

Get Better Freelance Clients

A 29-Day
Action Plan



by Austin L. Church

If I were to identify the one thing that plagued me when I first started freelancing, it would be a lack of clients.

Shocker, right?

The problem is common. Last year, I sent my freelancer friends this question in a survey: “What’s your biggest challenge as a creative & business owner?”

Nearly all of them mentioned what I’ve started calling “The Pipeline Problem”:

- “Getting qualified leads consistently”
- “Finding clients (finding my own niche)”
- “Creating a predictable flow of leads and sales”
- “Creating a marketing strategy that provides a steady stream of leads instead of random one-off leads or referrals”

The responses to my question mirror those from Contently’s [“The State of Freelancing in 2016”](#) study:



■ 49% of freelancers, the biggest slice, said that “securing enough work” was their biggest challenge.

Not surprising.

Two more responses from my freelancer friends make the relationship between pipeline and time management crystal clear:

- “Finding the time to hustle for new clients”
- “Juggling production work with business work”

On the surface this seems like a catch-22. You’re too busy working and creating for clients, but after you finish those assignments, you find yourself in a dry spell. Then, you have to hustle to find something, *anything*, to keep the lights on.

The perennial feast-or-famine dilemma, right?

No. I refuse to accept that.

Yes, time management problems inevitably become pipeline problems. But the inverse is also true: When we use our time effectively, we have more of it to dedicate to marketing, right?

Consistent marketing keeps your pipeline full.

I want MORE. I want consistency, stability, and sustainability, which brings me to this guide's raison d'être: showing you how to get more high-paying freelance clients this week.

I'll walk you through the steps. Some of them will yield fruit for you. Some won't. We all have different personalities and preferences, and when you're building a strong pipeline, you should play to your strengths.

The key is to learn through trial and error what works for you and then double down on that.

Let's get to it.

1

Follow up with past clients.

If you're not staying in touch with past clients, then you're probably missing out on repeat business. I used to assume that past clients would get in touch if they needed anything else.

Wrong.

Past clients forget about you. Or at least someone else is fresher on their minds. They have a lot going on, and during any given year, they may work with a number of freelancers. So send an email every two to three months, even if you're just saying, "Hi... How's it going?" Include a link to a blog post relevant to their goals. Create some value for them. That way, the next time they have a project, you will be the first freelancer who comes to mind.

Samar Owais said it well in this Copyblogger post: "You never know when a client might send work your way simply because you popped up on their radar at the right time."

Most of your follow-up emails will not produce new projects. Don't let that worry you. The goal is to stay on the radar of your past clients. I call this type of consistent follow-up "the art of the casual connection," and I seldom meet a freelance writer with a thriving business who doesn't make a regular habit of it.

At the same time, don't be afraid to ask point blank for new projects. Reply on the last email thread so they remember who you are. Keep the email short and warm, and be honest about why you're emailing.

Here's a template you can use to ask about new projects:



Hi (First Name),

I was thinking about you the other day. How's it going? I saw on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram that you (recent life event goes here).

**Anyway, I just wanted to check in with you and see if you needed help with anything. I've got some availability in (July), and would enjoy another opportunity to work with you.
Does anything come to mind?**

**Thanks/Regards/Cheers,
(Your Name)**

My friend [Ryan Waggoner](#) will even send this email to would-have-been clients who hired someone else:



Hi Jason,

It's been a few months since we chatted, just wanted to touch base and see how the project is going. I'm building out my schedule for Q4 and I still have some availability if you have any mobile app dev coming up. Thanks!

Ryan

I love that. It's a gutsy move, and the worst the client can do is ignore the email or say, "I haven't got anything." Or as a client said to me recently, "We don't need any help right now, but keep following up."

Action Step:

Go over your invoices from the last 18 months. Make a list of past clients. Reach out to them one at a time.

Further Reading – [“7 Ways to Follow Up with Past Clients and Silent Prospects Without Annoying Them”](#)



2

Ask for referrals.

Do you already have clients? Have you asked them for referrals? Most of the time, when I ask that question, freelancers blink at me. The best clients, the BEST, will come from people who are already acquainted with your work.

Referred clients come pre-sold.

You don't have to pitch them on your skill or experience because someone else whose opinion they trust recommended you. Sometimes, closing the deal with a referral is as simple as defining scope and coming up with a quick quote. Your new prospect says yes, and you're off to the races. I've even had referrals pay deposit invoices the same day they get in touch.

Keep in mind that a "hidden" source of referrals can be projects in a different department or business unit with the same client. You can get "internal," as well as external, referrals.

So make sure that each of your clients knows the full range of your capabilities. They may not have connected the dots between Jenny-as-blogger and Jenny-as-web-content-writer, or Jenny-who-writes-video-scripts and Jenny-who-writes-killer-product-descriptions.

I think we hesitate to ask for referrals because we're not sure *how* to ask without appearing tacky or aggressive. We're afraid we'll come off as weird, needy, or desperate. The key is to keep a referral request email template on hand so you don't have to stress about the wording.

Feel free to steal mine:



Hi (First Name),

I was thinking about you the other day. How's it going? I saw on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram that you (recent life event goes here).

Anyway, I just wanted to check in with you and see if you needed help with anything. I've got some availability in (July), and would enjoy another opportunity to work with you.

Does anything come to mind? If you'd prefer to brainstorm on the phone, I've got (1:30pm Eastern) open tomorrow.

**Cheers,
(Your Name)**

Action Step:

Revisit your client list. Were any of them particularly pleased with your work? Customize the email template above and ask at least one client for a referral.

Further Listening – [“The Business of Freelancing, Episode 17: Steli Efti On Getting Referrals”](#) (podcast episode)

3

Expand your offerings.

Branch out. For example, if you were a freelance writer, it's not like writing email sequences is SO different than writing articles. And once you brush up on a little strategy—which is easy because of, oh, a billion blog posts—you can write speeches, brochures, scripts, white papers, TV commercials, magazine articles, press releases, websites, direct mail, training videos, print ads, catalogs, and social media updates.

On occasion a client will want you to spin one format into another—for example, turn a case study into a white paper. Diversify your offerings, and you'll be mentally prepared to pounce on such opportunities when they present themselves.

Action Step:

Brainstorm a list of things you could write or other creative services you could sell. For example, I write web content, blog posts, email newsletters, and social media content for clients. I also sell websites, graphic design, and SEO services. What about you? Email past clients. Connect the dots for them. Ask them if they need help with other types of creative projects.



4

Reach out to family and friends.

Make sure everyone in your personal network knows that you want freelance projects.

Make it crystal-clear that...

1. **You are a freelancer who is good at [insert your specialization here].**
2. **You are accepting new projects;**
3. **You produce X, Y, and Z for clients, and**
4. **Your clients can expect to see A, B, and C happen as a result.**

The vast majority of freelancers I coach accidentally keep their freelancing a secret. They *tell* very few people what they're up to. How can people care and send work your way if they don't know you do freelance writing?

How can they mention you in the comments of a Facebook post when someone asks, "Does anyone know a writer who does websites?"

Make a regular habit of posting about how you'd love to help two people—be **SPECIFIC**—rock their websites with mind-blowing wordsmithery (or insert your forte here). Tell people what you do and cut to the chase. Tell them how they can work with you. Ask for referrals.

Action Step:

Get on your socials right now and post something like this: "Hi all, some of you know I'm a freelance writer. I have some availability this month, and I'm looking for two new clients who need web content. Can you think of anyone whose websites aren't up to date? Leave a comment below, and I'll PM you."

5

Reach out to colleagues, former coworkers, former employers, and other companies in the same industry.

Think about it: You already have some familiarity (or even expertise) which has clear value to those companies.

And they DO hire freelancers. You might as well get in the way of opportunity. You could even work for trade magazines and blogs that target that particular industry. Because you already know the specialized vocabulary and understand the inner workings of the business, you can work with greater accuracy and efficiency.

You will make fewer mistakes, and you will therefore be more time- and cost-efficient. We'll talk more about niching down in a second, so earmark this tactic for now.

Action Step:

Brainstorm a list of former co-workers and bosses. Reach out on LinkedIn. Use the template above to ask for referrals.

Further Reading – Check out the “Use Your Existing Contacts” section in this [post already mentioned](#).



6

Meet two people this week.

Here's the deal: I get most of my projects from referrals from past clients or from mutual acquaintances. If you're new to freelancing, you can't get referrals without having clients in the first place.

In order to
build up a
referral
network,
you must
proactively
expand your
personal
network.

You need to get to know more people, and you need to stay in touch with them. My favorite way to meet new people is to get to know new contacts over lunch and to try to help them in one concrete way afterwards.

Action Step:

Brainstorm a list of people you think are interesting in your city. Email one of them and schedule a lunch. Make it clear that you're buying.

Further Reading – [“5 Ways Buying Lunch for a Client Makes You More Persuasive”](#)

7

Update your social profiles today.

Review your LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other profiles, and edit them so that they include your freelance specialization. Add some hashtags (e.g., #freelancewriter or #freelance #writer) to your Twitter profile and then add keywords to your LinkedIn profile (e.g., freelance content writer, editor).

Word to the wise: Don't tell people you're a "storytelling maestro" or "design dude" or "code monkey." Clarity beats cleverness every time. Make your freelance writing business as OBVIOUS as a black eye, and use hashtags and keywords that people actually use in searches.

It works. One client who found me on LinkedIn has sent me over \$7,000 in business in 15 months. Not bad for a client with whom I had no prior relationship!

Action Step:

Add hashtags to your Twitter profile and keywords to your LinkedIn profile.

Further Reading – [“LinkedIn For Freelance Writers: Exactly How I Use LinkedIn To Land High-paying Clients”](#)

8

Add new people on LinkedIn today.

Certain types of businesses, such as small marketing agencies, have an ongoing need for freelancers. You can pick a geographic area, say, a 300-mile radius from your city.

Then, you can run a series of searches and identify people who might need your services. Send them an invitation to connect. After each person accepts your invitation, you can send some warm “cold” outreach. Introduce yourself. Be transparent about why you wanted to connect.

Send links to your website, portfolio, or writing samples. Find a project on their website that looks interesting and mention it. Maybe even offer a couple of pointers with the goal of creating value and proving you know your stuff. Schedule a short, get-to-know-you phone call to talk shop.

Action Step:

Uh... connect with new people on LinkedIn.

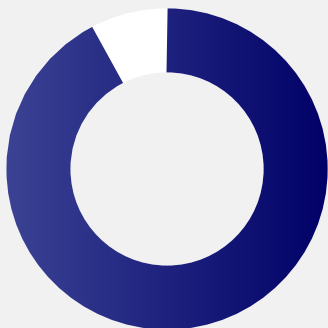


9

**Get three testimonials
this week.**

Testimonials are important because they offer social proof that you are worth hiring.

According to one study:



■ [92% of people rely on the opinions of family and friends](#) to make purchasing decisions.

Needless to say, putting testimonials on your website will make it more effective as a selling tool.

If you already have a client or two, then ask for testimonials. For many freelancers, it's helpful to have a reason to ask. For example, you could tell your client that you're updating your website and want to add some new testimonials. Or you're writing a case study, and you might be able to send some traffic their way.

Here's a template that I use:



Billy Bob,
I know you're slammed, but while we've got you gushing, would you be willing to leave a Google My Business review for (insert business name here)?

**You can use this link to write it: (link to my Google My Business listing).
I think people will benefit from reading about your experience.**

I have attached step-by-step instructions in case you need them.

Cheers,
(Your Name)

If you don't yet have any clients, then you barter for testimonials by helping a community organization, non-profit, church, or a small business you patronize.

Offer a small, well-defined project—web content, email newsletter fodder, or blog posts—in exchange for a testimonial. They win. You win. (Best of all, you can reach out to similar organizations later, share your portfolio and references, and pick up paying clients.)

A word of caution:

**Unless you
were the one
who proposed
the barter,
I would
recommend
against
working for
free. Ever.**

Over the years, a number of individuals tried to convince me to work for free with the promise of some vague benefit to me in the future. They would talk about how smart and talented I was. They would stroke my ego. They would use bad business pickup lines: “Can you help me out? I meet people all the time who need writing, and I’d love to send them to you.”

So enticing, right? Meh. After all of the promises and hot air, nothing materialized. The smooth talkers never wrote testimonials either.

Learn from my mistakes.

Action Step:

Revisit the list of past clients you created, pick three, and send emails asking for a testimonial. Or if you don’t have any clients, pick three businesses or organizations you believe you could help. Email them. Offer to barter a small project for a testimonial.

10

Create and share new content this week.

Creating on a weekly basis kills several birds with one stone:

- It showcases your skills and keeps them sharp.
- It keeps your portfolio up to date.
- It helps you build an audience, collect email address, and interact with potential clients.

You can include client success stories to go along with your new testimonials. Post the link to those stories on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and mention your client. I call this a “high five”: “Hey Brian, thanks again for giving me the chance to work on such a great project! You guys are awesome!” You make your clients the hero of the story, you build awareness around your freelancing business, and you drive some traffic to your blog.

Action Step:

Write a new blog post about something you wish clients knew about writing or pull together several quick fixes that clients could use immediately to strengthen their writing. Include links to several other resources. You can also [sign up for my free “Blogging Prompts That Don’t Suck” email series](#).

[Sign Up](#)



11

Pick a niche.

You can get freelance assignments a bunch of different ways: through referrals, bid sites, job postings, social media, and your website—to name a few. The bigger challenge is getting past the fear of missing out and deciding what type of writing you want to do and for whom.

For example, let's say you're an early adopter with apps. Even though you're not a software developer, you still geek out over the latest nifty technology. Maybe tech startups seem interesting to you. Which ones do you admire? Who can you help? How?

This short process from [Bidsketch](#) can help you zero in on your preferred clients:

1. My specific customer is someone with this problem:.
2. My prospective customer spends time researching the problem/solutions in these 3 places:.
3. One way I can break into one of the places above:.
4. My persuasive pitch in an email to them:.

Action Step:

Pick a niche. You don't have to stick with it forever, but you can't refine it over time unless you start the discovery process now.

Further Reading – This guide can help you pick a niche: [“The Ultimate Guide to Finding a Freelance Writing Niche.”](#)

12

Assemble a list of prospects this week.

Picking a niche will make it easier for you to assemble a list of prospects. For example, if startups are your jam, you can use industry-specific resources to work more efficiently.

- You can scour TechCrunch, Angel List, and Product Hunt for the names of cool tech startups.
- LinkedIn can show you the names of the founders and marketing directors.
- The websites of startup incubators/accelerators in your area will help you identify local startups.
- Tools like hunter.io will unearth the founders' email addresses.

Action Step:

Assemble your list.

13

Create relevant packages.

You have already expanded your offerings. Now create a bundle of them that fits to your niche. For example, most tech startups have similar needs:

1. **Web copy**
2. **Press release template**
3. **Press kit**
4. **5-10 flagship blog posts**
5. **Pitch decks for investors and customers**

You can sell the bundle at a flat price: “The Startup Startup Package.”

Cute, huh?

Action Step:

Create a package of your services.



14

Send out prospecting emails (a.k.a. do “cold” outreach).

Once you’ve got your list, you can email the appropriate people on your list, one by one.

Prospecting is a numbers game.

**You'll get
rejected or
ignored dozens
of times, but
don't let that
discourage
you.**

Even if only one person out of a hundred replies to your email, you'll be glad you stuck with it when that one person says yes. When in doubt, send out several more email pitches.

Keep your emails short and to the point—no more than a couple of paragraphs. Your goal is to establish credibility, link out to some samples of your work, prove you can get results, and make it clear you checked out their company.

End with a clear call-to-action: several possible times for a phone call to discuss. Say it's no pressure. You'd enjoy meeting someone new even if it's not a good fit.

Plan on spending at least half your time each time prospecting for clients. You can gradually dial back on that as you start to get writing assignments and more referrals from past clients. Eventually, referrals alone will provide more work than you can handle!

Action Step:

Send out five cold emails today.

Further Reading — My friend Ryan Waggoner offers some good advice and a killer email template you should [check out](#). Note: He is an iOS developer, so obviously you'll want your email template to talk about your experience in content and copywriting.



15

Keep all of your socials current.

This is simply another way of stating the obvious: You must proactively market yourself as a freelancer.

Let's say you do get a hot lead. You email back and forth with Daphne McDollars, and set up a time to Skype.

In the meantime, she checks you out online, and Whoops! Your "online presence" is really an online absence. Tumbleweed is blowing through your blog, your Facebook page, and your Twitter feed. Your LinkedIn profile says you still work at Best Buy. She wants you to help her blog consistently, and if your online presence is a content wasteland, then you haven't exactly won her confidence.

And you never get a second chance at a first impression. Oops.

What should you do instead? Publish at least one blog post weekly, and then turn the best pieces of each post into social updates. Create a content library, and recycle updates.

Action Step:

Go back to any blog posts you already have and pull content from them. Use that to start building your content library.

16

Network with other freelancers.

At any given time, hundreds of freelancers around the world have more work than they can handle. They're looking for a pressure release valve, which means that they'd like to farm some of that surplus out to other freelancers.

They will start by sending out feelers to freelancers they already know and trust. So even if you don't have much work right now, you'll benefit from connecting with other freelancers and forming relationships with them.

Keep in touch, and when the time is right, they will send work your way, especially if they know that you

- 1. will come in on time and budget,**
- 2. will make them look good, and**
- 3. won't try to poach the client unless they formally hand over the relationship.**

And before I forget, please don't become "that guy" who only ever gets in touch when he needs something. Don't become a taker.

**The biggest
part of
being a good
networker
is building
mutually
beneficial
relationships.**

Look for ways to help. Make introductions. Does your writer friend need an awesome designer? Send a couple of recommendations. That way, when you have a need, you have built up the relational equity and can ask for a favor without damaging the relationship.

Action Step:

Brainstorm a list of freelancers you know and respect. Email each one. Set up a time to discuss how the two of you can help one another.



17

Partner with other “non-competitive” freelancers.

Do you know any graphic designers or web developers? What about people who work in video or PR?

People with other freelance specializations will often have projects that require top-notch writing. You can serve as a strategic partner and fulfill the parts of the project that aren't in their wheelhouse. Let's say you have a friend from college who got into web design. She needs a go-to writer for her clients' web content.

The two of you can find ways to help one another build your businesses and get paid. You can share clients and collaborate on the same projects. In fact, this is one of the best things about freelancing: working with people you like on projects you like.

Action Step:

Brainstorm a list of designers and developers you know. Email each one. Set up a time to discuss how the two of you can share clients.

18

Use the Remora Method.

I already mentioned how you can use LinkedIn to track down marketing and advertising agencies. They have a regular need for creative services here. James Clear calls this “The Remora Method.” You focus on providing a skill or productized service, and the other party takes care of the rest of the process. For example, I often write scripts for a friend who owns a video production company. He takes care of all the project management and client relations. I just write. We have a mutually beneficial relationship. No one on his team particularly enjoys script writing, and I get paid with very little time invested in promotion or sales.

So how do you connect with agencies? Google and LinkedIn can help you find agency that occupy your niche in your area and around the world. Use the prospecting process outlined above to share some samples of your work and get your foot in the door.

Even if they don’t have any work for you immediately, agencies have a constant need for content for their clients’ websites, ad copy, video scripts, blog posts, and email newsletters. Yet, many of them don’t keep writers on staff. And their full-time staff often has more work than they can handle. Be the guy or gal who can stand in the breach.

Follow up with them every two to three months, and get in the way of opportunity.

Action Step:

Take a look at your client list. Which ones send you repeat business? What other types of companies need freelancers on a regular basis? Add any new prospects to your list, and send them your cold outreach email.

19

Cruise job boards and forums today.

There are tons of job boards out there for every specialization. For example, the ProBlogger's [Jobs for Bloggers](#) board has some decent opportunities.

You can also find writing jobs and freelance writing assignments on a variety of other sites and forums. Here are more examples of job boards for freelance writers that have decent posting volume:

- <https://www.freelancewriting.com/jobs/>
- <http://www.warriorforum.com/warriors-hire>
- <http://www.warriorforum.com/wanted-members-looking-hire-you/>
- <https://www.thebalance.com/freelance-writing-telecommuting-jobs-1360402>
- <https://www.reddit.com/r/HireaWriter/>

A couple of quick Google search for “best [insert skill/specialization] job boards” should be enough to get you started. Some of these sites may require that you make a posting for yourself. One post may do it, or you may need to report each week or month. In the latter case, set up a repeating task in your calendar. To copy and paste your job posting will only take you a couple of minutes.

Action Step:

Check those job boards for interesting projects right now.

20

Try some strategic Google searches, such as “freelance [your skill/specialization] jobs” and “[your skill] for us.”

Granted, a lot of freelancers may be typing in the same searches, but you may as well work every angle while you’re trying to drum up new work.

You can use your prospecting template to reach out to people who have legitimate opportunities. By “legitimate” I mean they don’t ask for “spec” work—that is, free work—and they offer to pay a set rate or project fee, instead of a percentage of advertising revenues.

Action Step:

Let me see... go to Google Search.



21

Check Craigslist for freelance jobs.

A word of caution: Don't do "spec" work, meaning ignore any posting (or any person, for that matter) who asks you to work for free while dangling future opportunities.

For example, if you're a writer, then you've already got writing samples. You could just send those over. You've already got writing samples, so you could just send those over. But no, the folks asking for free work aren't interested in your writing samples. They're interested in baiting unsuspecting writers with no intention of ever producing a paying gig. So beware. With that in mind, go to: <https://yourcity.craigslist.org/>.

Click on your skill or specialization underneath jobs, and then see if anyone has left an interesting posting. The good postings will mention dollar amounts, usually in the upper right.

Action Step:

Check Craigslist for freelance jobs in your city or cities near you.

22

Search for opportunities on Twitter.

You'll never grow your freelance business if you spend all day on Twitter—that is, unless you're using Twitter's advanced search to find companies in need of your skills.

Action Step:

Look on Twitter for opportunities right now.

Further Reading – [“How to Find Freelance Clients on Twitter”](#)



23

Book a speaking gig.

You may or may not enjoy public speaking, but the fact is, giving a tactical talk about writing at local marketing or startup event can get you business.

For example, let's say you contact the director of a startup accelerator in your city.

You're more afraid of public speaking than death, but you decide to put together a free hands-on workshop about writing strong web content. You meet new people. You form new relationships.

You can subtly market your services to a dozen people all at once.

You have a captive audience, and you can build rapport quickly by creating an "A-ha!" moment.

I've given talks about Kickstarter campaigns and writing good web content, the importance of storytelling in writing and attracting better clients, eliminating toxic clients from your life and meeting goals.

Guess what happens afterward? I swap business cards with a few folks. I invite them out to lunch. I ask some of them if I can add them to my regular educational e-newsletter, and I get new clients.

My talks were far from perfect. I still feel anxious because I want to do well, but I take heart in what [Tim Ferris](#) says: "It's totally fine if you get nervous and stammer a bit, drop F-bombs where needed, or generally feel like a nervous wreck. If you give good actionable, clear advice, people will forgive it all."

Action Step:

Make a list of organizations in your city that put on regular learning-focused events—your chamber of commerce, startup ecosystem, local service clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, and Rotary), business networking group (e.g., BNI), conferences, and other meetups. Reach out to the head of marketing or programming at each, and offer to give a talk or teach a workshop.

24

Say no.

I already told you to expand your offerings. And I told you that a million blog posts can teach you about the finer points of various types of freelance work. You don't have to wait until you're an "expert" before you can sell a video script or logo.

With that said, I would recommend against accepting a project where you don't have a high degree of confidence that you have what it takes to make the client look good and truly serve their goals.

**You can't
build a
freelance
business
using dodgy
technique
and hoping
for the
best.**

We all must start somewhere, without credentials and qualifications, but then we must hustle until we're really good.

Say no unless you can deliver quality. I take that back. Say “No, but I know someone who can do a great job with your direct mail campaign. I’ll introduce the two of you over email this afternoon.”

You may miss out on the one project, but you will teach the client that you put her interests before your own. She will want to give you first right of refusal.

Action Step:

Go back to your list of expanded offerings. Did you fudge anywhere? Can you identify any gaps in your knowledge or skills? Pick one, do some Google searches, assemble some resources, and create a training regimen for yourself.

Further Reading – Speaking of improving your skills (so that you can say “Yes!” with confidence and enthusiasm), check out these free training resources from [Copyhackers.com](https://copyhackers.com).

**25**

Always come in on time, on budget, with no excuses.

I remember being confused the first time a prospective client said, "Thanks for getting back to me."

“Who are these people who don’t respond to email inquiries?” I wondered.

Who would have thought actually responding to emails and phone calls was a competitive advantage! New freelancers tend to give weight to things beyond their control, things like experience and skill level that can only be gained over time.

Yet, as time passes, responsiveness is the thing that will keep clients coming back and make your business sustainable.

Consider the projects you already have. Are all of them on track? Will you be able to keep your word and meet the original deadline?

Action Step:

If the answer to the above question is no, then stop everything, beat all of your deadlines if it kills you, and protect your reputation.

26

Create a satisfying experience for clients.

Responsiveness is just one facet of a creating a great client experience.

Wow them. Don't procrastinate and don't make them ask for something. Deliver on time and on budget. Be generous with your time and expertise, and don't be afraid to throw in a little something extra: some social content to go along with a blog post, or a LinkedIn blurb to go along with the company's About page on the website.

Then, once you have wrapped up the project to everyone's satisfaction, ask for a testimonial. Wait a week, then ask for referrals too. Focus more on building relationships, rather than getting paid big bucks.

You don't
need a lot
of clients.
You just
need happy
clients.

Over time, you can cut loose any remaining bargain-bin clients. Your best clients will stick with you for the full ride because they're addicted to the reliable high of working with you.

Action Step:

Pick one thing about your onboarding process and improve it this week.

Further Reading – [“Steal My Complete Client Onboarding Process”](#)

27

Update your website.

This is a big topic, and one that deserves a guide or epic blog post of its very own. So I'll be brief. The better your website, the better your chances at scoring high-paying clients using the methods outlined above.

Action Step:

Update the content on your website. Add your expanded list of offerings. Test your contact form to ensure that you're receiving those submissions. Add a high-res photo of yourself (or add a more *recent* photo of yourself). If need be, pay someone else to clean up all of the tiny design and technical details that turn your website from a "cobbler's children have no shoes" excuse factory into a selling tool. Savvy?

Further Reading – [“How to Write Good Web Content”](#); [“How to Write a Good About Page”](#); [“How to Create a Freelance Writer Website That Actually Gets Clients”](#)



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Never discount your rate.

Respect for your work must start with you, and lowering your rates (because one client said, “That’s too much”) establishes a bad precedent.

If you come down on price, you're immediately not playing the game by your rules. And do you think the client who drives a hard bargain will suddenly decide to play by your rules?

No. Clients who get a "good deal" often become the most difficult to manage.

You also don't want word to get out that you gave one client a better deal than another. How would you feel if you paid \$1000 more for the exact same website? You would probably feel cheated.

But with all the negativity aside, your pricing is your branding. People's respect follows their money. And as strange as it may sound, clients truly believe that more expensive work is *better*.

According to my copywriting friend Dick Harrison who worked for several large, multinational advertising agencies, big brands are used to paying \$500 an hour for copywriting.

If you undercharge, people will doubt your skill. If you charge a premium, people will think you're good. And you probably are.

Action Step:

Raise your rates. Certainly don't lower them for price shoppers.

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Be patient.

Most freelancers I know really struggle the first six months. They may even spend more money than they make as they put up websites and print business cards, replace worn-out laptops and pay for web hosting.

Be encouraged though. By the end of my eighth month, I was earning more as a freelancer than I had in my salaried position at a marketing firm. I gave myself a “raise” the following year. The harder I work, the more money I make.

And that can’t be said of most lines of work.

If you’ve been freelancing a couple of months but don’t have much to show for it, that doesn’t mean you’re on the wrong track. Give it more time. I would certainly recommend more patience over more time spent on bidding sites and content mills.

(With that said, if you’ve been freelancing for a couple of years and you’re still struggling, shoot me an email: hello@austinlchurch.com.)

Action Step:

Make a list of things you *have* accomplished in life.

One Final *Inaction* Step

As we land this plane, I want to end with one final non-action step. This may rub some of you the wrong way. I hope you'll hear me out.

I recommend that you avoid bidding sites and content mills.

This may seem like strange advice to give, considering the purpose of this short guide is to help you get more clients, not to avoid them.

Even so, I don't believe that using bidding sites to get projects is a long-term business growth strategy. Here is my thinking:

- You will not get paid to write proposals and submit them.
- You may spend more time bidding for jobs than you spend working.
- You will often be asked to work for pennies. Once you factor in revisions, communication, and project management, you will barely beat minimum wage.
- Many clients will "blow scope." They'll ask you to do extra work outside of the original agreement—longer articles than initially requested or more rounds of revisions. You will have to negotiate extra pay, and some clients will refuse. After all, the reason they used the site in the first place was because they wanted "cheap."
- Any time spent on proposals and low-paying clients is time not spent on finding more valuable clients elsewhere.

To drive home that last point, let me walk you through some quick math.

Let's say you have 100 hours. A client on one of the bidding sites agrees to pay you \$15 an hour to write blog posts. "Better than nothing," you think. You work 100 hours and make \$1500.

Or let's say that rather than respond to jobs on bidding sites, you spent 80 hours prospecting. You finally find one client willing to pay you \$300 per blog post. You write five blog posts. Each one takes you four hours. You make \$1500.

Which \$1500 aligns with your long-term goals?

Even if you burn the same amount of time and make the same amount of money in both scenarios, the second one is better. Rather than build your business on top of someone else's platform, you are building out your own network and client base.

I cannot wholeheartedly recommend pursuing gigs on Upwork and similar freelance marketplaces because you simply cannot build a sustainable business if you're only getting paid \$15 an hour. Bidding sites present clients with thousands of options. If you were in their shoes, what would you do? You'd probably look for a "good enough" option at a low price. This fierce competition inspires a race to the bottom in terms of price.

So if you don't want your services to become a cheap commodity, then you must build your own client base. Your clients will pay higher prices because they value quality and trust you to do a good job. They'll stick with you even if you raise your rates from time to time.

Of course, there's an exception to every rule. You may be able to lasso that rare amazing client on Upwork who will pay your highest rates, ask for very few edits, and show reasonableness and kindness through the process.

But the best clients, the BEST, will come from people who are already acquainted with your work.

With that said, I know I won't convince all of you. If you simply can't help yourself, you can check out the content mills and bidding sites below. Just don't say I never did anything for you.

- [Upwork.com](https://www.upwork.com)
- [Coworks.com](https://www.coworks.com)
- [OnSite.io](https://www.onsite.io)
- [Gun.io](https://www.gun.io)
- [99u.com/joblist](https://www.99u.com/joblist)
- [iWriter.com](https://www.iwriter.com)
- [Writers.ph](https://www.writers.ph)
- [Textbroker.com](https://www.textbroker.com)
- [Guru.com](https://www.guru.com)
- [Freelancer.com](https://www.freelancer.com)
- [iFreelance.com](https://www.ifreelance.com)
- [Qualitytext.net](https://www.qualitytext.net)

In Closing.

For many aspiring freelancers, landing your first “real” client poses a huge challenge. And by “real,” I don’t mean getting paid minimum wage on Upwork.com.

I mean a legit, “private” client who helps you build your freelance career because she values quality and is therefore willing to pay you significantly more than minimum wage.

Aside from the financial benefits, landing your first (or next) high-paying client confirms that you aren’t crazy to try to build your freelancing business. It becomes more than possible. It becomes inevitable.

Follow the steps I outlined above.

Focus. Execute. Focus. Execute.

Also, drop me a line at hello@austinlchurch.com. I’d love to know which part of the guide was most helpful and which was most challenging.

[Send email](#)

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Austin Church". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Austin" and "Church" being capitalized and prominent.

Get Better Freelance Clients: A 29-Day Action Plan

by Austin L. Church

I want MORE. I want consistency, stability, and sustainability, which brings me to this guide's raison d'être: showing you how to get more high-paying freelance writing clients this week.

Below are the steps I would like for you to take over the next 29 days. Don't worry... I will walk you through each one.

One last thing: Go ahead and print out this checklist. That way, you can keep it on your desk to remind you to take action.

- 1 **Follow up** with past clients.
- 2 **Ask** for referrals.
- 3 **Expand** your offerings.
- 4 **Reach out** to family and friends.
- 5 **Reach out** to colleagues, former coworkers, former employers, and other companies in the same industry.
- 6 **Meet** two people this week.
- 7 **Update** your social profiles today.
- 8 **Add** new people on LinkedIn today.
- 9 **Get** three testimonials this week.
- 10 **Create and share** new content this week.
- 11 **Pick** a niche.
- 12 **Assemble** a list of prospects this week.
- 13 **Create** relevant packages.
- 14 **Send out** prospecting emails (a.k.a. do "cold" outreach).
- 15 **Keep** all of your socials **current**.
- 16 **Network** with other freelancers.
- 17 **Partner** with other "non-competitive" freelancers.
- 18 **Use** the Remora Method.
- 19 **Cruise job boards** and forums today.
- 20 Try some **strategic Google searches**, such as "freelance [your skill/specialization] jobs" and "[your skill] for us."
- 21 **Check Craigslist** for freelance jobs.
- 22 **Search for opportunities** on Twitter.
- 23 **Book** a speaking gig.
- 24 **Say no**.
- 25 Always come in on time, on budget, with **no excuses**.
- 26 **Create a satisfying experience** for clients.
- 27 **Update** your website.
- 28 **Never discount** your rate.
- 29 **Be patient**.