

DAW Business

By Tal Herzberg

In the past nine DAW World articles, we've covered a vast array of skills and tasks that one is required to master in order to become a DAW professional. As your level of confidence rises, there comes the point of putting a price tag on your time and the services you provide to your clients. Depending on your financial situation and entrepreneurial sense, you can choose between going independent (freelance), or joining an existing organization. Let's examine the pros and cons of each, methods for establishing and maintaining a clientele, keeping the work coming, calculating service charges, and other business issues.

THE EMPLOYEE ROUTE

There are many job opportunities in established organizations such as commercial recording studios, post production facilities, radio and TV stations, game design companies, etc. You'll most likely start at the bottom (runner, assistant to an engineer/mixer/editor), and hopefully work your way up to better positions. There's certainly a convenience factor in weekly paychecks and employee benefits, and the terms keep getting better as you climb up the ranks. Often the people you'll find working in such facilities are seasoned professionals, whom you'll be able to learn a lot from. There are, however, beginner's salaries, bosses, and corporate rules, and it's important to take a long hard look to determine if you're the type to deal with such factors.

THE FREELANCE ROUTE

Riskier, yet often more exciting, the freelance DAW engineer is a hot commodity these days. Qualified, well-trained DAW engineers can expect prosperous and profitable careers.

Freelance DAW engineers are operating in all the same fields employees do, but differ in the core of their business engagement, independent contracting. This means that as a freelancer, you are being hired for a limited time period to work on a specific project. You get paid an hourly, daily, or flat fee for your work, without any long-term obligations between you and your client. The risk element is the possibility of not working

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for long periods of time (because jobs may simply not come in, slow economy, and shifting industrial trends). On the other hand, making yourself available to work for multiple clients versus one employer increases your chances of coming across more lucrative and better paying work opportunities. If you have the spirit and patience to build such a career, go for it.

YOUR FIRST CLIENTS

Getting your first clients is a hard

task. An ad in the local music paper will often do the trick, and you can also offer to do jobs for people you know on a spec basis (speculating your time and gear for no payment commitment), hoping they end up liking your work, paying for it, and continue hiring you in the future. From there, it's typically word of mouth.

HOW MUCH?

This one may be the toughest question. As an employee, you're subject to the corporate earnings scale, and there's only so much room for immediate growth. As a freelancer however, you set your own price based on the types of services you are providing, and carry the consequences. This means that if your rates are too high, prospective clients might say, "You're too expensive for the budget." But if you set your rates too low, prospective clients might say, "You're too cheap to be good" and you'd lose the job as a result...where do you start?

FEE BASIS

The most common type of billing is hourly. Going rates are as low as \$10 per hour, and as high as \$250 per hour. \$30 per hour seems to be a good starting point, and with a steady workflow may yield a \$50k yearly income. Similar to musician's session scale, you may want to consider setting up a minimum charge per job (say five hours worth), so even if it takes you only one hour to finish, you'd still make \$150. Doing so can increase your income potential, by letting you service multiple clients on the same day, charging each the minimum fee.

Daily rate is also a common billing type, where you charge a fee per work day, regardless of the number of