Making Money Online: The Middle Man Method

Making Money By Being The Middleman

Introduction

You can make money by finding freelance jobs and subcontracting or offloading them to other freelancers. As noted in previous volumes, most freelancing sites take a large cut of your earnings by being the middleman. You can do the same, setting your cut as low or high as you see fit. You just have to look for people in smaller freelancing markets, outside of the major sites like Upwork and Freelancer.com.

In this guide, these terms are used to describe the chain of command:

☐ Top-level client   ☐ Middleman   ☐ Sub-freelancers

   (Hires you)   (You)   (Hired by you)

Chapter 1 Subcontracting Freelance Jobs

Offloading Jobs You Don't Have Time For

Once you've started freelancing on sites like Upwork and Fiverr, you may start getting more jobs than you can handle. You can offload entire jobs, and pay only a fraction of what you make from them to sub-freelancers.

Alternatively, you can simply hire your sub-freelancers to do parts of your job instead of an entire job. Instead of hiring someone to ghostwrite, hire someone to proofread. Instead of hiring someone to program for you, hire someone to test your code and annotate problems. Instead of hiring someone to create an entire image, sketch and color a simple draft and hire someone to add detail.

You can work quite efficiently if you do this. You'll have a virtual factory that works to everyone's strengths, and none of you will be forced to depend on your weaknesses. You'll know who can do what, and can contact your freelancers short notice. You'll save time, as everyone has a skill that they can do quickly. You will also save money, because you can pay people less for smaller jobs.

Doing this will also be good for your freelancing reputation, as you'll ultimately have creative control over your early project, and you'll be offering consistent results to top-level clients.

Offloading Jobs You Can't Do

Recall that on sites like Fiverr, you can't search for jobs, and can only be assigned jobs. You can only be "hand picked" and assigned a job by a top-level client. You won't want to do, or won't be able to do, some of the jobs you are offered.

But these inconveniences may be useful to you as a middleman. If you are working alone, you may be assigned a job that you never asked for and don't have the tools to complete. But as a middleman, you can accept those jobs, and have them done by someone who has invested in the things needed to do the job.

For example, if a client needs a Flash animation, and you don't have a copy of the Flash software, or if a client needs research done from a reference book that only exists in the New York Public Library, now you can get those jobs done. You simply have to ask someone to do it for you, and pay them part of what you earn.

Project Size

Deal in smaller projects at first, unless you don't mind paying your sub-freelancer before you receive your own payment. If you have a longer project, the freelancer you subcontract to will probably want to be paid in instalments and milestones, which you may not have the money for. So try to redistribute small jobs that involve only one payment.

Chapter 2 Offloading the Work

Finding Freelancers on Social Networks

You can post job offers on Reddit.com/r/slavelabour. Users there may expect a lower level of payment than people on major freelancing sites do.

You can also post jobs on Facebook and Twitter. In these cases, the top-level client who originally hired you may have added you to their feed, so do not repost the job publicly—it will be awkward if they find you have reposted the job they gave you. If you post the job in multiple places, reword the job description each time so that it is not removed as spam.

Instead of rewording the posting you received from the top-level client, you can simply send it to a user in a private message. Tell your friends or followers to ask you for freelancing jobs, and send them the job description privately.

Finding Freelancers Through Classified Ads

You might try to post jobs to Craigslist and Backpage, as there is no cost to post on those sites, and people will work cheaply with few questions asked. Don't post the freelancing job in just your area's Craigslist. Post it to several different regions (mainly large cities) since you don't actually need to hire a freelancer near you. Again: change the wording of each post so that it is not removed as spam.

Remember, these classified ads are primarily used by people looking for jobs in their community, so there is a lower barrier of entry. The people who respond to your ads on these sites may be--but are not necessarily--less skilled than freelancers you find on social networks.

If someone is interested in your work, try and converse with them on their social network of choice as a means to filter out not-so-competent freelancers.

Paying Low Rates

On major sites, there is often an unspoken lowest acceptable rate that emerges amongst freelancers. On major sites it is difficult to find decent ghostwriters, for example, who are willing to work for less than one dollar per 100 words. But on smaller sites, you can pay freelancers a far lower rate, and they will happily accept it.

This is not because they are desperate or unskilled. These freelancers use smaller sites to avoid competition and save the time they would spend seeking jobs on a larger site. On larger sites, there are jobs that it takes longer to find than to actually complete. Your capacity to provide a job instantly is very attractive to freelancers.

So when you find a freelancer to subcontract a job to, don't do what the large sites do, which is to ask for lots of qualifications and past projects. If someone can write a message competently, they can probably produce decent work. You don't need to see an entire portfolio of graphics work to believe that someone can edit an image. Just give someone the job.

Fixed Rate vs. Hourly Pay

You can pay your sub-freelancer in whatever way you like. However, you should deal in jobs that pay you a fixed rate. Don't take on jobs that are paid by the hour, as you will usually have to record your work for the top-level client, and it is difficult to have your sub-freelancer do that.

In theory, you can also repost jobs as "contest jobs" in which you accept the best design and pay for only the design that you choose to use. However, this will fail horribly if you don't get enough submissions and you have to pick between two bad designs. So contests are not the best way to be a middleman unless you have a lot of candidates.

Being Discrete

Although it's legal to outsource your work to someone willing to do it for you, it will likely not reflect well on you if your top-level client finds out. Clients expect consistent work from one person. One option is to be forwardly honest—you can tell your top-level client that you are the head of a freelancing group. This is not recommended, though. Most likely, your client will not ask—after all, they themselves are outsourcing.

With that said, take a few precautions. Do not re-post a job on the same site that you found it on. Avoid reposting on major freelancing sites and job sites. Subcontract jobs to people in private forums, or to people in public forums via private messages, or by email. If you must post the job on a public forum, change the wording and remove the specifics that your top-level client provided.

Take Responsibility

Just because you are offloading work to another person, that doesn't mean you aren't responsible for the final product. Answer questions that your sub-freelancer has, and get the answers from your top-level client if necessary. Look over the finished product and make minor changes as necessary.

If there is something that you find dubious, simply remove that content if you have the means to. Make sure your sub-freelancer has not plagiarized the content from elsewhere. If your sub-freelancer provides information that promotes breaking the law, writes something that is possibly slander or libel, or creates images that are potentially offensive, delete those things. If you have any doubts at all: remove it!

If You Aren't Paid

Remember that being the middleman will make you money, but it also involves you spending money on sub-freelancers. So don't spend money until you make it.
Generally, you should pay your freelancers their cut after you get paid by the top-level client. On the off chance that the top-level client has taken advantage of you and is not paying you, don't panic. Try to resolve the problem through the freelancing site.

Pay your sub-freelancer after it is resolved. You don't want to sink more money into your problem by paying your sub-freelancer money you don't have. If it takes longer for you to get paid, take responsibility and apologize without explaining the situation in detail. Most freelancers will not mind getting paid a little late as long as you remain collected.

Chapter 3 Replacing A Freelancer

Consider various types of freelancing and how difficult it is to subcontract each. Think about the worst-case scenario. If your sub-freelancer bails out, you will have to finish the project in one way or another. There are no penalties that a freelancing site will be able to inflict on you for uncompleted work. However, you may get poor ratings from your clients if you do not complete all of your projects.

You may have to finish some abandoned work yourself, so do not take on more projects than you can handle. But in many cases you can simply find a replacement freelancer to continue on with the project.

How hard or easy is it to do that? Well, it depends on the type of work.

Writing

Writing is an easy task to offload to other people. In the event that the top-level client wants last-minute changes, you can edit the text easily or write additional content. If the freelancer you subcontracted disappears, you don't have to be an expert in the topic, you just have to add filler and finish the writing. Writing by several people can be unnoticably interwoven.

Finding a replacement to carry on writing an academic paper is harder, since you will have to deal with citations and references, and the replacement freelancer may not have access to the academic sources that the first freelancer had. So it's best to avoid research-based writing.

Coding and Development

Coding and programming is only a good option if you've subcontracted to someone with a history of completing projects. Even if you know how to code, finishing someone else's half-completed project can be a nightmare. Web design, like coding, is also difficult to pick up or reassign in the event that your sub-freelancer bails out. You may have to virtually start from scratch if that happens.

Creative Work

Depending on the complexity of the job, it may be easy or difficult to subcontract artistic jobs. If you are designing an icon set or font, you can get away with minimal consistency, and you may be able to hire several people to each design one icon or font character. Then you can make a few final tweaks on your own.

Digital design is also easy to take over, as long as both you and your sub-freelancer are using the same graphics software. You'll have access to the same tools, and you can undo certain things that they have done.

But if you are working with non-digital fine art—that is, actual paintings or drawings—unless you are an extremely skilled artist, you probably won't be able to complete your sub-freelancer's work. Every artist has idiosyncrasies, and anything you try to touch up will stick out like a sore thumb.

Chapter 4 Necessities

Email Accounts

You will need to keep a database of your contacts. Most email services provide this in an address book feature. Make sure to record all of the information someone provides you with. You don't want to waste your time crawling through old messages on social media trying to find out how to contact someone--and don't waste someone's time by asking people to repeat information that they've already provided you with.

In short, keep records for your sub-freelancers that contain more than just email addresses. Keep their Paypal addresses, their user names on various sites, the way they prefer to be contacted, and whatever else they tell you.

File Storage

Cloud storage is important if you plan to deal with lots of files, work in several places, or keep several revisions of a file. Google Drive is useful, as you can set permissions to permit specific people to view and upload to specific folders. Simply click on the "Share" button and send the link to your contact.

Otherwise, you can have your sub-freelancers email their work to you. Consider tagging your emails with the name of the site the job was posted on, and the type of project you're handling, and whatever other information you find useful. In Gmail, you can create automatic filters, which search for certain words or properties in an email and automatically tag them. All of your different projects will be color-coded and distinguishable at a glance.

Online Payment Systems

A Paypal account is a must-have, as it is the most widely used financial service amongst online freelancers. Your clients can send you a PayPal.me link that you can simply click on to pay them.

However, Paypal is not available in all countries, so make sure that your sub-freelancer can receive payment before you offer them a job. If they can't accept PayPal, find an alternative way to pay them ahead of time.

Afterword

This guide showed you how to make the most of freelancing by delegating jobs to other people. As noted, it's a great option once you start getting more freelance work than you can handle—you will no longer have to refuse jobs. Remember that you can take on work that you don't personally have the skills or tools for.

Once again, be discrete, and message people privately when possible. Rewrite job postings so that it is not obvious that you are reposting a job. Know where to find freelancers, and keep an address book of sub-freelancers so that you can contact them whenever you have work for them. That way, you won't have to keep posting jobs on freelance sites.

Make yourself available to your sub-freelancers for questions, and make sure to arrange payment methods before you give a job to someone. Remember, you don't have to offer high wages to sub-freelancers as long as you don't ask too much of them, and they will be cooperative and grateful for the convenience of the jobs that you have spent time finding for them.