



A guide to **freelancing**

Chapter 03 – Get work

freelance
corner

GET WORK



So that's the basics taken care of. Now you need to earn some money.

To land your first gig, one very effective route is word-of-mouth. Tell everyone what you're up to. Literally, everyone you know. You'd be surprised how far it can get you.

As one freelancer pointed out: "I casually mentioned what I was doing to my mum and couldn't believe it when she introduced me to someone who later became an important client."

To fuel this effect, try to describe what you do in simple terms that anyone can understand, even a child. That isn't always easy, particularly if what you do is quite complex, but if you crafted an elevator pitch as described in the previous chapter, that's a good place to start.

The trick is to practice it on as many people as possible until you're able to hone a fluid and natural sounding description. If the person you're speaking to shows interest, you can then follow up with the more technical stuff.

Don't fall into the trap of spending ages producing fancy sales materials if this delays you from getting out there and talking to people. You don't even need a website to kick it all off, or at least not initially. A good CV or LinkedIn profile can do the job just as well.

On the subject of LinkedIn, you could also ask any past colleagues, employers or clients to write you a short recommendation – people are usually happy to do so. It reminds them why they enjoyed working with you and could trigger a request for your services.

WHEN TALKING TO POTENTIAL CLIENTS...

Bear in mind they aren't actually interested in your amazingness – what they're interested in is how you can solve their problem.

“Invest your time and resources in finding out everything humanly possible about the challenges that prospective clients face and the context in which they operate. The better you understand your client’s world, and the less everyone else in your market understands it, the more of a valued authority you will be.”

John Niland

Coach at Success 121 and co-founder of the European Forum for Independent Professionals

The world is full of service providers talking about how wonderful they are. You have the opportunity to differentiate yourself by focusing on the client’s needs instead.

USING AGENCIES

If you find that your personal network isn't getting you anywhere, you might want to try a recruitment agency specialising in freelancers or contractors, as they are well-placed to know where the opportunities are.

In fact, some large companies will only deal with freelancers via an agency. Although agencies keep a chunk of the overall fee, they can be a source of steady income – working regularly on a slightly lower rate is ultimately more profitable than long spells without a project.

Agencies can be a good way to build momentum initially, until you have enough success stories under your belt to go out there and prospect for clients on your own.

HOW AGENCIES OPERATE

Depending on the recruitment agency, the relationship can work as follows:

1. THE AGENCY PAYS YOU AND CHARGES THE CLIENT YOUR FEES PLUS COMMISSION.

If you trade through a limited company the recruitment agency can pay you gross, without deducting tax and NICs, which gives you more control over your tax situation. Bear in mind that since April 2017 special rules apply to the public sector, meaning that it is the responsibility of the department or agency that engages you to decide whether IR35 applies and therefore whether you can be paid gross. This rule is scheduled to be extended to the private sector from April 2020.

2. YOU INVOICE THE CLIENT DIRECTLY AND THE AGENT CHARGES THE CLIENT A SEPARATE COMMISSION FOR FINDING YOU.

Often the invoice amount is based on timesheets which are signed off by the client. There are also a growing number of online portals that operate an agency style model – some even charge a fixed fee to act as the matchmaker.

Your engagement on a project will usually involve an upper-level and a lower-level contract. The upper-level contract is the contract between the agency and the client and the lower-level contract is the agency's contract with you. You will never see the upper contract, but you can check the lower contract between the agency and your company to ensure that it contains proper business terms and conditions and doesn't contain clauses that restrict your ability to work for clients or place personal liability on you or your family. A 'bad' contract will look more like a contract of employment than a business contract.

Finally, be aware that agencies are subject to a number of laws and regulations. To check how these might affect you, visit www.ipse.co.uk/policy/policy-research/latest-publications/regulation/agency-workers-regulations.html.

Note to IPSE Plus members: remember you can claim up to £10,000 if your agency goes bankrupt and owes you money.

HOW TO CHOOSE GOOD RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

Some agencies have gained a poor reputation among freelancers, but equally there are many good ones that can prove very valuable for finding work.

When dealing with an agent, remember that fundamentally they are salespeople. They want to sell you a contract and to sell you to the client. This is how they get their commission.

They are businesses, first and foremost, in a competitive world. It's worth registering with several agencies to increase your chances. Start by looking at agents offering a work opportunity you may be interested in. It's important to meet them face-to-face. A good agent should take time to get to know you and your skills so they can sell you effectively.

A list of agencies is published on IPSE's supplier directory. The IPSE discussion boards are also a good source of information - IPSE members regularly share experiences about agencies and can point you in the direction of good ones.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING WORK THROUGH AN AGENCY

- Return calls quickly
- Provide a brief summary to explain why you are suited for a project (particularly if it's a project that particularly interests you)
- Follow up on every single project for which you have been put forward (it shows that you care and is also a good reason to get in touch)
- Try to find out as much as you can about the project from the agent before you give permission to send your details to the client. Don't let agents put you forward for a role for which you aren't suitable - agents are required to ask your permission before submitting your details to a client.

NEGOTIATING RATES WITH THE AGENCY

The agent will usually be paid commission as a percentage of your hourly rate, anywhere from 5% to 25% (although it can be higher), depending on industry and sector.

Some clients have agreements with agencies to supply freelancers on a fixed level of commission. In this case, the agent's margin is

usually non-negotiable, so if you want more money it will need to come from the client.

You therefore need to push home your competitive advantage during the initial discussion with the client. If the client really wants to hire you, this puts you in a stronger position to negotiate a larger share of the money being paid to the agent.

Like all sales meetings, it helps if you have researched the potential client – it will impress if you clearly understand their business and market. Also make sure you ask all necessary questions to understand the task you are looking to undertake and clarify the nature of the relationship between the client, the agency and you, for example, with whom you should be discussing contractual issues versus project issues.

Contract negotiation isn't just about getting more money. You may want to secure an IR35 friendly contract, which can reduce your tax and NI liability. You could also consider negotiating the right to work from home, more project control and so on. A rate will often be slightly higher if you accept payment terms of 30 days rather than seven.

If you're nervous about the thought of going for lots of interviews or negotiating, remember it's just a normal part of freelancing and gets easier with practice.

Don't take it personally – you're no longer an employee, so this is a straightforward business-to-business negotiation.

If you want to hone your negotiation skills try BPP's Business Mastery Course at: www.ipse.co.uk/member-benefits/ipse-academy/on-demand-courses/business.html. If you're an IPSE member you get the discounted price of £79.20 plus VAT.

“I use the phone a lot to build and maintain relationships with agents. I also use the online portal Jobserve. I think it’s important to be very clear about how you will market yourself. When I started out I had a long list of things that I could do but was in danger of being seen as a jack of all trades and expert in none. My “silver bullet” was to market myself as a project manager. Clients understand what this means. Once you are in the organisation you can turn your hand to lots of other things - once they get to know and trust you. You have to establish yourself first with a new client to gain trust through what you can do and bring to the party. I treat my business as a business and run it as such. It sounds trite, but how many of us take time out for training to keep our skills up to date or regard time spent at networking or other events as valuable marketing expenditure to expand our contacts and grow our opportunities for renewals. Thinking of yourself as “Jo Smith Ltd” and doing all of the things that companies do to increase their presence in the market place does, literally, pay dividends.”

Chris Bell
Freelance project manager

OTHER WAYS TO WIN WORK

After you have tapped your immediate network you can start to consider more formal marketing techniques, including:

- Email campaigns
- Thought leadership: public speaking, blogging, writing
- Leveraging social media and building an online presence
- SEO
- Cold calling
- Highly targeted networking

The possibilities are endless – for ideas that you could implement straight away, visit:

[www.ipse.co.uk/ advice-support/advice/winning-work](http://www.ipse.co.uk/advice-support/advice/winning-work)



APPROACHING CLIENTS DIRECTLY

You might find you prefer to work directly with the client, without a recruitment agency in between, as you then don't have to give away a percentage of your income.

Your direct client might not necessarily be the end-client. A lot of freelance work is available via intermediaries that aren't recruitment agencies, such as advertising/digital agencies or consultancies who will hire you to work on projects for their clients.

Sometimes these chains of intermediaries can get quite long, especially if the end-client is a big brand. In any case, the fewer the number of intermediaries between you and the end-client, the higher up the food chain you are, and therefore the better your rate and the simpler the lines of communication. However, getting higher up that food chain is hard work.

Here are a few approaches you could try:

TAPPING YOUR PERSONAL NETWORK

This can be one of the most effective ways of finding new business. After all, people buy from people, so face-to-face contact is likely to work much better than cold calling, advertising or other forms of promotion.

A recommendation by someone who knows you can be extremely influential indeed. One way to do this is to set up a three-tier contact system: an electronic database of names. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool can help, for example [zoho.eu](https://www.zoho.com) or [superoffice.co.uk](https://www.superoffice.co.uk).

Tier one: hottest prospects

Your first tier of contacts should include every person and organisation you know who is personally capable of offering work. Include everyone you have ever worked for in the past.

This list represents your hottest prospects. Contact them directly. Tell them you're now working for yourself and a bit about what you're doing. If you haven't already got a recommendation or testimonial from them, ask them to send you one as a) it will remind them why they liked working with you and b) you can use it to market yourself to other clients. This first tier has the greatest potential to get you going quickly, and to keep you going profitably for many years.

Tier two: people who could refer you to someone else

Your second tier should include everybody you know who might know someone else who could offer you work. Dismiss no one - include people you haven't spoken to in months or even years. Drop these people an email with a brief update on what you're doing and ask them if they know anyone who might benefit from your service. If you use LinkedIn, you could also connect with them on that – this helps you stay in touch.

Tier three: wish list of clients you would like to work with

Your third tier should include the people or organisations that you do not know personally but would want to work with - they might include the leading companies in your industry, or competitors of companies you no longer work with. This is your wish-list of possible clients.

Use directories, libraries, guides or whatever resources are available. You can then plan a targeted mailing or phone campaign. For networking events near you check: www.ipse.co.uk/events

“In terms of networking, one of the things I’ve actually done is to create groups where like-minded individuals come together. We meet up on a monthly basis and we actively discuss what’s going on, “OK what are you doing? Can I actually up-sell something with my skills? What am I doing? Do I actually need some Java skills or some Six Sigma skills?”

Manav Mehan

Change Management Specialist



HITTING THE PHONES

Cold calling can be very effective as long as it's extremely targeted – you don't want to be calling a huge number of completely random companies. Research specific organisations and departments that you think could benefit from your skills. The better you know their industry and challenges, the less 'cold' the call will be.

Phone the reception desk first to identify the best contact and subtly find out the best time to reach them. Do some desk research into that person and their work. Know what you are selling and how that could be useful to the person you want to speak to. Then call them.

Building rapport is **ESSENTIAL**. If you know they are just back from holiday, ask how it was. If you've been there too, share an anecdote.

Find out what makes them tick and you can almost be guaranteed that they will get back to you. Make it light-hearted but don't ramble. Introduce yourself and explain in a nutshell what you can offer (pitch it professionally but in a relaxed way so it doesn't come across as too formal).

If you have worked with a similar organisation, tell them what you did for that company.

Also, focus on their possible pain or pressure points which should come from your research or your conversation with the receptionist (e.g. they are always in meetings, travel a lot, are a team member down, about to launch a big product).

It can help to say, “you may not have a need at the moment, however if it’s OK, I would like to send you my CV/LinkedIn page and perhaps you could forward it to anyone you think might be interested.”

There is a certain art to cold calling and not everyone is comfortable doing it. If you are, then you have a fantastic asset! If not, don’t worry, email can be very effective as well.

EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

Targeted marketing via email can also be effective, and cost very little.

According to the EU anti-spam rules it is ok to send unsolicited email to business owners and company employees without their prior consent, as long as:

- You don’t conceal your identity
- You provide a valid address for opt-out requests
- You provide an easy (free of charge) way for the person to opt-out of receiving further communications from you

The rules for emailing private, non-business individuals are different – you can’t email them without their prior consent.

However this shouldn’t affect you if you are using the email campaign to win B2B clients in a traditional freelance capacity. When crafting your email, spend some time working on a good headline for the subject box. It’s no good saying something like ‘CV attached’ because at the end of the day, why should they care? If you have researched their ‘pain’ you should be able to come up with something very specific that addresses their problem and hints at a solution.

So for example, let’s say you’re a French speaking PR specialist in the UK. Do you know any UK companies selling to France? Have they got PR covered, or could they use your help?

If your research indicates that they lack the know-how, your subject box could say something like: ‘How to earn press attention in France’.

If you think they have the expertise in-house, but are stretched for time and could use

some help, it could be: ‘Need help writing French press releases?’

The trick is also to keep it short enough so the subject doesn’t disappear off the edge of the person’s screen (bear in mind they might be reading it on their mobile).

Individual targeted emails are likely to have a higher response rate, but if you want to do wider blanket mailings, services such as www.mailchimp.com can be used to set up and track the campaign.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL TO SUPPORT YOUR MARKETING DRIVE

Not everyone is comfortable with the idea of ‘marketing’, but the most successful independent professionals are the ones who are able to build a strong brand around the thing that they do. Proactive marketing is the key to not only getting more work, but better rates and more interesting projects. The stronger your brand, the more likely you are to land the juiciest gigs around.

Here are a few things to consider having in your arsenal:

A ‘PORTFOLIO’ CV

A CV can be a powerful marketing asset, but the traditional CV format is better suited to people chasing salaried jobs.

As an independent professional it’s better to take a ‘portfolio’ approach. So, instead of presenting your career in reverse chronological order with half a dozen bullet points underneath each job; write each major project you have done as an evidence-based case study and create a section titled ‘Portfolio’.

This is the most effective framework for professional contractors to write their CV – it breaks your career down into individual pieces of work.

You may identify 30 pieces of work and decide that 15 of them are up-to-date and relevant.

Once you have identified the key pieces of work, write them as short case studies (no more than 6 lines long), ideally using the STAR methodology (Situation, Task, Actions, Result).

The CV then becomes a portfolio of case studies and you are able to change the order around depending on what roles you are applying for. Of course, recruiters will still want to see your dates of employment or contract engagement, so put a career chronology section after the case studies with the date, company name and your job title.

This framework will provide you with much more flexibility and allow you to tailor the CV to the roles you are applying for in a much more effective way. If you want professional help putting your CV together, try: www.cvandinterviewadvisors.co.uk.

WEBSITE

When starting it out, don't spend too much time and money on your website.

It can be tempting to get completely absorbed with creating an amazing site, but make sure you don't stop doing the things that actually land paying clients, like getting out there and talking to people.



However, a good website can be an effective complement to your overall marketing approach. Sitting down to plan your website forces you to really think about how you communicate your offering.

You can start off with a simple one using platforms like [wix.com](https://www.wix.com) or [wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com) to create your website for free.

There's also www.about.me – a neat way to create a single webpage to link to any of your other online resources, such as pieces of work you've created. As with any face-to-face interaction, don't make it all about you.

Remember the golden rule – clients don't care about your amazingness. They care about how you can solve their problem. Do include your accolades and achievements, but do it in such a way that it reassures clients that you can deliver what you say you can.

Also, be sure to include a clear 'call to action' – a reason and a means to get in touch with you.

Once you start to gain momentum you can create a more sophisticated website, perhaps adding a regular blog, or a repository for articles, case studies or videos to showcase your expertise.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Some freelancers use their LinkedIn page instead of a website – it's a free, quick and easy way of creating an online profile that is always up to date.

You can also set up a custom URL on LinkedIn so you can publish a personalised link to your profile.

LinkedIn is a good way to stay connected to past clients and build your network. Asking for recommendations from past colleagues or clients is a good reason to get in touch and keeps you on their radar.

You can also create a 'company page' on either LinkedIn or Facebook.

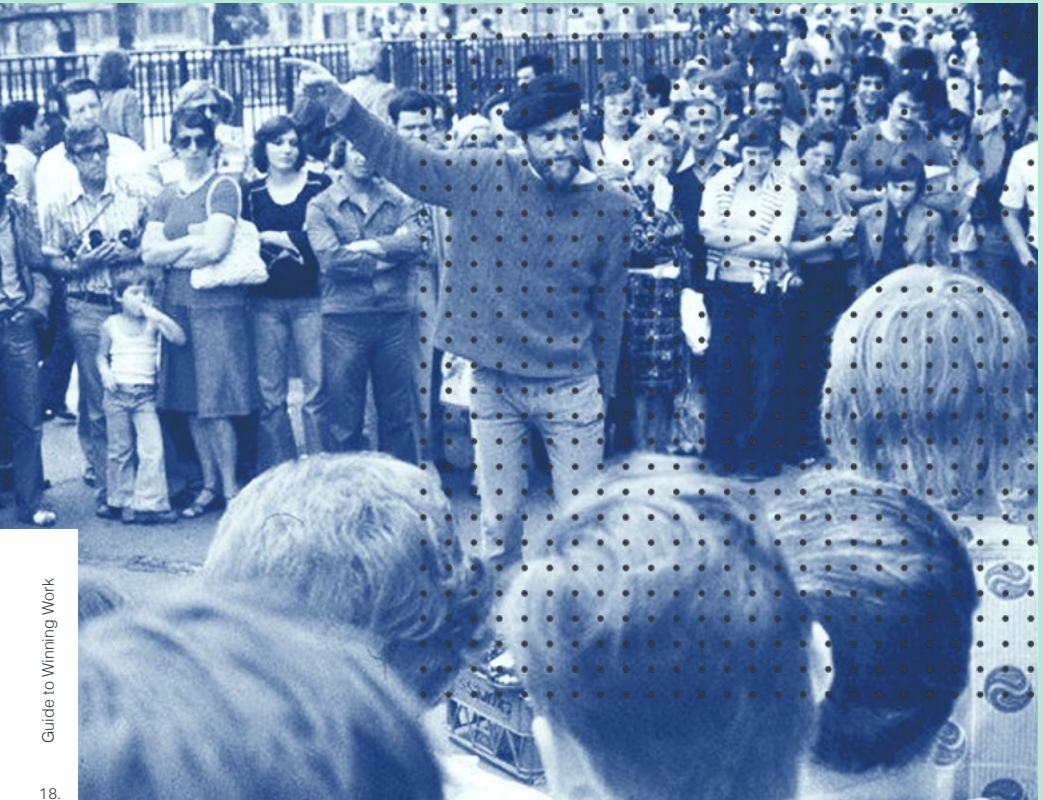
Twitter is another alternative – excellent for assessing the market, gathering information, developing your reputation and building relationships.

IPSE often runs seminars on using social media effectively – keep an eye on the events calendar at [ipse.co.uk](https://www.ipse.co.uk).

PR

You don't have to be a big company to use PR. Here are some of the things you might consider doing:

- Public speaking
- Make yourself available for interviews by positioning yourself as an expert in your field
- Look for press opportunities in relevant trade journals
- Write white papers and technical articles
- Consider writing a blog and contributing to other popular professional blogs
- Write case studies about recent projects
- Issue short press releases on recent successes.



“Public speaking is a useful way of building a reputation provided that you help others by giving useful information, not by directly selling services. Within most communities knowledge sharing is a valued way to behave, while overt marketing is poorly received. Other ways to share knowledge and information include publishing articles, contributing to podcasts, running webinars and video.

“In 2009 I invested in the professional production of a video case study about a large project. This was used as part of the entry for an international design award, which ended up taking me to San Francisco for the Awards event with help from UK Trade & Industry. That video keynote, which has been used at international industry events that I could not attend in person, has been instrumental in securing extra business and has resulted in more invitations to speak at international events.”

Colin Butcher

www.xdelta.co.uk

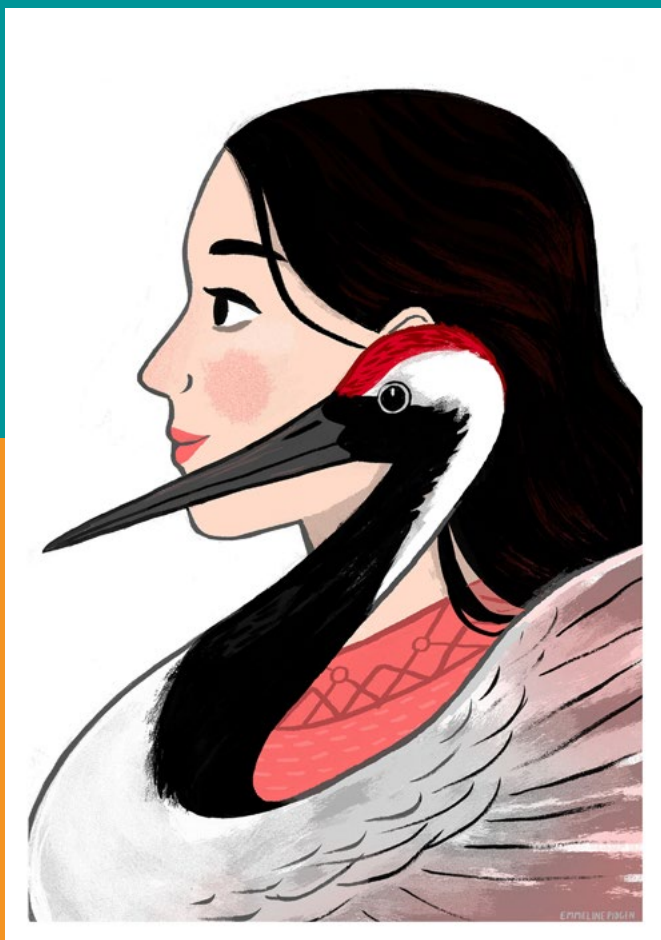
**Consulting Engineer specialising
in mission critical systems**

Case study: how to thrive in a competitive market

Emmeline Pidgen is a freelance illustrator and winner of the IPSE INSPIRE Award, presented to the most inspiring independent professional of the year. Her blog at emmelineillustration.com has also won an award for Best Arts and Culture Blog and was a finalist in the Unique Blogger of the Year Awards.

Emmeline works from her studio in North West England, producing illustrations for a range of high profile publications, including the front cover of the latest edition of Peter Pan.

We asked her how she succeeds, doing the work she loves...



WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

It's not healthy to focus on success too much, because you can never be as successful as you can imagine. When I started out I couldn't imagine where I am now, for example.

Success is a constantly moving goal post. You're always going to want more!

Therefore I think it's better to focus on work that makes you happy. Rather than focusing on success, I try to find projects I really enjoy.

It is hard though, because the natural tendency is always going to be to want to grow.

So how do you manage to do work you enjoy when there is so much competition?

The visual arts have always been a saturated market and that's not going to change anytime soon.

Sometimes it can feel daunting, because there is such a sea of creative people and it can feel really hard to stand out.

But competition is not a bad thing! It pushes me to make my work better, to make it uniquely 'me'.

A lot of artists feel they need to follow trends to succeed – to conform to a particular style. I prefer to focus on what I can give as a whole package. I just concentrate on my own work and don't give in to the temptation of looking at what other people are doing and thinking, "Oh I should be doing that to be more successful." Instead I work on developing my own visual voice, so whatever medium I'm using you can tell it's my work.





That is what makes me feel confident that I'm going to keep getting commissions, because people will come to me not just because of what it looks like, but because of every bit of me that goes into the project: the interpretation of the brief, the problem-solving, and the visual result.

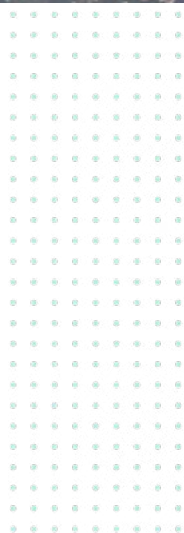
HOW DO YOU FIND AND WIN COMMISSIONS?

I spend about 40% of my working week on promotion!

I'm always on the lookout for new leads and opportunities, and that has kept me in a constant stream of commissions for six years.

The main way I do it is by spending time on blogging, promotion on social media, and getting involved in networking or collaborative events.

On my blog and social media channels I post a lot about projects I'm working on. Illustration lends itself incredibly well to social media; It's the kind of thing people share. I also write about issues





that crop up in the creative industries, such as late payment; which gives me authority in my field.

I use social media more often than the blog. For example on Instagram I post quick visual snapshots, and then use the blog for more detailed behind-the-scenes posts.

I always ask the client if it's ok to document and publish the work. They usually say yes because it's good for them as well, particularly if I tie it into the launch promotion. For example, when I was working on the cover of Peter Pan I would take screen shots of each stage of the illustration. Once the book was launched I published them along with a detailed 'process post'.

Not only is it good publicity, it's also a great learning tool for me as I'm able to track and review my progress over time. So I get two benefits in one!

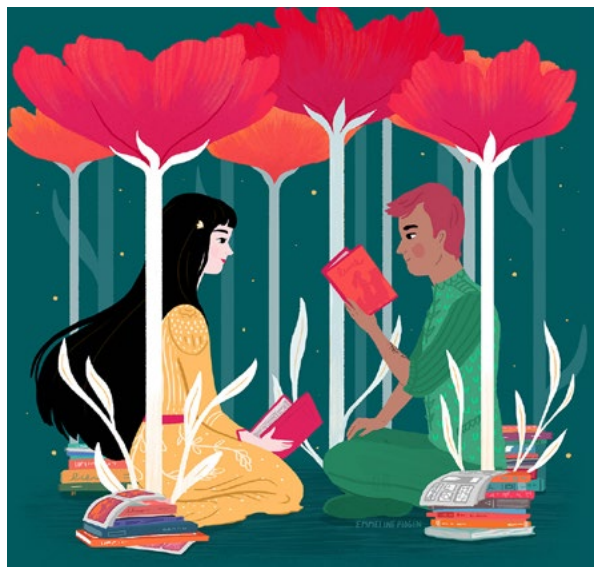
The other thing I do is go to networking events and meetups with other illustrators and creatives. Obviously there is going to be competition between designers, but I like to be part of a community of people who understand what I'm going through, and we often refer each other for commissions.

WHAT RESULTS DO YOU GET?

Some of my biggest commissions have come from Twitter. One of the picture books I illustrated came from the author seeing my work on there. I replied to one of his tweets and he noted me down and contacted me two weeks later!

I also followed one of my favourite Japanese musicians, and after listening to his album I tweeted him to say I really enjoyed his music. He then contacted me to do his album cover. The key is just to talk to people, make friends and not hard sell. I'm not intimidated by companies – it's just nice to speak to people as people!

The blogging and social media is essential to my work. I get so many leads from it.



For example, for the last two years I've done a one-month blog campaign called 'What Emmeline Wore' in which I illustrated my outfit every day for that month. I worked with brands like Laura Ashley, Fat Face and Oasis to collaborate with me on it.

It was very hard work to produce an illustration a day, particularly as I was still working on other commissions! So I wouldn't be able to sustain it all year round, but that one month got me over 100,000 views on my blog, which is amazing for my profile.

ANY ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT?

It's all a learning process!

After the blog campaign I got a lot of extra followers on social media. Next time I'll focus on channelling the traffic to build my email list. It's hard to find time for everything!

I also get a lot of emails from art students who read my blog and want some advice or a case study. I don't like to ignore people. I love talking to them, but it's got to the stage where it's become

quite time consuming as I get at least one very long list of questions every two weeks! I don't want to just redirect them to an FAQ, so I'm looking into other options such as live Q&A sessions on Patreon, a platform where people pay anywhere from a dollar a month to support their favourite artist.

Talking of time, how do you fit everything in?

Lots of late nights! Actually, I try to stick to 9-5 but in reality it's more like 8:30 to 5:30.

But projects with a tight deadline will definitely have me working weekends and evenings. I try to keep things balanced, so if I have a heavy week I'll give myself a day off the following week.



Emmeline Pidgeon

I would say my work-week averages out at around 45 hours, which includes the blogging, social media and so forth.

I try to keep my blogging schedule fairly organic. If you're too regimented, forcing yourself to post all the time, people can see through it. But if I haven't posted in a while, I'll do one!

I tend to promote myself simultaneously while working on commissions. I always love drawing, and it hardly takes any time to take a photo and post it on Instagram, but it gives a lot back!

I manage my schedule without getting too deeply into one project. That gives me variety. Sometimes I'll work the morning on a project and then do promotion in the afternoon. I also use days where I'm waiting for client feedback to do some promotion.

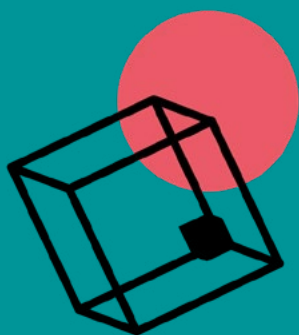
Sometimes I get too much work, but I've now reached the stage where I'm comfortable turning projects down. I've become quite choosy and have mastered the art of writing emails saying "sorry, I can't do it right now, but maybe we can work together in the future." I often find they come back!

DO YOU SET YOURSELF GOALS?

I make a vague plan of where I'd like to get to and then figure out how to get there. I don't set myself really hard goals.

I do have a business plan, but don't restrain myself with it. I give myself the luxury of being a bit flexible, making time to work on self-set projects. For example I'm currently working on a comic and writing my own picture book! Those are investments I'm making in developing my career .

The main thing is to have determination and to give myself space to say, "I'm doing it because I love it."



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