepare professional proposals.
   - Agree on project scope and payment.
   - Ask satisfied clients for testimonials and referrals.

Track your progress
Use a simple spreadsheet to monitor your client acquisition activities.
Activity
Weekly target
New prospects researched
30
Personalized emails
15–20
LinkedIn connections
15
Helpful social posts
2
Community contributions
3–5
Follow-ups
10
Portfolio improvements
1
These are suggested activity targets, not guaranteed conversion benchmarks. Adjust them according to your service, available time, and the quality of your prospects.
Understand your client acquisition numbers
Imagine you research 100 suitable businesses.
You contact them with personalized messages, and some respond. A smaller number become interested in discussing your services, and a few may eventually hire you.
The important thing is to measure every stage:

- Prospects contacted.
- Replies received.
- Positive conversations.
- Meetings arranged.
- Proposals sent.
- Projects won.

If nobody replies, improve your targeting and messaging. If people reply but do not purchase, review your offer, pricing, and sales conversations.
This approach helps you identify the actual problem instead of randomly changing your strategy.

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15. COMMON MISTAKES THAT STOP FREELANCERS FROM GETTING CLIENTS

Even skilled freelancers struggle to find customers because of mistakes in their marketing and communication.
Understanding these mistakes can help you avoid wasting time.
Mistake 1: Offering too many services
Trying to become a designer, developer, writer, marketer, and virtual assistant simultaneously can make your professional identity confusing.
Solution: Start with one primary service and a clearly defined target audience.
Mistake 2: Waiting for clients to find you
Creating a portfolio and waiting for inquiries is not a complete client acquisition strategy.
Solution: Combine your portfolio with direct outreach, networking, and professional relationships.
Mistake 3: Sending generic messages
Messages such as "Hello, I am a freelancer. Do you need my services?" provide little reason for a business to respond.
Solution: Mention a genuine observation about the business and explain how you could help.
Mistake 4: Having no portfolio
Potential clients need evidence of your abilities.
Solution: Create sample projects, concept designs, demonstrations, and detailed case studies.
Mistake 5: Charging too little
Extremely low pricing can make it difficult to maintain quality and can attract clients with unrealistic expectations.
Solution: Price your services according to the work, complexity, and agreed deliverables.
Mistake 6: Giving up after a few rejections
Not every business needs your service at the moment you contact them.
Solution: Continue researching suitable prospects, improving your communication, and building relationships.
Mistake 7: Ignoring follow-ups
Some opportunities are lost because freelancers never follow up after their initial contact.
Solution: Use a simple, respectful follow-up schedule.
Mistake 8: Focusing on other freelancers instead of buyers
Spending all your time in freelancer communities can create activity without producing business opportunities.
Solution: Participate in communities where business owners, entrepreneurs, creators, and decision-makers spend time.
Mistake 9: Not asking for referrals
Many freelancers finish a project and immediately move on without asking whether the client can recommend them.
Solution: Make testimonials and referral requests part of your project completion process.
Mistake 10: Depending on one client source
If all your projects come from one website, one social media account, or one customer, your income can become unstable.
Solution: Develop a combination of direct outreach, referrals, professional networking, and long-term online visibility.

16. Build a Freelance Business That Does Not Depend on Marketplaces

Getting your first direct client is an important milestone, but the bigger goal should be building a reliable freelance business.
Instead of constantly searching for individual projects, develop a system that generates opportunities from multiple sources.
A sustainable client acquisition system has three important components.
1. Active client acquisition
These methods help you initiate conversations with potential customers.
Examples:

- Cold email.
- LinkedIn outreach.
- Direct business contact.
- Networking.
- Agency partnerships.

2. Relationship-based acquisition
These methods help you receive opportunities through people who already know or trust your work.
Examples:

- Client referrals.
- Professional partnerships.
- Former colleagues.
- Existing customers.
- Business communities.

3. Long-term client attraction
These methods help potential customers discover your expertise over time.
Examples:

- Personal portfolio website.
- Search engine optimization.
- LinkedIn content.
- YouTube tutorials.
- Educational articles.
- Case studies.

The strongest approach is to combine these channels rather than depending entirely on one.
For example, cold email might help you start conversations today, referrals might bring opportunities through existing relationships, and your website might generate inquiries in the future.
You should also remember that marketplaces are not necessarily bad. If Upwork or Fiverr currently brings you business, you can continue using them while gradually developing independent client sources.
The goal is not simply to avoid freelance platforms. The goal is to build a business where you have more control over how customers discover, evaluate, and hire you.

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CONCLUSION: YOUR NEXT FREELANCE CLIENT COULD BE OUTSIDE UPWORK AND FIVERR

Finding freelance clients without Upwork or Fiverr is entirely possible, but it requires a different approach.
You cannot rely on a marketplace to display your profile, provide customer inquiries, or establish your reputation. You need to create those opportunities yourself.
Start by choosing a specific service and identifying businesses that genuinely need it. Build a portfolio that demonstrates your abilities, optimize your LinkedIn profile, and begin contacting relevant prospects through personalized emails and professional networking.
Use referrals, online communities, agency partnerships, and local businesses to expand your opportunities. Over time, develop a personal website and publish useful content to establish your credibility.
Most importantly, focus on solving real problems rather than simply advertising your skills.
You do not need thousands of followers, an expensive website, or years of professional experience to begin. You need a useful skill, a clear offer, evidence of your abilities, and a consistent approach to finding people who need your work.
Your first direct client might come from a LinkedIn conversation, a business email, a referral, or an agency partnership.
Start with one channel, take action every week, learn from your conversations, and improve your approach.
Remember: Freelancing is not just about finding jobs. It is about building relationships, delivering value, and becoming someone businesses trust to solve their problems.

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