

11 Rules to Avoid the "Getting Paid Freelance Blues"

By Cindy Cyr

The other day, a very talented copywriter called me for some advice on getting paid ...

She was having problems getting paid what she was worth and was unsure what to do.

One client, a well-respected person in her chosen niche—gave her lots of great samples and credibility. But she was getting paid by the hour (at a very low rate).

She was afraid to walk away from the company without having other clients. And already writing five solid hours a day for the client, she didn't know how she could take on more work.

I proposed that she reduce her hours and use the extra time to look for more lucrative work (or to do other work once she landed some). This lets her keep her association while freeing up her time.

A phone message from another client on a project that she had already half completed indicated the project might be cancelled. Fearful she would be asked to return the deposit, she didn't know what to do.

This conversation made me realize that for the new freelancer—and sometimes even the experienced one—a good portion of managing your finances revolves around charging for your services, how you get paid, and what you communicate to clients.

So today, I'm sharing 11 of my rules for running a successful freelance business when it comes to getting paid:

1. Create value in what you provide. Give 10 times or more the value of what you charge for your services. For example, give your client ideas of how to repurpose your copy. I show my clients how they can take my email article, break it into two or three blog posts, and then break those into social media posts, greatly increasing the value of my copy.
2. Get paid at least 50 percent *before* you begin *any* work on any project for a new client.
3. Turn a small project into a larger one by learning more about marketing and upselling.
4. Set up a package plan for your business that offers clients a better rate in exchange for guaranteed work over extended periods of time.
5. Always have your client sign an agreement that outlines your terms of service, what you will do, fee agreement, timetable, and any caveats.
6. Be sure to include a cancellation clause in your agreement that lets you keep your deposit should a client cancel the

contract after you've already started work. In my story above, this could have saved my copywriting friend lots of worry.

7. Never charge by hours worked. Charge by project based on the value and return on investment (ROI) you'll provide.
8. Always go back to your existing clients with ideas on how they could make more money, generate more leads, or improve ROI. It's easier (and less expensive) to sell to a happy customer than it is to acquire a new one.

9.

Don't take on a client that you know you can't succeed with—no matter how desperate you are for money. It'll cost you more money in the long run by damaging your reputation when the client shares that your copy "didn't work." Plus, you'll miss the opportunity to work with your ideal client.

I was once asked to write copy for a political party with completely opposing views from my own. I knew I could never write convincing copy for something I didn't believe in, so I turned it down. The client respected me and a week later referred another client to me, which turned into an ongoing relationship. Had I taken the other job, I would have failed and not had time to start this other project.

10. Consider offering an option to be paid on your results. For example, a reduced fee with a 2 percent royalty payment. This often makes it easier to get paid what you're worth and puts you in a stronger bargaining position with clients.
11. Hold firm on your rates. While you might need to charge less in the beginning while gaining experience, once you establish yourself, don't back down just to win business. There is always someone willing to pay you what you're worth. Plus, charging less can cause you to start resenting the client and time spent working for them, leading you to perform below your standards.

Following these rules will help you manage your finances and get paid what you're worth more consistently.

Do you have rules you'd add to this list? Share them with me below.

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7 Responses to "11 Rules to Avoid the "Getting Paid Freelance Blues" "

You can't always charge 50% up front, unfortunately. Some (perhaps even most) medium to large businesses don't work that way. I keep seeing this "advice" in AWAI articles and it just isn't relevant in the real world. Sure, if you're taking on work from an entrepreneur or small business (fewer than 10 employees), then you can—and should—get 50% up front. Don't try it with Bank of America or you'll get your feeling hurt!

Keith – over a year ago

Cindy:

Your "11 rules to avoid the freelance getting paid blues" is very well thought out and very useful -- a real class act! I picked up a few pointers that never occurred to me.

I've recently added another proviso to a proposal in a case where I feel that client hemming and hawing might compromise my self-imposed deadline. If the job will take me 2 weeks, I write: "first draft will be delivered in 2 weeks from the day work is commenced provided your deposit is received and provided your in-house decision-making process on okaying copy is not inhibited by committee.

Guest (Lou Wasser) – over a year ago

One time I wrote a sales letter for a client.

He didn't like it and so I rewrote it two more times.

No one would ever please this guy, believe me.

I was really glad I had a "no return deposit" clause in my agreement because he wanted to only give me \$50 for getting 3 letters.

I think another clause I'd add for the future would be "only one rewrite." Does that sound reasonable?

Susan F

Guest (Susan F) – over a year ago

I don't have another rule. I just wonder about getting half down. What are the rules for returning it? If that one writer had half finished her work, why should she return the money?

barbarjo – over a year ago

Cindy,

I was told by an expert copywriter that he always requires 100% payment on the front end.

I don't know how feasible this is for a beginner though.

No one talks about going up on your fees with an existing client. Is this just a "no-no?" It would seem to me it would be worth risking losing the client rather than feeling trapped and resentful.

Feedback welcome.

Karen M

Karen Peckham – over a year ago

Great post - it's just prompted me to write one about a recent experience I've had too. It would be hard to request payment up front these days in any type of work but making people value your work is important and will hopefully ensure your payment too. Thanks for sharing on Bizsugar.com

Guest (Sian Phillips) – over a year ago

Thanks @Sian Phillips. Glad you enjoyed the post. I still require payment up front and believe if you position yourself and your product or services right you can too.

Cindy Cyr – over a year ago

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