

5 ways to stop dry spells from ruining your freelance career

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I've never had a regular 9-5 office job, but I hear they're magical places where your income stays the same from month to month.

Now, don't get me wrong, I love freelancing.

It has numerous benefits: flexibility, autonomy, and being able to work in your pyjamas. But the downside of all that freedom and flexibility is the occasional, incredibly stressful dry spells that come with the territory.

You could have consistent work for months and then one of your clients has to slash their budget. Around the same time, a contract ends. Next thing you know, your once-busy schedule is empty.

I remember my first dry spell. It was the coldest winter I had ever experienced in New York City. Things had gotten so bad that I had come up with five different ways to spice up ramen noodles.

Cooped up in my studio, I spent my free time trying to come up with out-of-the-box ideas for extra income. My best idea? A web series about a freelancer with cabin fever.

The silver lining of my imposed work hiatus was that I also used the extra time for reflection.

I realized that dry spells didn't have to be a staple of the freelance life. With enough preparation, these stints of unemployment could be a thing of the past.

When I did get out of the dry spell, I took the following steps so I would never have to face a ramen-only diet again:

1. Network even when your plates are full

Everyone knows that one person at a networking event—the one that hasn't had a gig in months.

With every over-enthusiastic handshake and business card handed out, you can feel the desperation seeping out of their body.

It's not their fault. Getting clients isn't always easy. But, ironically, their eagerness is a client-repellant.

I love networking events. I get to mingle with people in my field and there's almost always free alcohol.

Plus, more often than not, I end the night with a few new clients. Once, I was casually chatting with one of my clients, who I met at a networking event, when she started to detail why she wanted to work with me in the first place: "You just looked so cool—so sure of yourself. You seemed like you knew what you were doing."

Projecting confidence even when I feel like a ball of nerves on the inside is something that I've worked on. But I think the secret to my success that night was that I just didn't care. I went to the networking event on a whim and wasn't there only looking for new clients.

"Network even when you don't need to. Confidence is easier to emit when you're not desperate for a job."

Despite your best efforts, people quickly pick up on desperation and your chances of getting a gig out of networking when you're already in a slump are slim to none.

Going to networking events when you're busy ensures that you'll have a reservoir of clients built up and won't even have time to worry when you eventually lose a client. You'll be too busy working on the next project in your calendar.

2. Keep in touch

My father was the first entrepreneur I ever knew. Walking by his side on the streets of Jamaica was like being with a famous person. We couldn't go ten feet without someone stopping us and wanting to chat.

My dad wasn't a celebrity, but he had perfected the art of maintaining relationships.

His network didn't just include 'important' people. He knew the names and personal details of security guards, taxi drivers, and janitors. Because of his example I learned that it's important to check in with people and see how they're doing.

Freelancing can be all-consuming, especially early on in your career. All you're focusing on is getting enough clients so that you can pay the bills.

"It's easy to get caught in the trap of being so focused on the money that you forget your clients are real human beings."

A successful freelance career is built on solid relationships.

While you're working on a project, make sure that you ask your client how they're doing from time to time. Share personal details about your own life and show that the relationship is a two-way street.

Your connection doesn't have to end when the project is completed. Keep in contact with old clients. Wish them 'Happy Birthday'. Check in to see how they're doing.

This way, when your calendar is empty, you're not just coming back to them sniffing for work. And because you're constantly communicating you're fresh in their mind when they need something done.

3. Look for opportunities to generate passive income

We only have so many hours a day we can work, and finding ways to generate income while you're not actively working is a great way to supplement your freelance career.

Designer and blogger [Sean McCabe has a now famous story](#) of how he made \$80,000 in 24 hours through a course he put together to help people learn hand lettering.

While the title is a bit misleading, Sean's story is a testament to the earning potential of passive income.

The course took him about seven months to build and launch, but clearly the payoff was worth it in the end.

In fact, the course took so much time that he actually walked away from client work. You might not be ready to commit that much time to building your own course, but you can start at a smaller scale by putting together something for [Skillshare](#) or [Udemy](#).

Beyond solidifying you as a thought leader in the industry, the income you receive from a course will come in for months or years, and all you had to do was create the materials once!

Books, guides, and courses take a lot of effort upfront, but that time pays off when you lose a few clients but still have money to pay the bills each month.

4. Build a blog

If creating a product to bring in passive income seems too daunting, maybe you need to start even smaller with a blog.

As a freelancer writer, I've had clients hire me based on the work that I do, while others have hired me because they like my personality and my ideas. Most of the time, however, it's a combination of the two.

I show my work through my resume and my portfolio. But I use my blog and guest posts to show my personality and creative philosophies. I can't count how many clients I've gotten based on a blog post that I wrote.

"The scary truth is that there are more freelancers than there are gigs and many are as or more capable than you are."

A blog is a way to stand out and showcase your unique voice and personality.

5. No matter what, you always need to save

When you have enough money saved up that you can live comfortably for a few months, you'll start seeing dry spells as a blessing.

With all this free time, you're forced to go on that vacation that you've been putting off. Or you'll finally have time to work on that passion project (or passive income-generating book or course!).

Ok, maybe those examples are a bit farfetched for most of us, but the extra time can be used for things that will eventually advance your career, like picking up a new skill or taking a course.

But you can't do any of these if you don't have a financial safety blanket in place.

Being financially savvy is a little trickier when you're a freelancer. No matter how good you are, your income will vary from month-to-month.

This [article](#) gives a great break down of how you can budget with a freelancer's income, while Leo Babauta's Zen Habits blog has some [great tips](#) on [creating a simplified budget](#).

Leo's suggestion works on defining your regular income (i.e. what you're making on long-term contract work or regular contributions) and then breaking that down into a simple formula such as:

- 60% for monthly expenses, such as rent, utilities, insurance, internet, transportation, and food
- 10% for retirement (long-term saving)
- 10% for debt reduction (or more long-term savings if you don't carry any debt)
- 10% for short-term saving for periodic expenses like auto or home maintenance and medical expenses as well as things like birthday gifts.
- 10% for guilt-free fun money

No matter how you choose to divvy up your monthly earnings, it's important to have some sort of saving system in place.

We can't stop the rainy days from coming, but there's no excuse for not carrying around an umbrella.

The unpredictability of freelancing is exciting, but it can also be scary when you have rent/mortgage and bills to pay.

You became a freelancer for a reason. Don't let the inevitable dry spells get in the way of your dreams.

Image credit: [Lukasz Szmigiel](#)