

How to start up?

I can't give general advices there, I'm just going to tell you how it went for me.

I've started to take photos series in 2000: having roughly mastered the basic techniques of photography, I also tried shortly after then (in 2002) to play with the computer. Being a software engineer, it wasn't much difficult to get used to the tools and I got an interest in creating posters for theatre plays with my group. Nothing serious at all.

In 2004/2005, people started to contact me to help them creating websites. I wasn't much of a graphic designer, but they happened to like my personal photo-work and then trusted me in creating websites – a completely different thing. *The quality of my personal work, while not linked directly to clients needs, helped me getting contacts.* Of course, being an engineer sounded good to them.

Mixing technical and artistic skills is what clients enjoy most in my profile. I can sound either artistic or technical and organized, depending on what they need. Most people radically separate these two aspects in their mind, which is a big mistake. Technical principles, composition are important in painting, music, photography. By just adding emotion to them, you'll end up having the right profile.

How to get clients?

I started freelancing besides of main job. I met a lot of persons at the university, where I was working. People started to give me jobs, then their friends, or just people googling (my site is fortunately easily accessible). I am really *quite* lucky because I've never tried to contact persons by myself.

But I'm also a polite and social person. And believe me, you'll badly need this. You don't need to be eagerly waiting to make contact with new persons (I'm not like that), but you must sound serious and social enough to listen to their needs.

If you're afraid of social contacts, and can't deal with clients talk, don't do this job.

Your art is your life

I don't know for other people but I'm constantly thinking of art and design: I don't do this because I'm looking for ideas, I just happen to *like* it. Since I'm completely self-taught (never went to an art school), I can only make this job because I'm *passionate* about it. I *love* it.

You must be devoted and passionate about your art and your work. *And your art must accomodate to commercial needs to!* Think of it before starting up!

Love your tools

I love to learn about printing techniques, about all the possibilities of Photoshop, or any similar program. *You must love your tools.* You don't need loads of them, but you need to know them perfectly. I often recommend inspecting all the possibilities of each tool in Photoshop, and try to understand what and how they would be useful to you. You'll then quickly pick up the right one for the right job and gain a lot of time. Struggling with your tools will quickly get on your nerves.

Don't forget to ask your business partners. I often print documents, magazines, etc. Well, I'm not a printer myself, how the hell could I know everything? Then, I'll just politely ask for help. If the person understands that you know the basics and just need precisions, he/she will gladly help.

Should you get this project?

Are all proposed projects fascinating? Of course not. So, what can you do when someone contacts you? Well, I would advice to reject projects that sound absolutely boring or uninteresting. Don't make excuses to a client unless you've made a mistake. Be polite, explain that the project is interesting but that it doesn't match your own interests.

On a first contact, I will also evaluate if the client's taste matches mine. They might contact you for something you don't like to do. I will reject them too. It is important that a client understands that *you take the project because it's interesting, because you like it.* This will be flattering for them, and you'll be frank too. They will respect you.

Sure, your interest might vary, not all projects are exciting, but if you have a good feeling with the person, the project usually runs smoothly.

You got the project, now, what next?

My motto is a famous one: *forms follows function.*

Your client is not an artist, it's useless to talk directly about artistic choices yet. This client wants to promote something to other people, for instance, visitors on a website. I'll ask the client which information the visitors would like to get, and add my suggestions too. The client understands that you won't propose artistic choices out of nowhere, but that your approach will match the required *functionality.*

Once you're sure about the *function*, you can get a glimpse of the client's taste and pick up the proposed *form.*

Estimate

Back home, you'll have to estimate the price of the project. I usually avoid telling it to the client the first time, because I might not take everything into account. I personally charge a standard amount per hour. I will divide the projects into subcategories, estimate the time taken for each one (make them a little longer) and come up with the price. I won't give the hour estimate to the client, though.

Try to ask people around you about their prices, as you shouldn't sound cheap. Working freelance, you'll have a lot of things to handle: insurances for health, etc. Your hour rate should be higher than for a regular job, because you won't be working 8h a day.

I also take into account the time spent on meetings, etc. before sending the estimate to the client (you can ask the person for a signed agreement, if you want). I also ask for 50% of the price. This way, the client is better involved into the project, and you'll both share the risks.

It is important to split your invoice into subcategories, so that if the client changes his mind, you can easily charge the right amount of money. Make it precise, like "The client will receive 5 mockups". You can of course then do more (don't sound greedy) but the client will clearly know that if he asks for 15 mockups, there's something wrong.

Now to the mockups

It is time to create the mockups. Usually, just simple images that you'll propose to the client. Try to come up with five different propositions. I don't mean changing colors, but real propositions. Bear in mind the *function* because you'll have to justify your choices to the client.

When it comes to color choices, I'm usually quite flexible. Of course, if something looks ugly, I'll notify the client. But I will formulate it in a *functional way* and not like a *personal taste*. For instance:

- ▶ "Using these two colors side by side prevents readability"
- ▶ "This color / font will drive attention to this element. Is it more important than the rest?"
- ▶ "All blocks here have the same functionality, it will help the visitor if they share the same color shade"

Sentences like this prove that you're seriously taking into account the functionality of your website, brochure, etc.

And then, it runs!

Once the mockups are accepted, the rest is fairly easy: the client is happy with the upcoming design, and you know what you have to do.

Organize yourself

You must be quite organized because you'll handle like 10 projects at the same time. The more the projects, the easier it is to fill your week. Most of the time, you'll be

waiting for the client to give you an answer about something.

Here is my workflow:

- ▶ I'm using a hierarchical on-line todo list (todoist.com)
- ▶ Each project has a section
- ▶ Each task within the project is listed
- ▶ For each project, keep track of the *next task you'll have to complete* (often called the GTD method). You've just sent a mockup to the client? Your next task becomes "Wait for an answer (mail sent on Dec 1st)". This way, you'll easily keep track of what's going on next.
- ▶ Everyday, scan your tasks
- ▶ If a task takes few time, do it as soon as possible (it can be, making of phonecall, sending an email)
- ▶ If it takes longer, you can organize yourself to do it today.

Be reactive: I always complete the tasks as soon as possible. If I'm in a rush, this is a problem but most of the time, you can devote some time in the morning to these. People quite enjoy my efficiency

No inspiration? Postponed the task. You can't do it too often but it's pointless to waste your time and energy if you're not in the mood.

No tasks to do?

Lucky man/girl! You've completed everything and don't have anything more to do. Believe me, this often happens.

Don't waste your free time. This time is for you! Spend it on preparing or creating personal projects! Experiment with new techniques, read tutorials, read blogs (I like ffffound.com a lot). *Your personal work will be a great motivation, and great showcase of your skills to your upcoming clients.*

Create art on your own, create your style!

99% of my DA gallery are personal projects. Nobody pays me for doing them, and I often work on them at night. But they are so motivating! Clients might enjoy them and give you some work related to your style. That's how you'll end up working on things you like.

Never neglect personal projects. You now, I sometimes shoot photos for clients, but I'll have constraints: the photos must sell a product or have some marketing goals. You'll enjoy leaving them behind when you work on your own. *Take time to build a solid portfolio that you like.*

My top advices

- ▶ Be a social person
- ▶ Master your tools and love them
- ▶ Understand the *functionality*
- ▶ Organize yourself
- ▶ Devote time to personal projects

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