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FROM SOLO TO STARTUP SUCCESS

The Freelancer to Startup Toolkit

A practical, visual guide that helps young freelancers turn irregular, informal work into a structured, sustainable business, with real frameworks, activities and a next step on every page.





KLUB PODJETNIŠKEGA GIBANJA EMC · EduMansha – Associação · Asociacija Aktyvistai

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

What is SHIFT?

SHIFT, From Solo to Startup Success helps young sole proprietors move from informal self-employment toward sustainable startups and job creation.

It is an **Erasmus+ Small-scale Partnership in Youth**, built for young freelancers, especially NEETs, migrants and under-represented young people, and for the youth workers who support them. This **Freelancer-to-Startup Toolkit** is one of its core results: an open, modular learning resource of six practical modules.



6 practical modules

4 languages

3 partner countries

Created by the SHIFT partnership

KLUB PODJETNIŠKEGA GIBANJA EMC
Slovenia

EduMansha – Associação
Portugal

Asociacija Aktyvistai
Lithuania

A partnership across Slovenia, Portugal and Lithuania. Full partner details and contacts are published at shift.elnlab.eu.

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shift.elnlab.eu

Open, practical and free to adapt, built with young freelancers, for young freelancers.

WELCOME

From surviving to building

Self-employment gives many young people a first income, but too often it stays fragile and hand-to-mouth. Most freelancers don't struggle because they lack talent. They struggle because **no one ever showed them how to turn scattered gigs into a business that lasts.**



SHIFT changes that. This toolkit takes the young freelancer step by step, from "I take whatever work comes" to **"I run something on purpose"**, in plain language, with real frameworks they fill in for their own situation, and a concrete next action on every page.

① Locate yourself

See exactly where you stand today and name your single most useful next step.

② Build the structure

Turn improvised freelancing into pricing, offers and systems that don't depend on luck.

③ Grow on your terms

Move from selling hours toward income that scales, without losing control.

Who this is for

- **Early-stage sole proprietors** who want to grow, but lack business language and confidence.
- **NEETs**, young people who turned to freelancing to survive, without the skills to make it sustainable.
- **Migrants & Roma youth** facing socio-economic barriers, often outside formal business networks.
- **Youth workers & mentors** who support them, who get a ready-to-run, non-formal curriculum.

No business background needed

Every framework is written in plain words and assumes no prior business education. Where a concept risks feeling abstract, facilitator notes show how to ground it in the learner's real situation.

SHIFT turns scattered gigs into a business that lasts, one honest next step at a time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The learning journey · six modules

Five themes of the SHIFT project map into six practical modules. They build on each other, but each also stands alone. Every module has concept pages, facilitator-led (F) and self-directed (S) activities, a case study and a resource library. **Click any module to jump straight to it.**

1 **Mapping Your Path** Module 1
Locate yourself, model your whole business on one page, find your niche and productize your offer.
Open → ~3 hrs

2 **Test It for Real** Module 2
Test a real service cheaply with Build–Measure–Learn, customer discovery and everyday AI.
Open → ~3 hrs

3 **Money That Lasts** Module 3
Read your money honestly, price with confidence, keep a reserve and decide with a rule.
Open → ~3 hrs

4 **Winning Clients** Module 4
Turn conversations into clients, and sell by understanding the problem, not by pressuring.
Open → ~3 hrs

5 **Being Seen** Module 5
Build a personal brand and visibility, and get found and remembered by the right people.
Open → ~4 hrs

6 **You Belong Here** Module 6
Grow identity, belonging and resilience, recognise your value and take ownership of your path.
Open → ~10 hrs

New to SHIFT? Start with Module 1 · Mapping Your Path, the map for everything that follows.

HOW TO USE IT

Built to be run, not just read

Each module is a facilitator's companion. Read it first, then run it in **short loops**: introduce one framework, let participants apply it to their own work for 10–15 minutes, then discuss. Never present two frameworks without an application in between, and make sure every section ends in an action the learner writes down.



Markers to watch for

Facilitator-led
Run with a group, in short loops

Self-directed
Learner works solo, on their own case

Try this
A quick exercise linked to an activity

Facilitator watch-out
Common traps to steer around

Youthpass
The competence this builds, to capture

Each module contains

- Facilitator-led (F) and self-directed (S) activities, the number varies by module
- Concept pages with keep-able infographics
- A case study & a resource library
- Around 3 hours of facilitated work for most modules (Module 6 is longer, ~10 hours)

Youthpass & recognition

Every module ends in reflection, where loose learning becomes a competence the young person can name and carry. This is the heart of the Youthpass process, and each module flags the key competence to capture (usually entrepreneurship and personal / learning-to-learn).

Localised for Portugal, Lithuania & Slovenia

Country-specific content, legal forms, VAT thresholds, registration points and funding routes, is built into each module for all three SHIFT countries, so you can teach the real local picture, not a generic one.

Read it, then run it. Every section should end with the learner writing down one concrete action.

MODULE ONE

Mapping Your Path

01

Business modelling & productization, locate yourself on the journey, then structure your work into a business.

This module is the map for everything that follows. Most freelancers don't fail for lack of talent, they fail because they **can't see where they are**, where they could go, or how the pieces of their work fit together. Module 1 fixes that.



By the end, a participant can

- Locate themselves on the freelancer journey and name their most useful next step.
- Map their whole business on one page, and describe their niche in one sentence.
- Choose a direction on purpose, and turn a service into a structured, repeatable offer.

⏱ ~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | 🌍 Localised · PT · LT · SI | Youthpass · Entrepreneurship

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · The Freelancer Journey
2 · Your business on one page (Canvas)
3 · Finding your niche
4 · Freelancer to startup: a spectrum
5 · Which kind of business do you want?
6 · Productizing your service
7 · Five ways a freelancer earns
8 · The Strategy Canvas (draw a different curve)
9 · The Positioning Map (own the empty space)
10 · The Value Proposition Canvas

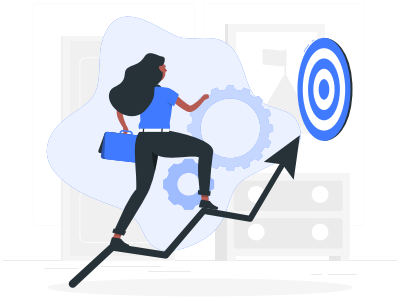
ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Map Your Journey, 45 min
F2 · One-Page Canvas Jam, 75 min
F3 · Niche & Promise Lab, 60 min
S1 · Find Your Niche, 30 min
S2 · Climb One Rung, 40 min
+ Resource library & templates

KNOW YOUR STAGE

The freelancer journey

Almost every freelancer believes they are either “doing fine” or “failing”, with nothing in between. That binary is the first thing to dismantle. A business is a journey with recognisable stages, and the single most useful thing you can do today is name honestly which stage you are actually in.



WHAT IT IS

There are four stages. **Starting**: can anyone pay you at all? **Stabilising**: repeat clients and predictable months. **Structuring**: pricing, processes and an offer that doesn't depend on you improvising every time. **Growing**: deliberately becoming bigger than yourself, with systems, products or a team. You can sit in different stages for different services at once, and that is completely normal.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

The classic mistake is solving the wrong stage's problem. Someone still Starting agonises over a logo, a business name and a website, all Structuring tasks, while quietly avoiding the only thing that matters at their stage: getting one person to pay them. Naming your stage cuts through that. It tells you the one problem worth your energy, and gives you permission to ignore the rest for now.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Judging yourself against Growing-stage founders you follow online. Their problems (hiring, systems, scale) are not your problems yet, and copying them wastes the exact energy your real stage needs. Compare yourself to where *you* were last month, not to someone three stages ahead.

✎ Do this now

Name your stage in one word. Then write the single most useful next step for that stage, and nothing else on the list until it is done.

Facilitator note

Ask each participant to place themselves on the journey out loud and say why. Others will often see their stage more accurately than they do, that gap is the lesson.

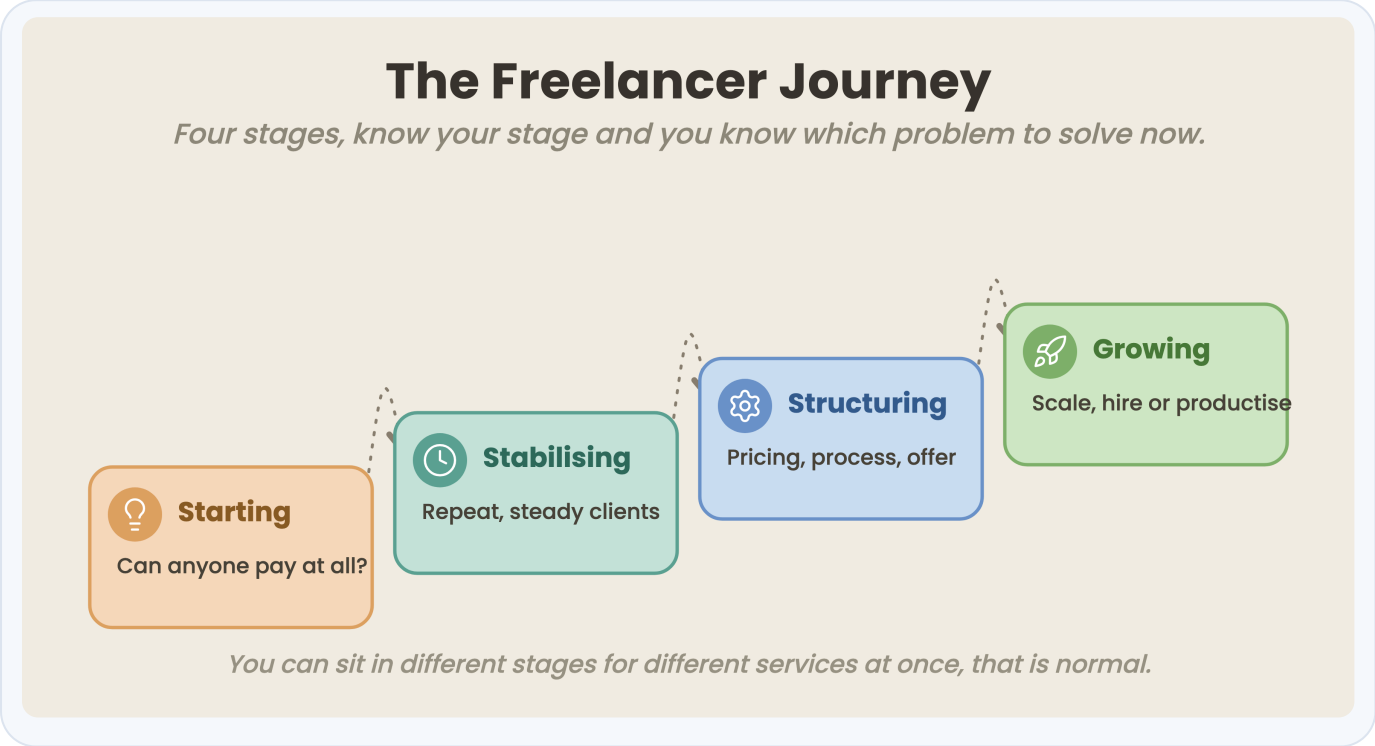
Know your stage, and you always know which problem is worth solving now, and which is just a distraction.

KNOW YOUR STAGE

The freelancer journey

HOW IT WORKS

Find the stage that matches your **reality**, not your ambition. If clients don't yet pay reliably, you are Starting, no matter how polished your brand looks. Read the journey from left to right, and be honest about where the arrow actually is for you today.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

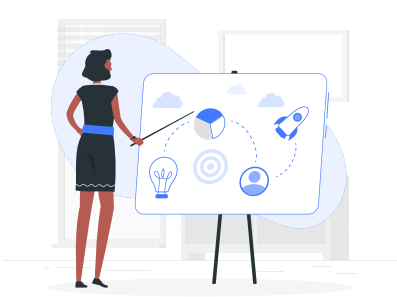
Marco calls himself “a struggling entrepreneur”. On the journey he is simply at **Starting**: two paid gigs, no repeat clients. Naming that changes everything, he stops redesigning his logo and spends the week asking five past contacts for one small paid job. That is the Starting-stage move, and it works.

You are not behind, you are somewhere specific. Name the stage, solve its one real problem, and the next stage takes care of itself.

YOUR BUSINESS ON ONE PAGE

The Business Model Canvas

You can't improve what you can't see. The Business Model Canvas puts your entire business, how you create value, deliver it, get paid and stay afloat, onto a single page you can actually read and change. The standard canvas is built for startups with teams; here it is rewritten so a solo freelancer can fill every block with something true.



WHAT IT IS

Nine blocks, in plain freelancer language: **who you help**, the **value** you create for them, the **channels** you reach them through, the **relationship** you keep, the **revenue** you earn, the **resources** and **activities** the work needs, the **partners** who help you deliver, and your **costs**. Together they show not nine separate facts, but one connected system.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Most freelancers hold their business only in their head, which makes every decision feel heavy and every weak spot invisible. On one page, patterns jump out: you're brilliant at delivery but have no channel, or you earn well but a single client is your whole revenue. Seeing the system is the first step to changing it deliberately instead of reacting.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Filling it like a form to be completed perfectly, or starting on the left with costs and activities. It is a thinking tool, not homework. One honest sticky note per block beats a tidy, lifeless grid, and the customer side must come first or the rest is guesswork.

✎ Do this now

Draw the nine blocks on one page and fill each with a single sticky note. Then circle the block you understand least, that is where your next week's attention belongs.

Facilitator note

Have participants present their canvas in 60 seconds. If they can't explain how the blocks connect, the model isn't clear yet, prompt them to find the one link that makes it a system.

Your whole business fits on one page. Fill the right side first, then work back, and read it as one connected system.

YOUR BUSINESS ON ONE PAGE

The Business Model Canvas

HOW IT WORKS

Fill the **right side first**, the customer-facing blocks, because everything else exists to serve them. Start with who you help and the value you create, then how you reach and keep them, then how you get paid. Only then move left to what it takes to deliver. Use a sticky note per block so you can move things as your thinking sharpens.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Sofia, a freelance editor, fills hers and spots it instantly: strong value, happy clients, but her only channel is one agency that sends all her work. One page reveals her real risk isn't skill, it's a single point of failure, so her next move is obvious: build a second channel before that one dries up.

A business you can see on one page is a business you can steer. Get it out of your head, fill the right side first, and read it as a whole.

BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Finding your niche

Most freelancers describe themselves by their tool, “a designer”, “a developer”, “a marketer”. It feels safe, but it makes you one of thousands, judged on price. A niche is how you stop competing on price and start being chosen. This sub-chapter is about finding yours honestly, and saying it in one sentence.



WHAT IT IS

A niche is not a smaller market, it is a **sharper** one. It is the specific overlap of three things: what you do best, the people you most want to help, and a problem those people will pay to solve. Choosing a niche is a **positioning** decision, not a ceiling on ambition, you can always widen later, from a position of strength.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

When you serve “everyone”, your offer sounds generic, you compete on price, and referrals can't describe you. A clear niche flips all three at once: clients self-select, you become the obvious choice for one problem, and you can charge for **expertise** instead of hours. For a young freelancer with a small network, a niche is the fastest, cheapest way to become known for something.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two traps. First, confusing a niche with a demographic, “students” or “young people” is an audience, not a niche, until you name their problem. Second, picking a niche you like that nobody pays for. Before you commit, test that the problem has money behind it.

✎ Do this now

Fill one sentence: “I help [who] who struggle with [problem] to [result].” Can't finish it? That is the single most useful thing to fix this week.

Facilitator note

Have each participant say their sentence out loud. If the room can't immediately picture the client, it is still too broad, push for one more level of specific.

Write one sentence: “I help [who] who struggle with [problem] to [result].” If you can't finish it, you haven't chosen yet.

BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Finding your niche

HOW IT WORKS

Answer three honest questions: **what you do best**, **who you genuinely want to help**, and **which of their problems is worth paying to solve**. Your niche is the small centre where all three overlap. If only two overlap, that is your warning sign: skill and client but no paid problem is a hobby; skill and problem but no clear client is hard to sell.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

"Freelance designer" says nothing. Ana narrows it: **"I build simple one-page websites for Lisbon food trucks that turn passers-by into orders."** Same skills, but now a food-truck owner hears their exact problem, refers her in a single sentence, and doesn't blink at the price, because she's not a designer, she's *their* designer.

You can't be the best at everything. Pick the one overlap you can own, name it in a sentence, and let it do your selling for you.

GO LEGIT, STEP BY STEP

Freelancer to startup: a spectrum

"Going legit" sounds like a single terrifying leap into companies, accountants and tax. It isn't. Becoming a business is a spectrum of small, reversible steps, and the useful question is never "should I register a company?" but "what is the smallest step that unlocks my next opportunity?"



WHAT IT IS

The spectrum runs from informal, cash work, through registered self-employment, a formal sole-proprietor status, a simple company, up to a full company. Each step to the right adds legitimacy, legal protection and access to clients who cannot pay someone unregistered, at the cost of a little more admin, tax and formality.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Staying fully informal quietly caps you: many clients, grants and platforms simply cannot work with someone who cannot issue an invoice. But leaping to a full company too early buries a one-person operation in accounting and obligations it does not need yet. Knowing the spectrum lets you take the smallest step that unlocks your next client, and no more.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two opposite errors: staying informal so long that you turn away real work, or forming a full company for the status when a simple registration would do. Let opportunity, not fear or vanity, decide your next step. And never treat the thresholds as fixed, always check the current local figure before you rely on it.

✎ Do this now

Mark where you are on the spectrum today, and name the one concrete opportunity that would justify the next step. If there isn't one yet, you're fine exactly where you are.

Facilitator note

Country facts change. Present the thresholds and portals as a current starting point and have participants confirm the live figure for their own country, that verification is itself a useful entrepreneurial skill.

Move along the spectrum one step at a time, and only when the protection you gain is worth the freedom you trade.

GO LEGIT, STEP BY STEP

Freelancer to startup: a spectrum

HOW IT WORKS

Find where you are on the diagram, then look one step to the right. For each SHIFT country the table shows the actual status names, the income thresholds where registration or VAT begins, and the official portal to do it. Take the step when a concrete opportunity, an invoice you can't issue, a client who needs a registered supplier, makes it worth it.



How it works in each SHIFT country

	Portugal	Lithuania	Slovenia
Simplest status	Trabalhador independente	Individuali veikla	Samostojni podjetnik (s.p.)
Company form	Soc. Unipessoal (Lda)	Mažoji bendrija (MB)	d.o.o.
VAT-exempt up to	€15,000 / yr	€45,000 / yr	€60,000 / yr
Register at	eportugal.gov.pt	registrucentras.lt	spot.gov.si

Good to know

Legal forms, thresholds and registration points are current as of 2025 (standard regime). They change with national law, check the official portal above before teaching a figure.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

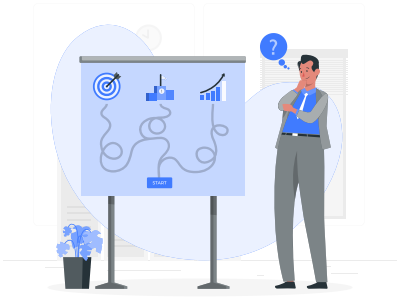
Rui works cash-in-hand until a café asks for a proper invoice. Instead of panicking or forming a company, he registers as a *trabalhador independente* in an afternoon, issues the invoice, and keeps everything else the same. One step to the right, one unlocked client, no drama.

You don't have to feel like a company to be one. Take the smallest legal step that unlocks your next client, and take the next only when the next client needs it.

TWO HONEST PATHS

Which kind of business do you want?

Almost every hard freelance decision, raise rates or take more clients, niche down or broaden, hire or stay solo, has a different right answer depending on the kind of business you're building. Most people never consciously choose, and get pulled both ways. This sub-chapter is about making that choice on purpose.



WHAT IT IS

Two archetypes. The **Niche Specialist** becomes more valuable rather than bigger: deeper expertise, higher rates, a small set of ideal clients, a business that stays intentionally small and lucrative. The **Growth Builder** adds capacity: systems, a team, or products, so the business earns even when the founder isn't personally doing the work. Neither is superior, they simply optimise for different lives.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Nearly every future decision has a different answer depending on your archetype, so choosing gives you a compass. Freelancers who never choose try to specialise and scale at the same time and do neither well: they raise rates like a Specialist but chase volume like a Builder, and burn out in the contradiction. Naming your path resolves that tension before it costs you years.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Trying to be both at once, or choosing the archetype that sounds impressive rather than the one you'd actually enjoy living. Scaling looks admirable online, but a Specialist who forces growth often ends up managing people they never wanted to manage. Choose the life, not the label.

✎ Do this now

Write one sentence: in five years, do I want to be more *valuable* or more *scalable*? Then look at your current decisions, are they pointing the same way, or pulling against each other?

Facilitator note

Let participants argue for their choice in pairs. Hearing someone defend the opposite archetype often clarifies their own, the goal is a deliberate choice, not group consensus.

Neither archetype is better. Knowing which one you actually want turns every later decision from a guess into a choice.

TWO HONEST PATHS

Which kind of business do you want?

HOW IT WORKS

Ask what a genuinely good future looks like for you: being the sought-after expert whom others recommend, or running something that grows beyond your own hours. There is no wrong answer, but there is a wrong move, trying to be both at once. Pick the one that fits your temperament and the life you want, and let it filter every later choice.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Two designers, identical skill. Lena chooses Specialist: she raises her rate every year, keeps six clients, and never wants staff. Tomas chooses Builder: he productises his service into templates and hires a junior. Five years on both are thriving, precisely because each stopped fighting their own model.

You can be the expert or build the engine, but not both at once. Pick your path on purpose, and it makes your hardest decisions easy.

SELL A PACKAGE, NOT YOUR HOURS

Productizing your service

The fastest way to stay stuck is to sell time: your income is capped by your hours and every sale reopens a price negotiation you often lose. Productizing is the shift out of that trap, packaging the same skill into a defined offer people can understand and buy without a meeting.



WHAT IT IS

Productizing means shaping your service into a defined offer: a name, a fixed scope of exactly what's included, a fixed price, and a clear outcome. Instead of “I do design, let's talk rates,” you offer “The One-Page Website, five sections, delivered in two weeks, for one price.” The work can be similar; the way it's sold is transformed.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Hourly work has two ceilings: your income is limited by your hours, and every sale reopens a negotiation. A package breaks both. It's faster to sell (clear scope, clear price), it lets you improve and systematise the same offer again and again, and it moves the conversation from your time to the client's outcome, which is what they actually pay for.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Packaging something clients don't actually want as a package, or leaving the scope so vague it drifts back into open-ended hours. A good package has firm edges, state clearly what is *not* included, or scope creep quietly turns your fixed price back into unpaid time.

✎ Do this now

Take one thing you deliver repeatedly and write it as a package: a name, exactly what's included, one price, one outcome. Show it to a past client and ask, would you have bought that?

Facilitator note

Have participants pitch their package in a single sentence. If it takes more than a sentence to explain the scope and price, it isn't productised yet, help them cut until it fits.

Turn your service into a named package with a fixed scope and price. It's easier to buy, easier to price, and it stops you selling your hours.

SELL A PACKAGE, NOT YOUR HOURS

Productizing your service

HOW IT WORKS

Look at what you already deliver repeatedly and give it a shape: name it, list precisely what's included (and what isn't), set one price, and promise one outcome. Then build a small ladder, a lighter entry offer, your core package, and a premium version, so clients self-select their level instead of haggling over yours.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

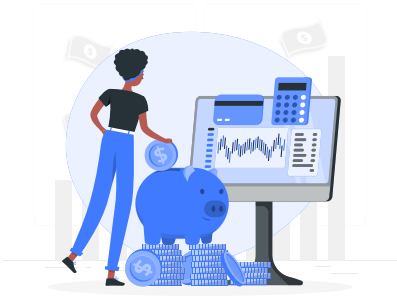
Inês edits podcasts by the hour and dreads quoting. She packages it: “Episode-Ready, edit, mix and show-notes for one episode, fixed price, three-day turnaround.” Now clients buy without a call, she batches the work, and raising the price is one number to change, not a new negotiation every time.

Stop selling your hours and start selling a result with a name and a price. It's easier for clients to buy, and far easier for you to grow.

CHOOSE HOW YOU GET PAID

Five ways a freelancer earns

Most freelancers accept how their trade “normally” gets paid and never question it. But the same skill can be sold in very different ways, and the model you choose shapes your income, your stability and your freedom. Designing that mix on purpose is one of the highest-leverage decisions in this module.



WHAT IT IS

Five common models. **Day rate**: sell blocks of your time. **Per-project**: one price for one defined outcome. **Productized package**: a fixed, repeatable offer. **Retainer**: a recurring monthly fee for ongoing access or work. **Digital product**: templates, courses or tools you make once and sell many times. Most trades can be delivered through several of these.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Your revenue model shapes your whole life, not just your income. Pure day-rate work is simple but caps you at your hours and drops to zero when you're ill or away. Retainers bring predictability but expectations. Products scale but need upfront effort with no guaranteed payoff. And relying on any single model, or single client, means one bad month becomes an emergency. Designing the mix is how you build stability.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two traps: staying on pure day-rate forever because it's familiar (and never escaping the hours), or chasing the “passive income” product before you have any steady base to fund the effort. Build the predictable streams first, then add the scalable one on top, not the other way round.

✎ Do this now

List which of the five models you use today. If it's only one, choose a second you could realistically add this quarter, and name the first small step toward it.

Facilitator note

Ask who relies on a single client or single model, that's the hidden risk in the room. Frame adding a second stream as risk reduction, not greed, it lands better and it's true.

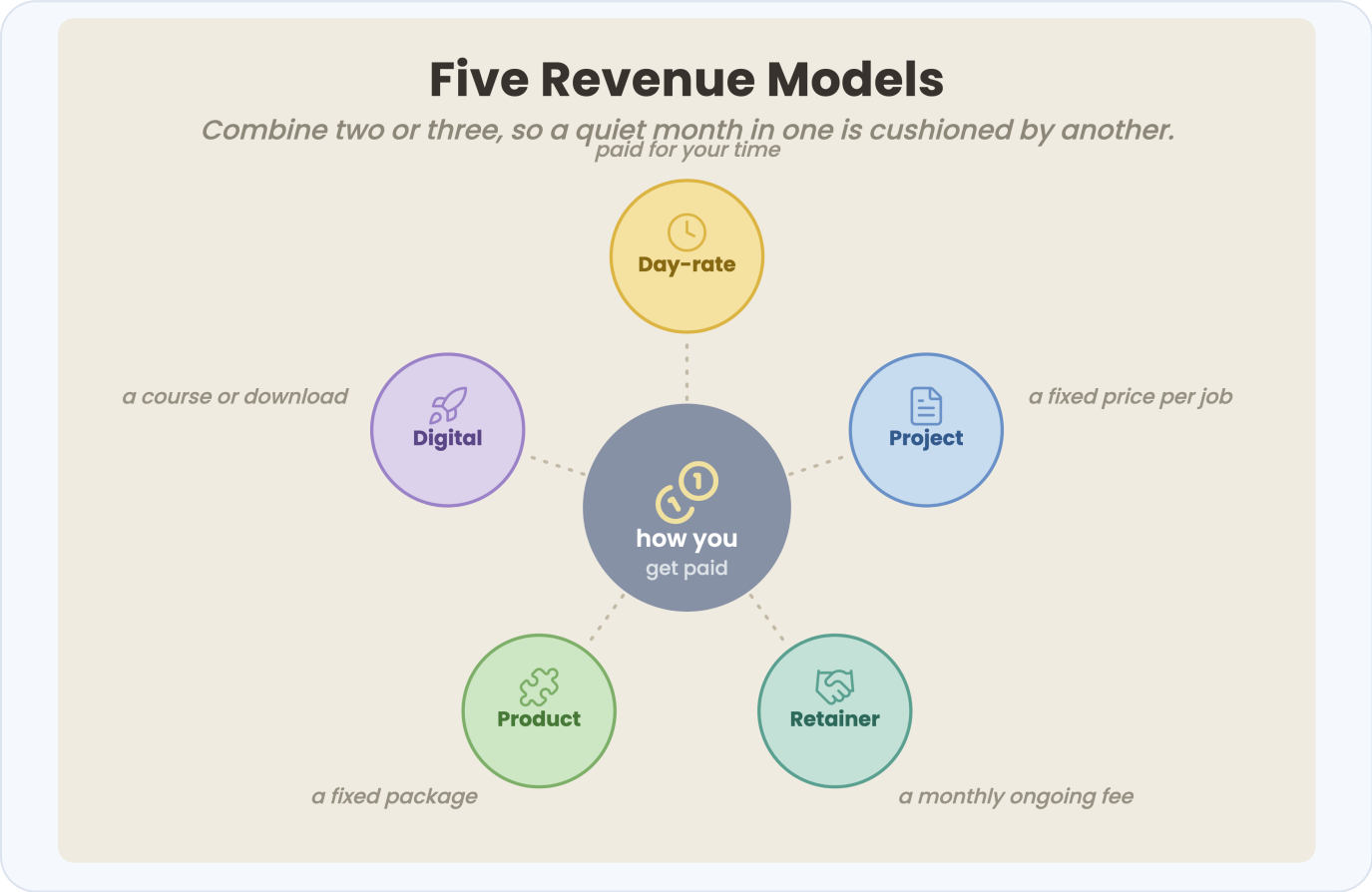
How you get paid is a choice. Combine two or three revenue models so a quiet month in one is cushioned by another.

CHOOSE HOW YOU GET PAID

Five ways a freelancer earns

HOW IT WORKS

Look at your skill and ask which of the five you could realistically sell it through. Then design a deliberate mix, for example a couple of retainers for a predictable base, project work on top, and one small digital product building in the background. Aim for at least two independent streams, so no single one failing sinks the month.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Pedro, a copywriter, earned only per-project, feast then famine. He redesigns it: two small monthly retainers cover his rent (a predictable base), projects add the upside, and he's slowly building a paid email-templates pack. Same skill, but now a slow project month no longer means panic.

One income stream is a single point of failure. Design a mix of two or three, and a quiet month stops being a crisis.

STAND OUT ON PURPOSE

The strategy canvas

"How do I stand out?" is usually answered with a wish, "by being better." The strategy canvas replaces the wish with a picture: it shows you and your rivals as value curves across the factors clients judge, so you can see that being different is about shape, not effort.



WHAT IT IS

The strategy canvas is a simple chart: along the bottom, the factors clients judge you on (price, speed, quality, attention, range); up the side, how much of each you offer, from low to high. You plot your value "curve" across those factors, and the typical rival's curve beside it. Where the two curves sit apart is where you're genuinely different.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Most freelancers try to stand out by being "better", but better at the same things everyone offers is just a slightly higher point on an identical curve, and a price war. The canvas shows that real differentiation comes from a different *shape*: low on some factors clients don't truly value, high on the ones they do, plus something no one else provides. It turns a slogan into a decision.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Drawing a curve that's simply "higher everywhere", that's not a strategy, it's a wish, and it usually just means a higher price with no reason. The discipline is choosing what to be deliberately *worse* at, so you can be genuinely better where it counts. Standing out always requires giving something up.

✎ Do this now

Plot your market's factors and the typical rival's curve, then mark one factor to reduce, one to raise, and one to create. That's the outline of a position only you occupy.

Facilitator note

Push participants to name a factor they'll deliberately score low on. If they won't drop anything, they haven't made a strategic choice, they've just written a longer to-do list.

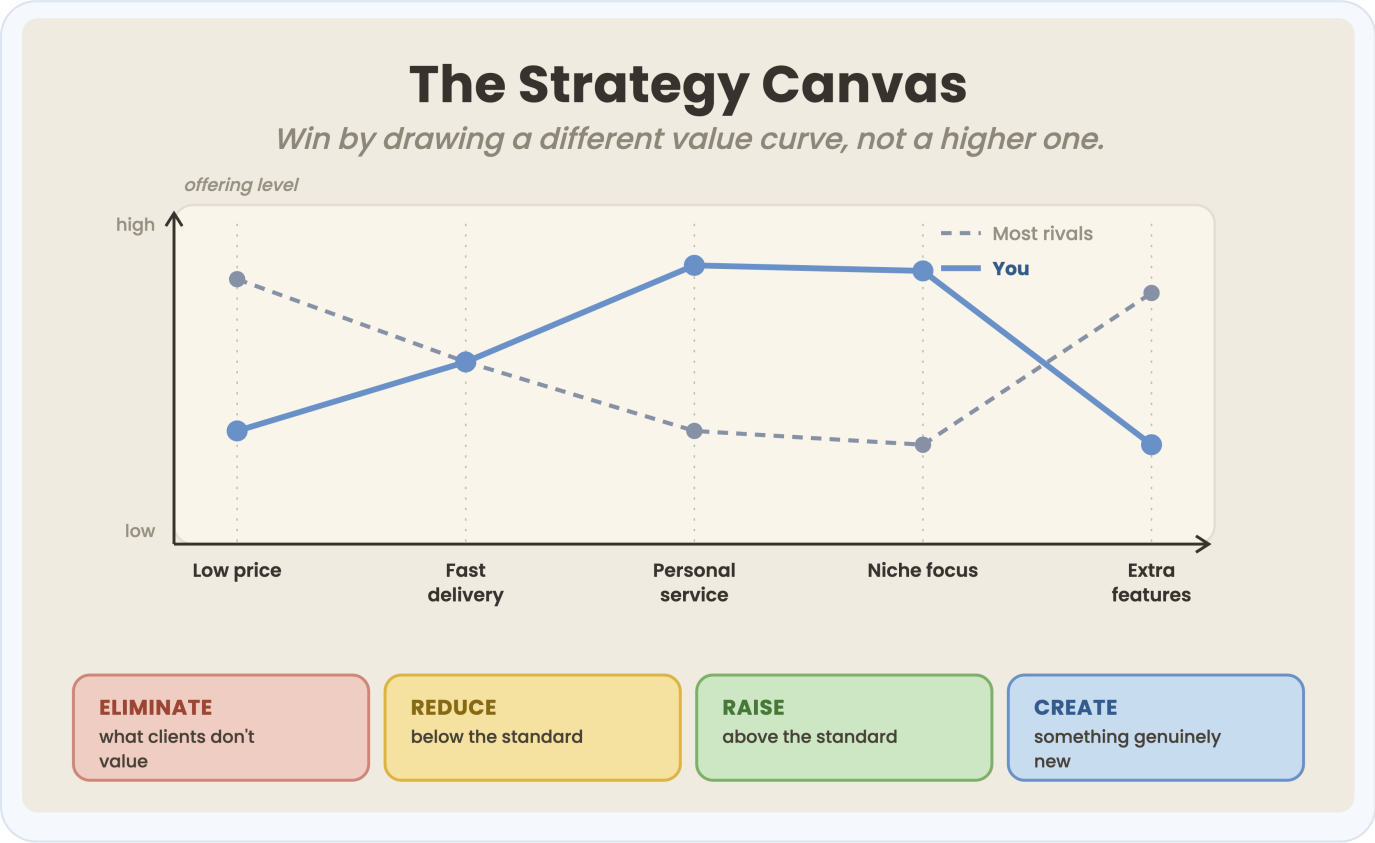
Draw your value curve against rivals. You stand out by choosing where to break away, not by trying to beat everyone at everything.

STAND OUT ON PURPOSE

The strategy canvas

HOW IT WORKS

List the five or six factors your market competes on. Plot the typical competitor's curve. Then draw yours deliberately: which factors will you **reduce** (and stop apologising for), which will you **raise** well above the norm, and what one factor will you **create** that no rival offers? Your break-away points are your positioning.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A wedding photographer surrounded by rivals all competing on “more photos, lower price” draws a different curve: fewer images but hand-finished, plus a same-week preview nobody else offers. She's not cheaper or higher-volume, she's a different shape, and she books the couples who want exactly that.

You can't stand out by being better at everything. Choose a different shape, less here, more there, one thing no one else offers, and let the curve do the arguing.

OWN THE EMPTY SPACE

The positioning map

"The market" feels vague until you draw it. A positioning map turns that vague sense into a picture of who sits where, on the two trade-offs clients actually care about, and, crucially, where no one sits. It's how a niche becomes visible to the people looking for it.



WHAT IT IS

A positioning map is a two-axis chart. Pick two things clients genuinely trade off, price versus quality, speed versus craft, generalist versus specialist, and put one on each axis. Plot yourself and your rivals as dots. The map turns a fuzzy feeling about the competition into a clear view of the crowded corners and the open spaces.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Competing head-on in a crowded corner means competing on price, because clients can't tell you apart. A clear, differentiated position, ideally in space rivals have left empty, makes you the obvious choice for the clients who want exactly that, and lets you charge for the difference. Positioning is what makes your niche findable.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Picking axes that don't matter to clients (so the map looks tidy but means nothing), or claiming an empty space that's empty because there's no demand. A gap is only an opportunity if paying clients are already standing in it, wishing someone would serve them.

✎ Do this now

Draw your market on two client-relevant axes, plot the main players, and mark one empty space. Then name three real clients who'd want what sits there, if you can't, choose a different gap.

Facilitator note

Debate the axes first, half the value is arguing about what clients actually trade off. A map with the wrong axes will lead the room confidently in the wrong direction.

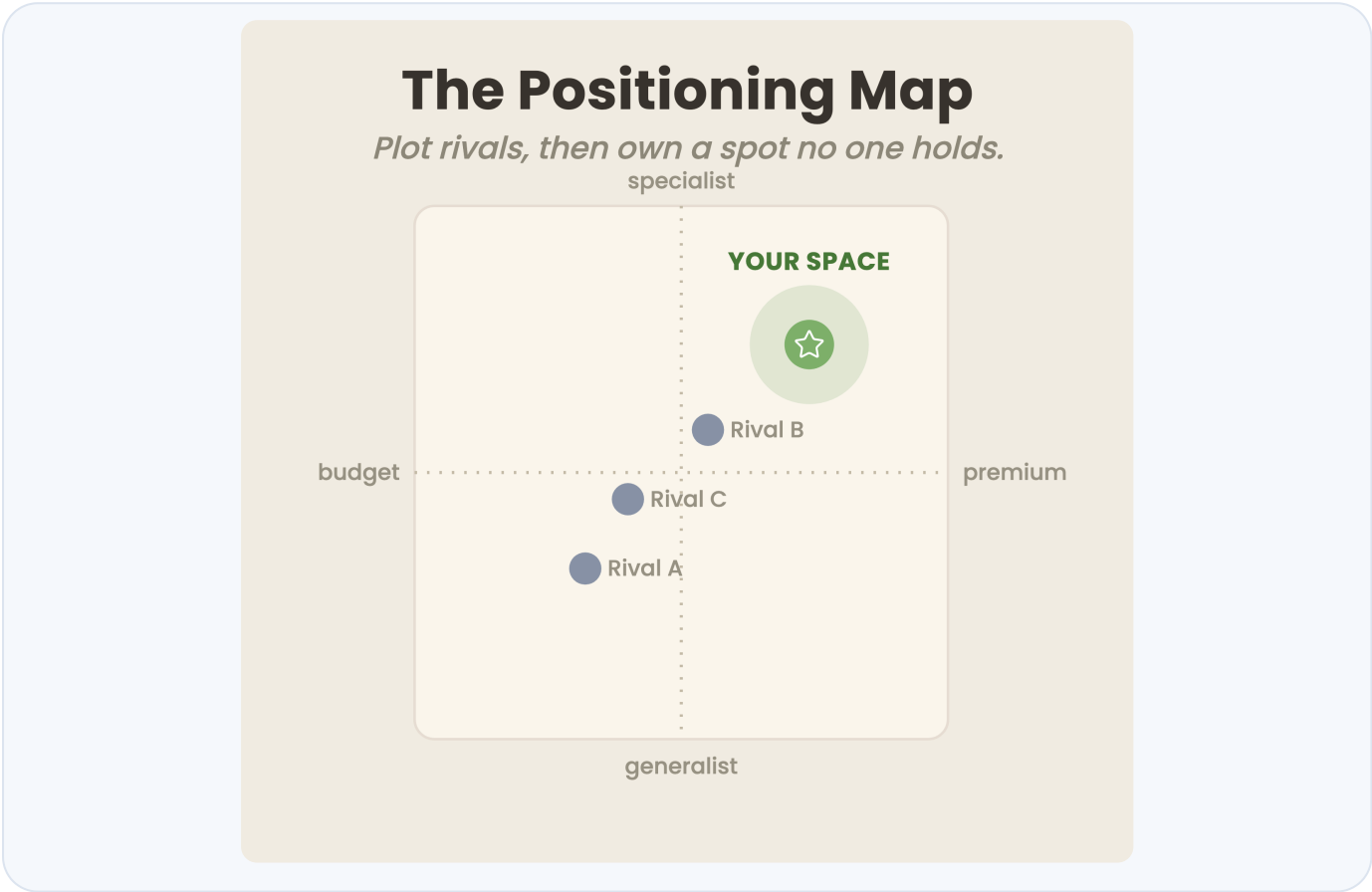
Plot the market on two axes clients care about, then own an empty space that clients actually want, not just any gap.

OWN THE EMPTY SPACE

The positioning map

HOW IT WORKS

Choose two axes that reflect real client trade-offs in your market. Plot the main players honestly. Look for a gap, then apply the test that separates a strategy from a fantasy: is there a group of clients who actively want what lives in that empty space, and can pay for it? If yes, that's your position. If no, it's empty for a reason.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

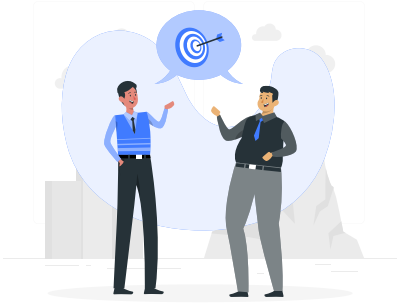
In a town full of “cheap and fast” web designers, Nuno maps the market and spots an empty corner: “premium, but small-business-friendly.” Local shop owners want better than the cheap option but fear agency prices, real demand, no supplier. He positions there and quietly owns it.

Don't fight for a crowded corner. Find the space clients want and rivals have left empty, and become the obvious choice there.

FIT YOUR OFFER TO THEIR WORLD

The value proposition canvas

The most common reason a freelance offer fails isn't weak skill, it's building something the maker finds interesting that solves no pain the client actually feels. The value proposition canvas forces the opposite order: understand their world first, then design an offer that answers it.



WHAT IT IS

The canvas has two halves. The **client profile**: the jobs they're trying to get done, the pains that frustrate them along the way, and the gains they hope for. Your **value map**: your products and services, the pain relievers they provide, and the gain creators they deliver. The whole tool exists to line the two halves up.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Designing from your features outward, “here's what I can do,” leaves you forever convincing people they should care. Designing from their world inward, “here's the pain I remove,” means the offer sells itself, because it names something the client already feels. The canvas simply forces that order, which is where most offers go right or wrong.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Filling in your own side first and then bending the client's world to fit it. The entire point is to start from their jobs, pains and gains honestly, including the ones your offer doesn't yet address. Fit you invent isn't fit; it's wishful thinking with a nice diagram.

✎ Do this now

Pick one real client. Fill only the client side, jobs, pains, gains. Then hold your current offer against it and mark the one pain or gain you speak to least. That's your next improvement.

Facilitator note

Have participants fill the client side for a real person they know, not an imagined “average” client. Averages have no pains; real people do, and that's exactly where fit is found.

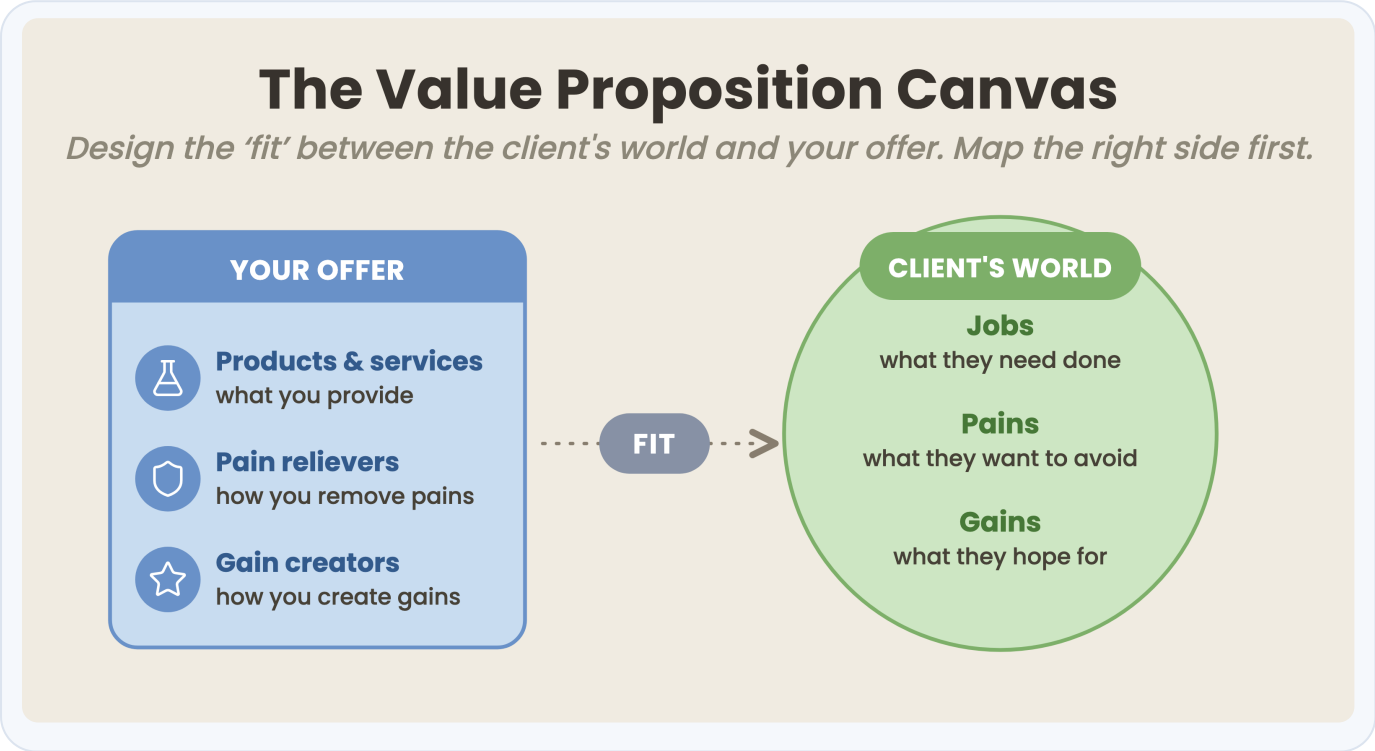
Map the client's jobs, pains and gains first, then shape your offer to fit them. Fit is what people actually pay for.

FIT YOUR OFFER TO THEIR WORLD

The value proposition canvas

HOW IT WORKS

Fill the client side first: pick one real client, list the job they're doing, the pains along the way, and the gains they want. Then, and only then, map your offer against it, which pains do you relieve, which gains do you create? Cross out any feature that matches nothing on their side; it's effort they won't pay for.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A bookkeeper lists her features, "monthly reports, reconciliations, tidy spreadsheets." Then she maps the client and sees it: the real pain is *fear of a tax mistake*, the real gain is *peace of mind*. She re-frames her whole offer around exactly that, and stops competing on spreadsheet features nobody was losing sleep over.

Don't build an offer and hope it fits. Map their jobs, pains and gains first, then shape your offer to answer them, that alignment is the whole game.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Map Your Journey

45 min

Exercise & guided discussion

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 1 · The Freelancer Journey.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Locate each of their services on the journey, and name one concrete next step that moves their most important service forward.

Step by step

1. **Warm-up** · 5 min

   Ask: "what does having a business mean to you?" Collect a few words. Introduce the idea that it's a journey with stages, not an on/off switch.

2. **Show the map** · 5 min

   Walk through the four stages in plain words. Repeat clearly: no stage is failure, Starting is a real, named stage.

3. **Place yourself** · 10 min

   Each person writes one sticky note per service and sticks it on the stage that fits. Encourage several notes, you can be in different stages for different work.

4. **Pair share** · 10 min

   In pairs, explain your placements. Each partner asks the key question: "what would move this note one step to the right?"

5. **Name the next step** · 10 min

   On the back of their most important sticky note, each person writes their single next action.

6. **Commit & close** · 5 min

   A few volunteers say their next step aloud. Hand out the Journey infographic to keep.

THE FRAMEWORK

You can sit in different stages for different services at the same time, that is normal.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

One large printed Journey poster (A1) or flipchart; sticky notes and a pen per person; the Journey infographic as a take-home.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print/draw the four-stage journey big. Read sub-chapter 1. Prepare one everyday "stages" example (e.g. learning to drive) to warm up.

Facilitator tips

For low-confidence learners or NEETs, open with the non-business example to lower the stakes. Validate informal, cash work as a legitimate "Starting" stage. Keep placements on private sticky notes, watch for shame, keep the tone light.

→ What can I do next?

Write your one next step with a date, and put it somewhere you'll see it every day this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which stage am I in, and what is my one next step? What surprised me about where my work actually sits? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can locate myself on the journey and plan a realistic next step."

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • One-Page Canvas Jam

75 min

Hands-on exercise

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 2 & 10 · The Business Model Canvas + starting from the client's problem.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Fill a one-page business model for their own work, starting from clients and value, and identify the single block they most need to strengthen.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   One page = your whole business. Show the worked example briefly, then put it away.
2. **Right side first** · 20 min
   Fill three blocks only: Who it's for, Your promise, How money comes in. Circulate and prompt.
3. **Pressure-test the promise** · 10 min
   In pairs, ask each other "so that what?" until the promise describes a result, not a service.
4. **Left side** · 20 min
   Now fill What you do, What you have, Key allies and What it costs.
5. **Gallery walk** · 15 min
   Post canvases on the wall. Everyone adds one sticky of helpful feedback to two other canvases.
6. **Close** · 5 min
   Each person names the one block they'll improve first.

THE FRAMEWORK

Order matters: fill the three right-hand blocks before you touch the left side.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

A printed blank freelancer canvas (A3/A2) per person; sticky notes; markers; one worked example on a flipchart.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print the canvases. Read sub-chapters 2 and 10. Prepare a simple worked example (a fictional local freelancer) to show structure without giving answers.

Facilitator tips

If a learner freezes, let them copy the worked example and adapt it. For creatives, encourage drawing and icons. For limited literacy or non-native speakers, allow icons, first language, or speaking answers aloud. Watch for "my client is everyone."

→ What can I do next?

Pick your weakest block and take one small action to strengthen it this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which block is my strongest, and which is weakest? What did filling the right side first reveal? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can describe my whole business on one page."

★ Expert extension

Zoom into the promise with the Value Proposition Canvas: map the client's jobs, pains and gains against your offer, and cut anything that doesn't answer a real pain or gain.

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Niche & Promise Lab

60 min

Peer interview & role-play

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 3 & 9 · Finding your niche + a standout identity.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Surface a real niche from their best past work and craft a one-sentence promise a stranger can understand and repeat.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   A niche makes you a clearer choice, not a smaller one. People recommend what they can describe.
2. **Interview, round 1** · 15 min
   Partner A interviews B about their best-ever paid job: who was the client, what was the problem, what result? B answers; A listens and notes.
3. **Swap** · 15 min
   Now B interviews A the same way.
4. **Draft the promise** · 10 min
   Each person completes: "I help [client] who struggle with [problem] to [result]."
5. **Test it** · 10 min
   Say your promise to your partner. They reflect back what they heard. Refine until it's instantly clear.
6. **Close** · 5 min
   Volunteers say their promise aloud to the group.

THE FRAMEWORK

Your niche sits where what you do best, one client, and a valuable problem overlap.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Printed interview cards & promise builder (I help ___ who struggle with ___ to ___); pens.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print the prompt cards and templates. Read sub-chapters 3 and 9. Decide pairings in advance if some learners are shy.

Facilitator tips

For shy learners the interview format is a gift, their partner draws it out. For migrants, draft in first language first, then translate together. Watch for vague promises, push for one client, one problem, one result.

→ What can I do next?

Use your promise sentence, word for word, on your profile and when you introduce yourself this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Could a stranger understand who I help and why? What did I learn about my own work by being interviewed? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + communication, "I can describe the value I create in one clear sentence."

★ Expert extension

Find your standout space with a Positioning Map: pick two axes your clients care about, plot local rivals, and place your own dot in the empty space no one else holds.

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Reflection worksheet

S1 • Find Your Niche

Your strongest offer lives where three honest answers overlap. You don't invent a niche, you notice the one already in your best work.

1. **List five paid jobs**
   Or fewer, include unpaid or hobby work that felt like your best.
2. **Circle one**
   The job you enjoyed most and were paid best for.
3. **Answer three questions**
   What did I do best? Who exactly was the client? What valuable problem did I solve?
4. **Write your niche**
   In the overlap of those three answers.
5. **Sense-check**
   Would you want more of this work, and could you find more clients like that one?



→ Next

Write: “My niche is helping [client] with [problem].” Then find one place those clients gather, online or locally.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

What's the thread connecting my best work, and what did fixing the scope and price make clearer?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~40 min · Design exercise

S2 · Climb One Rung

Selling hours has a hard ceiling. Packaging your expertise into a fixed, repeatable offer is how income grows without simply working more.

1. **Pick one service**
   One you currently sell by the hour or per custom job.
2. **Find your rung**
   Locate it on the Productizing Ladder.
3. **Design the next rung**
   Turn it into a named package: a name, exactly what's included, one clear price.
4. **Choose a revenue model**
   Time · project · retainer · productized · digital, pick the best fit.
5. **Write the one-line pitch**
   For your package.



→ Next

Offer your new package to one real client this week, or list it clearly on your profile.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

What's the thread connecting my best work, and what did fixing the scope and price make clearer? **Youthpass:** "I can recognise the value in my own work and package it into a repeatable offer."

CASE STUDY

DesignJoy: one designer, a productized service

Brett Williams was a graphic designer doing what most freelancers do, writing proposals, negotiating a price for every project, and firefighting scope creep. It paid the bills, but it did not scale, and it burned him out.

In 2017 he tried something different. Instead of selling custom projects by the hour, he packaged his design work into a single **productized offer, DesignJoy**: one flat monthly price, unlimited design requests, delivered one task at a time in 24–48 hours. Fixed price, fixed scope, a systemised way of working, clients drop requests into a shared board, and saved templates keep delivery fast.

He needed no investors and no team. He built a simple one-page website, launched it on **Product Hunt**, and shared his progress openly on Indie Hackers. A single viral post nearly doubled his monthly revenue almost overnight.

Today DesignJoy is a **one-person business, no employees, no contractors**, earning over $1 million a year, while Brett works a normal day. He got there not by taking on more clients or more hours, but by turning a custom service into a **repeatable, recurring product**.

Sources: usefreelance.com · starterstory.com · designjoy.co. Facilitator tip: pair it with a **local** freelancer's story from your own community.



THE MODULE 1 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Freelancer Journey, restructuring →**
- **Productizing the service →**
- **Revenue models, a subscription →**
- **Standing out, a different offer →**

What you can borrow from this story, at any size

1 Package a repeatable offer

One name, one scope, one price, instead of quoting every job from scratch.

2 Systemise delivery

A simple request board and saved templates keep quality high and your time low.

3 Build in public

Sharing your progress openly, Indie Hackers, LinkedIn, is free marketing that compounds.

He didn't earn more by working more hours, he packaged one service into a repeatable, recurring product.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything a facilitator or learner needs to go further with Module 1. The **printable templates are built into this toolkit** (next pages) and also downloadable at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- One-Page Freelancer Canvas ↗
- Niche Finder worksheet · S1 ↗
- Package Designer · S2 ↗
- Interview cards & Promise builder · F3 ↗

Frameworks & further reading

- Business Model Canvas, strategyzer.com
- Value Proposition Canvas, strategyzer.com
- Blue Ocean "Strategy Canvas" (ERRC)
- Lean Canvas, leanstack.com

Register your business (official)

- Portugal, eportugal.gov.pt (Empresa na Hora)
- Lithuania, registrucentras.lt
- Slovenia, spot.gov.si (e-VEM), free & online
- VAT-exempt up to €15k / €45k / €60k (PT/LT/SI)

Free tools for a one-person business

- Design, canva.com
- Invoicing, wave / zervant / sumup
- Booking, calendly / cal.com
- Organise, trello / notion

Watch & listen (free)

- Business Model Canvas, Strategyzer (YouTube)
- Value Proposition Canvas, Strategyzer
- Hourly Billing Is Nuts, Jonathan Stark
- Start With Why, Simon Sinek (TED)

For the facilitator

- Read the full module first, section by section
- Run it in short loops, one framework, then apply
- Every section ends in one written action
- Localised legal & tax facts (PT/LT/SI) →

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 4

One-Page Freelancer Canvas

Print this A4 (or scale to A3) and fill it in for your own work. Used in activity **F2 · One-Page Canvas Jam**.

One-Page Freelancer Canvas

SHIFT · print & fill

Fill the right side first, who it's for, your promise, how money comes in, then work back left.

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Proposition	Client Relationship	Client Segments

Key Resources	Channels

Cost Structure	Revenue Streams

1. **Start on the right**, who it's for, your promise, and how money comes in.
2. **Then work back left**, what you do, what you have, your allies, your costs.
3. **A blank block is useful**, it shows you exactly where to look next.

Fill the right side first, clients, promise, money. That is where the truth and the money are.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 4

Niche Finder Worksheet

Self-directed activity **S1 · Find Your Niche**. Print and complete on your own, you don't invent a niche, you notice the one already in your best work.

Niche Finder Worksheet (S1)

SHIFT · print & fill

Notice the niche already hiding in your best past work, you don't invent it, you find it.

1 · List your last five paid jobs

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2 · Circle the best one, then answer:

What did I do best?

_____

Who exactly was the client?

_____

What valuable problem did I solve?

_____

MY NICHE

I help _____

who struggle with _____

to achieve _____

1. **Be honest** about what you actually enjoyed, not what you think you 'should' do.
2. **Stuck?** Ask someone who knows your work: "what am I best at?" Their answer is often your niche.
3. **Narrow is good**, narrow is memorable, and memorable gets recommended.

Your strongest offer lives where what you do best, one client, and a valuable problem overlap.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 3 OF 4

Package Designer

Self-directed activity **S2 · Climb One Rung**. Take one hourly or custom service and design the next rung up, a named, fixed-scope, fixed-price package.

Package Designer (S2)

SHIFT · print & fill

Turn one hourly / custom service into a named, fixed-scope, fixed-price package.

1. **Package name**
   give it a clear, memorable name

2. **Exactly what's included**
   list every deliverable, keep scope tight

3. **One clear price**
   € ____, the whole package, not per hour

4. **Revenue model**
   time · project · retainer · productized · digital

5. **One-line pitch**
   "I help ___ get ___ with my ___ package."

1. **Only package what you've delivered** a few times, standardise what already repeats.

2. **Keep the scope tight**, a clear small offer sells far better than a vague big one.

3. **Then offer it** to one real client this week, or list it clearly on your profile.

Selling hours has a hard ceiling. A named, repeatable package is how income grows without more hours.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 4 OF 4

Interview Cards & Promise Builder

The material for facilitator activity **F3 · Niche & Promise Lab**. Print one per pair, interview your partner, then build the one-sentence promise together.

Interview Cards & Promise Builder (F3)

SHIFT · print & fill

Interview your partner about their best-ever paid job — then build a one-sentence promise.

Interview prompts — ask, listen, note

1. **Tell me about your best-ever paid job. What was it?**
2. **Who exactly was the client — and what did they struggle with?**
3. **What result did you get them?**

MY PROMISE

I help ↳ one specific client

who struggle with ↳ a specific problem

to ↳ a specific result

1. **Ask, listen, note**, don't pitch. Let your partner do the talking about their best job.
2. **One client, one problem, one result**, push past vague answers like 'I help businesses grow'.
3. **Test it**, if your partner can repeat your promise back accurately, it works.

Clients don't buy what you make, they buy the removal of a problem. Name it in one clear sentence.