

THE PRINCIPLES OF  
**SUCCESSFUL  
FREELANCING**

BY MILES BURKE



CONTROL YOUR OWN DESTINY—BECOME A SUCCESSFUL FREELANCER TODAY!

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## The Principles of Successful Freelancing

by Miles Burke

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When he isn't speaking at a conference or visiting friends and family in Canada, Kevin lives in Melbourne, Australia; he enjoys flying light aircraft and performing improvised comedy theater with Impro Melbourne. His personal blog, *Yes, I'm Canadian*, can be found at <http://yesimcanadian.com/>.

## About SitePoint

SitePoint specializes in publishing fun, practical, and easy-to-understand content for web professionals. Visit <http://www.sitepoint.com/> to access our books, newsletters, articles, and community forums.

*To my wife and soul mate,  
Meredith.*

*To my children—Davis, Leia, and  
our latest addition, Quinn, who  
arrived during the writing of this  
book.*



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# Preface

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When I started designing web sites as a freelancer in 1994, I would have loved to have had the guidance of a book such as this one. The number of mistakes I made back then meant that it wasn't long before I returned to work as an employee, and it took two more attempts at full-time freelancing before it really started to become viable in 2002. During my years as a web designer and developer, creative director, and new media director for other companies, I learned much of what appears within these covers. I believe the mistakes I've made were just as important a learning tool as the successes I've had.

Although I specifically discuss web designers and developers, many of the principles covered in this book could be applied across many positions, even other industries. If there's an underlying message you can take away from this book, I hope it is that you should never fear trying something and never stop yearning for more knowledge and experience.

If you have talent as a web professional, it's almost certain that with some effort and knowledge, you will be able to fulfil your dream of working for yourself. The mere fact that you've picked up this book means you've already got the drive—now, you'll learn enough to have a fantastic chance of freelancing success!

## Who Should Read This Book?

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This book is intended as a guide to approaching the decision to be your own boss, effecting a smooth transition into a freelance career, and making it a success once you're there. The book's holistic approach ensures that it not only covers how to make your freelancing journey a financial success, but also how to do it without risking your health and sanity.

If you're considering freelancing, and are currently employed or have recently graduated, but are worried about diving head-first into the unknown, this book is for you. And if you've recently made the leap into freelancing but are struggling, this book will show you the way.

# What's in This Book?

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## **Chapter 1: Considering Freelancing?**

What's it like to be a freelancer? Is it a life of complete control, working when you want, picking and choosing only the projects that interest you? Or is it a life of stress, working all hours, and wondering when your invoices will be paid so that you can afford your next meal? This chapter will show you the reality of freelancing, its advantages and disadvantages, and help you decide whether the freelancing life is for you.

## **Chapter 2: Prepare for the Transition**

Having decided to take the plunge, this chapter will guide you through the planning process essential to a successful transition into the freelancing lifestyle. You'll perform a SWOT analysis, create a business plan that sets out your goals and milestones, begin thinking about your business's brand, and establish relationships with associates and contacts you may need to rely upon.

## **Chapter 3: Manage Your Money**

How much should you charge per hour? How do you calculate your operating costs? How do you deal with debtors? Should you hire an accountant? Chapter 3 is all about money—and how, with a little forethought, it should never become a nightmare.

## **Chapter 4: Set Yourself Up**

Now that your finances are under control, it's time to get productive. Chapter 4 leads you through everything you need to consider in order to stay productive, happy, and healthy. We discuss planning your office, ergonomics, time tracking, organizing your tools, and how you can separate your work from the rest of your life.

## **Chapter 5: Win the Work**

Now it's time to make use of your new-found productivity and start bringing in the work! This chapter is all about creating your brand, developing your unique selling position, understanding the sales process, and overcoming your fear of selling.

**Chapter 6: Give Great Service**

Chapter 6 explains the basics and the benefits of giving great customer service. It's crucial to consider this component of your freelancing duties, even when you're up to your neck in project work. This chapter also deals with project management, clear communication, and the thorny subject of resolving issues with difficult clients.

**Chapter 7: Achieve Work–Life Balance**

As a freelancer it's often easy to forget about your work–life balance, emotional and physical health, and support of your community and the environment. Chapter 7 is all about ensuring your long-term well-being and engaging with the world beyond your office walls.

**Chapter 8: Where to from Here?**

Congratulations! You've built a successful freelancing business. Naturally, you'll now start to ask yourself where to go from here. You've reached decision time. What's the next step, the further challenge? You could stay freelancing as a single entity into the future, you may decide to hang up your tool belt and leave the freelance life, or you may decide to take the leap and grow your business beyond yourself.

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## The Book's Web Site

Located at <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/freelancer1/>, the web site that supports this book will give you access to the following facilities:

### Updates and Errata

No book is perfect, and we expect that watchful readers will be able to spot at least one or two mistakes before the end of this one. The Errata page on the book's web site (<http://www.sitepoint.com/books/freelancer1/errata.php>) will always have the latest information about known errors.

## The SitePoint Forums

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If you'd like to communicate with us or anyone else on the SitePoint publishing team about this book, you should join SitePoint's online community.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, you should join that community even if you don't want to talk to us, because a lot of fun and experienced web designers and developers hang out there. It's a good way to learn new stuff, get questions answered in a hurry, and just have fun.

## The SitePoint Newsletters

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In addition to books like this one, SitePoint publishes free email newsletters, including *The SitePoint Tribune* and *The SitePoint Tech Times*. Reading them will keep you up to date on the latest news, product releases, trends, tips, and techniques for all aspects of web development. Sign up to one or more SitePoint newsletters at <http://www.sitepoint.com/newsletter/>.

## Your Feedback

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If you can't find an answer through the forums, or if you wish to contact us for any other reason, the best place to write to is [books@sitepoint.com](mailto:books@sitepoint.com). We have a well-staffed email support system set up to track your inquiries, and if our support team members are unable to answer your question, they'll send it straight to us. Suggestions for improvements, as well as notices of any mistakes you may find, are especially welcome.

## Conventions Used in This Book

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You'll notice that we've used certain typographic and layout styles throughout this book to signify different types of information. Look out for the following items:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sitepoint.com/forums/>

## Tips, Notes, and Warnings



### Hey, You!

Tips will give you helpful little pointers.



### Ahem, Excuse Me ...

Notes are useful asides that are related—but not critical—to the topic at hand. Think of them as extra tidbits of information.



### Make Sure You Always ...

... pay attention to these important points.



### Watch Out!

Warnings will highlight any gotchas that are likely to trip you up along the way.

## Acknowledgments

I'd like to start by thanking you, the reader. Without you buying books and expanding your knowledge, there would be no opportunity for authors to share their thoughts in the printed form. Long live the Internet *and* the book.

Producing a book is indeed a group effort. I'd like to thank the publishing team at SitePoint for giving me this fantastic opportunity; particularly Simon Mackie and Chris Wyness, Managing Editors, who expertly steered this project. Thanks to Toby Somerville and Andrew Tetlaw, the Technical Editors, and Hilary Reynolds, language editor, who caressed my words into something far more eloquent. Thanks also to Myles Eftos, Expert Reviewer, who provided me with much-needed input.

All of the illustrations throughout this book are the work of Jay Hollywood, one of the team at Bam Creative and a gifted designer who interpreted my vague briefs into the great figures contained herein. Thanks, Jay!

Thanks to all my colleagues, clients, suppliers, and staff, both current and previous, who have helped me shape my ideas and given me the knowledge that I share here.

A warm thanks to Derek Featherstone, Mark Boulton, Molly E. Holzschlag, and Stephen Collins, who all granted me an interview. This book is far more valuable with your input. Thank you all for your patience, insight, and friendship.

Thanks to my parents for teaching me the value of good ethics and hard work. I wouldn't be writing this book without these important lessons.

My wife and children make me complete. I can never thank my wife, Meredith, enough for the patience she has shown me over the last few months as I snuck away in the evenings to write. All while you were either pregnant or handling life with a newborn child. This book is a testament to the fact that you allow me to undertake these projects without complaint or criticism. Thanks also to Davis, Leia, and Quinn, for being wonderful little people. I look forward to reading this book to all of you for bedtime stories, and I know you will have your own valuable advice to share.

# Chapter 1

## Considering Freelancing?

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You've probably heard your freelancer acquaintances boasting about lives of luxury, plenty of time off, the freedom to work when inspiration strikes and not before, no control-freak bosses, and dream projects of their choosing. Then again, other freelancers may have told you about working all night to meet deadlines, stressing between projects, missing regular social contact, and chasing clients who resist paying their bills.

The experience of freelancing, for most people, lies somewhere between these scenarios. You'll enjoy the chance to chill out in front of the TV during the day if you feel the need, yet you may have the occasional scare when you realize you don't know how you'll afford to eat next week. You will love the excitement of creating your own destiny; at the same time, there'll be moments when you wish someone else could make the right decisions for you!

So, before you decide to trade in your day job, you need to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the solo worker life, as well as understand the all-important range of skills and attributes of the successful freelancer.