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How to Create & Start a Membership Website

By

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Creating a membership website doesn't have to be hard, in fact with this plan you'll have a simple, straight forward process to help you get all this done, either by doing it yourself or outsourcing it.

The basis of this guide is to help you determine what you need and how to find reliable resources. Because creating a membership website requires putting together several tasks, I don't recommend you do it all yourself, *you could*, and if you already have a lot of the content already you're off to a good start, however if you're just starting out here's help for what you will need and how to get it.

But first, let's start with the basics:

Determine Your Needs: These are the services and products you need for putting together your membership site.

Find The Best Sources: Find out what types of service providers you'll need to get your site up fast and the best places to find these folks.

Allocate Your Funds: Freelancers are going to throw a dizzying number of quotes and price ranges at you. Here's how to sort through these offers so you can create a budget for your project.

Recruit The Best People For The Job: Tips for how to attract the best freelancers.

Do Your Research: Help for doing you due diligence so you can avoid the freelancers who are at best reliable... and at worst con artists.

What You're Going to Need

Let's start by determining exactly what you need to put your membership site together.

Here's the checklist:

Services

Web Design: You'll need to create the overall design for your membership site most notably the sales page. Most simple sites include a graphical header, graphical footer and basic graphics.

Graphics: Most website software comes equipped with graphics, however you may need additional graphics like ebook covers, 'buy now' buttons, etc. If you choose to use a web designer most designers include graphic design as part of their services.

Sales Letter: Your sales letter is the page that persuades your prospects to buy your products. This page is usually the front (index) page of your site, unless you have a squeeze page...

Squeeze Page: A squeeze page is where you collect leads of interested prospects before they see the sales page. Typically you offer a freebie like a free report in exchange for a viewers email address. Once they join your list, they receive a series of emails that help close the sale.

Note: Having a squeeze page is optional. You'll want to test to see whether you get more customers by putting your sales letter on your site's front page or by having this email-capture page as the index page.

Also note that even if you don't use a squeeze page, you can include an exit pop-up on your sales page that encourages people to join your list. (In other words, a pop-up window appears only if the prospect leaves your sales page without buying.)

Autoresponder Emails: This is the series of emails your autoresponder sends out automatically to help build trust with your prospects and close the sale.

Your Product: Of course you'll need a product. This may be a text-based product such as ebooks or reports, a software product, a video product or audio product. Since you're running a membership site, you have a recurring monthly need for these products so remember to budget accordingly.

You'll also need a "freebie" product such a free report in order to entice prospects to join your free newsletter. Creating a bonus product goes a long way with persuading prospects to join your membership site.

Setting Up Your Membership Website

Setting up your website is fairly straight forward. You'll need 3 things:

- **A domain name**
- **Website creator**
- **Payment Processor**
- **Membership Script**

Domain Name: Register your domain name at an accredited domain name registrar such as Godaddy.com. Choose a name that is descriptive, preferably something that

indicated what your site is about. Choose a .com whenever possible as that's what most people will remember. It won't hurt you to choose a .org or some other suffix but people usually think of .com's if typing it to the search engines.

For example, easyveganrecipes.com is a good name because it's descriptive. These are also keywords that people use to find vegan recipes.

Web Hosting: I use Hostgator.com and love them and with all the web hosts floating about it pays to have a preferred recommendation. In fact here's where you can get a coupon code for your [first month of hosting free](#).

Note: Most domain name registrars also provide hosting, I don't recommend that, instead use two separate companies for these services. If something should ever happen to the company, you don't want them to have full control of your domain name and website.

Payment Processor: You'll want to choose a payment processor that allows recurring billing, each of these are recommended quality payment processors:

[Paypal.com](#)
[Clickbank.com](#)
[2CheckOut.com](#)

Membership Site Script: This is a script that automates the management of your site, including tasks like collecting payments, creating accounts for new customers, dealing with cancellations and even setting up affiliate programs for your site. The two top membership site scripts are [aMember Pro](#) and [WP-Member](#) (membership site plugin for the Wordpress blogging platform).

Creating your Website

You can virtually use any website software to create your membership site, for example [Xsitepro](#) is one of the easiest website tools and it's perfect for creating a membership site. You can certainly outsource having this done but I personally prefer creating my own website as I like having control and site builders like Xsitepro make it super simple.

You can also create a Wordpress blog for your membership site and [WP-Member](#) integrates very well with Wordpress.

Find the Best Resources

You just learned the pieces required for putting together your membership site.

The next step is putting together the meat or the content of what you will be providing your subscribers.

You can certainly do all of these pieces yourself and it may cost less by comparison but it can be a big job. Should you choose to outsource your content (*recommended*) this guide will help you with how to find the right resources and what they might cost you.

What Type of Service Providers Do You Need?

Ghostwriters: Ghostwriters write regular content, such as ebooks, articles and reports. Those with specialized skills may write scripts for videos.

Copywriters: Copywriters write sales materials, such as sales letters, squeeze page copy, ads, autoresponder emails, one time offers and similar.

Proofreader / Editor: A proofreader or editor is a useful addition to your team if you want to put out highly polished ebooks, reports, articles and other content. (While ghostwriters usually proof their own work, they won't catch many of their mistakes just because they're too close to the work.)

Ebook Designer: Most people simply convert their Word documents straight into PDF files. However, you can make a good first impression on your customers by hiring an ebook designer to format your document to make it look crisp and professional.

Web/Graphics Designers: As the name implies, these folks design your site and create your graphics.

Software Architect / Designer: If you're creating software products, then you may need a software architect to help you turn your idea into functional software. This person can help you design the features, the graphics user interface and so on. Then you give this spec sheet (brief) to your coder..

Programmers (Coders): This is the person who actually codes your software as specified in your brief.

Script Installation: If you're going to be installing a membership site script like those mentioned above, (amember Pro or P-Member) a script installer can help you install and customize the script. Many script providers include installation service for a small additional fee so you may want to check that first.

Voiceover Artists: If you're creating audio or video content and you'd rather not lend your voice to the project, you can hire a professional voiceover artist.

Video Producer: It's easy to create your own videos nowadays but you may want to

hire someone else to create and edit the video for you. Full-service video producers can offer you models, voiceovers, music, editing and everything else you need to create a video.

Help for Finding Freelancers Online

One of the most popular places to find a freelancer is by visiting some of the top freelance boards online. Here you post your projects and let freelancers bid on them. Then you choose the freelancer who best meets your needs.

Here are the top ten freelancing sites I recommend in alphabetical order:

Codelance.com: As the name implies, this is a useful site if you need a coder (such as a software or script programmer).

Elance.com: This is perhaps one of the best known freelancing sites, which means it's a great place to start no matter what your project. You can post projects for coders, ghostwriters, copywriters, designers... and anything else you need. *This is the site where I recommend you start your freelancer search.*

Freelance.com: This is another general freelancing site, but right now it's only available to those living in France, Spain, Morocco, Germany and Switzerland. They have plans to open a United States subsidiary soon.

Getafreelancer.com: Here's another large, general freelancing site. You can post almost any type of project you want, from audio services to website design. This is a good place to find a writer (since the site isn't focused on programming like so many others).

Guru.com: This is a site that accepts projects in many categories, from advertising to writing. However, you'll find this site works best if you're looking for freelancers for large projects.

Ifreelance.com: This is a general freelancing site. There seems to be a lot of writers on the site, so you may have some competitive bids coming in if you post a writing project.

Odesk.com: This general freelancing site is different from the others in that the focus is on hourly jobs rather than fixed-fee jobs. However, in most cases you're better off placing fixed-fee project ads (so that you know up front how much the project will cost).

Projectlance.com: While you can post a variety of projects on this board, this site is best for programming and web design jobs.

Rentacoder.com: This site has a focus on programming as well as website design

and development. They also focus on safety, since transactions must go through their escrow service. This is a good place to post small to mid-size coding projects.

Note: If you need programming work, start your search on this site.

Scriptlance.com: Last but not least, here's another site that focuses on more technical projects such as software coding and web development.

Post an ad on Craigslist.org. This is a free classified ads site. If you're interested in working with someone locally, this is a good place to start your search.

Search Google. Naturally, you can track down a freelancer simply by searching for service providers in Google.

Example: You can search for "ghostwriters," "copywriters," "web designers" and so on. You may want to use words like "freelance" alongside your description (e.g., "freelance ghostwriters" and "freelance web designers").

These are great business and marketing forums to ask your questions, I use them all and have received some great ideas and information. They are all free forums that requires a simple registration.

WarriorForum.com

SitePoint.com

DigitalPoint.com

If you use sites like Twitter.com or Linkedin.com ask for recommendations there as well. Whenever I put a request to Twitter I generally get some pretty good leads.

Go to Voices.com. If you need voiceover work, stop over at this site first.

Finding Freelancers Offline

There may be good, reliable and professional freelancers right in your own backyard. Here's where you can look:

Check local universities. College students are a great resource, I've tapped into my daughter's university more than a few times and had great luck, only problem is they get busy and also eventually graduate, but for the time you can use them, they're great!

Ask offline colleagues. Ask around your offline network for recommendations.

Allocating Your Funds

Many people new to outsourcing find that the whole pricing thing is a little dizzying. That's because you're likely to get a wide range of prices and quotes for any project.

For example, let's say you're looking for someone to create a 10,000 word ebook for you. You may find people charging one penny per word (\$100) all the way up to those charging thousands of dollars for the same project... and everything in between.

Freelancers charge varying rates not only because of the quality of their work, but other things come into play like their reputation for good work, their professionalism, their ability to meet deadlines and the level of customer service they provide.

That means you need to take into consideration all these factors when you're finding your freelancer.

Tip: Do NOT shop around based on price alone.

Low-price doesn't always mean poor quality. You can sometimes find good freelancers at low prices, perhaps because they're establishing their business, running a special or even because they live someplace where the cost of living is low.

Likewise, don't assume that a high-priced service provider is your best option. Some people charge above market rates but aren't necessarily worth the price.

So how do you decide who to hire when the rates vary?

Here's a two-step process to follow:

Step 1: Filter out the outliers. In many cases, you'll have extreme low and high price quotes.

You can take a few minutes to check out the people offering these quotes to see if there is any justification for their prices (e.g., perhaps someone offering a low bid is very qualified, but needs to build his portfolio). In most cases, however, you can just skip over these outliers.

Step 2: Filter the remaining list by quality and customer service. At this point you need to do your due diligence.

This means you need to first determine which freelancers can produce the quality of work you're interested in. Then you need to further narrow your list by determining who'll be able to deliver the project on time.

Creating Your Budget

Here's a list of nine common projects and the approximate prices you might expect to pay for each of these projects.

As you just discovered, however, prices vary. Depending on your needs, you may find freelancers who charge more or less.

This list, however, will give you a good starting point for creating your budget and allocating your funds...

- **Graphics (if done separately from web design):** If you need just a single graphic like an ecover, you can expect to pay around \$60-\$100 per graphic. If you need a mini-site graphics bundle (header, footer and ecover), budget around \$120-\$250.
- **Copywriting, sales letter:** Most of the great copywriters charge in the neighborhood of \$1000 to \$3000 for a sales letter. But do note that better writers tend to charge considerably more – \$5000, \$7500, \$10,000... even upwards of \$20,000. (You'll also find those charging considerably less, but many of the lower priced copywriters turn out lower converting sales pieces.)

The reason some copywriters charge so much more is because they have a proven track record with results. Obviously, the better your letter converts, the more money you make – so it's worth investing in a good copywriter.

- **Product creation, ebooks or reports:** Many ghostwriters charge in the neighborhood of five cents to fifteen cents per word. If you need specialized content or advanced-level content that requires more research and/or expertise, expect to pay more.

Tip: You can find those charging less, but research their quality of work and their delivery history carefully.

- **Product creation, ebook editor:** Editors and proofreaders charge varying rates depending on whether you want them to merely clean up typos or whether you need them to do "deep editing" which may include rewriting the content. Light proofreading usually starts at around a one to three cents per word, while heavy editing runs from three cents to six cents per word.

Note: Do NOT hire an editor to tweak your sales materials, as doing so may ruin the conversion rate.

- **Product creation, audio book:** If you need to create an audio book, keep in mind that you'll first need to hire a ghostwriter to create the text. Then you'll need to hire a voiceover artist.

Some artists charge by the number of pages in your ebook, while others charge according to how many minutes the final product ends up being. Obviously, it's better for you to find someone who charges per-page (that way you know up front the cost for the entire project). For non sales materials, expect to pay at least \$5 to \$10 per page.

- **Product creation, software.** Most coders charge at least \$25 to \$50 per hour to develop software. The more complex your software project, the bigger your per-project fee.

You may be able to find good coders at low prices, simply because they live in a part of the world where the cost of living is lower. Just be sure there isn't a language barrier that prevents them from understanding your needs.

- **Product creation, video:** Video creation prices vary largely depending on what all you need from the producer.

For example, do you need them to create the script? Do you need them to provide models, voiceover artists, or are you just looking for a simple power-point presentation? Also, the content will affect the price. An advertisement that they create will cost more than an informational video.

Some producers charge per hour of their time, some per minute of video with some of the additions, like models, will be extra. Always be sure to ask to make sure you know what's included in the price.

Expect to pay at least \$100 for a one or two minute video. Higher-end filming and editing can run into the thousands for a video that's five minutes.

- **Script installation:** You can get simple scripts installed for as low as \$25. Those that are more complex or require customization may require \$100 or more. If you need something coded or created from scratch, then you'll need to hire a coder, not an installer.

- **Web design (with graphics):** If you have a simple website, you can find designers for as low as \$300 to \$500 per site. Expect to pay more for more complex sites, bigger sites or those requiring extensive graphics and design.

Finding the Best People for the Job

Now it's time to write a good project description that will attract good talent. The more details you provide in your project description, the more qualified candidates you'll have stepping forward to bid on your job.

Note: For the purposes of this discussion we'll focus on placing an ad on a freelancing board like elance.com. If you've found your freelancers elsewhere, then just focus on the "project description" part of this chapter.

Below we'll quickly go through the steps needed to post your project on a site like eLance, and then you'll get six project description templates you can modify and use to post your projects.

1) Open an account

Your first step is to open an account on those freelancing boards where you want to post job descriptions.

Generally this means you'll choose a *username* and *password*, fill in your *contact information* and verify your *email address*.

Some sites (like Elance.com) will require that you verify your phone number and take an "admissions test" first (this test simply shows that you're familiar with how the site works).

Once you're verified, you can move on to the next step...

2) Decide on the details of your project posting

Before you can post your job description on a freelance site, you'll need to include a few important details: These details include:

Category. Look over the categories carefully and choose those that best match your project description. The better category you choose, the more qualified candidates who'll find you.

For example, while copywriting technically is "nonfiction writing," stick with a more descriptive category like "sales writing." That way you'll get more qualified and experienced bidders.

Note: Most sites will let you choose more than one category and this is a good idea, as it will allow more people to see your ad. But again, stick to the most relevant categories.

Keywords. Keywords are those words your potential service provider will use to find

your project.

Some freelancing sites allow you to enter keywords into your post. In other cases, you just need to include your keywords in your project title, project description and "desired skills" field.

You should include as many variations on your keywords as possible to increase your visibility.

For example, if you're looking for a ghostwriter, then you might include keywords like: writer, ghostwriter, ebook creation, ebook writer, article writer, etc.

If you're looking for a voiceover artist, then you might include keywords like: voiceover artist, voice over, voiceover talent, voice talent, narration, audio book.

If you're looking for a programmer, you might include keywords like: programmer, software programmer, coder, software development, PHP coder, C++ coder, etc.

If you're looking for a copywriter, you might include words like: copywriter, ad writer, sales letter writer, copy writer, sales writer, direct response writer.

Budget. You have the option of submitting an open budget where you don't set any guidelines or offer a price range (e.g., "\$500 to \$1500).

If you offer an open budget, you're probably going to have to sort through a lot more proposals and that could include outliers that you'll likely filter out anyway. It's better to offer a price range within your budget but keep it close to the market average.

Note: Sometimes you'll see advice that you should post cheap price ranges and justify it by including the line, "This project should be easy for anyone who knows what they're doing."

Personally I wouldn't bother with that. The experienced professionals know whether a project is truly easy or difficult, and they'll bid accordingly no matter what you say on the matter.

Fixed fee vs. hourly fee. Choose fixed fees over hourly fees. That way you know EXACTLY how much you're paying for a project. Hourly fees rarely go under the estimate, they're more likely to go over, meaning it will cost you more money.

Escrow. Many freelancing sites offer the option of escrow, some actually require it. Whenever possible, use it. It protects your money. And since the service provider doesn't know you, most will be happy to use escrow since it protects them too.

Start date / delivery deadline. You're likely to get more proposals if you offer some flexibility in the delivery deadline. However, if you are on a strict timeline, then be sure to

emphasize that in your description so that you don't get bids from those who can't deliver on time.

Sealed vs. non-sealed bids. Most people who submit project descriptions on freelance boards solicit sealed bids (meaning others can't see their bid amounts).

If you offer open bidding, then you'll get people who are undercutting each other and selling themselves mainly on price. This may discourage those with higher prices from bidding, because of that, I suggest you seal your bids so that only you can see them.

3) Creating your Project Descriptions

Now that you've sorted out all the details, it's time to create your project descriptions.

Overall, the more details that you provide, the more qualified the candidates you'll get. So for example, if you're looking for a copywriter, you'll get loads of sales writers sending proposals. But if you ask for a copywriter for a specific topic, you'll get more qualified people bidding on the job.

Below are six examples of typical project descriptions. Please feel free to use these descriptions as templates when you start posting projects on freelancing sites...

Example "Sales Letter" Project Description

Title: Sales letter needed for fitness membership site.

Description: Do you have a proven track record writing high-converting sales letters? Do you write for the bodybuilding markets? If so, this job might be for you.

Here are the details...

Target market: Young men age 18-35 who are interested in bodybuilding to strip the fat and pack on muscle.

Product: Recurring monthly membership in a site that delivers new fitness ebooks and videos each month. For the sales letter you'll only need to review one 50 page ebook and one ten minute video. You'll also get access to the tools as offered as bonuses, such as calorie counters, an online exercise journal and a spreadsheet that tracks progress.

The letter: Your job is to create a traditional sales letter that turns my targeted browsers into buyers. Please include in your bid the cost to write the letter, two

headline alternatives, and one revision (if we need to tweak to improve conversions).

Note: I'm more interested in you creating a persuasive letter rather than a letter of a certain length.

What I need from you: Please send me your sample sales letters for bodybuilding products (or similar). Please also send me information about the conversion rates you've generated in the past (and whether these results were for bodybuilding products).

I look forward to working with you!

Example "Autoresponder Email" Project Description

Title: Copywriter needed for "Learn French" autoresponder series.

Description: I'm looking for a copywriter who has experience and results writing persuasive autoresponder email sequences.

Target market: Mainly middle-age and retired people from the United States, Canada and England who want to learn a little French so they can spend time in France.

Product: I'm looking for three (3) emails ranging in length from 250 to 500 words each (you decide which is best) that will persuade people to join my "Learn French" site. You'll get access to the complete site as well as the current sales letter to help you write the emails.

Knowledge of French not required.

What I need from you: Please send me your samples of autoresponder sequences you've created in the past (along with the results these sequences generated). If you've worked in any language niches before, please let me know.

I look forward to working with you!

Example "Web Design" Project Description

Title: Simple web mini-design needed (plus graphics) for my gardening niche membership site.

Description: I'm looking for someone who can create a simple yet professional looking mini-site for the gardening market based on one of three color schemes that I provide to you (your choice, you use the one you think works best).

Mini-site design should include:

- Header graphic.
- Footer graphic.
- Background graphic.
- Membership card cover graphic (in 2 sizes).
- "Sign Up" button.
- Matching checkmark graphics (for a sales letter).

Turnaround time is two weeks after I accept your proposal and bid. Please don't bid if you can't complete the site within two weeks.

Please send me your portfolio samples. In particular, show me any gardening samples and member card designs you've created.

Thanks for your proposals!

Example "Membership Content Creation" Project Description

Title: Ghostwriter needed to create 10 affiliate marketing membership lessons.

Description: I'm looking for a 20,000 word content (in total, in the form of "10 lessons") on the topic of affiliate marketing. The best candidate will have personal experience with internet marketing, affiliate marketing as well as Google AdSense, WordPress blogs and search engine optimization. At a minimum, you should have written about these topics before.

I'll provide a complete outline (that includes chapters and subtopics within these chapters) for all 10 lessons.

I'm looking for a content that's packed with information for the beginner affiliate marketer... yet the lessons shouldn't read like a textbook. Can you take a serious topic and create an engaging yet informative lesson? Then you might be perfect for this job.

Send me your proposal that includes delivery deadline and price. Also include samples of your writing – especially those samples related to affiliate marketing, internet marketing, AdSense, blogging or SEO. Do let me know of any personal "hands on" experience you have with these topics.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Example "Voiceover" Project Description

Title: Female voiceover artist needed to create audio book.

Description: I'm looking for female voice talent to narrate a 20,000 word (about 50 page) ebook on the topic of parenting an autistic child.

This ebook was written by a nurse – so your narration should be in a confident, trustworthy and authoritative voice... yet approachable, soothing and friendly. I want readers to get the sense that their healthcare provider is talking to them personally.

You'll also need to be able to send the finished product to me as a downloadable MP3 file. The file should be ready to give directly to my customers.

Does this sound like something you can do? If so, send me a few samples of your voiceover work along with your bid for the project and expected delivery date. I look forward to hearing from you!

Example "Proofreader" Project Description

Title: Proofreader needed for a monthly membership site.

Description: Are you a grammar nut? Do typos drive you nuts? Do you have a strong urge to correct people who end their sentences with prepositions? If so, you might be perfect for this project!

What I need is a proofreader who can do "light" proofing of a "monthly" membership site (on the topic of dog training). By light proofing, I mean that you look for typos like:

- Spelling errors that the spellchecker can't catch ("be" instead of "bee").
- Wrong word usage ("their" instead of "there").
- And problems with punctuation.

Heavy editing such as rewriting or otherwise restructuring sentences will NOT be needed for this project.

I'm happy with the content my ghostwriter is creating as it is – I just need your eagle eye to catch the errors so we can put a little spit and polish on the final product.

The keyword of this project is "monthly"; and I need someone who can work on this project on a monthly basis.

If this looks like your perfect job, send me a description of your past work, the reason why I should choose you and your references. I look forward to hearing from you!

Do Your Research

Unfortunately there are service providers who are sloppy and unprofessional. They miss deadlines and don't communicate with you. There are also scammers out there.

That's why you should *NOT* shop around based on price alone.

Always take into consideration things like quality of the work, customer service, history, ability to meet deadlines, professionalism and so on.

Doing Your Due Diligence

Fortunately, it's pretty easy to weed out those who deliver sloppy results (or no results) from those professionals who deliver high quality work on time.

Here are 4 things I use to weed out the non-professionals:

CONSIDER samples
CONTACT references
CHECK feedback
COLLECT information

Let's look at these four points in detail...

1) Ask For Samples

Always ask for samples, specifically ask for samples that are related to the project you're working on.

If you need a sales letter for a health product, for example, ask to see samples from other health products. If you need graphics for a gaming site, ask for similar samples from their portfolio, and so on.

If someone won't give you samples **don't use them**. Even if they tell you that they're new and haven't built a portfolio yet. That's because even someone who's never had a client before will provide some type of sample, even if it's something they created just for the purpose of showing to potential clients.

What I'm trying to stress is don't let price or anything else sway you on this point. If you can't see any samples, then you have no way of judging whether this person is capable of turning out the work you require.

At the same time, be cautious of freelancers or ghostwriters who are showing everything that they did for their clients. Usually these "written materials" are exclusive property of the client, and this may be a sign that they won't care about YOUR intellectual property

even after you get the exclusive rights of the content that they'll be providing you.

Side Note: Sometimes you'll hear business folks advising that you ask service providers to create something specific for you for free so that you can judge their work.

This is NOT a good idea.
While a few inexperienced or desperate beginners may accept this, the most qualified freelancers won't accept that offer (in part because some scammers put together their projects by getting "freebies" from various sources).

The professionals respect their time and expect you to respect their time too. (Plus they usually have plenty of samples you can gauge.)

If you want specific examples from the BEST candidates, then pay for these small samples. For example, if you are looking to hire a ghostwriter for a big project, then hire a few ghostwriters to write 1000 words for you. Then award the big project to the writer who turned out the best work.

2) CONTACT References

If you like the quality of a freelancer's work, move that person to your short list and take this next step: Contact their references (i.e., the people who gave testimonials).

Just reading their testimonials isn't enough. If the person who gave the testimonial or reference has their contact information, even if it's just a website, then you're within your rights to contact them.

Since the person you're contacting doesn't get anything out of answering you, s(he) is going to be answering out of the goodness of his/her own heart. And that means you can't weigh this person down with questions. Instead, get straight to the point and ask a simple question (one that only takes a minute or two to answer).

Here's a simple email you can use for this purpose...

Subject: [name], do you still recommend [name of freelancer]?

Dear [name],

You're listed as a reference on [name of freelancer's] website here: [enter page where testimonial appears].

As I'm considering using [name of freelancer's] services, I just have one quick question for you: Do you still recommend [his/her] services? If not, why not?

If you'd rather get in touch via phone, you can call me at [phone number].
Otherwise, just hit reply to email me.

Thank you in advance for your time!

Sincerely,

[your name]

P.S. Your [type of project – such as "graphics" or "sales letter"] looks great!

You won't get feedback from everyone you contact, but don't make any assumptions one way or another if someone doesn't reply back to you.

3) CHECK Feedback

If you're hiring someone from a freelance board, check their onsite ratings and reviews (i.e., feedback from other users).

You're looking for someone who has a long, good history.

If someone has a long history and lots of ratings, you can expect to see a couple poor ratings mixed in. That's normal, as someone who's been in business for a long time occasionally will get a disgruntled customer.

Just make sure any negative ratings are the rare exception rather than a pattern.

Be wary of someone who's new, even if they have good ratings. People who are new don't have much of reputation to protect, so it's easier for them to ruin that reputation since they can just rebuild it later or start under a new name.

That doesn't mean you should assume that all new service providers are scammers, not at all, just make sure that you don't jump in headfirst because someone has good ratings. Be sure to complete all the steps of this due diligence process before making a final decision.

4) COLLECT Information

If everything else checks out, then your last step is to collect addition history and reputation information on your potential freelancer. And you can do this via a simple search in Google. Here's how...

➔ **Plug the freelancer's name into Google.** You can also search for variations on a person's name (such as "Joseph Johnson" and "Joe Johnson"). Just be

sure that references to the person are referencing your potential freelancer and not someone with the same name.

- ➔ **Read forum posts.** If you found the person on a forum – or if you know his username on other forums – read some of his past posts.
- ➔ **Search for the freelancer’s known email addresses.** While you may find people with the same name online, it’s extremely rare to find more than one person with the same email address (the exception is if someone sells their domain name). As such, you can usually trust that the email address is referencing your potential freelancer.
- ➔ **Search for the freelancer’s other contact information.** If you know his phone number, plug it into a Google search and see what pops up.
- ➔ **Plug in other information.** When you do the above searches, you may uncover usernames, phone numbers, email addresses and so on that you didn’t know about before. Run Google searches for this new information as well.

So what are you looking for?

You’re basically looking for a good history, professionalism, courteous discussions with others, good testimonials from others and simply general signs of good business practices.

You want to be sure that this person has not only a good reputation, but a long, established history online.

Red flags would be things like:

- Getting banned from forums or other sites.
- A pattern of customer (or affiliate) complaints.
- Disrespectful, unprofessional or otherwise poor attitude on forums.

If you get red flags and bad feeling about someone, move on. There are plenty of other service providers who’d be happy to meet your needs.

Getting Off to a Good Start

Even if you’ve found the perfect freelancer who has a great track record, a lack of communication can delay or even prevent the project from continuing.

Here are six simple steps to make sure a bump on the outsourcing road doesn’t turn into

a disaster...

Set Up Escrow

I've mentioned this a few times but it's worth repeating: *Use escrow.*

Not only does it protect you in the event that a project isn't delivered, it also makes the freelancer feel at ease since he's guaranteed payment if he completes and delivers the project.

If you found the freelancer through another channel, you can still use an escrow service.

One way to do that is by going to a freelancing board like RentACoder.com, which is known for its escrow service, posting your project... and hiring the freelancer officially through the site. Then you can use their escrow service for the project.

Note: As these freelancing sites get a commission from the freelancer, you may need to add that extra (commission fee) to the project budget.

Send Detailed Briefs

Sending detailed briefs and specifications to your freelancer is one of the most important steps you can take. Here are a few examples:

- **Web design:** Tell the designer what color schemes you had in mind, what types of graphics and what overall "mood" you'd like your site to convey. Let him/her know who your target market is (e.g., who'll use the site). Then show your designer samples of sites and graphics that you like being sure to express specifically what you like about the samples.

Be sure to tell your designer if there is anything you don't want included in your design. For example, if your audience is comprised mostly of middle-age folks, you might ask they they not use 10 point font that requires squinting to read.

- **Copywriting:** Most copywriters will give you a questionnaire to fill out, which will ask questions about your target market, your product, your competitor's product, your unique selling proposition, your offer, your guarantee and so on.

If your copywriter doesn't ask this information, consider finding one who does. Simply put, you don't want to work with a copywriter who's so inexperienced that he doesn't realize he needs to ask you for this information.

- **Ghostwriting:** Here you need to be as specific as possible about what topics

you want included (and excluded – if any) in your membership site content, the length of each lesson, and who your target market is.

Simply saying, “I want a 3,000 word lesson on dog training” isn’t enough. You need to outline to show your ghostwriter what topics you want covered.

Example: “Lesson 1 of this membership site should cover the pros and cons of different styles of training, such as clicker training, treat training and praise training. It should also cover when to start training a puppy, how long the sessions should be, how many sessions per day, how many sessions per week, and what to do if a puppy can’t hold his attention...”

Note: It’s always helpful if you let your writer know your opinions and how you’d like to approach a topic.

For example, if all dog trainers are praising clicker training, then your writer will lean towards emphasizing clicker training in your lessons too... UNLESS you tell him differently.

You may also point to writing styles and samples that you like and tell him or her what, specifically, you like about the samples.

Sign Contracts

If you won't be using an escrow service through a freelancing board, work up your own contract, it actually protects both parties.

Some freelances will have their own contracts for you to sign. If not, you should contact a lawyer to draft up an agreement you can use.

Below are the main five things to include in your contract (your attorney can add in the other “standard contract” items):

- **Payment terms.** If you’re using escrow, mention this in the contract – and state who pays for the escrow fees. If you’re not using escrow (which I don’t recommend), then lay out the payment terms.

For smaller projects, it’s common for the business person (that’s you) to pay half the fee up front and half upon delivery. For larger projects, you may pay in thirds. For even bigger projects, you can pay 25% at a time (as the freelancer delivers 25% of the project). If it’s an ongoing project, then you’ll likely pay weekly.

Tip: If you’re not sure of what terms to set up, talk to the freelancer to come to a mutual agreement that’s fair to both of you.

Be sure to also lay out how you'll pay (e.g., Paypal? Bank wire? Personal check? 2Checkout? Something else?).

- **Delivery deadlines.** Your agreement should state the beginning and end date of the project. If it's a project that will take more than a couple weeks, you may ask for smaller pieces of the project to be delivered on certain dates.
- **Project specifications.** This is the heart of the contract. Here you list exactly what the project is and how much money you're paying for the project. Be specific and detailed.
- **Copyrights.** Be sure to include in your contract who owns copyright to the work when it's completed (and paid for).
- **Contract terminations and kill fees.** If something happens that you need to terminate the project midway through, usually you'll need to pay a "kill fee" (to compensate the freelancer for the time he's put in as well as any opportunities lost). Ask your freelancer what his kill fee is.

State Your Expectations

The contract you sign will go a long ways towards setting expectations, as you both know what you're expected to do and when.

However, it's also helpful to talk about non-contractual expectations. By this I mean things that you'd like or expect to happen (but you won't enforce by contract).

These expectations are mainly a matter of personal preference. For example, you might want to mention that you'd like an update on projects every 48 or 72 hours. Or you might prefer to talk on the phone once per week or have a face to face weekly meeting if you're working with someone locally.

Start Small

It's time to get started on your first project together. The key will be to **start slow and start small.**

You don't want to give your new freelancer a big job until you've first had a chance to see if you work well together on smaller jobs.

Don't expect new people on your team to work under tight deadlines. For example, don't ask a copywriter to complete a sales letter fast because you're launching the product in five days. If something happens that you can't keep your promises to your customers, it's YOUR reputation on the line.

In other words, don't make promises to customers and partners that you're not absolutely sure you can keep.

Regardless of how you learn or get set up with your membership site I hope you'll stick to making the commitment. Creating a membership site is an excellent way to generate income online and can be so rewarding, both personally and financially. *Enjoy!*

My Best for your success,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mrs. Liz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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