

SCAM STUFF

So, you want to know about Freelance Scams, huh? Pull up a chair and have a listen.

First up, I'm Corrie! By day I am a humble marketing freelancer who works with nonprofits & small businesses. In some of my spare time, I love learning about scams, hucksters, swindlers, and con artists, be they professional, religious, artistic, or otherwise. This little guide is the compilation of my notes from the Freelance Chat I guested on back in February 2022 and is by no means a comprehensive list of scams, but it does contain some general information about scams that may be helpful.

Next, know that there can be a lot of shame when talking about being the target of a scam. Judging from my research, let me tell you that if you have been scammed - you are NOT alone; you have nothing to be ashamed about & and we do not talk about this stuff enough.

What are some common scams?

In my research, I've found the most common scams targeting freelancers fall into four categories:

Bait & Switch - A potential client contacts you but then pitches YOU to work for them in a Multi-Level Marketing/"Direct Sales" program. The usual multi-level marketing suspects can be involved, but I often see companies I've never heard of and tend to focus HEAVY on the "coaching" or "business partnership" angles.

Payment - When potential clients send unsolicited funds before engagement or want to pay you in an unusual way (Bitcoin or another cryptocurrency, stock or equity, some product that doesn't show, a service trade, etc.).

Pay-to-Play -When a middleman asks you to "pay" for access to freelance jobs OR, I've seen reference to freelancers being asked to pay a "processing fee" to work for companies outside the country they reside in.

Exploitation - Excessive spec or test work. This is especially seen in "freelance" websites, though I've also heard of "legitimate" clients who try to pull this as well.

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If I think I'm about to be scammed, but it isn't one of the above things, what are some other red flags?

Not wanting to follow your process.

HASTE - needing a project started RIGHT AWAY and not willing to wait.

Anonymity - not being willing to talk to you face-to-face or contact you in an out-of-the-ordinary way (i.e., "I only want to be contacted on WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.").

Limited information about a company or a person. I also give a significant heaping of side-eye to LinkedIn "business opportunities" that look like they are using a photobank headshot.

What are some ways to protect yourself from being scammed?

Trust your gut. I can't say this enough. Many people I've read about who were almost scammed or were scammed posted something first to a freelance blog or Reddit that said, "Is this a scam?" If it feels too good to be true, it IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

Talk to other freelancers. There is a lot of shame associated with falling for something that turns out to be a scam, which is why I think many people aren't aware of the depth and breadth of freelance scams. Sunshine is the best disinfectant.

Do your research. Scams are typically repeatable, and the people/organizations that run scams have to do it at volume to pay off. If you get contact & it sounds too good to be true, POP THOSE SENTENCES INTO GOOGLE. Odds are, you will find them.

If you've been scammed...

I'm not a legal person or law enforcement, I'm just a freelancer who hates/loves scams, but US Freelancers, you can start with www.usa.gov/stop-scams-frauds and go from there. If you are the victim of a payment scam, make sure to put a fraud alert on your accounts!

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