

# Web Work 101



## How To Escape The Cubicle

# Web Work 101: How To Escape The Cubicle

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## Foreword

The world of work is changing. The web work revolution, brought about by the technological advances we've seen over the past few years, means that increasing numbers of us are no longer working from cramped cubicles in corporate offices. Instead, we are using the web to work from our homes, or anywhere else that we can get a decent Wi-Fi connection. The number of web workers is growing every day as companies come to realize the benefits of more flexible working arrangements (lower overheads, increased staff retention), while more people are also choosing to freelance.

While the prospect of working from home (or maybe by a swimming pool or in a beach hut somewhere exotic) sounds very enticing, it can also bring its challenges. How do you stay motivated when you're not surrounded by your colleagues? What do you do if a critical piece of hardware fails? What are the best applications to use to stay productive? How do you make sure that you maintain good work/life balance?

This e-book is a collection of WebWorkerDaily posts on the subject of getting started that should address some of those concerns. Whether you're wondering if making the move to working remotely is the right move for you, or whether you're just setting off on your web working journey, I hope that you find it useful.

Simon Mackie, Editor, WebWorkerDaily.

# Before You Start

## Traits of a Successful Web Worker

Nancy Nally

We talk a lot here on WWD about the benefits of being a web worker. But not everyone is suited to it, and not everyone likes it, despite the fact that the freedom and comfort of working from home can sound like nirvana. In [“7 Signs That You’re Not \(Yet\) Cut Out For Teleworking,”](#) Celine outlines seven traits that mean that web working could be hard for you. Maybe you see yourself in Celine’s seven signs, or you hesitate to describe yourself as outgoing and organized. Yet you still aspire to a web working career. What do you do?

After spending a few years as a self-employed web worker, I’ve assembled a list of a few traits that should be part of the optimal web worker personality. And there is good news, because they are traits that can be acquired through discipline and practice.

- **Flexibility.** It is extremely difficult to maintain the extremely structured ways of the corporate world when working out of a home office. Web workers have to be able to roll with interruptions, and learn how to get things done without the backup and resources of a whole office. Sometimes this takes creativity and the willingness to do things a little differently.
- **Self-motivation.** Successful web workers are the workers who are motivated from within to excel in their work, not by the fear of a boss who could be staring over their shoulder at any moment. This trait is especially important for self-employed web workers who don’t have to answer to even a distant boss in an office somewhere.
- **Focus.** Being a web worker typically means being faced with lots of distractions: uncompleted personal tasks that are visible during work hours, social media, and email. The ability to focus on the task at hand despite distractions is critical to web worker success.
- **Organization.** Web work means being entirely responsible for keeping track of large quantities of information, and for planning your own schedule. Being self-employed, in particular, requires detailed record keeping for financial purposes even if an accountant is doing the actual calculations.
- **Independence.** Remote workers can’t ask the boss for direction on everything they do. Web workers have to be willing to take initiative on things themselves without asking explicit permission from a superior every step of the way.
- **Confidence.** Co-workers aren’t easily available for web workers to ask for backup or a second opinion on their decisions. Along with the independence to make their own decisions, web workers then need the confidence to believe in the correctness of those decisions. Otherwise they will quickly be paralyzed by uncertainty and indecision.

All of these traits can be learned by a person who is self-aware and cares enough about their goals to make a serious attempt at change. Depending on the desired trait, helpful resources might include productivity sites like this one, self-help books or even a career coach. And you don’t need to set out to overhaul your personality completely. If you have a problem focusing, the goal should be to acquire just enough focus to function in your web work setting, not to be able to stare at the head of a pin while the ceiling crashes down on you.

Web workers who love what they do and who are naturally productive might find it hard to imagine that there are people who would actually prefer the more structured life of a traditional office. Yet there really are downsides to web work, especially for certain personalities. Pamela addressed one of these when [she encouraged web workers to join groups](#) to fight isolation.

The perceived freedom of being a web worker appeals to almost everyone from the outside. But the reality is that not everyone is suited to it or will actually be happy doing it. It is wise to

take a hard look at your strengths and weaknesses, and what you really need to be a happy and productive worker, before jumping into something that is rewarding but challenging.

## Preparing for a Career Online

Darrell Etherington

You may come to web work through no choice of your own, either because you've been moved into a remote working position at your current job, or because your current gig is ending and finding a replacement full-time salaried job isn't the easiest thing to do in this economic climate. If it is your choice, though, there are steps you can take well in advance to make your chosen path that much easier to follow.

It wasn't that long ago that I was working full-time at a consulting firm, dressing in a suit and going in to a physical office five or six days a week. I knew about two months in advance that I would be leaving for sure to pursue working remotely from home as a freelancer. Unlike when you make the transition from one regular job to another, leaving to work for yourself actually requires a lot of preparation.

### Test the Waters

Planning to work online from home is all well and good, but if you don't actually have any work lined up, then you won't really be doing much besides full-time web browsing.

Having an idea of what type of work you want to do when you start is a good beginning, but it isn't enough. Because working remotely from home generally allows you considerable flexibility with your working hours, it's a good idea to actually start before you take the plunge and go for it full-time.

Doing so will not only set you up with work for when you actually do start web working as a career, but it should also let you find out if you're making the right move. In most cases, when you leave a day job, there aren't any takebacks. Web work is one of the few situations where you can actually organize a trial period. Take advantage of that.

### Pave the Way

Working online as a freelancer has a lot to do with the quality of your work, but it's also half, or maybe even two-thirds self-promotion. That means significant attention must be paid to identity management, or [personal branding](#), or whatever you want to call it.

Laying down that groundwork well ahead of time means you won't be started with a blank slate once you hit the open waters of the web, a situation comparable to entering the job market fresh out of school.

That groundwork can consist of well-developed and complete social networking profiles, clips and publications at outlets, including your own personal blog, and relevant conference attendance and participation. If you've dabbled in online work part-time, something I mentioned was a good idea above, you'll also be well prepared to show what you've done.

### Evaluate Your Finances and Lifestyle

Transitioning to online work can be a lot like starting your own business, because in many ways, that's exactly what you're doing. Part of that means expecting and preparing for an unprofitable period while you get your footing. Even if you do line things up and you actually don't experience any lag time between your old job and your new career, having the peace of mind that comes with making sure your finances can take a hit will help during dry spells.

You should also take a good look at your lifestyle and think about your goals in pursuing a remote career. If you want to do it to make your schedule more flexible and [balanced](#), take

some time off work and see if flexibility and balance is actually something you value. It may be that routine suits you best, which might change the type of web work you target.

Also beware the lure of distraction. I found it best to actually minimize the number of things that might cause my attention to stray during the day by keeping the video game consoles in the closet and eschewing a cable subscription altogether.

As with most things, with web working preparation is the key to success. It may be tempting to jump headfirst into something that seems new and exciting, but if you put it off for as long as possible and concentrate on getting your ducks in a row, you'll be richly rewarded in your new life.

## Setting Up Your Home Office

Dawn Foster

I started working from home occasionally when I worked at Intel. It started on an *ad hoc* basis when I was waiting for a delivery at home or for conference calls in the very early morning or late at night to talk to people in other timezones. When I started working from home on a regular basis, it didn't take me long to realize that my existing home office setup wasn't going to cut it.

It's hard to know what you're going to need of your office when you're first starting out, so, for the second of our [Web Work 101](#) series of articles, I asked some fellow WWD bloggers and my Twitter friends what tips they might give to people setting up a home office. Here's what I learned.

[Simon's](#) biggest mistake was assuming that his home office was adequately equipped for full-time working when it clearly wasn't. An unstable internet connection meant that he frequently had to venture out and find somewhere else to get online. For printing and faxing, he had to pop out to a print shop. All these interruptions really put a crimp on his flow at the start.

When I started out, I underestimated the importance of having a reliable phone with amazing battery life, headset and speaker for the marathon conference calls that were a requirement of my job.

This doesn't mean that you need to have every tool, gadget, or office supply your first week. As [@jasonglaspey](#) says, you shouldn't scrimp on the things that you know you will need, but take some time to think about whether you really need some of the less frequently-used tools.

Meanwhile, [@zuggy](#) recommends spending the extra money on a good chair, and likes having a couch or another chair in his office for a change of pace, especially when reading. Productivity will tank if you are constantly uncomfortable. A second monitor to expand your screen real estate is another good productivity investment.

You are now also the IT department for your home office. As [@zuggy](#) mentions, you need to make sure that you have reliable backups of your data. Personally, I [backup](#) my laptop to Amazon S3 about every 6 hours (I'm a paranoid ex-sys admin).

Separating office space from play space and work from family was another common theme. Keep the office far away from the television and other distractions while creating enough privacy to have serious business conversations. (Thanks [@joewevans](#), [@kevinfox](#), and [@Ron\\_Barrett](#).)

[@sarahgilbert](#) stresses that "if you have kids, make *sure* that your door to the office locks from the inside *and* outside." You need to be able to keep little people with sticky fingers out of the office regardless of whether or not you are working.

People like light. Good lighting and large windows are a great way to make sure that you enjoy working in your office. You want to avoid prison cell or dungeon decor at all costs. (Thanks [@TiEsQue](#) and [@Ron\\_Barrett](#).)

A huge thank you to all of the people who contributed tips to this article!

## New Web Worker? Who's Got Your Back?

Pamela Poole

One of the things that can really help you when you're starting out as a web worker is having a "safety network" of *mentors* in your field.

The ideal situation is to have access to a few people with freelance experience whom you know well enough to be able to lean on a little, people who will gladly share their wisdom and let you pick their brains. You should have at least one mentor whose expertise you can draw on for tips, tech support, quality control — and even reassurance.

When I first started freelance tech writing, I had no clue how to charge or quote for a tech writing project. I had worked as an in-house tech writer and done some side projects. But I was second fiddle on those jobs; the guy I worked with handled the proposal and contract with the client, and was paying me by the hour. I didn't have to worry about the details because my colleague, who had been working in freelance tech writing for over 15 years, took the lead.

So when the day came that I actually needed to quote on a tech writing job, I just asked him exactly what to do, and he sent me his secret formula. And then any time I hit a wall, I'd fire off an email to my guru and he'd help me out. In the first year or so, I asked him to give me feedback on what I'd written, to help me deal with scope creep, and for some assistance with software problems, among other things.

Similarly, when I started freelance translating at a high volume, my husband, who'd been at it for years, shared his efficient and logical file naming and organizing systems with me, gave me a quick tutorial and a list of keyboard shortcuts for the most widely used CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool, and was basically there for me while I learned to fly solo.

If you don't already have such a network, don't despair. The great thing about the Internet these days is that you have unprecedented access to experts in your field, and chances are good that you'll find some who are generous enough to share. You may find the info you need just by reading their blogs, but you can also establish relationships with these virtual strangers by subscribing to their blogs and actively participating in the conversation.

If you're not sure where to find your expert colleagues, mine the web. Set up a Google alert (or use [Yotify](#), [Alerts.com](#), [Trackle](#), or another) to hunt for pertinent key phrases. Join professional groups in the real world and don't forget to search for groups on [LinkedIn](#) (and/or [Xing](#), or [Viadeo](#) if you're in Europe) and, yes, even [Facebook](#). My pro groups on Facebook are bigger and more active than the ones on LinkedIn!

## Working Online

### Search Engine Optimization Basics

Celine Roque

For any web worker with a blog, web site or online portfolio, knowing how to optimize it for search engines is a must. After all, what's the point of having an online presence if no one can find it? By using some simple Search Engine Optimizations (SEO) techniques on your web site, you can increase the chances that your target visitors will find it through Yahoo, Google and other search engines.

In this post, I'll discuss some basic SEO techniques and how to apply them.

### Understanding the Jargon

The first thing we need to define is SEO itself. We already know what the acronym stands for, but what does it mean? According to [the SEOmoz dictionary](#), SEO is "the process of increasing

the number of visitors to a web site by achieving high rank in the search results of a search engine.” So when you perform SEO on a site, you are making sure that when someone types in relevant keywords into Google (or other search engines), the site will appear in the results. Ideally it should appear within the first page or results, or even as the first result. Here are some other common SEO terms, together with definitions:

- **Keyword:** The word or phrase that users enter into search engines.
- **Crawlers, bots and spiders:** These are the names given to the programs that search engines use to browse, analyze, and index your site.
- **Search volume:** This is the number of people who search for a given keyword. Some tools measure this per day, per month, or per 100 days.
- **Competition:** These are the other sites that aim to rank well in the same keyword as you do.
- **Search engine result pages (SERPS):** The term itself is descriptive — these are the pages of results that appear when you type a keyword into a search engine.
- **Back link:** A link to your site from another site.
- **On-page optimization.** These are the SEO techniques you apply on your blog or site itself, and therefore have most control over. It doesn't involve outside factors such as getting backlinks from other sites.

## How Important is SEO?

Applying even the most basic on-page optimization can bring in better, more qualified traffic from search engines. Still, SEO is not the only way to draw new visitors to your site. Nothing beats creating quality content that people will want to share. SEO is just the polish that will make your site appear more accessible to search engine crawlers. Without solid content behind it, SEO by itself will not make a difference in the long run.

At the same time, there's such a thing as overdoing it. Don't apply short-sighted techniques, such as stuffing your site with unnecessary keywords, or getting hundreds of back links from irrelevant sites. Doing this will make your site seem like spam to visitors, and could even be banned by the search engines from showing up in SERPS altogether ([Google has some guidelines on techniques to avoid here](#)).

## Choosing Keywords

The first step is to come up with a “seed list.” Think about all the possible keywords (or phrases) your target audience will use when looking for a site like yours. If you're providing a specific service, make sure to include keywords related to that service.

After that, check out the search metrics of the words in your seed list, to find out which to optimize your site's copy for. You need to find out the search volume and level of competition for each keyword. You can do this with some free tools:

- [WordTracker's free version](#). (Doesn't include competition data.)
- [Keyword Discovery's free version](#). (Doesn't include competition data.)
- [Nichebot Classic](#). It's powered by WordTracker, but links to competition data (although you have to click to get the numbers).

Here's a good rule of thumb to remember: apart from relevance, good keywords have high search volume but low competition. The mistake many beginners make is that they aim for the most popularly-searched keywords (those with high search volume). While there's nothing wrong with that, competition for those terms is so strong that it's hard to rank well for them in the SERPS. By adding [a few modifiers](#) (additional words to make a more specific phrase) to popular keywords, you have a better chance of ranking well.

## Getting to Work

Performing on-page optimization throughout your web site is easy, especially if you are familiar with HTML. Even if you aren't, there are dozens of online tutorials out there which can help you find and tweak the code on your web site with little difficulty.

**URLs.** The first thing you should look at is your URLs. Does your domain name contain an important keyword? If it does, that's a bonus. If not, then channel your efforts into crafting SEO-friendly URLs for the pages of your site or the posts of your blog. For example, a page about hiring logo designers is better if given the following url: <http://www.example.com/hiring-logo-designers>. Avoid using only dates, numbers, and irrelevant words as the URLs of your pages. Note that descriptive "search engine friendly" URLs may not affect ranking themselves, but people will be more likely to click through a page with a descriptive URL from a SERP.

**Page title.** This line of text (in the <title> tag) appears on the title bar of your browser when you're looking at a web site. It should contain your primary target keywords, but don't overdo it. This title will appear in SERPs, and you don't want it to look like keyword-stuffed spam.

**Headings.** The heading tags of your pages (<h1>, <h2>, etc.) serve a dual purpose. They show your readers the hierarchy of information on a page, and they are also useful for SEO. Use relevant keywords within these tags.

**Content.** Your content should contain a few of your choice keywords, but you should be careful that the added keywords aren't detrimental to a visitor's reading experience. Make sure the keywords are there when necessary, but don't insert them in every other sentence just because you think the search engine bots will like it.

## Additional Resources

If you want to learn more, here are some guides you can start with:

- I already linked to the SEOmoz dictionary above, but [the entire site](#) has a collection of good resources, particularly [The Beginner's Checklist for Learning SEO](#) and [Beginner's Guide to SEO](#).
- WebsitePublisher.net has [a clear and simple SEO guide](#).
- As for what you shouldn't do, Lyndsay Walker wrote [a two-part series on SEO tricks to avoid](#).

## Hiring Subcontractors

Celine Roque

Whether you need a [contingency plan](#) or you just want to [free up your schedule](#), at some point you'll need to hire subcontractors. Though this practice is more common with freelancers, even teleworking employees are seeing the benefits of getting outside help.

For those who are new to the idea, the task of hiring subcontractors can seem daunting. While the process requires patience, leadership and business savvy, finding and managing the right subcontractor for your job is entirely possible.

## Preparation and Managing Expectations

**Check your existing arrangements first.** Before you hire others to help you out, make sure your current arrangement with clients allow you to do so. Some of my project contracts include a clause that says that I can't delegate my work to others without notifying my client first. If your existing contracts have this clause, make sure you get your client's permission before you work with a subcontractor.

**Prepare a written agreement.** Just like any other business relationship, hiring a subcontractor requires a contract. While the legality of the contract is important, it's also a gesture that both parties are getting into a serious business arrangement. If you want to draft the contract yourself, take a look at this [sample contract from ILRG.com](#) and [the sample agreements on RocketLawyer](#) (which Imran [previously reviewed](#)).

**For big projects, have a manual ready.** If your project needs detailed instructions, it's best to have a single go-to reference ready for your subcontractors. This prevents you from having to send multiple emails that start with "I forgot to tell you..." Having everything in a single file is more convenient and less confusing for both parties.

You could include the following items in your manual:

- Project schedule.
- How to submit work.
- How deadlines and [mistakes](#) will be dealt with.
- List of recommended references.
- Examples of the finished product (for reference).

**Know how to separate the hype from the reality.** While outsourcing can work really well if you plan for it, the practice seems over-hyped in the media. It's rare that the hiring and working process is as simple as it's made out to be. In my experience, it always costs more and takes longer than I initially expected. Remember that you'll have to spend a lot of time during the training phase and that your role as administrator is not as easy as it looks.

## The Selection Process

You can start looking for candidates by placing ads at freelance job sites such as [Odesk](#), [Elance](#) and [GetAFreelancer](#). If you have a relatively popular blog, using it to place a "for hire" ad gives you the benefit of reaching out to people who are already familiar with your work.

Even if price is the driving force behind most bids on freelance job sites, you should never hire based on price alone. After all, hiring the wrong subcontractor can cost you more than just money. Act as if you are looking for an employee. What work experience does each candidate have? What shows up when you enter their names into Facebook or Google?

Apart from an applicant's resume and portfolio, you also need to know their ability to communicate, stick to deadlines and follow instructions. You can usually assess this during the application process. For a more thorough approach, conduct a phone interview or ask for a list of professional references that you can talk to.

Once you're ready to assign tasks it's always a good idea to start with something small. Build up from that as your new hire gains your trust and displays effectiveness in her work. I had a friend who made the mistake of taking a leap and assigning 50 percent of his data entry work to a new subcontractor. When the new subcontractor failed to deliver, he lost some of his most valuable clients. You can easily avoid this by taking new working relationships one small step at a time.

Remember that in the end, outsourcing tasks is supposed to make your work easier. The hiring process may take a lot of initial effort, but if you are armed with a solid plan you'll find that the results are well worth it.

## The Freelancer's Library of Free E-books, Manifestos and Other Resources

Celine Roque

There's no shortage of free learning materials available online for both new and experienced freelancers. While you can turn to hundreds of articles and blog posts, there's nothing like

reading a longer, more comprehensive book to really get some insight on a particular topic. Here's a collection of some great downloadable PDFs, e-books and manifestos:

## Freelancing and Teleworking

### **Go Freelance**

Leif Kendall's "Go Freelance" is an introductory guide to the world of freelancing. You'll go through the process of preparing yourself for the leap to the freelance world, finding work, networking and setting rates. If you've been freelancing for while, some of Kendall's advice might seem elementary. But if you're a new freelancer or about to become one, you can easily learn the basics from this e-book.

### **A Human's Guide to Freelance Living**

Unlike the nuts-and-bolts guide listed above, this PDF from Charlie Pabst focuses on productivity and work habits. As practicing freelancers know, these things are just as important as business skills.

## Business Tips

### **Your Business Brickyard**

Howard Mann's guide strips away the non-essentials of business building, allowing you to "go back to the brickyard" and start with the fundamentals. It's a useful book if you're encountering problems with your business. On the first reading, I was able to take a long, honest look at my own freelancing practice and spot several weaknesses. There's also an accompanying goal-setting worksheet you can download.

### **Getting Real**

"Getting Real" from 37signals (the company behind the popular project management app, [Basecamp](#)) may be about building web apps, but many of the ideas are applicable to almost any kind of freelancing endeavor — especially if you find yourself working with a group. This e-book is free to read online, but if you prefer to read it as a printed book or downloadable PDF, you'll have to buy it.

### **100 Ways to Help You Make Money**

Although the title sounds gimmicky, the advice contained in this guide by management guru Tom Peters is practical. It includes points on thanking your clients, getting up early and finding your story. At over 60 pages, this book is much longer than most of the guides in this collection, so you might want to read this in small doses over a few days.

## Improving Your Web Presence

### **The Simple Web**

For anyone who has ever wanted more from their blog or web site, Skellie recommends that you evaluate each element based on four categories — Gripping, Resonating, Interacting and Talking. As the name implies, the ideas in this guide are simple and easy to implement.

### **Killer Flagship Content**

This is required reading for anyone with a professional blog. In this e-book, Chris Garrett talks about the importance of compelling blog posts, the "flagship" content that will be the core of your blog. (Note: a feed subscription is required to download the book)

### **Rockstar Personal Branding**

If you're new to [personal branding](#), this free download provides a clear, actionable introduction. Throughout the guide, Skellie asks some simple yet compelling questions that can help anyone form their brand, be they generalists or specialists. Other topics include how to craft your personal elevator pitch and how to leverage blogging for your brand. (Note: a

newsletter subscription is required to download the book.)

## Inspiration

### [The Liberation Manifesto](#)

In this guide, Jonathan Mead of [Illuminated Mind](#) lists the reasons why you should liberate yourself from the cubicle-bound lifestyle. Mead provides an inspirational boost to aspiring teleworkers, particularly if they have a rebellious streak. A recommended read for those who can't seem to push themselves to take the first step.

### [How to be Creative](#)

Hugh MacLeod, best known for his business card cartoons over at [Gapingvoid.com](#), compiled this honest, straightforward collection of blog posts on what it takes to be creative. It's worth reading over and over again, especially when you're feeling uninspired or frustrated with your work.

## 6 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Taking on a New Client

Celine Roque

At the start of their careers, most freelancers take on every new client that comes along. But as we mature and gain more experience, we become more discerning when we're choosing who we work with. This usually happens because we're starting to specialize, we want to avoid dead-end projects, or we become more specific about the work we prefer to do.

As we become more involved in selecting clients, what criteria can we set?

**Are you the best freelancer for the project?** We usually hope that the answer to this question is "yes," but this isn't always the case. From the start, we need to know if our work values, skills and experience are what the client needs.

Even if you don't have all the skills needed, do you know where you can find capable people who can help you out? This is where your network comes in. If you aren't the best freelancer for the job, you can always pass on the project to someone who is.

**What do you know about the prospect's working history with freelancers?** If I'm talking with a potential client who has worked with freelancers before, I make the effort to find out what their working relationship was like. I find that the more difficult and unpleasant their experience with prior freelancers was, the more likely they are to volunteer this information. This helps you avoid the mistakes that your predecessors made, as well as predict future obstacles and problems.

**Do they see your services as a cost or an investment?** Many new business owners see it as a chore to go out of their way and hire a professional. Some even go out of their way to point out how replaceable you are if you charge them "too much" for something they can "hire a high school student to do". Watch out for these [warning signs](#). They indicate that the client sees you as an expense, and not as a professional that can actually help their business. They are probably hiring you because they know they need the finished product — but they don't know why or how it affects their business.

**Can you handle the extra workload?** If I may make a slight reworking of [Hofstadter's Law](#): "You always have less free time than you expect, even if you take this law into account." It's not just the project work that will take up your time. [Client support](#) can eat up several hours of your workweek, especially at the beginning. You might also need to [provide extras to keep the client informed](#) and [happy](#).

It can be tempting to take on a new project, particularly in economically turbulent times. But

if you don't have the resources or the time to devote your best work to the job, then accepting it can be detrimental to your career.

**Is there a possibility of developing a long-term working relationship?** Not all clients need long term work, but many of them do, even if they don't know it yet. If you see a possibility of working with this client in the long haul, it's best to take advantage of it if you can. Having one long-term client can be more profitable and fulfilling than trying to keep a constant incoming stream of several short-term clients. It's easier for the client too, as screening, hiring and training new freelancers can be a drain on their time and resources as well.

**What will you learn from this job?** As freelancers, we need to be more conscious about stepping up and acquiring new skills. We aren't automatically sent to seminars and training courses like most of our corporate counterparts.

## Twitter for Business FAQ

Meryl K. Evans

Twitter is still a scary, untamed frontier for many businesses. They know that they should be engaging with the Twitter community, but aren't sure how to do it.

I've collected up some of the most common questions asked by Twitter-for-business newbies and answered them below.

### **Is it bad to have a lopsided following/followers ratio?**

Balance is better. Following 150 people with only 75 following is OK. If you have more lopsided figures of, say, 300 following to 75 followers, that might give tweeters pause before they consider following you. Focus on [quality over quantity](#).

### **How do I stop people from following me?**

Block them. Go to the person's Twitter page and click "Block" in the sidebar under "Actions." Once you block someone, they won't show up in your followers list.

### **I'm concerned that a follower of my company is a porn site. What if my clients see such a follower prior to my blocking them?**

First off, most folks don't have time to analyze your list of followers. Secondly, most people know that spammers go after everyone and we don't always catch them all. So it's not a concern, unless you have lots of them.

### **If you block someone, is there a way to see those you blocked, in case you want to reverse your decision?**

You can reverse your decision by going to the person's Twitter page and clicking "Unblock" under "Actions." You can view a list of people you've blocked, but it's an XML file and not very readable: <http://twitter.com/blocks/blocking.xml>.

### **Should I protect my Twitter page, so I can avoid spammers and such?**

This is a bad idea, particularly if you're using Twitter for business. Some [Twitter users don't follow people](#) who protect their updates.

### **I'm trying to implement Twitter at my company, but can't get executive buy-in. What can I do?**

Many businesses are using Twitter to connect and exchange ideas with customers. It might help to do a search to find case studies and [examples of businesses using Twitter](#) and show how they've benefited.

### **Do you recommend having separate Twitter accounts for business personal use?**

That depends. Many people have a single account that they use for all because it adds personality. But if you like to share strong opinions and talk about sensitive topics like religion

or politics, then a separate personal account would be wise. It also depends on what you represent. Are you working for a large company and tweeting in its name or are you a one-person business?

### **What are the liabilities associated with a business using Twitter?**

It's up to the business. The company might want to consider drafting a policy on the company's rules for how employees use Twitter and other social networking sites. Suggestions for things to address include usage, company disclosure and consequences for violating policy.

### **Who should manage a company's Twitter account? Marketing? Product Management? Sales?**

It's important to note that Twitter users easily detect fakery. Who does the tweeting depends on the purpose of the Twitter account(s). Be honest about who is doing the tweeting. Avoid having personnel far removed from the executives to do the CEO's tweeting, for example.

### **What are those words starting with # like "#b2b"?**

They're [hashtags](#). They make it easier to tag references to a topic, event or other common factor. For example, if someone tweets about a job opportunity, he could tag it with "#jobs" so those looking for jobs can easily find it.

### **Should you use a account name that is recognized to be associated with your company, or not?**

For business-related Twitter accounts, you should either use your real name or your company's name. If you use the company's name, you should put your real name in your profile. If multiple people tweet from the same company account, then say so in the profile. List their names, if you can.

### **If the people you are following are listed on your Twitter page, how do you prevent people from clicking on your competition? Can you follow someone without it being listed?**

It's better to not hide the people you follow, even your competition. Having open dialogue with your industry — including your competitors — will help you earn trust and credibility. If you really want to follow someone without them knowing, then subscribe to their Twitter RSS feed.

### **How often should a business tweet?**

Avoid posting many tweets in a short space of time and [overwhelming followers' streams](#). Think quality over quantity. A good rule of thumb is to post few tweets spread out over the course of the day.

### **How do you respond to people who say something good or bad about your business?**

[Being able to rapidly respond to any news about your business](#) is valuable. If it's good, either tweet the person directly or in a direct message (DM). You don't want to bug people with a short "Thank you for that." If it's something bad, try to solve the problem or ask questions to find out the problem. If you find out the problem and you're researching the answer, don't wait until you find the answer to respond. You can respond quickly with a "We're researching this and will get back to you."

### **Should I block followers who have nothing to do with my business?**

No — unless they're spammers or have inappropriate content.

### **How can we quickly build up our list of people to follow?**

Use [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) or an application like [twellow.com](http://twellow.com), which can search profiles for keywords. However, don't be in a hurry to build a big list. Remember lopsided followers/following is not good.

### **Is there a way to integrate CRM with Twitter?**

Some CRM applications include Twitter and other social media sites as part of the app. Some have add-ons. If yours doesn't, create a custom field.

### **How do I get leads on Twitter?**

Focus on providing value with your tweets. Spread out links to your own content, because doing it too often turns off many users. Help others, ask questions and share thoughts about your industry or business in general. These are just a few of many ways you can [build relationships on Twitter](#).

## Breaking Out of Your Shell: How to Overcome Social Media Shyness

Celine Roque

Using social media tools seems to be a must in every knowledge worker's life — whether you're a remote worker or not.

But not everyone finds it easy to make new connections through these tools. For example, a designer I work with told me that she doesn't have a [LinkedIn](#) profile, and although she signed up for [Twitter](#), her account is inactive.

"Don't clients ever ask to connect with you through these tools?" I asked her. "Yes, but I'm too shy to actually use those things," she replied.

I know how she feels, because I felt the same way a year ago. While it's possible to maintain a healthy career without using social media tools, they can help to give a new dimension to professional relationships. If you feel that you're too shy for social media, how do you get past your hesitation?

### Working Around the Issues

First, you have to **figure out why you are hesitant to try social networking in the first place**. Do you find the tools intimidating? Do you feel like you're not at the same level as the experts you're trying to communicate with? Learning the reason behind your social networking shyness usually makes it easier to overcome.

The good news is that whatever your reason may be, **online communication is usually less intimidating than face-to-face interaction**. Also, you'll find that most of the people you want to communicate with are approachable and helpful. Most of the active users on social media sites are excited about sharing ideas, meeting new people, and receiving feedback. Even when you try to contact established experts or authority figures, you'll find that most of them are willing to help.

### Getting the Hang of It

Like anything else, becoming more active in social networks requires practice. It helps to **start with people you already know**. For your first steps, add friends and online acquaintances to your contact list. It helps to do this before adding the ones who have never heard of you before. Apart from the fact that it's easier, the activity you generate during this initial stage gives future contacts an idea about your personality and what kinds of people you interact with.

Once you've made a few connections, you can **announce that you're new to social media**. Make a publicly visible post asking others for advice: "I'm new to this. Can anyone tell me what this feature is for?" Apart from receiving practical tips from experienced social networkers, you're also forging new connections by asking for help.

You'll also feel more confident if you **learn the etiquette**, both through experience and [by reading about it](#). By being familiar with the established standards or rules, you'll know whether

certain actions or comments you've made are seen as awkward.

If you feel the pressure to say something smart or monumental, **loosen up by making candid replies.** This lighter task will allow you to get into the rhythm of writing. Also, you're building on something someone else initiated, taking off the pressure you feel about saying something original. You can do this by sending @replies on Twitter, as well as status replies on Facebook. [In a previous post](#), Meryl offered several suggestions on how to do this via Twitter, although her advice is applicable to other tools as well.

One thing that has worked for me, especially when connecting with other bloggers, is that whenever I want to compliment them on their latest work, I do it via a social networking tool rather than through the comments section of their blog. Doing this makes it easier to establish a two-way connection, and, before I know it, they're adding me as a contact via other tools as well.

Remember that whatever happens, **you have nothing to lose.** Don't take it personally [if you have few followers](#) or if some people don't want to add you to their contact list. Focus instead on providing value to those who are happy to interact with you.

## Jumping Into Your Web Business

Amber Riviere

Starting a business can be a huge undertaking, but fortunately for the aspiring web worker, it doesn't have to be. The really great thing about starting a web working business is that getting set up can be easy and low cost.

**You don't need a fancy set-up.** You can get by with a few basic necessities (in most cases, a computer, an Internet connection, a web site and maybe some business cards).

**You don't need to quit your day job.** You can keep working at your current job until your web work picks up enough to support you.

**You can work around your current obligations.** You can work at night, on weekends, in the mornings after you take the kids to school, or use any time you have available. It doesn't have to be a huge commitment. Web working is a lot more flexible than most jobs, and you can get a lot done in just a couple of hours a day.

**You don't have to sell the farm.** You can work where you are, without making any major lifestyle changes to compensate for the new venture. If you were starting a traditional "bricks and mortar" business, you might have to find a way to fund the business, which might include selling assets, moving to a smaller place, etc.

So, what are you waiting for? To start, you'll need a few things:

**Set up a legal entity for your business as soon as possible.** This is good for tax and liability purposes, as well as maintaining personal privacy. Be sure to speak with your accountant or tax adviser about the most appropriate entity for your business and needs.

**Set up a business account as soon as you get your first check (or sooner).** If you set up a [PayPal](#) or [Google Checkout](#) account that isn't used for personal purchases, then it could serve as your "business account." Of course, you should always consult an accountant for assistance and advice surrounding your business finances.

**A web site.** Even if you just have a small site to start with, you need a face for your business online. You also need a place to post regular and frequent updates (a blog, a newsletter, or a podcast are a few examples). This will help you to start establishing your site with search engines and with building traffic. The earlier you start posting regular (and relevant) content to your site, the better off you will be. You need a way to build a list of followers who want to stay updated about you and your products and services. Aside from these few basic "must haves," you can forgo the fancy design until you can afford it.

**Create (and maintain) a consistent lead generation plan.** This might consist of a lot of writing and posting online, or a cold-calling or advertising campaign.

**Build a portfolio and testimonials.** Do free work for family, friends, former business colleagues and nonprofit organizations. Do whatever you can do to create a respectable portfolio and authentic testimonials regarding the quality of your work.

Here are a couple of things you don't need just yet.

**A logo or "identity."** Your name or business name will do, along with a specific description of the services/products you provide and the ideal target customer you serve.

**A fancy web site.** While you do need a web site, you don't have to drop the big bucks on it to start with.

The key is to *start small, think sustainable, and focus on lead generation and building a following*. If you have a product or service that people are ready and willing to buy, you can worry about the more complicated tasks involved in starting a business a little later on. For now, just jump!

## Telecommuting – Out of Sight Doesn't Have to Mean Out of Mind

Judi Sohn

On first glance, telecommuting is a dream gig. You get to draw a regular salary, dress in comfortable clothing (shoes optional) and come and go as you please with no one looking over your shoulder.

Ask any telecommuter for a downside, and they'll likely start talking about the isolation. It's more than discussing last night's game around the water cooler. When you're physically in the office simply doing your job, your presence is a constant reminder to the rest of your team of the value you add to the company. No virtual project management site can replace the spontaneous collaboration that happens in the hallway. And when the boss is looking for someone to play a role on a key project, odds are her first thought isn't going to be that guy sitting 200 miles away.

So how do you sit in your pajamas all day and stay connected to your peers?

It depends on the company, and it depends on you.

### It Depends on the Company

It's not about you or your job. It's about the culture. How much conversation typically happens in the hallways? Do folks tend to work from home in the evenings or take their work on the road? How much work is planned in advance vs. what happens spontaneously?

If you want to work for a telecommuting-friendly company, consider working for a nonprofit organization or a vendor that services nonprofits. In general, you'd be hard pressed to find an industry more conducive to non-traditional work environments than the nonprofit sector. I've attended a number of nonprofit conferences where I continually meet folks who, like me, work full-time for geographically-distant causes.

Of course, if you are working to provide a direct service you need to be where that service is. However, there are opportunities to work for organizations where they may be grateful to have your expertise without the overhead of having you on site. While nonprofits do traditionally pay less than comparable jobs in the for-profit world, the compensation is not as bad as you might think. And you have the warm fuzzies of working for the greater good. Check out the [Nonprofit Technology Network \(NTEN\)](#) for more information about working in the nonprofit technology world.

Regardless of the sector, whatever you do, **don't expect the culture to change to suit you.** If your co-workers rarely log in to a project management/collaboration web site; if they never have conversations via IM or Twitter; if emails are rarely longer than 5 words; if their idea of an impromptu conference call involves a cell phone in speaker mode...*they're not going to change for you.*

Last week I was visiting my office, as I do each month, and I asked my co-workers to share with me any challenges they've had working with a telecommuter. They expressed that they feel bad that I miss some of the casual hallway conversation, but for the most part not much is different. They IM with me just as much as they IM with each other. In fact, after over three years we've developed our own shorthand language that works well for SMS and IM. We use a variety of web-based tools to keep in touch and stay organized. It's just part of our culture, regardless of where everyone is physically.

If you can't figure out a way to comfortably work in the culture of the company even when you're not there – without expecting anyone else to change their habits – then you may be wasting your time. Even if you are perfectly comfortable with telecommuting, have an ideal home office, and have your supervisor's buy-in, you will probably feel frustrated and disenfranchised in the end.

## It Depends on You

So you work for a progressive company that loves to communicate via instant messenger or Skype. They use web apps or VPN and nothing important happens in the office anyway. Home office here I come, right? Not so fast.

Your coworkers can't see that you're busy. They can't tell when you're in a good mood. Except for scheduled or impromptu phone calls or web conferences, you have to be comfortable showing who you are almost entirely in written communication.

There are some people who are able to comfortably write emails that aren't too long, aren't too short, and it's the same as if they were standing in front of you. They make ideal telecommuters. And there are others who have difficulty coming across as they intend in writing. Those folks should stick close to the office.

Here's something you don't want to hear: The successful telecommuter practices [Inbox Zero](#). That's right, you need to make sure that every email is read and dealt with in a timely manner. You'll need a system for quickly responding to IMs and other messages, even if it's to say you can't deal with it at the moment. Superior electronic organization skills are key to a telecommuter's successful relationship with peers.

If you can't keep up with your email and other electronic communication when you're face-to-face with your coworkers, forget working remotely on a regular basis. You'll have all your typical email from the outside, plus additional communication from co-workers who can no longer just shout at you from down the hall. Imagine how your coworkers would feel if they asked you a question in person and you routinely ignored them for a few hours...or a few days? Whether it's IM, Twitter, Skype, the telephone or the inbox, you need to get on top of the communication tool that's as readily accessible to you and your coworkers during business hours as conversation. It's not always realistic to expect people to call you for everything.

## How To Respond to an Online Job Ad

Celine Roque

I've noticed that many new freelancers tend to be nonchalant when responding to online job ads. Maybe online applications appear more instant and casual when compared with the traditional alternative of showing up for a series of interviews. Even though applying for a freelance job online is fast, it doesn't mean it's easy. You need to consider several issues before rushing your application for a prospective project.

**Learn how to read between the lines.** Job ads often [give away more information](#) than most people see. Be diligent when it comes to finding any clues about the type of freelancer that best suits the job, as well as the best way to apply.

**Know exactly what they are looking for.** Spend some time researching the company (or the individual) that posted the ad. Doing this helps you choose the appropriate tone and

approach for your application. When I applied as a blogger for WebWorkerDaily, I knew from the tone of the blog that I shouldn't be too formal or serious, so I kept my cover letter brief and casual. Also, your research can help you select the best items, case studies and web site links to include in your portfolio.

**Follow directions.** This might seem like common sense but, as someone who's been on the hiring end, I've noticed that many applicants still fail to follow directions. If you don't follow directions from the ad, you're telling your potential client that you will have a hard time following job instructions as well.

**Get a name, if you can.** "To whom it may concern" is never a good opening line. Most job ads include the name of the contact person, and it's a mistake not to take advantage of that. If there's no name attached to the ad, look at the company web site or call them to get the name of the person you'll address the application to.

**Keep it as short as possible.** Even if you're required to answer several questions, keep the text concise. You're competing with dozens of applicants, most of them writing paragraph after paragraph about their unrelated work experience and maybe even their life story. As someone who prefers receiving short but clear messages, I do my best to keep outgoing messages that way as well. It pays off, too. Many of my clients have replied to my applications by saying, "What a breath of fresh air! I was getting tired of reading 40 long emails about this job."

If you're worried that you might not be saying enough about yourself, remember that your portfolio and work experience will speak for you.

**Have a template ready, but always modify it before sending.** Templates are useful for freelancers, but sending these without customization gives off the wrong impression. Unmodified templates indicate that you're sending the same application to several other potential clients, showing that you're not that committed to a particular job or project. Whenever I hire contractors, the template applications go straight to the trash bin.

**Know how to follow up.** When I was looking for a researcher two years ago, one of the applicants immediately emailed me the day after, "Do I have the job?" I politely told her that I'm still going through applications and, as I mentioned in the ad, I will contact all applicants within the week. Again, she emailed me the day later, as well as the day after that. While I understand how excited and anxious one can be during the application process, it's best to keep these feelings to yourself. Constantly following up on your application can drain your energy and annoy your potential client.

Still, you have to be responsive when you're asked to submit additional requirements or to schedule a phone interview. One of my friends is so afraid of phone interviews that she doesn't reply to such requests. If you're not comfortable with some of the requirements, communicate with the prospective client. Don't leave them hanging.

Although you have to keep several things in mind when responding to online job ads, it gets easier with practice. Don't get intimidated by these things, as they're part of the reality of online freelancing. After all, it's still easier than wearing out your shoes by rushing from building to building and spending long hours in the waiting room for an interview.

## Where to Work?

Scott Blitstein

As web workers, we like to feel that we can sit down just about anywhere and be connected and productive. Armed with our laptops and Wi-Fi, or mobile broadband, that is usually the case.

But just because we *can* work anywhere, doesn't mean that we *should*. Our work environment is a critical part of our work process and can have tremendous influence on our productivity.

So what are our options?

**Home:** It's no surprise that many web workers set up their work spaces at home. With a spare room or out of the way corner, you can be up and running with minimal cost and effort.

However, many of the benefits of a work at home environment are also potential drawbacks. Being close to family is great but they can also be a distraction. And while I would love the zero mile commute, maintaining a work-life balance can be a real issue for some.

There can also be privacy concerns when your home address or phone number is also used as a business location. PO boxes or mail stops can assist with the physical mail, and many folks use their mobile as a business line. Using a virtual phone service like [GrandCentral](#) or [PhoneFusion](#) can help keep your home line clear, as well as presenting a more professional appearance.

**Hot-Spots:** If you have ever walked in to a Panera or Starbucks, or a local coffee shop or cafe that offers free Wi-Fi, you've seen the scores of folks set up with their laptops diligently tapping away.

Working in a public spot like this certainly offers its advantages. The availability of Wi-Fi makes access to work easy, and we all know that [caffeine fuels the web worker](#). Also, there is a feeling of community that can develop and the presence of other folks around can ease the sense of isolation that can be an issue for solo workers.

While I think hot-spots can serve as great meeting places, it would be a challenge for me as a full time work location. Making and receiving calls can be difficult, and sometimes power availability can be a big issue.

Also, rules for purchasing requirements and time limits can vary widely by location, and the costs of a daily coffee / bagel can add up quickly.

If you do utilize the space and services of a local establishment, be sure to also support them with your purchases.

**Traditional Office:** Many web workers do work in traditional office environments or set up shop by renting local office space. I found a nice space in the downtown area of my village that is quite affordable and gives me a conveniently-located space to work and hold meetings.

I appreciate never having to worry about finding a comfortable chair or a power outlet. I like maintaining control of my own Internet connection, and I don't know how I would function without my whiteboard. Having a distinct work space, located out of the home, also makes that [end of day transition](#) much easier.

There are additional costs like insurance that can come along with a rented space but it is a good option for those that want to have a distinct work environment or a physical presence in your community.

**Coworking:** We've [written a lot about coworking here on WebWorkerDaily](#) and it is an exciting trend for the solo web worker. A good coworking facility can offer a lot of the benefits of a coffee-shop or cafe, while also providing some traditional office luxuries like whiteboards or meeting rooms. It is an emerging trend, though, and finding a good space can be difficult, especially in smaller suburban or remote areas.

When you've decided where you're going to work from, it's important to remember that the title of "web worker" is given to those who use the web to work productively and efficiently, no matter where you set up.

## Planning, Budgeting and Goal-Setting

Darrell Etherington

In this post, I'm going to get back to basics. The key to successful web work, and getting paid to do it, is knowing exactly what it is you want to do, and how you're going to go about doing it. In other words, you have to **plan**, you have to **budget**, and you have to **set goals** for yourself.

### Plan Your Role

Imagine you're treating yourself as a new hire. It's time to plot out your career path, which

means answering the tough questions about what your role is and what you want to accomplish in your new position. It's all well and good to say you want to be a web worker, but what does that really mean? It only describes the method, not the nature or content of your work.

The web working sphere is filled with people who seem not to have taken the time to answer the very basic question of what it is they do. Not that you can't wear multiple hats, but you should definitely wear at least one.

I find it handy to give myself a job title, and even go so far as to write out the description for that title. When I'm feeling especially ambitious, I work on my career path, which has different titles arranged in a hierarchy, each with their own corresponding description. You may have ventured in to web working to escape structure, but it can go a long way in helping you (and your client) know what it is you're hoping to achieve.

Word to the wise: avoid the "Social Media Consultant" title until you've actually done professional consulting work devoted to social media, and can point prospective clients to solid examples of what that work entailed. Otherwise, you're setting yourself up to become known as [something far less flattering](#).

## Your Finances

Budgeting is a trying exercise in the best of circumstances. If you're just starting out as a freelancer, and are used to the people in Accounting handling that side of things, it can be downright terrifying. Even if you've worked as a freelancer before, working online introduces new challenges into the equation which could result in a very different experience.

First, there's some good news. Computer equipment, internet service, cellular and phone bills, and even a portion of your rent may all qualify as deductible expenses. I have an accountant, since my brain isn't wired for numbers, but if you want to go it alone, the Anti 9-to-5 Guide has a handy [Freelancer Tax FAQ](#) that should start you off on the right track.

You need to budget for your web work-related overhead. Think about and budget for things like web hosting and domain registration, web service subscriptions, software purchases (some of which you may be able to bill to clients, depending on the nature of the contract), and consumables like pre-paid long distance cards, and, believe it or not, easy-to-forget things like batteries for your hardware peripherals.

Budget for the short-term until you get a good feel for what sort of costs will be likely to recur.

## Your Goals

This is related to your role, in that setting a career path comes in to play when you're setting goals for yourself. But since you're not just an employee any longer, it goes far beyond that. You also want to think about output goals, spending goals, and even establish a desired future state for your web working business for the purposes of developing a clear strategic vision.

You can measure your output goals in terms of deliverables, projects, contracts, blog posts, etc. depending on the nature of your business. Establish clear targets attached to timelines, but don't be afraid to alter these as you learn more about web work and what you can realistically expect.

Spending goals are easy to measure, so long as you accurately track your spending history. Make sure to record even the little things, and then aim to reduce costs wherever possible, just like any corporation would.

Establish a desired future state once you've been working long enough to know what you can reasonably expect out of your web working career in the future. Paint a picture of what your practice will look like at one year, and then at five, and so on, for as long as you'd like. Having a future state in mind will help keep you motivated, and help make sure you don't become stagnant. Revisit and revise your targets regularly to make sure you aren't working towards something that isn't possible or desirable any longer.

Hopefully these tips help you work out a clear vision of what you'd like to put into and get out of web working, long before you wade into the tools, services and best practices we examine here at WebWorkerDaily.

## Socializing

Dawn Foster

Many of us are social beings who enjoy interacting with other people, and until you leave an office environment, you probably don't realize how much contact you have with other human beings throughout the day. In an office, you run into people in the hallways, in the lunchroom, and at meetings. It can be easier to have social conversations or even to bounce ideas off of someone when you run into them unexpectedly. When you work remotely, whether you are a telecommuter or a freelancer, it is possible to go the entire day without ever seeing or speaking to anyone. However there are also plenty of ways to replace those interactions with new ones.

Use **technology** to have conversations with other people. Instant messaging, [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and other social networking sites are the primary ways that I talk to people online throughout the day. I regularly chat with clients, friends, and peers in my industry using several of these tools. I'll admit to not being much of a phone person, since I prefer to talk to people online or in person, but giving people a quick call to chat about work or anything else can help provide some additional contact with other people.

Have **lunch** with old friends, peers, clients or other web workers. I spend too many lunches dropping crumbs onto my keyboard because it is just too easy to work through lunch when you work remotely. I make myself schedule a couple of lunches a week. It gets me out of the house, and I always end up having interesting conversations with people.

Join or start a **group exercise** program. This could be as simple as planning a walk several days a week with someone you know in the neighborhood or joining an exercise class at the gym. Combine physical activity to get your butt out of the chair and social interactions!

Take your **work out of the house**. I like to spend some time [working in coffee shops](#) with other people to break up the time working in my home office. I usually save up some work that can easily be done with some distractions (email, administrative tasks, etc.) while saving the client work that requires focused concentration for my home office.

Attend **local industry meetups**. Find a couple of groups of people working in your industry and attend a few regular events. As [Pamela noted](#), it's a great way to meet new people with common work interests. You can also use these events to bounce ideas off of people or get feedback on some of your ideas.

## No Web Worker Is an Island — So Join Some Groups

Pamela Poole

I think it's safe to say that the web working lifestyle — being able to work in the comfort and tranquility of our own inviolate little worlds — is an introvert's dream come true.

But not all web workers fit that mold, to be sure. In fact, some people hesitate to make the leap to web working because they're concerned about being isolated. No matter what your personality type, one thing is true for all of us: Every now and then we have to get out and get some human interaction, for our mental health as well as that of our careers. Holing up at home is not the best way to further your professional goals, get new clients, or find partners (of any variety). At any time, but especially in our current economic climate, having a substantial professional network can mean more security for the web worker.

When I first started web working, I had moved to a new city in a foreign country where I had no local contacts, either social or professional, other than my husband. After a while, I needed to make a serious effort to get an offline life and become a participant in my professional community. So I chose a tech mixer that I'd read about on a blog for my debutante moment. I

even bought a new shirt. And I can't tell you how glad I am that I went.

That evening I met a lot of people. (I was on a mission, after all.) Some I've written about, some I've worked with, and others are just fun to hang out with. That night, I discovered a [coworking center](#), which is also a meeting hub for all kinds of tech professional groups and events (I now subscribe to the center's events feed), and I learned about (and consequently joined) a local [group for women in tech](#). Since this one event, my network has grown considerably.

I recently started attending [Paris Open Coffee Club](#) meetings, which are held every Thursday morning. There are Open Coffee Clubs all over the world, from Boulder, Colo., to Chennai, India. And even though this group is generally for entrepreneurs, it's a pleasant, coworking environment with a techie crowd. There's always a chance somebody could be looking for the skills you have, or that you'll meet people who share your interests, so don't hesitate to branch out into areas other than your nearest extreme programming club...

In addition to joining groups, consider volunteering. Some volunteer work I did recently led to two speaking engagements, one of which will be at the upcoming [Society for Technical Communication – France annual conference](#) in March. The conference theme is "Connecting Communities," and it's open to anyone: STC members and non-members from anywhere in the world. I'll be there, talking about online identity and the Wizard of Oz (really), so if you're a web worker in the Paris area and you need to get out of the house, or if you want an excuse to come to Paris, this might be just the thing for you.

If you're thinking of becoming a web worker, my advice is not to worry about being isolated from other people, at least if you live in a reasonably large city. You can pick and choose the groups you want to be part of and adjust your extracurricular activity load to suit your needs. If you are an extreme introvert, just buy a new shirt and go for it. You won't be sorry!

## Common Early Mistakes and How To Avoid Them

Celine Roque

When we took our first steps in this world, our feet were unsure and our legs were struggling. The same could be said for freelancers who are venturing onto the web working path for the first time. There are bound to be mistakes and struggles on the way, making us feel that we aren't ready to go pro yet.

It's good to remember that everyone has felt like that at least once in their career. Almost all freelancers have a story to tell about the mistakes they made and what they could have done to avoid them.

### Equipment and the Home Office

After one of his first meetings with a client, fellow WWD blogger [Scott Blitstein](#) wanted to send his client a questionnaire to assess their needs. When he asked them how they preferred to receive the questionnaire, they opted for fax instead of email.

Realizing that he didn't have [a fax machine](#) handy, Scott decided to buy one on the way home. "I think I've only used it two or three times since then, and only because I had it," Scott said.

While it's important to have [a fully-equipped home office](#), we should also have a realistic idea about how often we're going to use each item before purchasing. This prevents us from overspending on equipment when we're starting out, without under-equipping ourselves.

### Dealing with Clients

[Ruth Thaler-Carter](#) is a freelance writer and editor. When starting out, she worked on a project where she made a profit of "next to nothing." She explains, "I didn't confirm who would be responsible for printing and mailing a newsletter I was contracted to write, edit, lay out and

produce for print. It never occurred to me that the client would expect me to pay for printing and mailing.”

As Ruth’s example illustrates, one of the most important aspects of client-consultant relationships is the **list of deliverables**. This list indicates who is accountable for a task and when it is due. Without this list, it’s hard for both the client and the freelancer to identify what their areas of responsibility are.

## Money Matters

Elena has been a freelance writer and editor for 11 years, but when she started out she was a far cry from the veteran she is now. Initially, she was billing her clients *after* every long-term project was completed. This left her with poor cash flow and clients who weren’t submitting their deliverables on time.

Elena decided to bill clients monthly. “Every month, I bill for work I’ve done in the last month. That way, if things sit, at least you got paid, or you can refuse to continue the work until you get paid,” she said.

[How to charge for one’s services](#) is a decision that beginning freelancers face. As Elena notes in her story, it’s important to bill regularly for big projects. But how do you charge? Charging by the hour is hard for both parties to track.

One thing that has worked for me all these years is charging per milestone. This is because the deliverables are defined, and the client pays based on the results I produce, not how much time I spent on it. If you set the rates right, your fees per milestone can reflect your ideal hourly rate anyway.

After you’ve decided how to charge, another question comes up: how much? This tends to be a hotly debated topic among freelancers.

David, a legal consultant, said that he was embarrassed to find that he was charging half as much as his competitors. “Upon mature reflection, I left my rates unchanged. I have never been short of work and I have always earned enough,” David said.

I have an alternative story to tell about undercharging. Early in my online writing career, I would see other writers take jobs for \$1-\$2 per article. This made me nervous as I was charging \$8 to \$10. If I had cut my rates, I would be taking a loss. So I stuck to my rates and focused on finding the types of clients who wouldn’t be swayed by price alone.

Perhaps the best amount to charge isn’t a specific number. After all, several factors come into play:

- how much your client is willing to pay;
- what everyone else is charging;
- how much you’ll need for business and living expenses;
- and what rates you feel are “fair” to both you and the client.

Keeping this in mind, there is no right amount to charge, there’s only what’s right for you.

Your early web working career will always be unsure and full of mistakes, no matter how well you plan or research. By learning through other people’s experiences and hearing about their humble beginnings, then maybe your first steps as web workers won’t be as awkward – and even if they are, rest assured that it’s quite normal.

## Hardware & Software

### Be Your Own Tech Support

Meryl K. Evans

I'm not suggesting you crack open your computer to fix it, but with a few of the tactics outlined in this post you can solve many of your computer problems on your own.

Besides, wouldn't you rather solve your problems instead of waiting for a live support person to pick up the phone and sweeten you up, telling you how important you are and how the company wants to provide you with the very best service possible. Yadda yadda ... just ask me what my problem is already!

Here are 10 steps to becoming your own Mr. or Ms. Fix-it:

1. **Reboot or power off/on.** This applies to computers, mobile devices, printers, routers and other electronics. It even works on my DVR when it freezes. For PCs, shut them down before rebooting, if you can. If the computer freezes and won't budge after enough time passes, turn it off for a few minutes before turning it back on.
2. **Run anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and keep it up to date.** For some of you, this is probably a no-brainer. Sadly, I've heard stories of people with problems who were many updates behind, or they forgot they turned off the software and never turned it back on. Most standard anti-virus apps can run a full-system scan at least once a week. Make sure yours does.
3. **Check cables and switches.** Just last week, my son told me his laptop wouldn't work. I checked the adapter and it was fine. It turned out the surge protector wasn't switched on.
4. **Know how to save and import files in different formats.** When Office 2007 was released, people in my community emailed me because they couldn't open the .docx, .pptx and .xlsx files it uses. Easy fix: download the free [Office Compatibility Pack](#) from Microsoft. Those with Office 2007 can change the default save file format back to .doc, .ppt and .xls. There are some fairly standard formats, like vCard and CSV files, that you can import and export into many different applications: Outlook, Gmail, Apple Address Book, Excel and more. Make "File > Save as" your friend. You can almost never go wrong in converting files to Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) format as virtually everyone can open and view them. Many free sites and apps can convert your files.
5. **Visit manufacturer and developer web sites.** Software not behaving? Hardware acting wonky? Go to the web site of the developer or manufacturer to search the knowledge base or support pages. You can often find the answers here without having to call support. Or if you can't find the answers, email support. It's often less time consuming (if you don't need an immediate answer) because you don't wait on anyone or sit through long questions. But before you do that, try #6.
6. **Search the web for a solution.** Bloggers often receive emails from people asking for help with a problem, just because they once blogged about the product or service — don't be tempted to go down this route! Save yourself a step and go straight to the resource or an already published answer. If the manufacturer or developer web site doesn't have the answer, search the web. I've found many solutions on other web sites. Make your search as specific as possible. If you receive an error message, copy/paste the error text (if possible) or write it down (or take a screen shot), and use it in your search query, along with the name of the application or other relevant information.
7. **Rule out other possibilities.** Tech support people and programmers do this all the time. Let's say you keep receiving a pop-up message that your USB drive could perform faster on a USB 2.0 port, as happened to me recently. A few things come to mind: The USB drive is broken; the USB port is broken; the drivers need updating. Now, I could still open the files on the USB drive, so I didn't think it was broken. For this same reason, I knew the USB port wasn't broken. Before trying complicated debugging, I located another USB drive and plugged it in; the error message didn't show up. Problem solved: it was the cheap USB drive causing the problem. I switched to a newer one and haven't had a problem since.
8. **Watch Wi-Fi use.** Keep your credit card and other personal information off public Wi-Fi connections, which have little security. Limit what you log into while on Wi-Fi. In other words, checking your bank account can wait until you find a more secure connection.
9. **Uninstall and reinstall the application.** Sometimes an application can become corrupted. After exhausting all other options, re-install the app.

10. **Sync and backup everything.** I recently lost a file (yes, just lost it). Luckily, I had a back-up on an external drive, so I just copied it back to my computer. I sync my personal information manager with Google Calendar and Contacts and my BlackBerry. When someone's contact information disappears from one of the resources, I had it on another. With [many syncing tools and options available](#), you can make sure never lose any data. Not only do I have an external drive, but also I use an online backup services.

While a phone call to tech support sounds faster than finding the answers yourself, it doesn't always work out that way. You can solve many problems within a few minutes using these steps. The best parts? There's no waiting, no working through someone's idea of a script, no redoing the steps you've already done, and no listening to awful hold music. You're your best tech support person.

## 10 Apps You Can't Do Without

Aliza Sherman

So you've been downsized. Or you've bailed before being booted because you saw the writing on the wall. Or maybe you skipped the steady paycheck for a go at being a freelancer. Whatever the reason you're out there on your own now, we've compiled a list of apps you'll need to run your web-working business.

This is by no means a comprehensive list, just a sampling of the apps and solutions that we've blogged about in the past.

Here's what the new web worker needs to get the job done well:

### Backoffice

#### 1. Invoice management

I can't run my business without my [Freshbooks](#), but there are many options out there for freelancers to manage invoices and track income and expenses. Some other options we've reviewed include:

- [Freshbooks, Zoho, Blinksale, Cashboard](#)
- [Bootstrap](#)
- [Involer](#) (Mac only)
- [Invotrak](#)
- [Billings 3](#) (Mac only)
- [CurdBee](#)

You can also track expenses with these apps:

- [Paybackable](#) (online)
- [Expens'd](#) (online)

#### 2. Time tracking

While Freshbooks does have time tracking, I must confess I'm remiss with tracking my time with a tracker (and yes, even with my cute Freshbooks time tracking widget for Mac OSX). I've been a little better lately at guesstimating my time and logging it into my project management system (see No. 7 below), but need to get better at it to understand the profitability of my work projects. Some time tracking solutions we've blogged about in the past include:

- [88Miles, MyHours, Sidejobtrack, MeeTimer](#) (roundup)
- [TimeXchange](#)
- [Xpenser](#)
- [Harvest](#)

### 3. CRM

I have to admit I'm the first to ignore anything that has an acronym. But if you spell it out — Customer Relationship Management — you can see that this is an essential part of building your web working business. I've always maintained customer contacts and relationships in an ad-hoc sort of way; now I wish I had started out on the right foot instead of having to backtrack and re-engineer my patchwork system into something more streamlined. Here are some CRM options that are affordable when you're just starting out. Take a look at our past reviews for:

- [Tactile CRM](#)
- [Highrise](#)
- [SugarCRM](#), [ConcourseSuite 5.0](#), [SplendidCRM](#) (roundup, open source)
- [Bizroof](#)
- [Zoho CRM](#) (this review actually covers their enterprise-level app; check out their non-enterprise solution)

Some useful apps to complement your CRM efforts include:

- [CloudContacts](#)
- [DropCard](#), [Rmbrme](#), [BeamMe](#), [ShareCard](#), [SnapDat](#) (roundup)
- [Daylite Touch](#) (Mac, iPhone)

### 4. RSS Reader

A good RSS reader is vital to stay on top of the news, blogs and articles that you need to read to stay on top of your game as a web worker. I am currently using [Google Reader](#) and occasionally play with [Snackr](#). Here are some WebWorkerDaily posts offering tips for managing your RSS feeds:

- [Fine-Tune Your RSS Subscriptions](#)
- [More efficient RSS reading](#)
- [Should you kill your RSS reader?](#)

Here are some RSS feed readers, news filtering tools and related solutions we've reviewed to drink from the information firehose:

- [Filtrbox](#) (and [my initial review](#))
- [Yahoo Pipes](#)
- [FeedMyInbox](#)
- [Snackr](#)
- [AideRSS](#)
- [IMFeeds](#)

And here are some apps to save something you want to read for later:

[ReadItLater](#), [Instapaper](#), [LaterLoop](#)

## Communications

### 5. Email management

Note: I'm a [Gmail](#) kinda gal. Won't touch Outlook. However, my fellow bloggers have reviewed some Outlook add-ons and other email management solutions to wrangle your email communications into submission.

Starting with a [good email organization system](#) and the right supplementary tools to manage your email communications is important. As your web work picks up and you juggle multiple projects, you'll be grateful you set something up early that you are in the habit of using and that keeps your communications in order and easily accessible as needed. Here are some email tips, add-ons and apps we've discussed:

- [Xobni](#) (for Outlook)
- [Title Tweaks](#) (for Gmail)
- [Multiple Inboxes](#) (for Gmail)

and stay tuned for my new post about [PostBox](#).

## 6. Calls, Conferencing and Instant Messaging

When it comes to video conferencing, I'm toggling between two solutions. Each one works well for me; which one I choose often depends on the other user. [Skype](#) was my free long distance call solution for aeons, but now I often turn to [Google Talk](#) with video as a quick and easy solution, because it is totally integrated into my Gmail and I don't have to launch Skype. In fact, I only launch Skype now when I have a scheduled call, rather than running it in the background. Since my Gmail is always open, it is a perfect way for my team members to reach me quickly – usually by IM first and then by video if further discussion is needed.

Here are some voice conferencing and video and voice chat solutions we've reviewed:

- [Calliflower](#)
- [FreeConference](#)
- [Gmail Voice & Video Chat](#)
- [Gizmo 5](#)
- [TokBox Video Chat](#)

And check out [Four iPhone VoIP services worth ringing up](#).

Here are some Web conferencing apps worth exploring:

- [Fuze](#)
- [YuuGuu](#)
- [Skype and Yugma](#)
- [GotoMeeting vs. Yugma](#)
- [DimDim](#)
- [PalBee](#)
- [Oneeko](#) (Windows)

Here's a helpful [web conferencing roundup covering nine tools](#).

## Work Process

### 7. Project management

For a long time, I was singing the praises of [Basecamp](#), but recently my web working company has outgrown it. I'm no longer flying solo, with a few virtual team members on a couple of projects. I now have a business partner and nine independent contractors working on multiple projects, so we've graduated to [5pm](#). Before deciding on 5pm, we looked at a number of project management solutions, many of which I've reviewed in the past. Before you rush over and get an account with the project management system that works for me, check out my post [Project Management, Collaboration and How Our Brains Work](#).

Then take a look at some of these reviews:

- [LiquidPlanner](#)
- [Clarizen](#)
- [Wrike](#)
- [5pm](#)
- [Joint Contact](#)
- [Staction](#)

And here are some thoughts about [alternatives to Basecamp](#).

## 8. Calendars and Schedules

I'm currently using [doodle](#) for scheduling but my calendaring system is a bit more complicated. Basically, I enter most of my schedule onto my [Google Calendar](#), which is then synced to my iCal on my Mac, which syncs to my iPhone. But I also have my [30Boxes](#) calendar in the mix, although it is beginning to seem redundant as I've gotten more used to Google Calendar.

Regardless of the app you use, keeping track of your appointments and arranging schedules to sync with others is a major challenge, so having some good tools right away can be very handy.

Here's a great roundup we did on [simple electronic to-do lists, schedulers and reminders](#), and some ideas for [Web-enabling your schedule](#).

Some calendaring solutions we've reviewed in the past include:

- [Google Calendar vs. 30Boxes](#)
- [Jiffle](#)
- [FuseCal](#)

And some scheduling solutions:

- [WhenIsGood](#)
- [TimeBridge](#)
- [TimeDriver](#) ("enterprise-level scheduling")
- [Tungle](#) (Microsoft Exchange add-on)

## 9. Cloud-based collaboration/doc sharing

These days, I can't live without my cloud-based workspaces. I'm a [Google Docs addict now](#), and after my business partner's computer crashed this week, I think she may be a new convert. While some project management tools have collaborative white boards or workspaces, I still haven't found a solution straightforward and functional as [Google Docs](#).

That said, there are many other document sharing and collaborative space solutions we've reviewed in the past including:

- [DocVerse](#) (for MS Office docs)
- [Collanos Workplace](#)
- [iWork.com](#)
- [GroupSwim](#)
- [ClearSpace](#)
- [Colaab](#)
- [Backboard](#)
- [DocStoc](#)

And here's an interesting take on [collaboration among dispersed teams](#), with input from Socialtext's Ross Mayfield.

## 10. File storage/backup/sync

I haven't played around a lot with online file storage or backup and syncing. I've been using Apple [Time Machine](#) and [Time Capsule](#) to take care of my backup needs. In terms of big file storage or sharing, I've used [YouSendIt](#) to email anything larger than 1MB, but most of my web work doesn't involve incredibly large files, and when it does, I tend to fall use an FTP site instead.

Here are some online solutions for file storage and backup:

- [Box.net](#)
- [Mozy](#)
- [Egnyte](#)
- [DropBox](#)

- [GoodSync](#)

As you can see, there are many solutions to our daily web working challenges. Picking the right solutions for your new web working business sometimes means trying out several – particular if they are free or offer a free trial – to see which ones really work well for the way you like to work. Keep in mind that it's important to have a scalable system so that, as you grow, you can upgrade easily without having to learn a new, more robust system.

## Two Tools to Get You Started

Darrell Etherington

Doing what we do here at WebWorkerDaily, it is sometimes easy to forget from whence we came. That is to say, everything has a beginning, including a career, or part of a career, devoted to working online. For many of us already in the field, the starting point may have been a natural inclination towards technology that gradually blossomed into a full-fledged professional pursuit.

But for those just getting their feet wet, the process might not be so organic. You might be showing up late to the game, and with only a basic grasp of the rules to begin with. Let's take some of the pressure off by taking an introductory look at two of the basic tools of the trade.

### **Blogs**

Blogs (or weblogs, to give them their original name), are a web worker's best friend. They help with research, networking, sales, and brand establishment (personal or corporate). Once upon a time, you could just put up a web site and forget it, or maybe go back and update content once a quarter, or once every two quarters. That was fine when the Internet was just a supplement to real-world business, but it's become much more than that. In web working, your web site is the social face you present to the client, and having a blog helps keep you relevant.

Imagine a salesperson who checks in with a prospect once a quarter. Now imagine that salesperson provides exactly the same information in exactly the same way to exactly the same stakeholder every time. That's what you're doing if you're not providing frequently-updated content on your web site. With a blog, which you might update on a daily or weekly basis with articles about new developments and trends in your field, you can show prospects that you're engaged, excited about your field, and always aware of shifts in the business landscape.

That's the "why", but what about the "how"? The best way to get started is to become familiar with some basic blog publishing software. Try out a free [WordPress.com](#) (disclosure: WebWorkerDaily is hosted on WordPress; see additional disclosure related to WordPress below) or [Blogger](#) account, both of which offer visual editing and preset templates; leaving you to concentrate on the content, not the geeky back-end stuff. Read around so you get familiar with the blog writing style. Note the average length of posts, where paragraph breaks occur, the use of hyperlinking, etc. You don't have to share your blogging with the public until you're comfortable doing so. Take your time and build competence first.

### **Twitter**

You've probably heard about it, but you may not yet have gone so far as to sign up for an account. [Twitter](#) is a relatively new kind of social network, that, unlike its popular predecessors [MySpace](#) and [Facebook](#), is focused primarily on users' content and less on users' profiles or identities.

When I first discovered Twitter, which was not all that long ago, I had no idea what to do with it. I couldn't figure out how to find people to add, no one I knew was using it, and the 140-character limit seemed arbitrary and somewhat cruel. I came to realize that it is a valuable way to expand your network of potential clients, collaborators and service providers, and to conduct spot research and enhance your reputation as an online professional.

Nowadays, you will find that most professionals working online who have active blogs will also have a “Follow me” button or at least link to their Twitter profile in some way. Twitter takes the concepts I talked about with blogging to the next level. To successfully use your account to further your professional goals, you have to provide updated content with a frequency previously unheard of, and with significant brevity, as well. Those in advertising will probably relish the challenge of drilling down meaningful content to 140 characters, as I soon came to.

How to use Twitter successfully is a topic that is still subject to fervent debate. If you’re looking for a good starting point, Darren Rowse of [Pro Blogger.net](http://Pro Blogger.net) is frequently considered an expert in the field, and you can find his Twitter-oriented blog at [Twitip.com](http://Twitip.com). With Twitter, as with blogs, the key is to follow others and take in as much as possible, in order to get comfortable with the unique form of communication it presents.

I know the “watch and learn” method of gaining familiarity with these basic web working tools might not appeal to those newcomers who’ve been forced by the loss of employment to seek work online, rather than chosen it themselves. But like starting any new career, there will be ramp up time, and training and orientation are required if you want to become truly successful. Hopefully our [Web Work 101](#) series of articles will help cut down the time on that learning curve.

*(Disclosure: WordPress is backed by True Ventures, a venture capital firm that is an investor in the parent company of this blog, Giga Omni Media. Om Malik, founder of Giga Omni Media, is also a venture partner at True.)*