

Strictly Private & Confidential

The Indie List

THE 2020 IRISH FREELANCE SURVEY **Key Findings**

BACKGROUND

Ever since we started The Indie List back in June, we've had many people tell us about the lack of information on freelance talent in Ireland, especially in a sector that is so research-heavy as marketing and digital services.

In November last we made an initial attempt to address this by doing a broad survey on the experiences of a cross-section of our indie community. The survey was conducted across November 9 -16th via email to our 400 members with a final completion rate of 34%.

There were so many things that we could have asked but we focused on a few fundamentals: your experience of freelancing during the past year and your outlook for 2021.

We also asked for some feedback on the Indie List.

The unvarnished results are included here including verbatim quotes from many of you.

Our thanks to everyone who responded.

Úna & Peter

KEY FINDINGS

- The Indie List community has an average of 16 years or more professional experience. Our survey showed that most people have been working freelance for over 6 years, with a quarter working freelance for over 10 years.
- Most of our community have had a difficult professional as well as personal time in 2020: 77% had at least one client project cancelled and almost half have seen work fall off from agencies and direct clients.
- This has led to pressure on pricing with 4 in 10 being asked to reduce their fees while 30% have found it harder to get paid on time.
- At least one-third say they were working longer hours than before the pandemic.
- However, over half say that they are glad they are freelancing now rather than being tied to a full-time role.
- Despite the fall-off in work, 68% have used the time to upskill while 23% have set up a new business during 2020.
- Most freelancers business came from existing direct clients in the last year with agencies accounting for around one-third. Other freelancers and platforms like The Indie List represented about 25% of their business.
- Despite these drawbacks there is a generally positive outlook in relation to their choice of the freelance route, with 71% saying that they are 'happy' or 'very satisfied' with their professional career path in the last year.
- 7 in 10 indies believe that more clients will hire freelancers than before in 2021 while almost 60% think the business climate favours the freelance model.
- There were mixed views on the prospect for fees increasing though, with only one third believing that payments for freelancers will improve in 2021

TIME SPENT FREELANCING

6.5 years

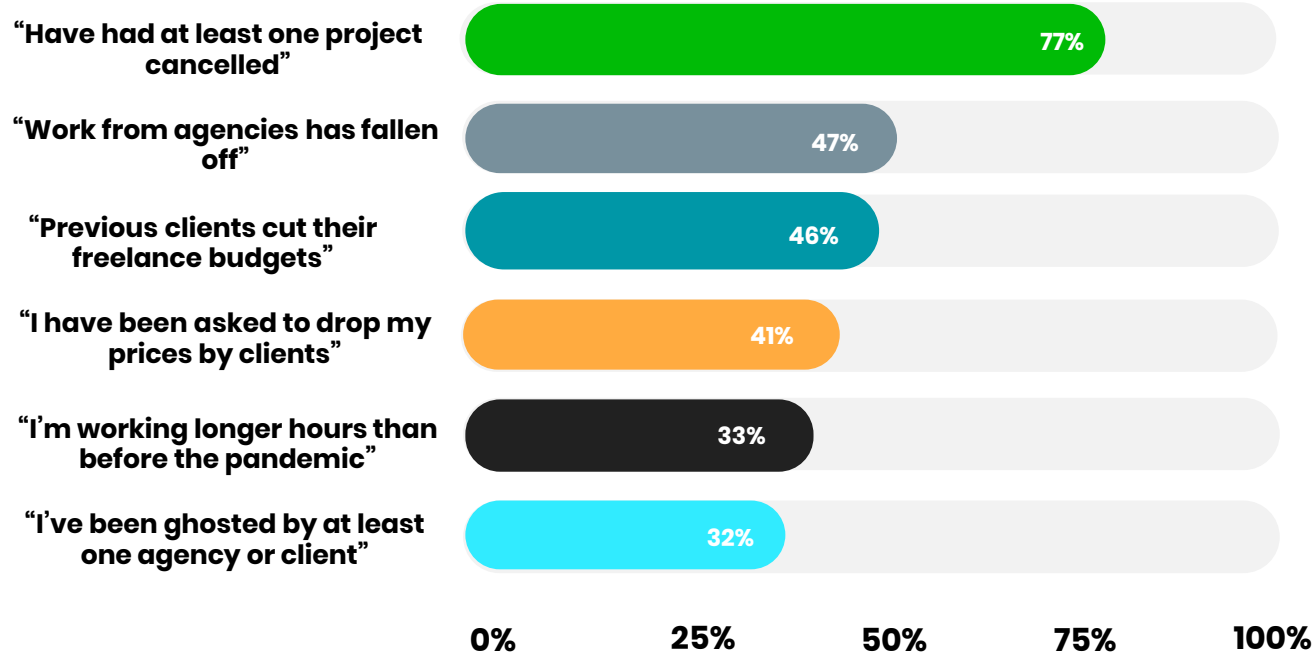
Average freelance spell to date

20% began in 2020

25% freelancing for 10 years+



CHALLENGES DURING COVID



FREELANCING DURING COVID

“HAVE USED ANY SPARE TIME TO UPSKILL”

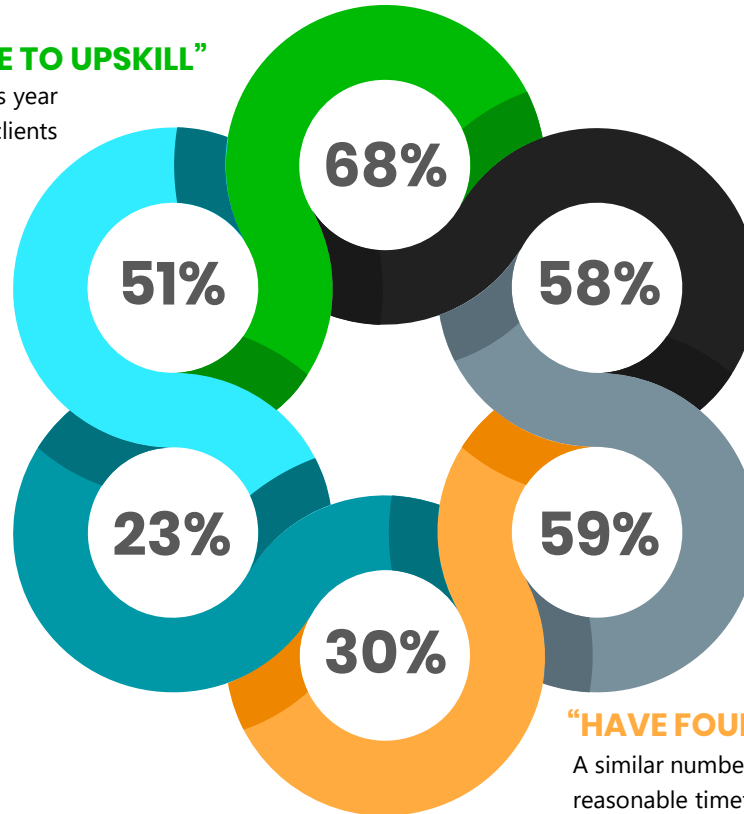
The majority of freelancers have used this year to develop their skill set for clients

“I’M GLAD THAT I’M FREELANCING”

The majority are happy that they have chosen to work freelance. However, almost 30% would prefer to be in full-time employment

“I’VE STARTED A DIFFERENT BUSINESS BECAUSE OF COVID”

A really encouraging indicator that freelancers are self-starters & not sitting around just waiting for work



“NOT AS BUSY AS PREVIOUS YEARS”

However, 1 in 3 say that they have been busy across the year

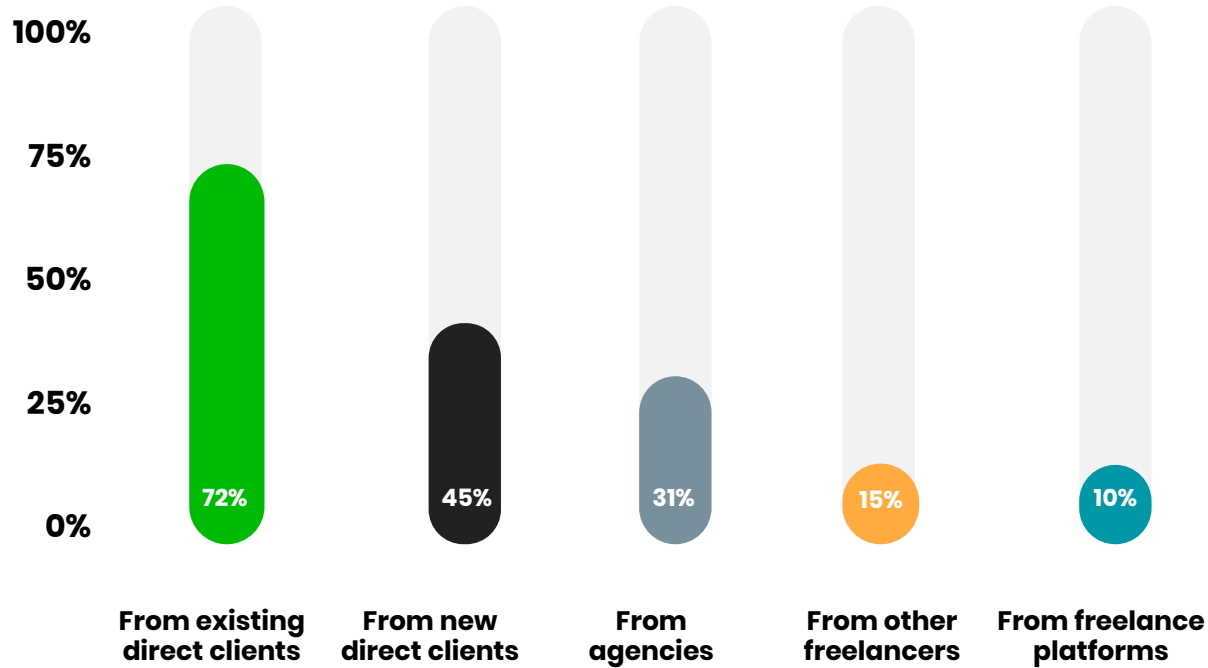
“HAVE FOUND IT MUCH TOUGHER TO GAIN WORK”

However, 1 in 5 have not had a problem in this regard

“HAVE FOUND IT HARDER TO GET PAID ON TIME”

A similar number said their clients are paying within a reasonable timeframe

WHERE WORK CAME FROM IN 2020



OPTIMISM PREVAILS...

“What’s your professional satisfaction as a freelancer now compared to previously?”



..AND A POSITIVE OUTLOOK FOR 2021

70%

“I think more clients will hire freelancers than before”

“I think the business climate favours the freelance model”

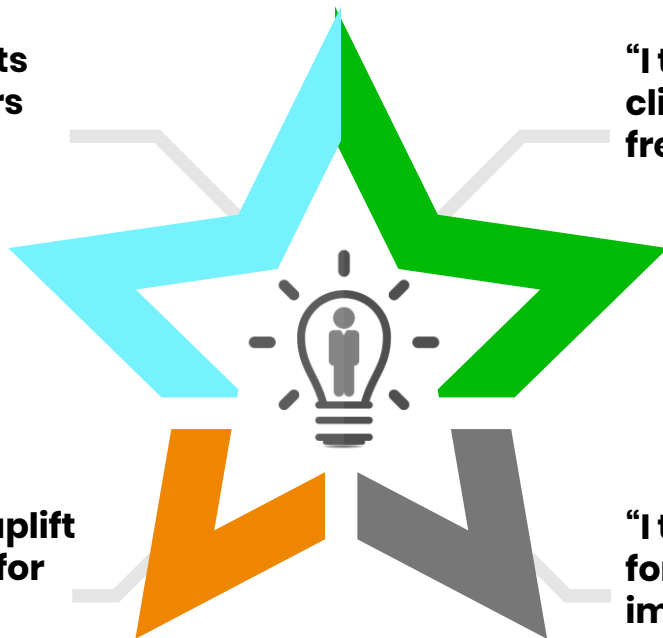
58%

58%

“I can foresee an uplift in freelance work for people like me”

“I think payments for freelancers will improve in 2021”

36%



DIRECT QUOTES FROM THE COMMUNITY

“

VIEWS ON A TOUGH YEAR...

“I think people underestimate how much we miss the daily interactions that in-person freelancing offered. It's less fun doing everything remotely.”

“The events I was working on for 2020 are apparently only postponed. As much as I would love to continue on them, I feel I am better off concentrating on other industries & not relying on their return.”

“I found that clients initially stopped any training they considered to be superfluous, i.e. ‘soft skills’, so all my work disappeared. Things are very slowly coming back. I do find people are starting to upskill and look for opportunities to do this.”

“I managed to secure a retainer for 2021 so I am pleased and relieved. Although I did have to reduce my daily rate but when I looked at the bigger picture and having the security of work then I swallowed hard and did the deal. I am happy that I did.”

“

SOME COMMON GRIPES...

“Some see freelancers as a cheaper alternative to taking on an employee. Definite contracts need to be adhered to in respect of time, contracted work and professional ability. A freelance business is working with you not for you as an employee.”

“Clients who use freelancers only want to pay them the same pro rata as they would a full time employee without the benefits . Clients need to pay for the privilege of being able to hire and fire at the drop of a hat. And take into account that the freelancer has to pay their own health, USC and PRSI.”

“Networking is much more complex than before. Casual coffees are out, and Zoom always seems like you need a fixed agenda to discuss rather than just using a casual coffee to stay 'top of mind'.”

“I think people underestimate how much we miss the daily interactions that in-person freelancing offered. It's less fun doing everything remotely.”

“

GETTING PAID & HELP FROM THE STATE

“You’d think with everything going on this year, that companies would ensure you get paid, but sadly that hasn’t been the case for some - and it’s really disappointing!”

“Pricing is so variable - direct clients happy enough with higher hourly rate, agencies rate is much lower.”

“I’ve had to sign on for benefits this year and when freelance work has come in I’ve declared it to the Social Welfare office. But they have made it extremely difficult and sometimes asked that I get clients to fill in dockets as if I were a casual employee. They have next to nothing in place for self-employed / freelancers who might need help rebuilding client relationships and finding new business. I’m hoping to start the Back To Work Enterprise allowance soon but that too sounds like it has it’s issues — i.e. not allowed to set up a business that is similar to any previous business.”

“

ON THE YEAR AHEAD...

“2020 has been a tough one for freelancers, but there are green shoots pushing their way through the mud. I’m more optimistic for 2021 in November than I was in April, that’s for sure. It has been difficult to balance this, frankly, not just financially but also psychologically.”

“There’s definitely room for growth in the freelance industry, key to that happening is getting the word out there and connecting businesses (especially smaller companies) with a good freelance network.”

“I am hoping that more businesses will be looking for freelance contractors simply because they won’t have to worry about them being able to not only work from home but properly manage working from home.”

“Client budgets will be affected for another couple of years. I envisage the “work for exposure” culture being exploited and many desperate freelancers taking the offers. Thus lowering the bar financially for everyone.”

“

ON TAKING POSITIVE ACTION...

“The fundamentals haven’t changed. COVID or not, you get work because you consistently deliver, provide real flexibility, don’t require a permanent salary or commitment from direct clients or agencies, and because you offer better value..”

“I have collated a network of freelance experts from creative to technical. It empowers me as we can share knowledge and also distribute references to clients. I think the expression is 'hunt in packs' which is advice I robbed from your first online symposium !!”

“This year I have been working hard on streamlining administration and communication systems. I wish I'd done it earlier and would strongly recommend to others in order to free up time for the stuff you're really good at and can charge more for!”

“I've got to be more proactively seeking work by promoting myself more regularly. Also I will be applying my creative thinking in more innovative ways to products and services.”

VIEWS ON THE INDIE LIST

“

LOTS DONE...

“I’m very happy with the service so far. Although I have not booked any jobs, I feel the service will take time for clients/agencies to use.”

“The list is a valuable service . Providing support to freelancers is something I’d like to do . Getting work is one thing but it’s a lonely business. They need both work and support . Keep going don’t stop.”

“The work achieved and delivered by Indie List to date has far exceeded my initial expectations, so all I can say is to continue - and thanks.”

“I would like to be able to update/make changes to my profile on the Indie List but I’m not really sure how/if that’s possible. I think that the Indie List is a great initiative and comes from really positive motivations.”

“

BUT MORE TO DO..

“Transparency - no idea of how The Indie List works after submitting our details. We don't know if or how we are being pitched. Collaboration would be good.”

“I think there's so many people on your list that it is hard for the majority to be found or recommended....?”

“I think it's more suited to creative freelancers. Not sure it's for consultants and other specific skill sets i.e., PR, etc.”

“I get the projects and call-outs to create work for 'buy Irish' etc., but it sends a poxy message that creative is free, easy. Creative people are competitive and love solving - they jump into sending out ideas.”

“

THINGS WE'LL LOOK AT FOR 2021...

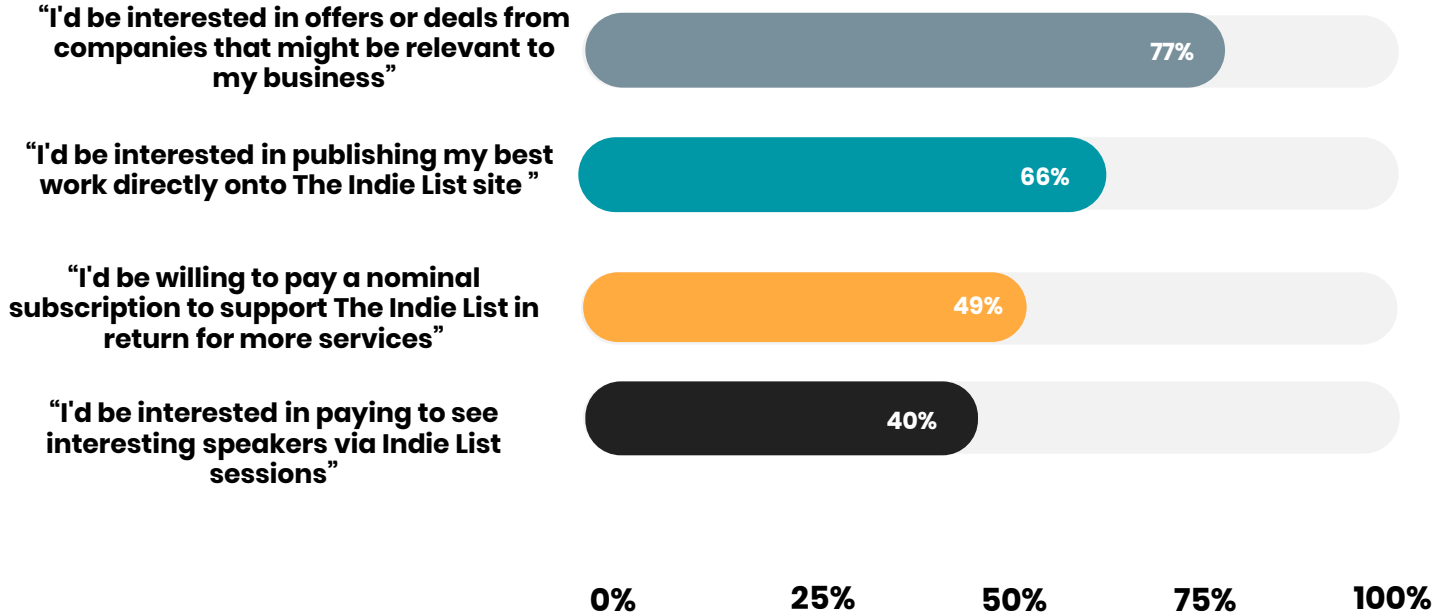
“Perhaps consider an Indie List Slack channel to bounce ideas off like minded people or even just to reach out and connect! Some projects may require another hand to join in - somewhere to connect would bridge that gap when looking for extra help.”

“Already very good. Improvements could be more shorter work orientated updates, Jobs boards, skills workshops, practical stuff. Could you tap into the Indie talent pool to facilitate online workshops?”

“It may be worth putting the 'this is us' page to the fore of your website so potential clients know you are experts in the business and are not going to sell them something you do not recommend - you have a serious reputation which you take seriously.”

“Maybe a panel to vet members? There's a need to protect consistency and standard of Indie List members so it becomes the cream of the crop and offers mentorship to those who need to up skill.”

INTEREST IN NEW INDIE LIST SERVICES



OUR RESPONSE TO YOU

- When we started The Indie List we said that we wouldn't get everything right. We would learn, take feedback and hopefully improve along the way.
- With very limited resources we focused our efforts on creating a platform that works and one that allows us to match up clients and agencies with the most relevant independent talent and do it quickly.
- We also needed to create industry awareness of the service and did this with the help of some very generous indies who assisted with creative messaging, social activity and PR.
- In asking for help or creating a social initiative brief like #MaskUp or #BuyIrishOnline, we have always stressed to our community that work for paying clients comes first and we would never expect individuals to prioritise Indie List work. Hopefully, with the campaigns that we have done to date we have been very much determined to put the freelancers involved front and centre and hopefully many have received kudos from it.
- In response to the view that The Indie List might only be for 'creatives'. It isn't. The Indie List is for all independent marketing & creative talent with no age, gender or skills-levels bar.
- While a large percentage of our base work in a creative capacity around 40% span the areas of planning, project management, strategic input and e-commerce roles.
- In respect of how we match individuals to prospective roles, we firstly use the information that each of you have provided us when signing up. We look closely at relevant experience, references of work done / clients worked with. We then contact a shortlist to check availability and costs and then talk to prospective clients.

OUR RESPONSE TO YOU

- With over 400 people now on The Indie List there might naturally be a fear in some quarters, that individuals will never get found. Our response to this is that of the 70 projects that we have put people into over the last 6 months, not one of the freelancers would have been found without being on The Indie List.
- We need more people not less, across most skills categories. We believe that it is better that there is more structure and a reference hub around freelance talent versus the randomness and free-for-all that prevailed up to now.
- If people register, provide us with the most relevant information on what makes them unique, and keep in touch with us, then in the words of Liam Neeson, “we will find you!”.
- There were some great suggestions on how we can improve The Indie List for the year ahead. We will investigate the Slack channel idea; we will look to add more of a community element to the main website, especially to showcase your best work; we will investigate potential offers or deals from companies that might be relevant to your business, and we will look at ways in which people can help and collaborate with each other from across our community.
- Yes, The Indie List is not perfect and we have a lot more that we would like to do to improve it and continue to champion the cause of freelancers in Ireland in 2021.
- But it is a service that is free to our community and we need your positive engagement along the way to help make it a really brilliant service.

**We'd love to hear from you on how we can help
make The Indie List work better for you in 2021.
Don't be shy, send us a text to set up a call:**

Peter: 086-2310222

Úna: 086-3890036