

Nostalgia, Scams, and The Hard Work We Put In

Freelance marketplaces can be a blessing in disguise for those looking to showcase their abilities, or doomsday for those who struggle to rise above the growing competition. Either way, freelance platforms offer the chance to work with an array of companies and individuals that you wouldn't necessarily have the leeway of doing in a more traditional work environment. They provide the chance to display your versatility, really showcase what you can offer. Ten years ago, when I began this journey, the oDesks and the Elances of the freelance world were like magical places where opportunity seemed almost too good to be true. Sure, there was steep competition, and I was but one of many who had unique skills, but these sites were offering something that I couldn't obtain working a more "traditional" job.

I was seen as a reliable Executive Assistant who maybe had some special quality. I wasn't a top salesperson, so I wasn't quintessential to increasing the company's revenue. And I also wasn't management, so I wasn't the reason why operations ran smoothly. Answering phones, making sure all customers were left satisfied—or at least tried taming some of the beasts—in addition to filing records, making sure the filing room didn't turn into a storage unit, making sure the showroom floor and displays were attractive and clean, and on the off-chance help in assembling a furniture set or two, assisting in deliveries. If anyone has ever worked in retail, you understand that you're not limited to wearing one hat; you wear several that leave you wondering if your official job title really does fit. To your co-workers, there's no better fit.

That's what I mean by reliability; those I worked with didn't see me as anything other than the girl who answers the phones and obeys directions. They didn't see the behind the scenes work I'd done for the CEO that fluctuated between absurd and pretty darn cool. This is where I learned how to conduct competitor analysis and honed my editing skills. This is where I broke out of my shell and utilized people skills, I'd never known I had. This is where most of my skills derived from. But none of this was seen, which is why these freelancing sites were so attractive, yet so intimidating.

When I finally landed my first gig, a sense of accomplishment came over me that may sound trivial to anyone that's never dabbled in freelancing. It had been a long time coming, feeling that sense of confidence and pride. I was well on my way to losing both, and then I took a chance on a grant researching gig and I swear, it was that axiomatic hallelujah moment.

It was a simple gig, really, but I put my all into that gig as if it were a six-month project. As if it were the gig of a lifetime. In a sense, it was. This gig led to making a name for myself during the transition from Elance to Upwork. This is what ignited my freelancing career.

I can't help but get a bit nostalgic when thinking back to the earlier days when scams were spread fewer and farther in between. There's no doubt that they prevailed, but it seemed to be that they lived more in the shadows than they do now.

Red flags aren't always obvious, and the people administering these scams are starting to take more realistic approaches. I don't know about anybody else, but the thought of these rings of scams that are formulating produce an uneasiness that can't be easily described. I'm discouraged

that these false opportunities can be tempting. I'm angry that these individuals make a profit out of honest, hard workers. I'm stressed that this is what has become of gig work. I think of all those who are struggling to make ends meet, at their wits end because of failed attempt after failed attempt. I sympathize as much as emphasize—finding a gig these days is work within itself. The reality of rising grocery prices, gas prices, and let's not forget bills and other expenses, it all can be too much to grasp onto. It's overwhelming and it creates a tailspin.

And then you have those who post alluring job posts, throwing bait, just waiting to see who latches on. How many can they catch in a day—in a month? In a year? It's draining, but most of all, it's distressing.

Can we blame the freelancing platforms for not taking better care of their freelancers? Do we point fingers at the websites that give free range to these falsities? That's a tough question to answer, because there's moving parts involved here. We can easily say that Fiverr and Upwork are certainly benefiting from the popularity of their platforms, but we freelancers can paint different pictures. We're the ones applying and trying and deciphering which opportunities are not only worth it but are legit. We're the ones spending money trying to get our names out there. We're the ones putting in sweat to make a living. I guess what I'm trying to say is that while these scam artists are making ends meet, they're taking advantage of people who are trying to do the same. They're weaving these webs over what was once seen as such a cool, such an interesting way of making a living.

They are making it easy to look at the earlier days of these platforms as something nostalgic.