

**The Career
Freelancer Status
Report: Results
From The
Nation1099
Survey, 2018**



Introduction

The [Career Freelancer Status Report](#) summarizes the findings of a survey conducted by Nation1099 of active freelancers and independent consultants. Our goal was to understand where they get career and business information and what information or support they still need.

During May and June of 2018, more than 300 respondents completed this short survey, giving a picture of the emerging “career freelance” professional who is satisfied with their career choice but struggling to get more clients and to take their business to the next level.

The survey was distributed to the subscriber lists, forums and social media followers of organizations and consultants that work primarily with independent providers of creative and professional services. It was also promoted to visitors of Nation1099. We believe the responses are broadly representative of freelancers who are actively seeking career and business information.



Summary of findings

1. Most active freelancers are “career freelancers.”
2. Freelancers are flexible in how they refer to themselves.
3. Active freelancers have a lot of experience.
4. Freelancers feel fairly competent at managing their careers.
5. Career freelancers primarily rely on online sources for information.
6. The active freelancer’s biggest concern is business development.
7. Freelancers are dissatisfied with job boards.
8. Full-time freelancers appear to be earning incomes comparable to their peers in traditional employment.
9. Many freelancers appear to reach a plateau effect in their income after five years.
10. Many freelancers are also employers or clients of other freelancers themselves.



Meet the career freelancer

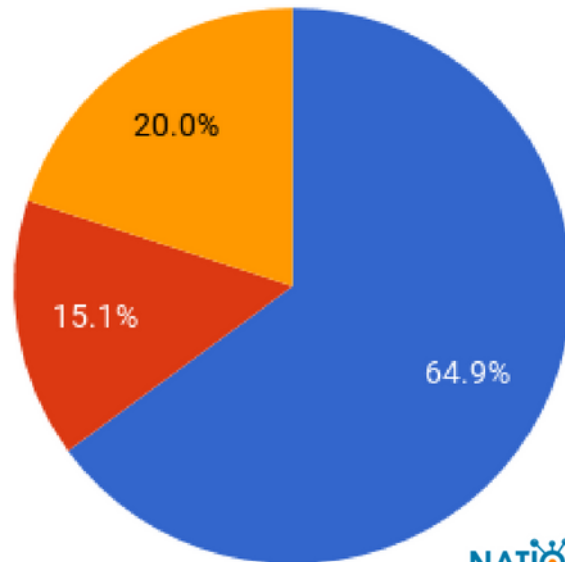
Collectively, these findings paint a picture of career freelancers who are getting effectively launched in the early stages of independent work but who have opportunities to improve their business skills and need more information and support as they gain more experience. For example:

- Career freelancers make incomes comparable to their peers in traditional employment, but their income growth beyond five years of experience begins to slow down.
- Career freelancers mostly say they feel competent at running their businesses, but many express a significant need for business development support.
- Career freelancers report relying heavily on online resources for information, but they say online job boards and gig-matching websites don't have the right opportunities for their experience level and qualifications.

1. Most active freelancers are “career freelancers.”

Status of active freelancers

- Primarily a freelancer and active full time
- Primarily a freelancer and active part time
- Traditional worker with freelance income



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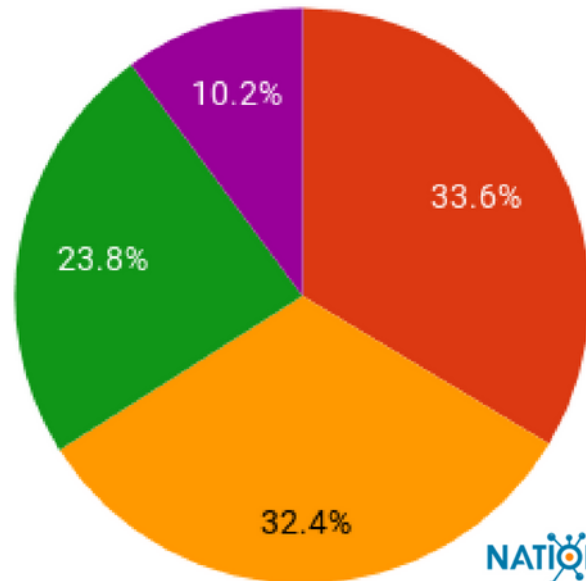


- 65 percent of respondents who are freelancing say they do so full time.
- 15 percent identify as primarily freelance workers but only work part time.
- The remaining 20 percent are primarily in traditional role-based jobs and do freelance work on the side.

2. Freelancers are flexible in how they refer to themselves.

Which term do you use for your work?

- Independent consultant
- Both freelancer and independent consultant
- Freelancer
- Other

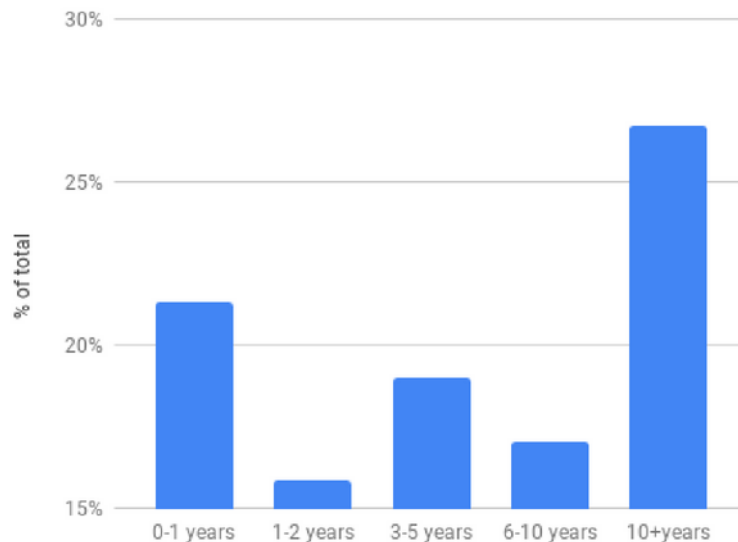


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- There is no dominant label that freelancers use for themselves, and in fact they are more likely to call themselves “both a freelancer and an independent consultant” than a freelancer.
- Respondents who selected “other” often described themselves as a business owner or as self-employed.

3. Active freelancers have a lot of experience.

Percentage of responses to the question "How long have you been freelancing?"

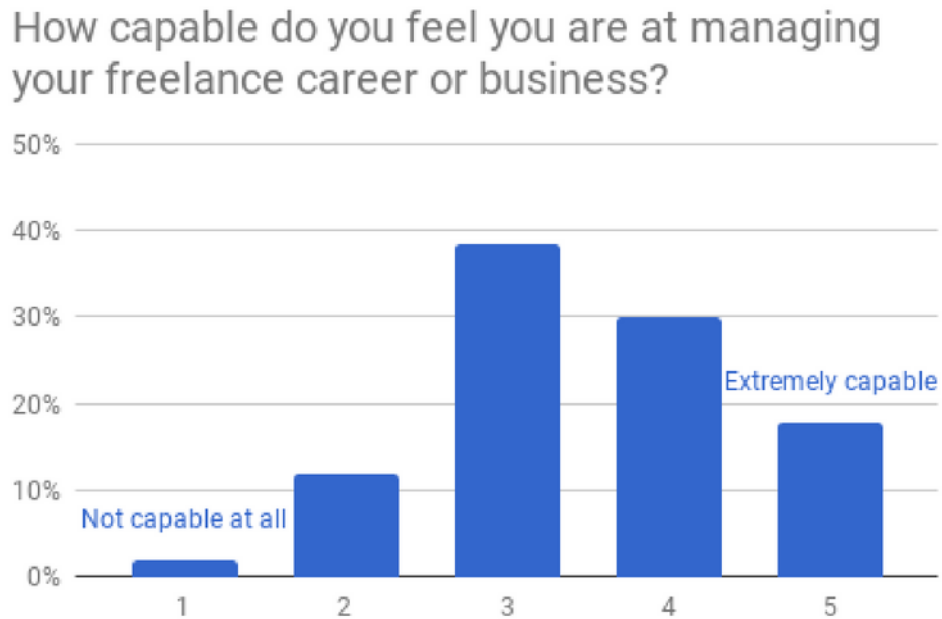


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- Keeping in mind that this survey was distributed in networks where freelancers are actively looking for information, the respondents are an experienced group. Active freelancers are distributed broadly across experience levels.
- The most common answer (27 percent) was 10 or more years of experience as a freelancer.
- Almost two-thirds of active freelancers – 63 percent – have at least three years of experience.

4. Freelancers feel fairly competent at managing their careers.



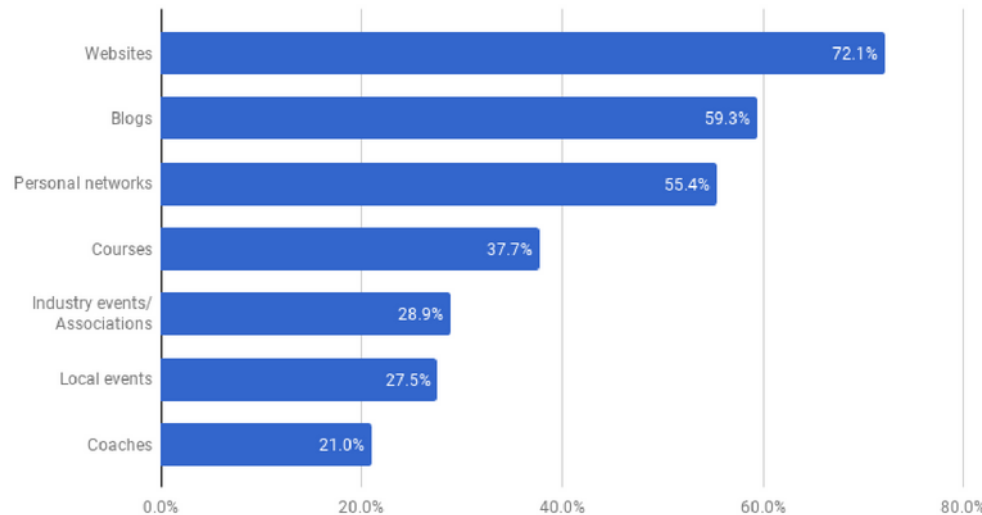
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- Most respondents reported being capable at running their businesses.
- However, over one-third – 38.6 percent – selected the middle level of capability. This indicates substantial room for improvement in the business operations capacity of active freelancers, especially as nearly two-thirds have three years of experience or more.

5. Career freelancers primarily rely on online sources for information.

Do you use any of the following to get career and business information about freelancing? (Check all that apply.)



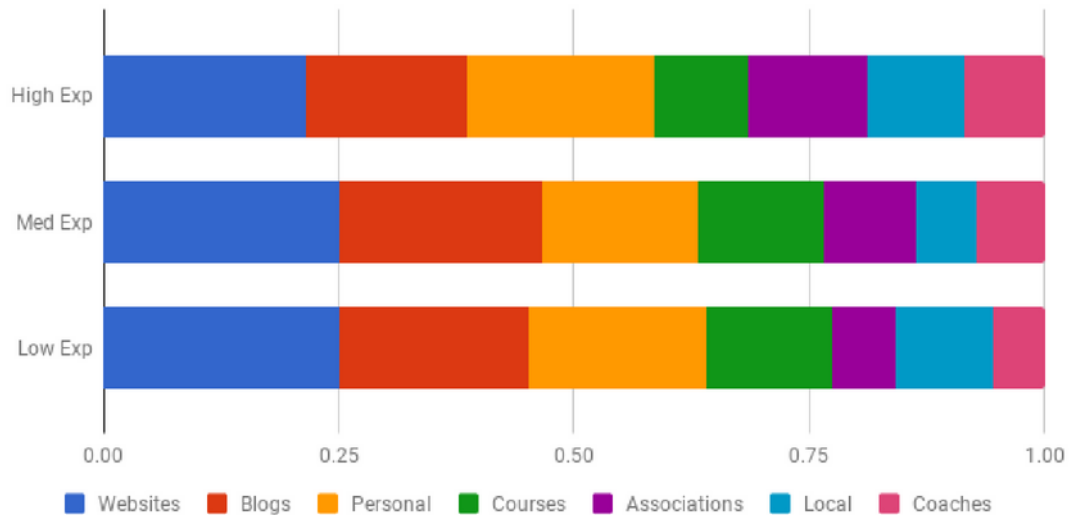
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- Websites and blogs are the main source of business information for active freelancers.
- But 55 percent of respondents also say they use personal networks to get information about freelancing.
- 29 percent say they use industry events/associations.
- 27.5 percent say they use local networking events.

5. continued

Do you use any of the following to get career and business information about freelancing? (Check all that apply.)



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- Information sources do not appear to vary greatly by experience level, suggesting that as people get more experienced, they don't find new sources of business information.

6. The active freelancer's biggest concern is business development.

Do you feel you need more information about the following aspects of your freelance career or business?



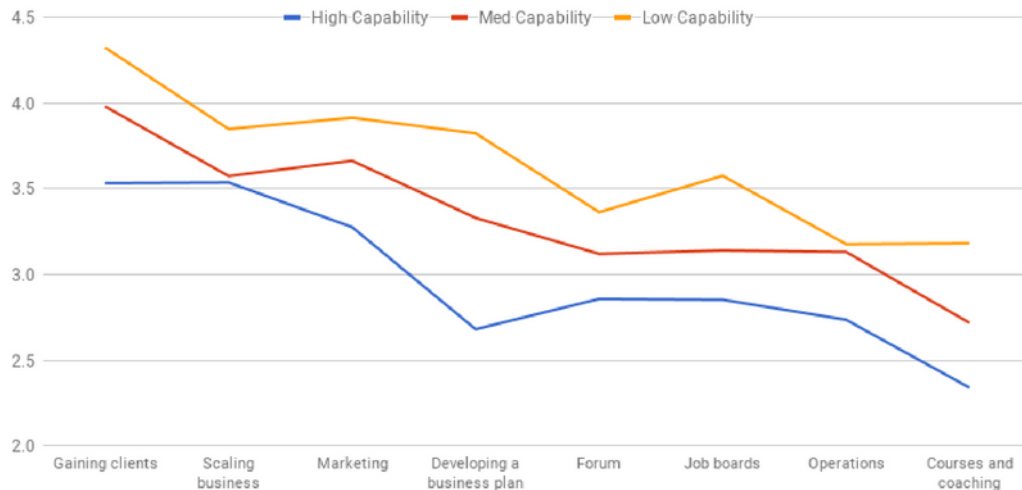
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- On a scale of 1-5 for “no need” to “high need,” the median response was a 3. The responses above that were all related to business development.

6. continued

Do you feel you need more information about the following aspects of your freelance career or business?



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- Across all levels of perceived capability, gaining clients was the largest reported need for information, followed by scaling their business to the next level and marketing.
- The biggest point of divergence is at developing a business plan. Freelancers who felt least capable rated that significantly higher than peers who felt more capable. Likewise, less experienced freelancers were more likely to say they need information on developing a business plan than highly experienced freelancers. This suggests a sensitivity to strategic support for newer freelancers.

7. Freelancers are really dissatisfied with job boards.

We asked two open-ended questions related to the experience freelancers have with online job boards and marketplaces.

- *Which job boards, if any, do you use to look for freelance jobs?*
- *If a new type of job board were introduced, what might make it valuable to you?*

In the responses to these question, freelancers expressed a lot of frustration. Their concerns center on a few key issues:

1. Low rates, including competition from workers in other parts of the world who can accept lower rates.
2. The quality of the job inventory.
3. A desire for job boards specialized by profession rather than general-purpose job boards.

However, as shown above, respondents indicated that information on job boards was somewhat needed. (The average response was 3.1 on a scale of 1-5.)

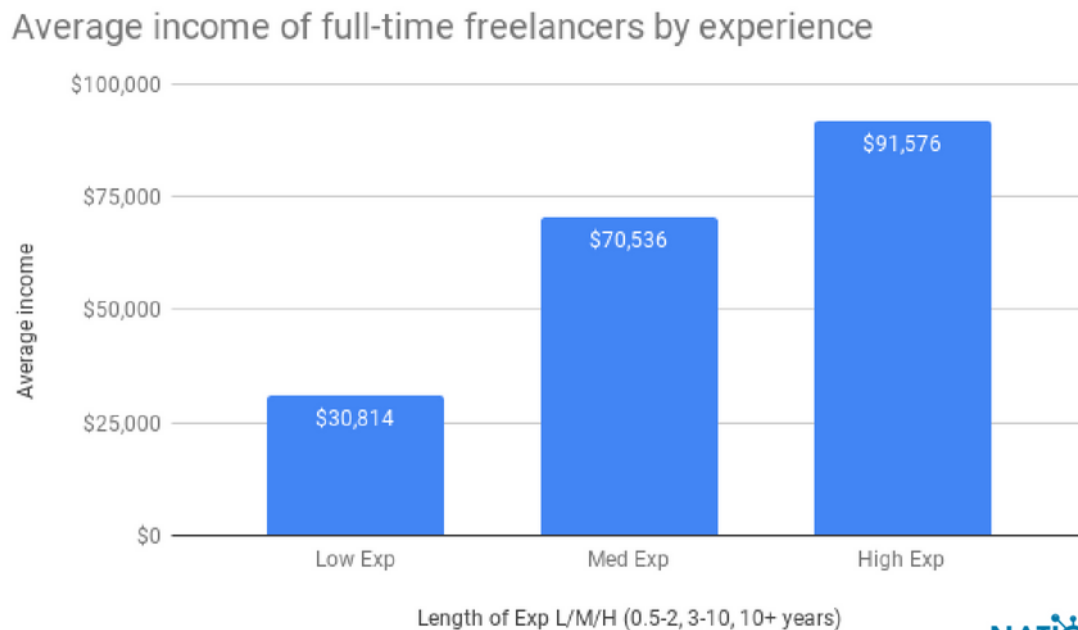
And online resources generally are the predominant way freelancers get information. This suggests many freelancers are eager for effective job boards.

Below is a sampling of some of the qualitative responses to those open-ended questions:

7. continued

- "I no longer use job boards; the work is pretty low paying."
- "Haven't found any that have been effective although have tried several."
- "Was using _____, but now they charge for it – most gigs weren't a close fit anyway."
- "They either don't work, or the information is overwhelming."
- "Don't care for the rate charges/fake jobs being posted."
- I use "_____, and it's rubbish."
- "Job boards tend to be for those looking for the cheapest option."
- "I had a profile on _____. No serious leads – just spam. Also tried _____. Again, a joke."
- "I've only gotten very low-paying jobs there, and have turned away from them for now."
- "_____, and it's awful. Am moving away from it. "
- "I got early gigs off job boards, but haven't seen any that would pay what I need to be paid today."
- "Often you can find yourself in a situation where you are fighting to get paid after completion of the job."
- "I'll check _____ occasionally, but have never actually applied for one of those jobs."
- "General waste of time"

8. Full-time freelancers appear to be earning incomes comparable to peers in traditional employment.



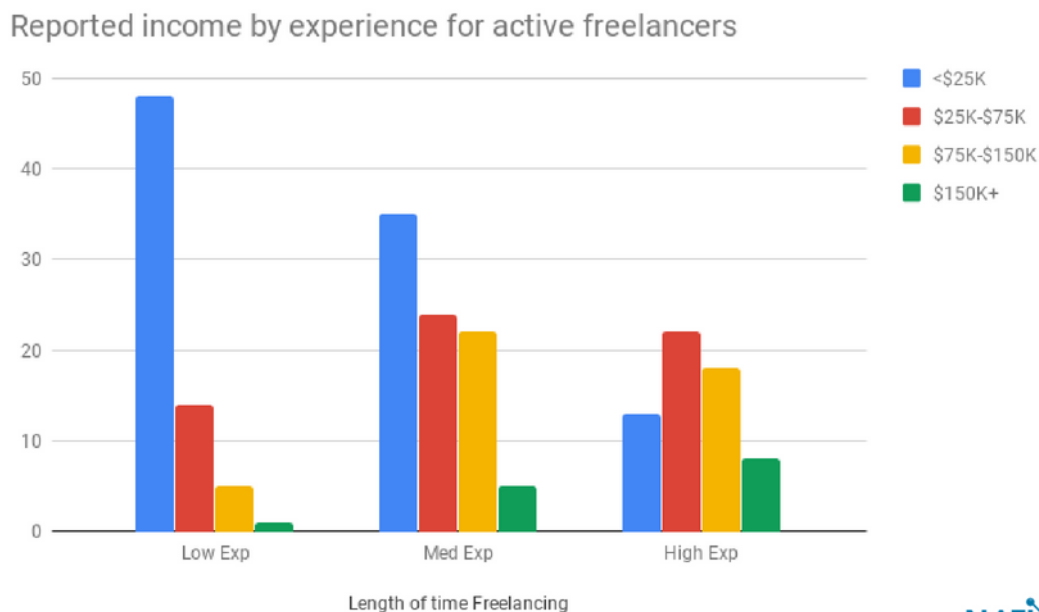
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- The average income for active full-time freelancers with 3-10 years of experience was \$70,536.
- The average response by all full-time freelancers was \$65,431.
- This result is similar to that of the [2018 The State of Independence In America survey by MBO Partners](#), which finds that full-time independents (working at least 15 hours a week and averaging over 35 hours a week) report an average annual income of \$69,100. As MBO Partners notes, the typical U.S. worker earns \$46,000, and the median annual household income in the U.S. is \$59,039.

N.B. The survey question was ambiguous with regard to gross receipts versus net earnings. However, the averages were estimated as median values, which limits the effect of outliers and compensates somewhat for that ambiguity.

9. Many freelancers appear to reach a plateau effect in their income after five years.



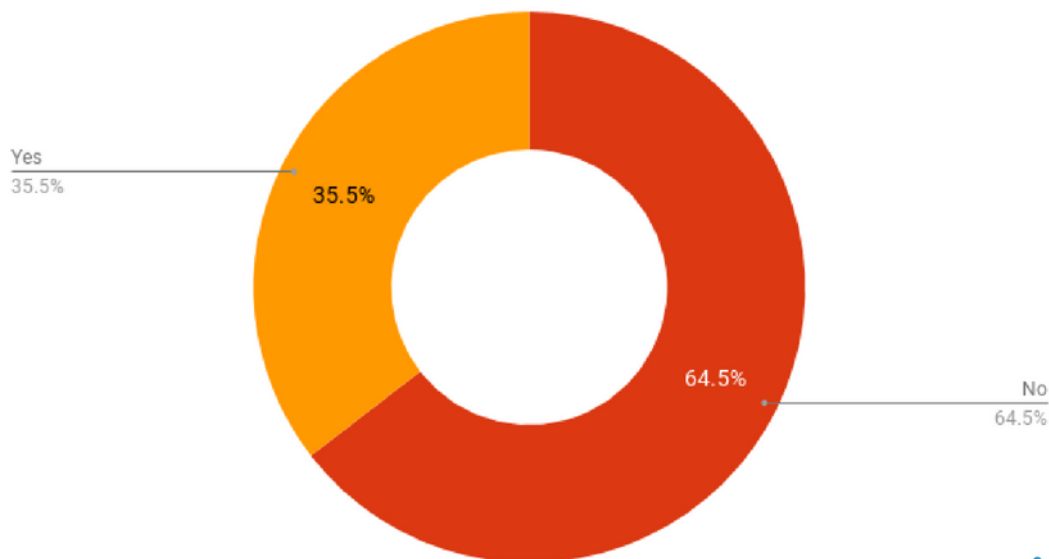
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- Freelancers with more experience perceive themselves to be more capable.
- However, for active freelancers, the jump in income from low experience to medium experience is greater than the jump in income from medium experience to high experience. Jumps in income seem to get shorter after about five years of experience.
- As with findings #4 and #5 above, this income plateau effect suggests that career freelancers have substantial room for improvement in the business operations capacity and that suitable information and support becomes more scarce above a certain level of experience.

10. Many freelancers are also employers or clients of freelancers themselves.

Percentage of full-time freelancers who have employees or contractors



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- 35.5 percent of full-time freelance say they use employees, subcontractors or both to provide their services to clients or run their businesses.
- The average number of subcontractors or employees used by full-time freelancers was 3.8.

Notes

The Nation1099 Freelance Survey was conducted in May and June of 2018. This report was written and distributed in August of 2018.

This survey focused on freelancers actively looking for career or business information rather than on the population or of the workforce at large.

The survey was distributed to the subscriber lists, forums and social media followers of service providers and consultants who work primarily with independent providers of creative and professional services. It was also promoted to visitors of Nation1099. We believe the survey is representative of skilled professionals who are or are considering becoming active freelancers or independent consultants and are actively seeking information and advice. The distribution was mostly but not exclusively in the U.S.

Acknowledgements

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[Ilise Benun](#)

[Dorie Clark](#)

[Ed Gandia](#)

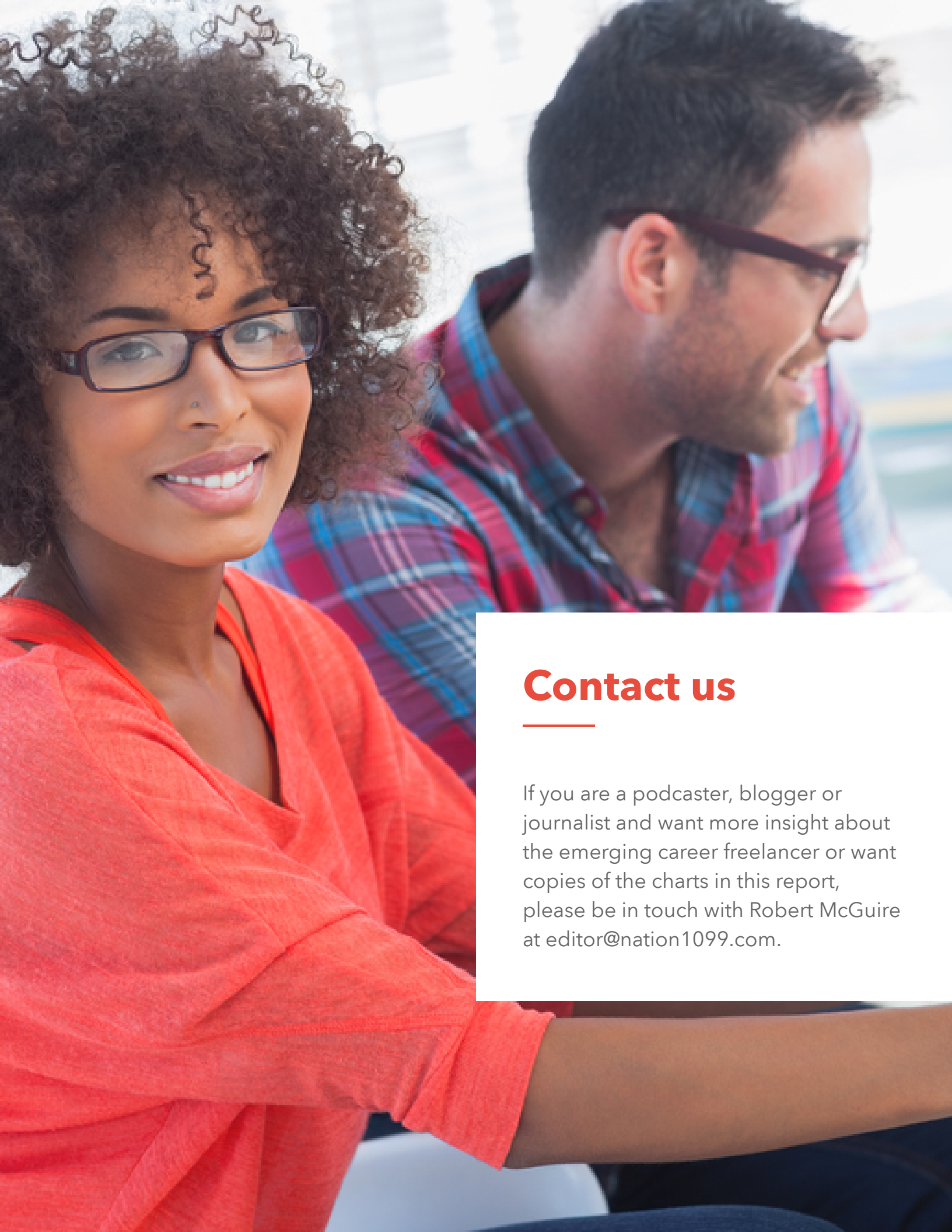
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About Nation1099

Nation1099 provides career and business advice for experienced freelancers and consultants. Our mission is to support the growing number of career freelancers by helping them achieve the financial success and work satisfaction they deserve.





Contact us

If you are a podcaster, blogger or journalist and want more insight about the emerging career freelancer or want copies of the charts in this report, please be in touch with Robert McGuire at editor@nation1099.com.