

Freelancer Starter Kit

Everything you need to launch, price, and land your first clients

By Enoch Thoreux

This guide is for people who want to freelance but don't know where to start. It's not untested theory, but practical steps to go from "I have skills" to "I have paying clients."

By the end of this guide, you'll have:

1. A clear service offering
2. A rate that doesn't undervalue you
3. A simple system for finding clients
4. Templates for proposals, contracts, and invoices
5. The mindset to handle rejection and imposter syndrome
6. Real examples of freelancers who made it work
7. A plan for your first 30 days

Let's gooo!

Contents

- 1** **Define Your Offer:** Niche down and stand out
- 2** **Set Your Rate:** The math that works
- 3** **Find Clients:** Three proven channels
- 4** **Close the Deal:** From lead to signed contract
- 5** **Deliver and Get Paid:** Do great work, collect money
- 6** **The Freelancer Mindset:** Handling the mental game
- 7** **Case Studies:** Real freelancer journeys
- 8** **Your First 30 Days:** Week-by-week action plan
- 9** **Templates & Scripts:** Copy-paste resources
- 10** **Worksheets:** Plan your business

Chapter 1

Define Your Offer

Most new freelancers make a fatal mistake: they try to do everything for everyone. “I’m a designer” or “I do marketing” is too vague. Clients don’t hire generalists—they hire specialists who solve specific problems.

The Offer Formula

A strong freelance offer has three parts:

- **Who** you help (target client)
- **What** you do (specific service)
- **Result** they get (outcome)

Weak: *“I’m a web designer”*

Strong: *“I design conversion-focused landing pages for SaaS startups that turn visitors into trial signups”*

Weak: *“I do social media”*

Strong: *“I create 30 days of Instagram content for real estate agents that generates listing inquiries”*

Exercise: Write your offer using this template:

"I help [specific type of client] with [specific service] so they can [specific result]."

Pick a Niche (At Least to Start)

Niching down feels scary. "Won't I miss out on opportunities?" No. You'll actually get MORE opportunities because:

- You become referable (*"I know someone who does exactly that"*)
- You can charge more (*specialists > generalists*)
- Your marketing becomes easier (*you know exactly where your clients hang out*)
- You get better faster (*repetition builds expertise*)

You can always expand later. Start narrow, then widen.

The Niche Selection Matrix

Score each potential niche from 1-5:

Factor	Question to Ask
Interest	Do I enjoy working with these people/problems?
Expertise	Can I deliver real results here?
Market Size	Are there enough potential clients?
Willingness to Pay	Do they have budget and see this as important?
Accessibility	Can I actually reach them?

Aim for niches that score 3+ in all categories, and 4-5 in at least two.

Chapter 2

Set Your Rate

Pricing is where most freelancers leave money on the table. Here's how to calculate a rate that actually works.

The Math

Start with what you need to earn:

Annual income goal	\$80,000
+ Taxes (~25-30%)	\$24,000
+ Health insurance	\$6,000
+ Software/tools	\$2,000
+ Other expenses	\$3,000
Total needed	\$115,000

Now divide by billable hours. You won't bill 40 hours/week—expect 20-25 hours of actual client work. The rest is admin, marketing, and life.

$\$115,000 \div 1,200 \text{ billable hours} = \$96/\text{hour minimum}$

Round up. You'd charge at least \$100/hour.

Hourly vs. Project Pricing

Hourly rates are easy to calculate but have a ceiling—there are only so many hours. Project pricing is better because:

- Clients care about outcomes, not hours
- You're rewarded for being efficient
- No awkward time-tracking conversations
- To convert: estimate the hours, multiply by your rate, then add 20% buffer.

Pro tip: Never quote on the spot. Say *“Let me put together a proposal for you”* and send it within 24 hours. This gives you time to think and positions you as professional.

The Value Question

Before every project, ask: *“What is this worth to the client?”*

If your landing page redesign could generate \$50,000 in additional revenue for them, charging \$3,000 is a no-brainer investment. Price based on value, not just time.

Pricing Tiers Strategy

Offer three options instead of one:

Tier	What's Included	Psychology
Basic	Core deliverable only	Anchor (rarely chosen)
Standard	Core + extras	What you want them to pick
Premium	Everything + white glove	Makes Standard look reasonable

Most clients pick the middle option. Price it where you want to land.

Chapter 3

Find Clients

You don't need a huge audience or fancy marketing. You need a simple system that puts you in front of the right people consistently.

The Three Client Channels

1. Your Network (Fastest)

Your first clients almost always come from people you already know. Send this message to 20 people:

"Hey [Name], I'm starting to take on freelance [service] work, specifically helping [target clients] with [specific outcome]. If you know anyone who might need this, I'd appreciate an introduction. Happy to give you more details if helpful!"

That's it. No pitch, just awareness. People want to help—let them.

2. Outbound (Most Controllable)

Cold outreach works when done right. The key: make it about them, not you.

Bad: *“Hi, I’m a freelance designer looking for work...”*

Good: *“Hi [Name], I noticed [specific observation about their business]. I have an idea that could [specific benefit]—would you be open to a quick chat?”*

Send 5-10 personalized messages per day. Expect a 10-20% response rate. That’s 5-10 conversations per week, which should yield 1-2 clients per month.

3. Content (Slowest but Scales)

Share what you know. Write about problems your target clients face. Post on LinkedIn, Twitter, or a simple blog. This builds trust before they ever talk to you.

Content compounds over time—something you write today can bring clients for years.

Where to Find Clients

LinkedIn: Best for B2B services. Use Sales Navigator to find decision-makers.

Twitter/X: Great for tech, startups, creator economy. (and follow me [@enochthru](#)x while you’re at it)

Industry communities: Slack groups, Discord servers, forums where your clients hang out.

Upwork/Fiverr: Good for building initial testimonials, but don’t stay there long (race to the bottom on price).

Chapter 4

Close the Deal

You've got a lead. Now what? Here's the process from first contact to signed contract.

The Discovery Call

This is NOT a sales pitch. It's a conversation to understand if you can help them and if you want to work together.

Ask these questions (in your own words):

1. What are you trying to accomplish?
2. Why is this important right now?
3. What have you tried before?
4. What does success look like?
5. What's your timeline?
6. Do you have a budget in mind?

Listen more than you talk. Take notes. At the end, say: "This sounds like something I can help with. I'll send over a proposal by [date]."

The Proposal

Keep it simple. Include:

Summary: Restate their problem and goals (shows you listened)

Solution: What you'll do, in plain English

Deliverables: Exactly what they get

Timeline: When they get it

Investment: Your price (call it investment, not cost)

Next Steps: How to move forward

Send proposals as PDFs. Follow up after 2-3 days if you don't hear back.

Handling Objections

"That's more than we budgeted."

Response: *"I understand. We can adjust the scope to fit your budget. What's most important to you?"* Then offer your Basic tier or a reduced scope.

"We need to think about it."

Response: *"Of course. What questions do you have that would help with the decision?"* Often they have a concern they haven't voiced.

“Can you do it faster?”

Response: *“I can prioritize this project, but rush work typically requires a 25% rush fee to cover the disruption to other clients. Does that work for you?”*

The Contract

Always use a contract. It protects both of you. Include:

- Scope of work (what’s included AND what’s not)
- Payment terms (50% upfront is standard)
- Revision limits (e.g., “2 rounds of revisions included”)
- Timeline and milestones
- Ownership/rights transfer
- Cancellation terms

Chapter 5

Deliver and Get Paid

Client Onboarding Checklist

A smooth start prevents problems later. Before you begin work:

- Contract signed
- Deposit received
- Kick-off call scheduled or completed
- Access/logins received (if needed)
- Brand guidelines/assets collected
- Key stakeholders identified
- Communication channel agreed (email, Slack, etc.)
- Meeting cadence set (weekly check-ins?)
- Timeline milestones confirmed
- Success criteria defined

Template: Send a “Welcome” email after signing that covers all logistics. It makes you look professional and prevents “where do I send files?” confusion.

Communication

Overcommunicate, especially at the beginning. Send weekly updates even if they don't ask. Clients hate silence—it makes them nervous.

When you hit a problem, tell them immediately with a proposed solution. Don't wait until it's a crisis.

The Weekly Update Template

Subject: [Project Name] - Week [#] Update

Hi [Name],

This week:

- [Completed item 1]
- [Completed item 2]

Next week:

- [Planned item 1]
- [Planned item 2]

Need from you:

- [Any blockers or requests]

On track? Yes / Slight delay [explain if needed]

Let me know if you have questions!

Getting Paid

Payment terms to consider:

- **50/50:** 50% upfront, 50% on completion (most common)
- **100% upfront:** For small projects or new clients
- **Milestone-based:** For larger projects, tie payments to deliverables

Use professional invoicing tools: Wave (free), Stripe Invoicing, QuickBooks, or FreshBooks.

If a client is late on payment:

Day 1: Friendly reminder

Day 7: Follow up, mention late fee

Day 14: Pause work until payment received

Day 30+: Consider collections or writing it off

After the Project

- Ask for a testimonial (strike while the iron is hot)
- Ask for referrals (“Know anyone else who might need this?”)
- Add them to your portfolio
- Follow up in 3 months for repeat work

Chapter 6

The Freelancer Mindset

The hardest part of freelancing isn't finding clients or doing the work. It's managing your own head. Here's how to handle the mental game.

Imposter Syndrome

That voice that says "Who am I to charge for this? They're going to find out I don't know what I'm doing"? Every freelancer hears it. Even the successful ones.

The truth: You don't need to be the world's best at something to help someone. You just need to be better than them at it. And you are, or they wouldn't be hiring you.

Reframe imposter syndrome as a sign you're growing. If you felt 100% confident, you'd be playing it too safe.

Practical tactics:

Keep a "wins" file: Screenshot every positive message, testimonial, or result. Read it when doubt creeps in.

Remember the beginner: You're not competing with 20-year veterans. You're helping people who know less than you about this thing.

Charge anyway: Confidence follows action. The more you charge and deliver, the more confident you become.

Handling Rejection

You will get rejected. A lot. Proposals ignored, clients ghosting, "we went with someone else" emails. It stings, but it's part of the game.

Reframes that help:

- **Not a fit ≠ not good enough:** Sometimes it's budget, timing, or they needed something different. It's rarely about your worth.
- **Rejection is filtering:** Every "no" gets you closer to the right "yes." Bad-fit clients who pass are doing you a favor.
- **Volume solves rejection:** If you send 50 pitches and get 5 clients, the 45 rejections don't matter. Focus on the wins.

The 24-hour rule: Feel bad for 24 hours max. Vent, be disappointed, eat ice cream. Then move on. Dwelling helps no one.

Staying Motivated Without a Boss

No one will fire you for watching Netflix all day. That freedom is a blessing and a curse.

Systems that work:

Time blocking: Schedule your client work, outreach, and admin in specific blocks. Treat them like meetings you can't skip.

Daily minimums: Set one non-negotiable: “I will send 5 pitches every day no matter what.”

Environment design: Work somewhere you can focus. Coffee shop, co-working space, a dedicated desk at home.

Accountability: Find a freelance friend or join a community. Knowing someone else will ask “How’d this week go?” helps.

The Feast / Famine Cycle

Every freelancer experiences this: too much work one month, scrambling the next. Here’s how to smooth it out:

Never stop marketing: Even when you’re busy. Dedicate 20% of your time to finding future work.

Build a pipeline: Keep a list of potential clients at different stages. Always have conversations happening.

Save aggressively: When feasting, save 30-50%. When famine hits, you’re not panicking.

Consider retainers: Monthly clients smooth out income. Even small recurring revenue helps.

Comparison is Poison

Someone on Twitter just hit \$50k months. Someone else just landed a dream client. Meanwhile, you’re still grinding for \$3k projects.

Remember:

- You're seeing highlight reels, not the whole story
- Everyone started somewhere (usually where you are)
- Your path is your path—different isn't worse
- Focus on being better than you were last month

Mental health note: Freelancing can be isolating. If you're struggling, talk to someone. A therapist, a friend, a community. Going it alone doesn't mean suffering alone.

Chapter 7

Case Studies

Real stories of freelancers who figured it out. Different paths, same destination: a sustainable freelance business.

Maria — The Reluctant Designer

From agency burnout to \$8k months in 6 months

The situation: Maria was a graphic designer at an agency making \$55k/year. The hours were brutal, the clients were assigned to her, and she had zero creative control. She dreamed of freelancing but thought “I’m not senior enough.”

The pivot: During COVID, her agency cut salaries. She started taking small projects on the side—logo refreshes for friends of friends, Instagram templates for local businesses. Nothing fancy, \$300-500 each.

The breakthrough: One client, a fitness coach, loved her work and referred her to three other coaches. Maria realized: she didn’t need to serve “businesses,” she could specialize in fitness/wellness brands. They had similar needs, traveled in the same circles, and were happy to pay for design that matched their energy.

The result: Within 6 months, she was at \$8k/month working with

personal trainers, yoga studios, and supplement brands. She quit the agency. Her secret? She niched down to people she genuinely enjoyed, and they referred her everywhere.

Key lesson: “I thought I needed to be for everyone. Turns out, being for a specific someone made everything easier.”

James — The Side Hustle That Grew Up

Copywriter who replaced his salary in 18 months

The situation: James worked in corporate marketing, writing boring internal communications. He was decent at writing but had no portfolio, no audience, and no clue where to start.

The experiment: He took a copy course online (\$500) and started offering landing page rewrites on Upwork just to practice. First gig: \$150. But he got a 5-star review. Then another. Then another.

The grind: For 8 months, James worked his day job and freelanced nights/weekends. He averaged \$1,500/month extra. Not life-changing, but proof it could work. He raised his rates every few projects.

The leap: At month 12, he had \$15k saved and a few recurring clients. He negotiated a 4-day week at work to free up more time. By month 18, his freelance income matched his salary. He gave notice.

Today: \$12-15k months writing landing pages and email sequences for SaaS companies. He left Upwork after building direct relationships.

Key lesson: “I didn’t quit to freelance. I freelanced until quitting made sense. There’s no prize for going broke being brave.”

Priya — The Accidental Specialist

Web developer who found gold in a “boring” niche

The situation: Priya could code, but so could a million other developers. She was competing on price with offshore devs and losing. Her dream clients—cool startups—all had in-house teams or wanted to pay nothing.

The accident: Her aunt ran a dental practice and needed a website. Priya built it for free as a favor. It turned out great—online booking, insurance info, mobile-friendly. Her aunt’s dentist friends noticed.

The insight: Dental practices were underserved. Most had terrible websites, didn’t understand tech, but had good revenue. They needed someone who could speak their language. Priya realized: she could be “the dentist website person.”

The scaling: She built a template system for dental sites. Each project went from 40 hours to 15 hours. She joined dental Facebook groups, spoke at a small dental conference (just showed up and asked). Referrals exploded.

Today: \$15k+/month building websites exclusively for dental practices. She has a waiting list. Competitors are charging \$800; she charges \$5,000+ and wins on expertise.

Key lesson: “Boring niches = less competition + more money. Dentists don’t care about my GitHub—they care that I understand their patients.”

Chapter 8

Your First 30 Days

Here's your action plan:

Week 1: Foundation

- Define your offer (who, what, result)
- Calculate your rate
- Set up basic online presence (LinkedIn at minimum)
- Create a simple portfolio (even just 2-3 examples)
- Draft your contract template
- Set up invoicing (Wave, Stripe, etc.)

Week 2: Outreach

- Message 20 people in your network
- Send 5 cold outreach messages per day
- Join 2-3 communities where your clients hang out
- Post one piece of content about your expertise
- Update LinkedIn headline to reflect your offer

Week 3: Conversations

- Book discovery calls with warm leads
- Continue daily outreach
- Send your first proposals
- Follow up on unanswered messages
- Ask for feedback on proposals that didn't convert

Week 4: Close and Deliver

- Sign your first client
- Onboard them properly
- Deliver great work
- Ask for testimonial and referrals
- Keep the outreach going (never stop marketing)
- Reflect: what worked? What didn't?

Remember: Freelancing is a numbers game at first.
More conversations = more opportunities = more clients.
Consistency beats intensity.

Chapter 9

Templates & Scripts

Network Outreach Message

Hey [Name], I'm taking on freelance [service] work, helping [target clients] [achieve specific result]. If you know anyone who might need this, I'd love an introduction. Thanks!

Cold Email Template #1 — The Observation

Subject: Quick idea for [Company Name]

Hi [Name],

I came across [company] and noticed [specific observation—their website, content, product, etc.].

I help [similar companies] [achieve result] through [your service]. Recently helped [brief example] achieve [result].

Would you be open to a 15-minute chat to see if I could help?

[Your name]

Cold Email Template #2 — The Value Lead

Subject: [Specific benefit] for [Company]

Hi [Name],

I've been following [Company] and love what you're doing with [specific thing]. I had a few ideas on how you could [specific improvement].

Would it be helpful if I shared them? No pitch, just observations from someone who does this full-time.

[Your name]

[Your service] for [type of client]

Cold Email Template #3 — The Case Study

Subject: How [Similar Company] got [Result]

Hi [Name],

Last month, I helped [similar company in their industry] [specific result—increase conversions by 40%, cut design time in half, etc.].

I noticed [Company Name] is in a similar space and thought the same approach might work for you.

Worth a quick call to explore?

[Your name]

Follow-Up Email #1 (3 days later)

Subject: Re: [Original Subject]

Hi [Name],

Just floating this back to the top of your inbox. Any interest in chatting about [specific benefit]?

[Your name]

Follow-Up Email #2 (7 days later)

Subject: Re: [Original Subject]

Hi [Name],

I know you're busy—wanted to check in one more time. If now's not the right time, no problem at all. If things change down the road, I'm easy to find.

[Your name]

Follow-Up Email #3 — The Breakup (14 days later)

Subject: Should I close the loop?

Hi [Name],

Haven't heard back, so I'll assume the timing isn't right. I'll close out this thread, but feel free to reach out if things change.

All the best,

[Your name]

Proposal Follow-Up

Hi [Name],

Just following up on the proposal I sent [X days ago]. Happy to answer any questions or adjust anything based on your feedback.

Let me know either way—I want to make sure this timeline works for you.

[Your name]

Testimonial Request

Hi [Name],

So glad the project turned out well! Would you be open to writing a brief testimonial I could use on my website? Just a few sentences about the experience and results would be great.

If you're short on time, I can draft something based on our conversations and you can approve/edit it.

Thanks!

Referral Request

Hi [Name],

I loved working on [project]—thanks again for being such a great client!

Quick question: do you know anyone else who might need [your service]? Happy to offer [discount/bonus] for any introductions.

No pressure either way. Just thought I'd ask!

[Your name]

The “Welcome” Onboarding Email

Subject: Let's get started! [Project Name] Onboarding

Hi [Name],

Excited to kick off [Project Name]! Here's everything we need to get rolling:

What I need from you:

- [List of assets, access, information]
- [Timeline for receiving these]

How we'll communicate:

- [Email/Slack/other]
- Weekly updates every [day]
- Quick questions via [method]

Timeline:

- Kick-off: [date]
- First milestone: [date]
- Final delivery: [date]

Next step: [What they should do right now]

Let me know if anything looks off. Looking forward to this!

[Your name]

Chapter 10

Worksheets

Print these out, fill them in, and keep them somewhere visible.

I mean it...

Do it now...

WORKSHEET

Define Your Offer

I help _____ (specific type of client)

with _____ (specific service)

so they can _____ (specific outcome)

My ideal client is someone who:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Where my ideal clients hang out online:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

WORKSHEET

Calculate Your Rate

Annual income goal	\$	
+ Taxes (multiply above by 0.3)	\$	
+ Health insurance (annual)	\$	
+ Software/tools (annual)	\$	
+ Other business expenses	\$	
= Total annual needed	\$	

Billable hours per week: _____

(be realistic: 20-25 is typical)

× 50 weeks = _____ billable hours/year

Your minimum hourly rate:

Total ÷ Hours = \$ _____ / _____ hr

Project rate for a typical project:

Estimated hours _____ × hourly rate × 1.2 (buffer)

= \$ _____

WORKSHEET

Weekly OutreachTracker

Goal: _____ outreach messages per week

Day	Cold Emails Sent	LinkedIn	Followups	Responses
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
TOTAL				

Response rate:

$(\text{Responses} \div \text{Total Outreach}) \times 100 =$ _____ %

Discovery calls booked: _____

Proposals sent: _____

WORKSHEET

Client Red Flags Checklist

Before signing any client, check for these warning signs:

- Wants to pay in “equity” or “exposure”
- Says the project is “really simple” or “shouldn’t take long”
- Compares to huge companies (“Just like Uber but for...”)
- Wants unlimited revisions
- Asks for free spec work or “ideas” before hiring
- Previous freelancers quit or were fired
- Vague about budget or says “What’s your best price?”
- Needs everything “ASAP” or “urgent”
- Won’t sign a contract or pay a deposit
- “I’ll know it when I see it” direction

Score:

0-1 flags = Proceed

2-3 flags = Proceed with caution

4+ flags = Run

Final Thoughts

**Freelancing isn't complicated.
It's simple—just not easy.**

The formula is:

1. Solve a specific problem
2. For specific people
3. At a price that works for both of you
4. Deliver great work
5. Repeat

The hard part is doing it consistently, especially when you're starting out and haven't built momentum yet. Keep going. The first client is the hardest. The second is easier. By the tenth, you'll have systems and referrals doing most of the work.

You've got this. I'll be right here, reach out if you need. I answer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Enoch Thoreux". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Enoch" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Thoreux".

Reader-Only Bonus

Thanks for reading the whole guide! As a thank you, I've built some exclusive tools just for you—not linked anywhere on our site.

Access your bonus tools at: thrux.app/readers/

Inside: Client Red Flag Scorecard, Weekly Revenue Tracker, and Proposal Template Generator.

—

Built by ThruX

Free tools for freelancers and side hustlers