



the
freelance jungle

THE STATE OF AUSTRALIAN FREELANCING

A summation of Australian freelancers and their work habits

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Australian Freelance Market Survey

The nature of Australian work is changing. More and more people are opting for freelance and self-employment opportunities.

Yet how freelancers work day-to-day, why we freelance, the challenges we face and the benefits of working for yourself are often overlooked.

Even an accurate picture of what a freelancer looks like is missing from the dialogue.

This survey attempts to change that.

From May 2019 through to November 2019, Australian grassroots community the Freelance Jungle conducted a survey of the state of freelancing in Australia.

Our group acts like a virtual support group come watercooler experience for Australian freelancers. We're peer-led and act to answer questions for the community, end the isolation inherent in freelancing, remind freelancers stress has a productivity cost and raise the knowledge bar.

That's why while standard occupational surveys tend to focus on pay rates, earnings and qualifications, we plumb the murkier depths, intrinsic motivations and attempt to define the elements that straight statistical analysis may miss.

The Aim of the Survey

- » **Capture** a snapshot of what it is like to freelance in Australia- who freelances, what they do and why
- » **Catalogue** the challenges, areas of growth and to highlight the abilities of Australian freelancers
- » **Identify** areas of opportunity to improve the working lives and mental health outcomes for Australian freelancers
- » **Provide** a viable roadmap on how to create a successful freelance business for future and fledgling freelancers
- » **Identify** and potentially bust myths and misconceptions surrounding the quality, skill and experience of Australian freelancers
- » **Chart** the impact of changes made by the Freelance Jungle on the Australian scene generally
- » **Inform** the future planning of the Freelance Jungle so that we focus on building what freelancers need.

By understanding freelancing in Australia better, we aim to help freelancers improve their business performance and their relationship with the freelance lifestyle. We also want to demonstrate to stakeholders and interested parties what it means to be a freelancer in Australia.

This survey and subsequent report aim to do just that.

Why research matters to the Freelance Jungle

Our mission began with a survey in 2011 when founder Rebekah Lambert wanted to identify if freelancing in Australia had significant challenges and/or she was making more mistakes than she needed to. Turns out, it was both.

The original survey saw 166 freelancers from across Australia respond.

While client management, low pay, under payment and late payment were key features of the Australian freelance experience, isolation was main problem facing freelancers.

The Freelance Jungle began to meet these challenges head on. It began with meeting once a month in Sydney to talk about the challenges over a beer and a meal.

In 2017, the survey was repeated and saw 330 freelancers respond. Again, while payment issues, client management, and finding work were the key challenges, isolation was still the hardest part of freelancing.

This report deals with the 2019 re-run of the survey that attracted 566 responses.

Today's Freelance Jungle is a peer-led group (so for freelancers by freelancers) that focuses on:

- » Ending the isolation inherent in freelancing
- » Reminding freelancers stress has a productivity cost
- » Raising the knowledge bar
- » Advocacy for freelancers

It's since grown to include:

- A 5500+ virtual community
- Mailing list of 2000
- Networking events in Sydney, Wollongong, Central Coast, Newcastle, Brisbane, Cairns, Adelaide and Melbourne
- A virtual bi-monthly stress down
- A dedicated website
www.freelancejungle.com.au

In 2019, we repeated the survey to test the changing nature of the Australian freelancing industry.

Factors influencing changes in our surveys

Like any good research geeks, we know that any movement in our data may be influenced by societal and cultural factors. That's why we've included a summary of what we believe may influence changes in our results between the 2011, 2017 and 2019 surveys.

These included:

- » Structural changes to questions. E.g. the introduction of non-binary gender and prefer not to say gender-related options within demography, the usage of postcodes over suburb and town names for greater clarity and rewording some challenge-based questions to capture signs of stress and distress.
- » Increased interest in freelancers generally since 2010. Australian freelancing is a growth industry. This is reflected in the growth of freelance related start-ups and services (e.g. increased proliferation of specialised membership sites and job marketplaces) and the field of freelancing receiving more coverage in media and so on.
- » The changing nature of the Freelance Jungle's ability to reach freelancers. While we didn't only fish in our own pond for respondents, we know our growth has made an impact on garnering responses.

Our membership has grown from 500 to over 5500. We have expanded our networking program from Sydney and Brisbane to include Wollongong, Central Coast, Newcastle, Adelaide, Cairns and Melbourne.

- » The website that was introduced in 2014 has now been revamped in 2019. And there has been increased interest in the Freelance Jungle via National Freelance Day, miscellaneous podcast appearances, self-produced Vivid Ideas events in 2015 and 2017, and increased media interest in expert commentary in freelancing sought at the Freelance Jungle, and the Freelance Jungle winning the 2019 Workplace Wellbeing award in the NSW Mental Health Matters awards by WayAhead.
- » The impact of focussing on freelancer needs. Through our increased presence, we have not only got a ready-made audience to reach out to, we're also directly influencing the nature of the challenges faced by Australian freelancers. Our community helps reduce isolation for example. Plus, it may also influence others who launch their own projects and businesses servicing the freelance field.

Notes on the collection of our data

While we had the unique opportunity to focus on bringing the opinions of Freelance Jungle members to the fore, this survey was shared and available extensively outside of our regular channels. We did this to ensure we gained a broad perspective of what it is like to freelance in Australia.

Our promotion of the survey included:

- » All social media channels available to the Freelance Jungle on multiple occasions (this included Facebook group, Facebook page, LinkedIn page, website's blog)
- » The social media channels of the founder and other associated administration (this included but was not limited to their freelancing social media profiles and personal profiles, sharing to associated groups and so on)
- » Sharing the survey in high-volume Facebook groups across general business, freelancing, creative arts, specialist groups such as writing and music, advocacy groups in disability, start-up and local business groups
- » Promoting it during media appearances (predominately radio)
- » Inclusion in the newsletter for the Freelance Jungle

- » Outreach to other businesses and advocacy group working in freelance, including but not limited to Kate Toon's Clever Copywriting School, The Freelance Collective, Freelance Australia, Rachel's List, Health Writer Hub, Never Not Creative, and accounting software, Rounded
- » Successfully invigorating members of the Freelance Jungle to share the survey in their wider online and peer connections as well as having a high focus drive within the group to reach a desired target of 500 responses

Respondents were not incentivised, rewarded or paid for their responses to ensure the integrity of the data.

To keep the answers honest, respondents could opt to remain anonymous by not supplying their email address at the end of the survey. This was clearly outlined at both top and tail of the survey itself.

By the close of the survey on November 11 2019, we had received 566 responses with a completion rate of 84%. That completion rate didn't include any abandons of the survey and was merely reflective of those who chose to opt out of supplying their email address and/or other optional questions. The core mandatory data response rate is 100%.

What does a freelancer look like?

Freelancers in Australia are seen as fresh-faced, university graduates looking to skill their design skills in temporary work situations. Or so it seems.

The reality is that freelancing is a multi-faceted, diverse career that spans all kinds of fields, experience and age groups, and working styles, as this data shows.

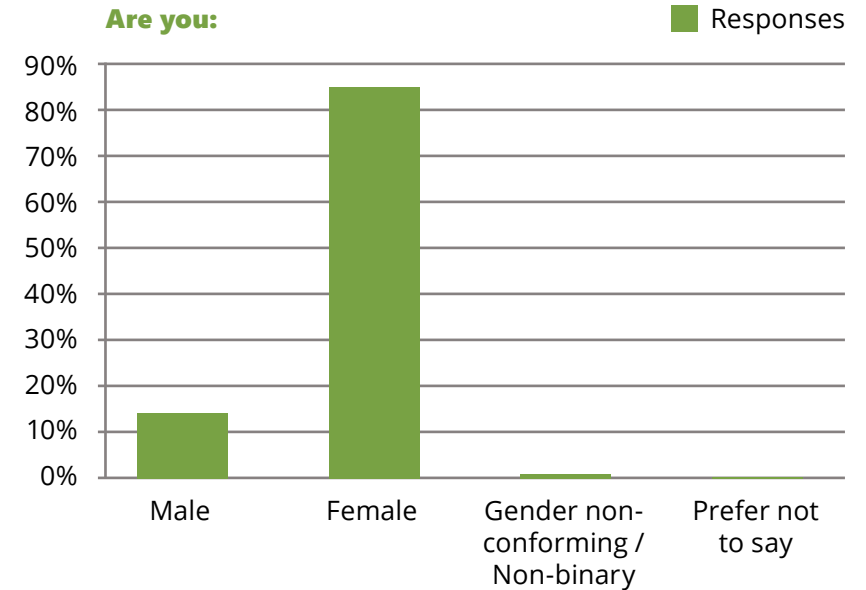
Those that identify as female are scooping the freelance pools to the tune of 84%. Considering this is matched later in the report with family considerations inspiring many to freelance as the top answer, it's not too difficult a conclusion to draw that women are freelancing to balance their family and work needs.

The hours also reflect part-time/school-time work periods and over 75% of respondents are aged between 30 to 49.

This of course is not the only reason why women freelance, and we know we have men making use of freelancing to also balance their parenting needs, but it certainly paints a picture. Why people freelance is explored in greater detail later in the report.

We've also introduced two classifications for people that do not conform to gender or binary modalities or who would prefer not to say in 2019 that were not present in 2011 and were less encompassing in 2017.

Gender breakdown



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Male	14.13%	80
Female	84.45%	478
Gender non-conforming / Non-binary	1.06%	6
Prefer not to say	0.35%	2
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

What age group do we fit into?

The idea that Australian freelancers are gung-ho whipper snappers fresh from the halls of TAFE and university don't really apply. Those aged 30-49 (so 30s and 40s) take up 75% of the responses.

When looking at age in relation to occupational choices, it can be difficult to determine where the impacts lie. **We do have some theories on the influencing factors.**

A recent discussion in the Freelance Jungle outside this survey demonstrated that people over the age of 40 are experiencing more ageism when applying for part-time, full-time and contract work. We also know from previous discussions, as well as media reports that unpaid internships for current students and new graduates may be influencing early-stage career opportunities. Graduation has also been delayed from year 12 to undergraduate degree, with many more opting for honours, masters and post-doctorate studies.

It's almost as though working careers have shrunk from graduation to retirement into starting in earnest at late 20s after education has been completed. And opportunities beginning to reduce due to ageism and parenting impacts by 40. When working in certain careers, can we only expect to see fifteen years of access to secure, steady work?

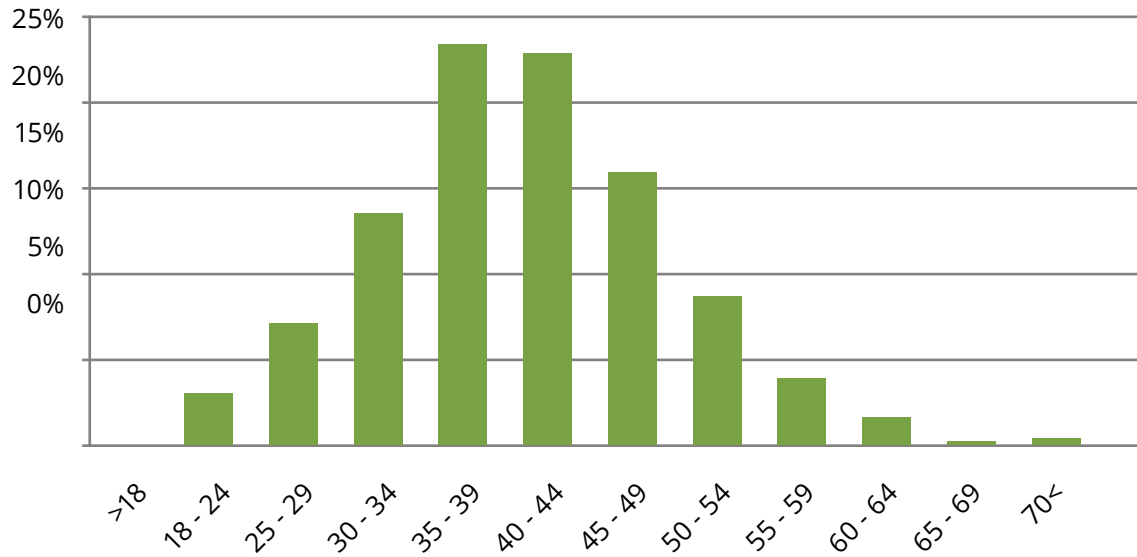
In which case, is it any wonder Australians are choosing in record numbers to create their own path and attempt to have greater control over their career? With the changing nature of work seeing Australians change careers **five to seven** times during their working life, freelance can also be seen as a way of leaving dissatisfying careers or previous fields behind. This may also account for the change in the 40s especially, when reflection on career trajectory and the relationship with work is heightened.

Another potential impact may be through the housing crisis. With rising costs of housing in Sydney and Melbourne, some may be leaving the larger centres for regional and coastal towns or other capital cities to remove economic pressure, own their home, be closer to family or generally take advantage of the coveted sea change/tree change culture. It may also reflect increased mobility with one partner creating the need for greater flexibility with a partner's job. For example, military, police force or other transfer-based careers may impact a partner's choices with their own career. Self-employment may reduce or even remove this impact.

In that, rather than depending on job availability in their chosen new location, Australians seem content to invent their own.

What age group do you fit into?

■ Responses



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
18- 24	3.00%	17
25 to 29	7.07%	40
30 to 34	13.25%	75
35 to 39	23.32%	132
40 to 44	22.79%	129
45 to 49	15.90%	90
50 to 54	8.66%	49
55 to 59	3.89%	22
60 to 64	1.59%	9
65 to 69	0.18%	1
70 plus	0.35%	2
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

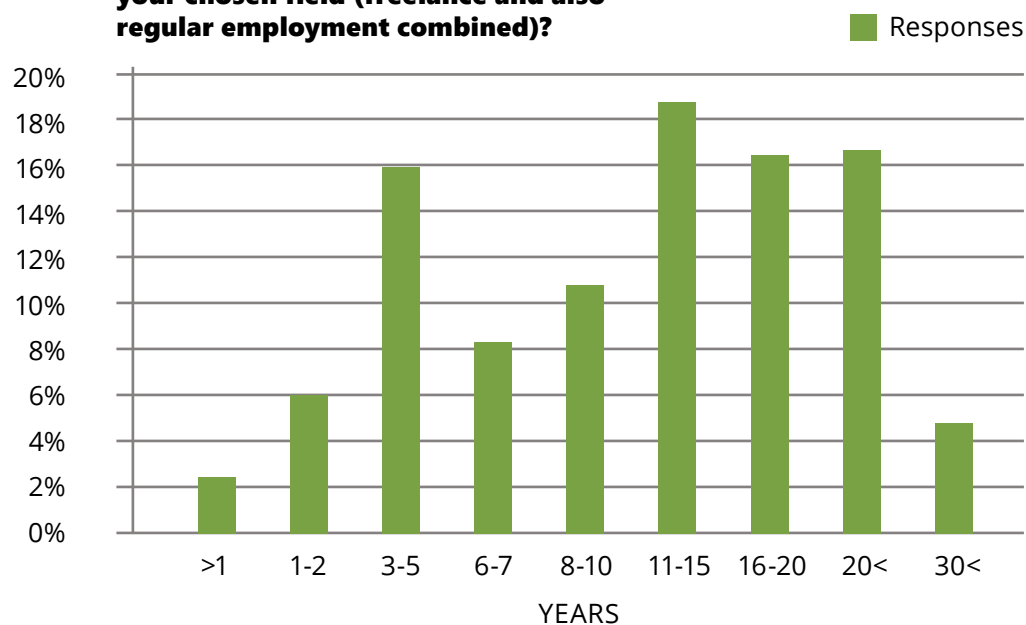
How experienced are we?

Similarly, the assumption we're inexperienced is turned on its head through the length of our freelancing journey.

The length of our career we enjoyed shows expertise and staying power. We're often the sort of people that would be in senior roles, with **56% having more than a decade's experience** and **over 21% having more than 20 years** under their belt.

We're bringing a wealth of experience to the clients we service. These experience levels would normally reflect strong wages. Yet, does that seniority, experience and skill translate into great rates of pay?

How long have you been working in your chosen field (freelance and also regular employment combined)?



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Less than a year	2.47%	14
A year to 2 years	6.01%	34
3 to 5 years	15.90%	90
6 to 7 years	8.30%	47
8 to 10 years	10.78%	61
11 to 15 years	18.73%	106
16 to 20 years	16.43%	93
More than 20 years	16.61%	94
More than 30 years	4.77%	27
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

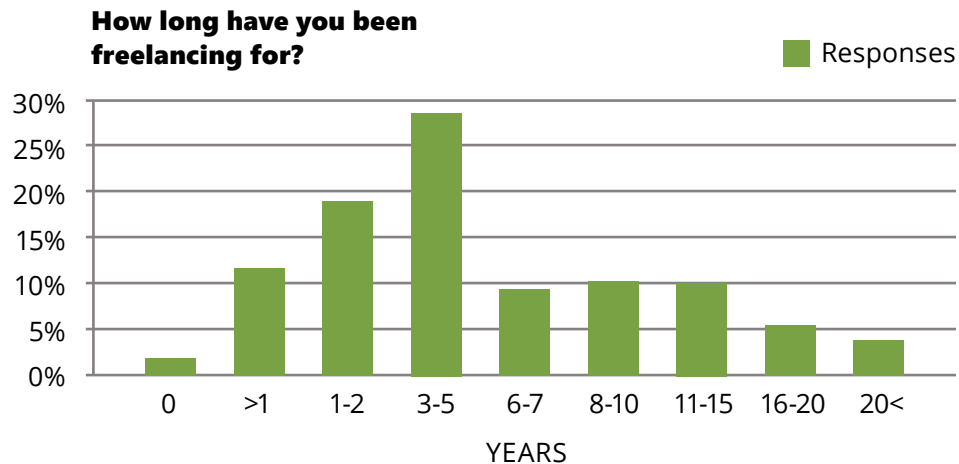
How long have we been freelancing?

Freelancing is a tough gig. It is not for everyone and it may not be a long-term strategy. Considering that it is often chosen to support the individual's lifestyle, the relationship with freelancing can also change.

When considering the longevity of freelance careers, you have to consider the degree of difficulty also associated with the career. Considering the amount of issues with late payment, difficult clients, work insecurity, stigma, low-ball rates and pressure, it's unsurprising it may suit for a period of time as opposed to a long-term choice.

Also, the nature of need changes. Those managing child-rearing responsibilities, traveling, looking after physical or mental health, studying or living somewhere with lower employment prospects may change their circumstances. A side project may transform into a primary money-maker.

Whatever the case, we're definitely not as transient as monikers like "gig economy" imply.



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
I am thinking about trying it or I am about to start	1.94%	11
Less than a year	11.66%	66
A year to 2 years	18.90%	107
3 to 5 years	28.45%	161
6 to 7 years	9.36%	53
8 to 10 years	10.25%	58
11 to 15 years	10.07%	57
16 to 20 years	5.48%	31
More than 20 years	3.89%	22
Answered		566
Skipped		0

What are we offering?

110 different vocational fields were chosen. 5% chose the OTHER occupational box and claimed they worked in different fields from those on offer. After sifting through those who could have chosen other options, two thirds of the other responses were catered for previously. There were 11 extra occupational fields not covered.

That means 121 different freelance careers highlighted in total.

None of these are particularly surprising careers for freelancers. Content marketing and writing is heavily promoted as a viable freelance career with few educational barriers around the world. SEO remains a must for the usual standard target markets of freelance services in agencies, small businesses, sole operators and start-ups.

Web and graphic design similarly cater to agencies, small business, sole operators and start-up.

Since the GFC, advertising agencies have changed the way they work to include more campaign-based labour, influencing all kinds of marketing related fields.

Journalism, though in decline as an industry overall, still remains pitch-based and is likely even more transient than before. Gone are the days of in-house editors and subbies at newspapers and publishing houses, meaning more of the workforce are relying on other sources of employment.

The increased interest in social media means both paid and organic social media remain popular.

But you can freelance in just about anything these days. Including psychology, art therapy, placemaking and urban renewal, granting writing, disability support, industrial relations, law and more.

The Top Ten

1	Copywriting and content writing (inclusive of SEO etc)	41.17%	233
2	Editing and proofing services	21.73%	123
3	Marketing & related services (e.g. social media, general marketing etc)	21.02%	119
4	Writer/author	18.02%	102
5	Graphic Design	17.49%	99
6	Website design	14.31%	81
7	Journalism	12.90%	73
8	Website development	10.07%	57
9	Branding	8.30%	47
10	Advertising - online (e.g. AdWords, PPC, Facebook advertising etc)	6.89%	39
	Community management / social media services	6.89%	39

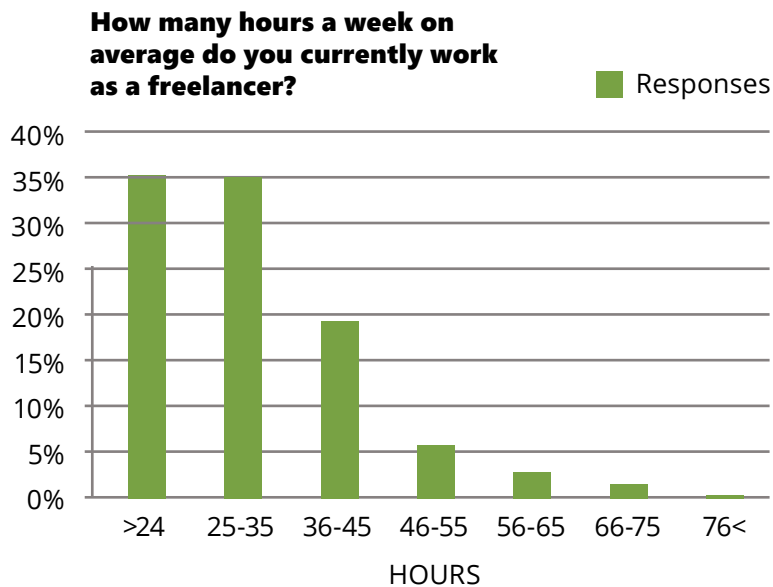
When do we work?

Contrary to popular mythology, freelancers are not workaholics... not in the traditional sense at least.

The bulk appears to be within part-time or full-time working range. The almost even split may be indicative of the high proportion of parents working hours that reflect school times and after school care times.

It may also be associated with lifestyle impacts like travel, or health and disability management.

Although just over 10% (10.6%) work more than 45 hours per week.



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Less than 24 hours	35.16%	199
25 to 35 hours	34.98%	198
36 to 45 hours	19.26%	109
46 to 55 hours	5.83%	33
56 to 65 hours	2.83%	16
66 to 75 hours	1.59%	9
76 or more hours	0.35%	2
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

Why do we choose freelancing?

Lifestyle is the biggest influencing factor when deciding to freelance.

With a **predominance of women respondents within the age group of 30 to 49**, perhaps it isn't that surprising that the number one reason people choose freelancing is due to family and managing parenting better. Is workplace inflexibility playing a role? Anecdotally, it is what we hear within online community.

Hot on the heels is that sensation of freedom and autonomy reflected in both the freedom and job satisfaction responses. We want greater control to use our talents and fly higher. Freelancers want to work on efficient, quality projects and have no time for presenteeism, set work hours or doing things that don't make sense.

It is however worrisome that just over 16% of respondents left through redundancy and toxic bosses or work culture. [40% of workers will experience bullying in their workplace](#). In 2017, a Victorian study found [17% of the state's suicides were workplace related](#).

With **60% feeling less secure at work** plus these alarming statistics related to bullying, suicide and our own figure related to workplace toxicity, is it any wonder Australian freelancers are shying away from traditional workplaces?

Australia also struggles to meet the needs of people with **mental health conditions and/or physical disabilities with almost 7.5% of respondents choosing freelance** to look after ourselves better. Considering 1 in 5 Australians has a disability and Beyond Blue now estimates 1 in 2 Australians will have a major mental health crisis in their lifetime, standard workplaces may be woefully out of step with the needs of Australian workers. Indeed, Beyond Blue estimates that while [7 out of 10 workplaces would like to be viewed as mentally healthy, only 4 out of 10](#) are willing to do the work to make it a reality.

A lack of support, flexibility, autonomy and support is making freelancing incredibly attractive.

What is the NUMBER ONE reason you chose freelancing?

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
To spend more time with my family/ manage parenting needs better	22.08%	125
For the feeling of freedom and commanding my own destiny	20.67%	117
I was made redundant/ pushed out/ fired and landed here	10.25%	58
To manage a physical or mental health issue better	7.42%	42
I was looking for job satisfaction I couldn't find working for someone else	6.01%	34
I was sick of working for jerk bosses or toxic workplaces, industries etc	6.01%	34
I'm a rebel: working for other people doesn't suit me	4.59%	26
To make more money	4.06%	23
Other (an answer NOT listed. Please don't combine answers or answer "all of it".)	3.89%	22

To allow me to travel where I wanted to/ to be location independent	3.71%	21
I'm regionally based and the opportunities are harder to come by	3.71%	21
I wanted to change fields or career paths	2.47%	14
I don't enjoy working in offices/office politics	1.94%	11
I'm launching a business/start-up idea, so freelancing makes it easier than other forms of employment to do that	1.24%	7
To study or balance studying needs better	1.06%	6
I'm a carer to a person with disability, illness etc and need greater flexibility as a result	0.71%	4
I am not into the commute	0.18%	1
To become a celebrity in my field	0.00%	0
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

How do we get work?

In freelance, friendship matters.

Networks, reputation and positive word of mouth makes all the difference when you're freelancing. The top 4 responses for where to get work rely on relationships as well as demonstrating great work to get the next lead.

This flies in the face of conventional wisdom about the freelance sector.

For example, although it's been a growth area for innovation and invention in the start-up world, providing job boards accounts for 10% or less of the work freelancers get. Anecdotally, while job boards can help streamline the process of finding work, they're often seen as an early stage steppingstone. Lower rates through open competition with overseas markets, the transitory nature of client relationships and even some rumbles about restrictions and limitations placed on individual's usage of the platform may influence this.

Teaching SEO is also a growth industry with a significant array of online and face-to-face courses, DIY programs and support mechanisms on offer. This

translates into **22% of the work volume and a positive skill to have in acquiring work for yourself**. Yet other activities of the relationship kind seem far more effective.

Pounding the pavement also tends to help. Things such as organic marketing, cold calling, working on your own marketing channels, networking and being present in groups to help with business enquiries makes all the difference.

There appears to be less return in arenas where money is required to access work than not, backing up the assumption that a lot of freelance work comes from working room, putting in the time and building the reputation (through work, organic marketing, being present).

How do you currently source work? Choose all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Client referral	75.80%	429
Peer referral	60.95%	345
Old boss, old colleagues or previous industry network	46.64%	264
Friend / family referral	41.17%	233
Participating in Facebook groups &/or online forums	39.75%	225
Organic social media (such as your pages & channels etc)	26.86%	152
Face to face networking events	24.38%	138
Organic SEO on my website and/or blog	22.97%	130
Through digital/marketing/advertising agencies	14.13%	80
Cold calling and cold emailing	12.19%	69
Other social media advertising forms (LinkedIn, Twitter etc)	12.19%	69
Facebook advertising	11.66%	66
Searching standard job websites (Seek, CareerOne etc)	11.13%	63
Pro-bono work / volunteering	10.42%	59
Via paid professional memberships with job boards attached	10.07%	57

By presenting at events	9.01%	51
Bidding for jobs online (e.g. eLance, Freelancer, Upwork, Fivver etc)	8.30%	47
Working at co-working joints and similar	7.60%	43
Other (please specify)	5.83%	33
Instagram advertising	5.65%	32
Posting or answering Gumtree or similar free ads	4.59%	26
Checking out specialised sites in my field (e.g. Clearview, JobsinHR, Jobzilla etc)	4.24%	24
Via employment agencies	3.53%	20
Paying for my own advertising online (e.g. AdWords, banner ads etc)	2.65%	15
Public relations (paid or unpaid)	2.12%	12
Leaflet drops, postcards at cafes and similar print materials	1.94%	11
Entering competitions	1.41%	8
Paying for space in print magazines, newspapers	0.71%	4
BNI or similar	0.71%	4
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

Where do the challenges lie?

Freelance is a career brimming with all kinds of personal responsibilities.

Money and value, self-doubt and self-advocacy, business development, increased competition and ironically, an aversion to marketing and self-promotion add up to create some diverse challenges.

The age-old question of 'what should I charge?' is giving many a freelancer a run for their money. Value and marketing also tie in. Here, you can almost see that we find a difficulty in advocating for our value and demonstrating our worth with confidence. This is not helped with almost 30% getting requests for free work and almost 35% facing rejection of their rates.

For the most part, freelancing industries lack standard rate cards and even those available have become 'suggested rates' as opposed to enforceable. When we lack confidence, are concerned about cheap labour and have no real guiding lights in what to charge, is it any wonder we are often struggling to work out what to charge? Or negotiating our rates down, find it difficult to say no to scope creep or are prone to overwork? And that our clients, who generally have the ample choice, consider price a far greater factor in their decision making than say experience, ability or credibility?

If you look at the majority of responses, freelancers shy away from demonstrating their value. We often lack the confidence or time to be able to make a case for our abilities. The issue is compounded by repeatedly facing the same rejection, downward rate negotiation and requests for free work.

Unable to counter objections due to a focus on price, Australian freelancers lower their rates, see work go offshore or never hear from clients again.

Creating a situation where we hide away from marketing, think it's uncool to advocate for our value and accept client ignorance is taking a toll.

Businesses simply don't respect the experience freelancers offer. And we don't know how to sell it to them. The cycle continues.

What's the solution?

Australian freelancers need to work on their confidence, marketing and pitching skills. We also need to learn how to counter objections and take our business presentation as seriously as we do the work we perform for our clients.

Our target market also needs to be educated as to the value of choosing Australian freelancers. Mythology exists that choosing offshore labour over Australian talent is a benevolent act of support for people living in poverty. Yet much of this is unqualified assumption and potentially self-serving.

Stigma also remains with freelancers in assumptions about our lack of experience, ability or professional skills.

Advocacy has to be done to ensure that these assumptions about the quality of our work are shut down, once and for all.

What sorts of challenges do you face when trying to find work?

Choose all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Knowing how to quote and/or what rates I should be charging	50.09%	283
Explaining the value in what I do	46.19%	261
Finding time to maintain my marketing, blogging, social media etc activities	45.84%	259
I find self-promotion challenging due to introversion/introspection/self-reflection	36.81%	208
Rejection of rates and charges as too high	34.16%	193
Time required to create proposals / pitch / meetings	32.39%	183
Requests for free work	29.91%	169
Marketing isn't something I enjoy and/or not something I feel confident when doing	27.08%	153
My industry has a lot of competition from cheaper offshore labour	25.49%	144
Attracting the right-fit or compatible client	21.59%	122
Planning and strategising business development activities doesn't come naturally to me	21.42%	121

Knowing where to go to find work	19.65%	111
Networking events are hard to get to or not something I enjoy	18.23%	103
Attitudes towards freelancers as somehow inferior	15.40%	87
Competing against louder, more sales savvy or even aggressive freelancers	15.04%	85
Closing the sale / Non-responses when asked to pitch or quote	14.69%	83
Finding work is not an issue for me	10.09%	57
Ageism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism or another form of discrimination	8.14%	46
Agencies not briefing me properly	7.26%	41
My geographical location rules me out of a lot of work	6.55%	37
Other (please specify)	5.13%	29
My work is seasonal	3.54%	20
	Answered	565
	Skipped	1

Can you make a living freelancing in Australia?

Here is where our experience of freelancing doesn't match our practical needs. **What does it say when freelancing is the main source of income in 70% of cases yet only 38.16% make enough money to pay the bills?**

In terms of what freelancers dislike the most, timetabling issues and work instability came through strongly. Cashflow is a huge issue and featured prominently in this section as well. Both are a significant source of stress for freelancers as they grapple to manage work demands and attempt to make ends meet as they await late payments. Low ball rates, late paying clients and work instability are making it difficult for freelancers to make ends meet.

Cause for concern is not only the day-to-day impacts.

Many businesses that hire freelancers are unaware of their need to contribute to superannuation for work that has a value of \$450 or more a month. Freelancers, already feeling work scarcity and competition, don't request it.

We also know through this survey and via common comment threads in the Freelance Jungle that freelancers are under-insured, not saving money, cannot afford to take off sick days, and therefore are completely unprepared for issues such as long-term illness, accident, or temporary or permanent disability. Very few have a contingency plan should they fall ill. Should a freelancer lose their ability to generate income through permanent disability, illness or death, they and/or their family may lack the protections many other Australian workers have.

This level of financial insecurity is not a sustainable long-term strategy.

Is freelancing your main occupation / source of income?

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	70.14%	397
No - I also work part time to supplement my freelance income	15.02%	85
No- freelancing is my side gig / night work after my bill-paying job	9.19%	52
No - it supplements AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY, Centrelink or Disability Pension etc	4.59%	26
I have not started yet	1.06%	6
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

Does your business currently make enough money to pay your bills?

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	38.16%	216
No	21.73%	123
Sometimes	24.03%	136
Not sure	1.59%	9
I have another source of income, so it doesn't have to	14.49%	82
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

What's keeping us up at night?

It's less about being in the gutter staring at the stars and more about ruminating about whether we can keep the lights on.

When half your survey respondents are filled with self-doubt and worried about money, that can take a toll. Building confidence matters. We can't produce work we love and set boundaries or ask for what we need without it.

Over 40% of us don't have enough time, we're waiting to be paid and we aren't confident enough to sell ourselves.

Freelancers have a lot to worry about. Not all the challenges are in the hands of the client-freelancer relationship as often assumed. Many are not related to acquiring work, which is often the focus of innovation in the freelance industry.

What we're finding with freelancers is that confidence makes all the difference. And that we could do with support to manage our financial affairs, with debt collection and being able to manage time and clients better.

Our self-care is of concern as well. 30% of freelancers are stressed, not looking after their health or getting appropriate weekend and holiday downtime. Work-life balance is a struggle for freelancers as much if not more so for the average Australian.

And while the isolation that began the Freelance Jungle is no longer the number one problem facing Australian freelancers, it still impacts 30% of the workforce.

What causes you stress and/or makes your freelancing experience less satisfying than it could be? Choose all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Self-doubt, a lack of confidence and/or imposter syndrome	52.65%	298
Not enough money / cash-flow management	51.94%	294
Late paying clients/long payment cycles	43.11%	244
Not enough time / time management	42.76%	242
Marketing a freelance business / selling myself	40.81%	231
Maintaining work-life balance and/or issues with stress	33.57%	190
Maintaining healthy habits such as eating well, exercising & getting enough sleep	30.39%	172
Procrastination, distraction and general apathy	30.39%	172
Isolation and loneliness	30.21%	171
Lack of holidays, weekends and appropriate down time	30.21%	171
Wearing way too many hats (admin, accounting, the work, biz dev etc)	30.04%	170
Juggling parenting and family responsibilities	29.68%	168

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Time & effort wasted on leads that don't convert to clients	29.51%	167
Super, retirement and all that jazz	29.15%	165
Saying no to work	25.62%	145
Managing mental health impacts	25.44%	144
Scheduling impacts- feast and famine timetable	25.09%	142
Tax time and related finance issues	24.03%	136
Figuring out how to grow my business from a sole person adventure	20.49%	116
The sheer amount of work required to complete / workflow issues	19.26%	109
Affording new equipment, technology and/or training to stay in the game	19.26%	109
Competitors, self-comparison and keeping up with the Joneses	18.90%	107
Concerns about burn out	18.73%	106
Managing client expectations	15.19%	86
Managing health and/or disability impacts	14.84%	84
NBN and internet access quality	12.54%	71

Finding the right contractors/freelancers to share the work with	12.19%	69
The difficulties associated with securing loans, credit cards etc	11.13%	63
Not enough support from family and friends	10.07%	57
Information on running a business is splintered and hard to come by	9.36%	53
Client's requiring on-site work limiting my ability to apply for otherwise suitable contracts and projects	9.01%	51
The challenge / love is gone- so what next?	7.42%	42
Technical and technology issues	5.65%	32
Other (please specify)	4.42%	25
Bullying within my industry and/or with clients	3.00%	17
Conflict with suppliers, contractors or staff	1.77%	10
In-fighting and/or poor behaviour within the freelance scene	1.24%	7
Nothing. I'm completely stress-free.	0.53%	3
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

What do we want to learn?

We remain curious and focused on trying to upskill.

Developing business, staying on the right side of money and taxation, preserving self-care, pricing, efficiency and collaboration are the hot topics.

It looks like we want to take off the financial pressures associated with low and late payments. We also want to supplement that income with grants and pricing ourselves better.

We also believe we could improve the bottom line by being more efficient, setting ourselves up properly in regard to tax and law, and getting some coaching.

We want to learn SEO and collaborate better. All while warding off burn out and stress.

We're determined to fix things. But are they the right things to be fixing?

There's a desire to throw money at the problems. Or at least, bring more money in to hopefully resolve it. Yet the more we delve into our challenges, they're less about the mechanics of freelancing and more about what lingers within.

What would you like to learn to improve your freelancing? Choose all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Lead generation & business development	41.64%	234
Business hygiene stuff e.g. law, tax, business and/or GST registration, terms and conditions etc	38.79%	218
Learning from a coach or mentor	34.16%	192
DIY SEO	32.92%	185
Where to go for funding, grants and governmental support programs	31.32%	176
Stress reduction and/or mental health support inclusive of burn out recovery	31.14%	175
Pricing and price negotiation including price rise management	31.14%	175
How to automate my business so I'm more efficient	30.78%	173
How to collaborate with others to win bigger jobs	29.54%	166
Tips from a lawyer about contracts, problems as they arise etc	28.29%	159



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Taking money further- e.g. SMSF, saving, CFO advisory, investing etc	26.69%	150
Productivity hacks	25.27%	142
Online networking tips & tricks	25.09%	141
DIY advertising with things like Google AdWords, Facebook ads etc	23.13%	130
Real world networking tips & tricks	22.42%	126
Social media skills and techniques	21.53%	121
Client management - including the difficult ones	20.28%	114
WordPress/SquareSpace etc tips	18.68%	105
DIY marketing including content, blogging etc	18.33%	103
How to hire/manage contractors	16.37%	92
Time management skills	16.01%	90

General access to eBooks, podcasts and information on a variety of topics	10.50%	59
Training on the latest software and/or equipment in my industry	10.50%	59
eCourses on freelancing and specific aspects therein so I can DIY later	9.79%	55
IT basics so I can troubleshoot tech issues myself	8.90%	50
Nothing- I know it all	1.07%	6
	Answered	562
	Skipped	4

How are we connecting?

Our community matters to us– and so too does meeting our next client! Freelancers want to network to find people to work with, to network online and increase their professional development or network face-to-face. Learning takes a backseat, as does self-care. **Interestingly, just over 10%**

don't care about events at all. It would be interesting to assess whether this translates into freelance habits and reality. The difficulty assessing any attitude to events is that people often love the idea of an event, yet it rarely translates into actual attendance.

What kind of events would you attend? Choose all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Networking face to face (tailored)	54.06%	306
Events for professional development on specific areas of interest	52.30%	296
Networking online	43.46%	246
Mixers that are specifically designed for you to meet other freelancers/contractors to work with	43.46%	246
Un-conferencing for freelancers (where people present topics, vote for things they want to see presented and so on)	37.28%	211
Traditional conferencing (presenters on specific topics & panels etc)	32.33%	183
Self-care, stress reduction and/or mental health focused events	28.98%	164
Relaxation retreats / workshops / events to learn how to manage worklife balance	24.73%	140
Showcasing events with the ability to show your work at events	19.61%	111
Nothing– I don't like events much	10.42%	59
Other (please specify)	2.47%	14
	Answered	566
	Skipped	0

What do we like about freelancing?

Based on open-ended responses, the birds were well and truly out of the cage and flying high when it came to the love of freelancing.

Freedom is the big winner. We love being there for family, calling the shots, and the flexibility.

We get to choose, and we love it.

Work quality is important too. We want to be able to do the best work possible for our clients. But we also care about it for our sense satisfaction, personal gratification, portfolio and the challenge. We value variety, opportunity and creativity.

Plus, we're happy to see the back of office politics, having a boss or the dreaded commute.

We're so happy that despite being an optional question, the freelancers were happy to tell us all the positives.



What we dislike about freelancing?

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the content shared in this section, we opted not to use a cloud tagging system.

Instead, answers have been tabulated. 440 freelancers responded to this section.

Of that, 108 or just under a quarter (**24.5%**), **disliked the unstable nature of the work. 18% named cashflow as a major hurdle. 11% found client management tricky.**

14% again highlighted isolation and loneliness caused them issue. **10% were tired of wearing all the hats** and being accountable for everything. A further **6% even longed for office camaraderie to bounce ideas off and share the load.**

Other repeated areas of concern included the lack of holidays and the complete inability to shut off. Here, freelancers wished for better access to coworking or a magical way to step away from the email.

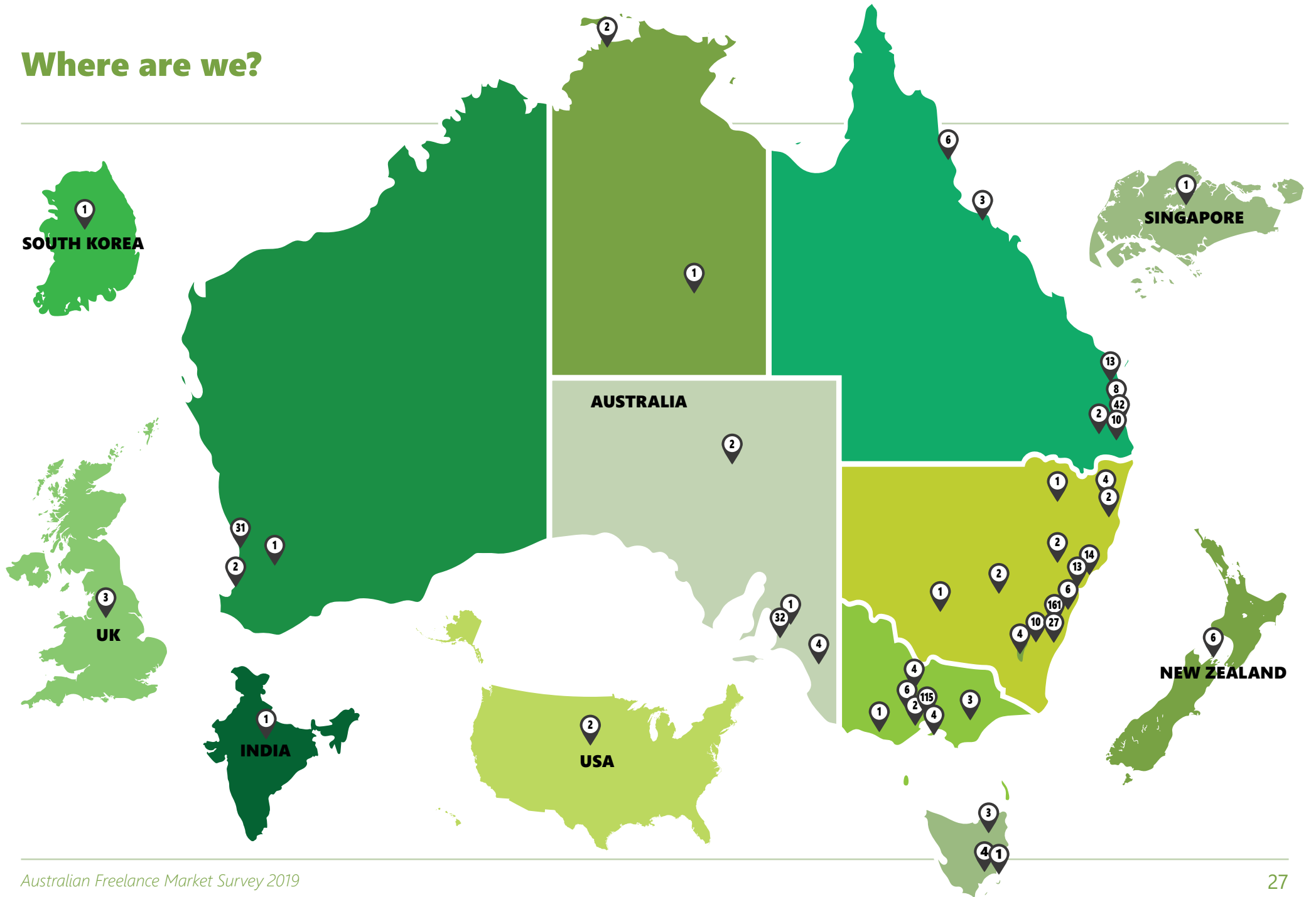
Stigma from family, neighbours, clients, friends and more were strong. From the friends offended by the lack of social interaction during the designated workdays to snide comments across the Christmas table, freelancers are feeling under-valued.

Clients and prospects don't help the situation. They bring a flurry of requests for free work, work outside of scope and surprise attack requests make freelancers feel under pressure and underappreciated. Assumptions that freelancers are waiting for someone to bring their start-up to their door for the next million-dollar opportunity (and be paid in sweat equity while they wait for it to materialise) grates.

A loss of purpose and motivation go hand-in-hand with overwork. Self-doubt creeps in and sadly, stress increases and mental health suffers.

With all the responsibility and arguably somewhat thankless occupation, it can be tough to remain connected to the freelance lifelong term.

Where are we?



Region	State	Count
Australian Capital Territory	ACT	4
Capital Region	NSW	6
Central Coast	NSW	13
Central West	NSW	2
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	NSW	4
Hunter Valley excluding Newcastle	NSW	2
Illawarra	NSW	27
Mid North Coast	NSW	2
New England and North West	NSW	1
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	NSW	14
Richmond - Tweed	NSW	9
Riverina	NSW	1
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	NSW	10
Sydney - Sutherland	NSW	161

Darwin	NT	2
Northern Territory - Outback	NT	1
Brisbane	QLD	42
Cairns	QLD	6
Gold Coast	QLD	10
Sunshine Coast	QLD	8
Toowoomba	QLD	2
Townsville	QLD	3
Adelaide - West	SA	32
Barossa - Yorke - Mid North	SA	1
South Australia - Outback	SA	2
South Australia - South East	SA	4
Hobart	TAS	4
Launceston and North East	TAS	3
South East	TAS	1
Ballarat	VIC	6

Bendigo	VIC	4
Geelong	VIC	2
Latrobe - Gippsland	VIC	3
Melbourne - West	VIC	115
Mornington Peninsula	VIC	4
Warrnambool and South West	VIC	1
Bunbury	WA	2
Perth - South West	WA	31
Western Australia - Wheat Belt	WA	1
New Zealand	Overseas	6
UK	Overseas	3
USA	Overseas	2
India	Overseas	1
Singapore	Overseas	1
South Korea	Overseas	1
		560



The Freelance Jungle is an Australian online support community aimed at ending the isolation inherent with freelance life and self-employment.

A place for information sharing, stress reduction purposes and deals with the daily life of being a freelancer. We're low on sales and high on relationship and community building.

Design [Jessica Harkins | sixonions.com](#)
[Jinny Coyle | fluxdesignstudio.com.au](#)

We aim to:

- » Build community and end isolation.
- » Raise the bar for Australian freelancers (and our adopted Kiwi cousins) through information sharing and strength building as an industry.
- » Remind freelancers that stress has a productivity cost - and to give practical strategies to combat the stress, mental health issues and suicidality within self-employment.
- » Replace the lost camaraderie of 'working for da man' with online and offline places to go.
- » End the stigma associated with self-employment and create a viable and prosperous future industry.

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