BUSINESS; NAVIGATING THE GIG ECONOMY; Freelance tech jobs can pay a lot, if you know where to look

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FULL TEXT

You don't need a fancy college degree to make great money if you happen to have tech skills. If you can code, provide help with websites or test software, you may be able to earn a six-figure income. Experience and references are helpful, but no degree is required. If you don't have the relevant skills and you're willing to learn tech, you could earn plenty.

"Tech provides a comfortable living and can have huge upsides depending on career choices," says Chris Kolmar, co-founder of Zippia and editor of its career advice blog.

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Learning skills

If you don't already have mad tech skills, you may need training to get into this field. Those training opportunities increasingly involve certificate programs that you can do online.

Coursera, for instance, offers classes on user experience, web design, cybersecurity and data analytics. Most of these programs can be completed in six months of independent study that demands less than 10 hours a week. Coursera charges $39 a month for unlimited access, and Google offers some scholarships for those who can't afford the cost.

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The money

Google estimates that annual earnings of people who complete its certificate programs start at $50,000. Zippia estimates that information systems managers earn a median salary of $131,000, while information security directors pull in a median of $173,000. And those at the top of their craft earn considerably more.

Google says that there are hundreds of thousands more tech jobs than workers to fill them, and that more than 100 big companies are committed to finding full-time jobs for graduates of its certificate training programs. One of the benefits of tech careers is that people can work remotely.

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Finding gigs

When it comes to finding tech work in the freelance world, choose your agent carefully. Several big sites that promise to connect tech experts with work, such as Freelancer and Upwork, expect workers to bid against one another for jobs. That can push rates down.

But many sites offer reasonable to excellent pay. Here are some of the best:

Working Not Working and Creatively are both geared toward artists and designers. If you're a website designer or a user-experience expert, these are great places to post a portfolio and look for work. Neither site takes a commission from creatives who find work.

If you have at least five years of experience, you can apply to join Braintrust. All freelancer members of the tech cooperative get a piece of the network, so your acceptance to Braintrust hinges on being accepted by the freelancers who are already there. Your Braintrust shares don't pay dividends, but they give you a vote in how the

network operates. If you find a job through Braintrust, you'll get 100% of your rate. The site adds a 10% fee to the client's bill to pay network expenses.

SMA enlists freelancers for software development, systems engineering, computer graphics and presentation, management analytics and other projects. The site asks freelancers to sign up with a detailed resume. Those who make it through the screening process are invited to work on jobs that pay $28 to $80 an hour.

Toptal markets its talent to corporate clients needing project work. In theory, freelancers set their own hourly rates and simply make their services available through the platform. However, a Toptal spokesperson says the site lets freelancers know when their expected hourly rates make them "uncompetitive." The site is secretive about its markup, which is rumored to be substantial. But freelancers say they're still well-compensated.

You don't necessarily need mad coding skills to build a simple website with Wix or WordPress, and if you can do it, you can find plenty of work on Fiverr. This broad-based marketplace enables freelancers to set the prices and parameters of the job they're proposing. Clients come to you.

GoLance connects tech specialists with clients. You set up a profile that says what you do and what you charge. Companies contact you when they're interested. If you get hired, you pay an 8% fee to GoLance for making the connection.

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Kristof is the editor of SideHusl.com, an independent site that reviews hundreds of money-making opportunities in the gig economy.

DETAILS

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