

Becoming a Software Freelancer

YOUR REALISTIC 100 DAY PLAN



Your step-by-step guide to more freedom, exciting projects, and a stable income

More and more developers are taking the leap into freelancing. Some do it right after college, others after a few years of work experience, and many mid-level professionals make the switch when they've had enough of rigid structures. The appeal is clear: higher hourly rates, flexible schedules, location independence, and the chance to work on projects that truly sharpen your skills.

The numbers speak for themselves: the share of freelancers in the tech industry has been rising steadily. In the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) more and more developers are choosing self-employment. Sometimes out of excitement for the freedom, sometimes out of frustration with their previous jobs.

But how do you actually make the leap? Hoping things will magically fall into place isn't a strategy. Starting a freelance career requires structure and preparation. That's exactly why we've designed this 100-day plan for you.

We'll guide you through four phases, taking you from your first idea to your first paid project:

Phase 1: Preparation: self-reflection, financial planning, goal setting, building a portfolio

Phase 2: Define your offer & network: service catalog, pricing model, pitch, first contacts

Phase 3: Kick-off: legal and administrative steps, accounting without panic, project management & time planning, communication with clients, quality assurance & feedback

Phase 4: Client acquisition: winning your first projects, leveraging your network, becoming visible

By the end of this journey, you won't just have a clear roadmap, you'll also have the confidence you need to truly get started.



Phase 1: Preparation – Laying the Foundation

DAYS 1-30

The first month might feel a little unproductive: instead of looking for projects right away, you'll be focusing on self-reflection, goal setting, financial planning, and building your portfolio. But don't underestimate this step: Laying the groundwork now will make everything else much easier later on.

Self-reflection

Before you plan anything, take some time to reflect. Ask yourself honestly:

- Why do I want to become a freelancer? (flexibility, independence, exciting projects, better work-life balance?)
- What kind of projects will fulfill me in the long run? (web, apps, cloud, data, specific industries?)
- Which skills do I want to apply and further develop?

Clarity at this stage is essential: Do you want to begin with smaller projects to gain experience, or dive straight into more specialized work? The key question is whether to double down on a niche you already feel confident in, or to keep your options open and explore different areas. Our advice: if you've already found a strong niche, focus on it. If not, stay flexible and use this phase to experiment.

Financial planning

You can't succeed without a plan for your finances.

- Review your savings: How many months can you cover without income? If that's not realistic, consider starting out part-time.
- List your fixed costs: rent, insurance, living expenses, etc.
- Estimate your startup expenses: business registration, software, hardware, a home office setup, maybe a co-working space. Keep your initial costs low as you can always expand once the first projects come in.
- Consider starting out part-time as a freelancer while staying in your current employment (perhaps by reducing your hours there) to ensure financial stability as you make the transition.

Goal setting

Set clear, measurable goals. For example:

- Land your first clients within 3–6 months.
- Reach a specific monthly income within 6 months.
- Define your working hours: will you start part-time with 20 hours a week or go all-in with 40+ hours?

Build your portfolio

Your portfolio is your calling card. Choose projects that truly represent you:

- Students: University projects, side projects, open-source contributions, hackathons.
- Mid-senior and up developers: Professional work, complex projects, measurable results.

Don't just explain the technology, but highlight the value you created for users or customers. If you don't have formal references, ask former teammates, supervisors, or clients for short testimonials.



Phase 2: Define Your Offering & Build Your Network

DAYS 31-60

You've spent the first 30 days getting organized and laying the groundwork. Now it's time to get more specific: How do you want to position yourself in the market? What exactly are you offering? How will you convince clients? And how do you build a strong professional network?

Create a service catalog

Be clear about the services you provide, and phrase them in a way that anyone can understand, even people without a background in tech. Your level of experience influences how you position yourself, but no matter where you are in your journey, there are ways to start and grow.

Even during your studies you can gain valuable experience through smaller projects, whether professional, private, or academic. This could be university assignments, personal side projects, or open-source contributions on GitHub. Every project you complete, whether for yourself or for a client, builds practical know-how and demonstrates your reliability. Continuous learning, earning certifications, and trying out new technologies will strengthen your profile further.

As you advance, it becomes increasingly important to define where you want to specialize. Ask yourself what you do particularly well, which technologies you want to work with, and which types of projects truly motivate you. A portfolio that is too broad can appear shallow. You do not have to cover everything. Instead, focus on your strengths and gain solid experience in real project work.

Do not write your service catalog like a traditional résumé. Clients might care less about where you have worked and more about which problems you can solve for them.

Present your offerings like a menu and support them with short examples or stories that show how collaboration with you might look in practice

Develop a compelling offer

When presenting your services, always remember: clients care about what you can do for them. A clear pitch makes all the difference. One simple formula is: "I help companies solve [problem] by offering [service]."

This immediately communicates your value and makes it obvious to clients why they should hire you. Support your pitch with short examples or case studies, just small projects where you've successfully solved similar challenges. This makes your expertise tangible and credible.

Keep your pitch short and memorable. You should be able to drop it into a conversation, an email, or even a quick chat message. The clearer and more concise it is, the easier it will be for clients to remember why they need you.

Pricing model & contracts

Sooner or later, you'll need to talk about pricing. The two most common models are:



- **Hourly rate:** flexible, useful for tasks where the workload is hard to predict.
- **Project price:** better when the scope is clearly defined.

Whichever model you choose, a contract is non-negotiable. It protects both you and your clients. Make sure it covers:

- Project scope and deadlines
- Payment terms (when, how much, how often)
- Cancellation clauses and change requests

At the beginning, you can rely on standard contract templates (for example, from the [WKO](#)). For more complex projects later on, it's worth having your contracts reviewed legally, but you don't need to worry about that right away.

However, keep in mind that many clients use their own contracts or require you to sign an NDA. You don't need to be a legal expert, but you should take the time to understand what's written in these documents. Read them carefully and, if necessary, have them reviewed by a professional. While templates such as those from the WKO are a good starting point, you won't always be able to use your preferred version, since larger clients often insist on their own agreements.

Build your network

A strong network is one of the most valuable assets you can have, especially in tech. Many freelancers land their best projects not through platforms but through personal contacts. In order to do that:

- Reconnect with old colleagues, mentors, or classmates.
- Join online communities (LinkedIn groups, Slack or Discord servers, [Meetup groups](#)).
- Attend one or two meetups per month (either locally or online) and set yourself a goal like, "I'll introduce myself to at least three new people today."

Most importantly: networking isn't a one-off activity. It's about building authentic, long-term relationships, not transactional "quid pro quo" exchanges.

Tips from openDEVS for New Freelancers

Start lean.

You don't need a perfect website or dozens of tools in the beginning; focus on clients and projects.

Be clear about what you offer.

Your pitch should be understandable in 30 seconds.

Set deadlines.

For yourself and your clients, this builds trust.

Ask for feedback.

Every piece of feedback is valuable for improving and strengthening your portfolio.

Keep learning.

New tools, frameworks, and soft skills are your professional currency.



Phase 3: Kick-off

DAYS 61-80

Now it's official: you take the legal steps, set up your business structure, and prepare for your first projects. It may sound dry ... and sometimes it is. But don't worry: almost every freelancer feels uncertain at first when it comes to taxes, accounting, and contracts. However, you don't need to become an expert overnight. Take these topics seriously and make sure you get the right information at the right time.

Legal and administrative steps

Business registration: In Austria, you need to obtain a business license and register your business through the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKO). There you'll find all the information you need about forms, business licenses, and membership.

Taxes: Once you register, taxes become relevant. Key topics include:

- Income tax
- VAT (sales tax)
- Small business regulation (if applicable)

Insurance & social security: As a self-employed person in Austria, you're covered by the SVS (Social Insurance for the Self-Employed). This includes health, pension, and accident insurance.

Accounting without panic

Accounting often sounds scarier than it is. In the beginning, a simple system is more than enough:

- Track your income and expenses clearly.
- Collect and organize receipts (digitize them right away if possible).
- Use tools that simplify your work, such as Debitoor, lexoffice, or sevDesk.



You can manage everything yourself, but many freelancers eventually hand things over to a tax advisor to save time. However, even if you outsource, it's important to understand the basics.

Project management & time planning

Once the first projects roll in, you'll need structure. Tools can help keep you organized:

- Project management: Trello, Asana, Jira
- Time tracking: Toggl, Clockify
- Organization: Notion, Google Calendar

Set fixed work blocks and establish routines. Especially in the early days, it's easy to lose track of time and priorities.

Communication with clients

Clear communication prevents most problems before they happen. Decide early on:

- Which channel will you use? (Email, Slack, Teams, WhatsApp)
- How often will you provide updates? (e.g., weekly reports)
- How quickly will you respond? (e.g., within 24 hours)

Create templates for status reports or feedback emails. They'll save you time and ensure consistency.

Quality assurance & feedback

Regular feedback is the secret to happy clients. Don't wait until the end of a project, but ask for input along the way. This not only helps you solve issues early, but also gives you valuable testimonials and portfolio material.

Phase 4: Customer Acquisition

DAYS 81-100

Now it's time to get down to business: winning clients. Without projects, freelancing remains just an idea. In this phase, you'll learn how to land your first jobs through platforms, direct outreach, and by building your personal brand.

Freelance platforms

Online platforms, such as [Freelancermap](#) or [Gulp](#), are a fast way to get your first projects. They are especially useful, because you can immediately respond to offers. Your profile is like your shop window. Don't just list your skills, but explain the problems you solve. Add a professional photo, a clear portfolio, and a short personal introduction.

Be clear about your current availability. Indicate whether you are available, not available, or partially available (if the platform offers this option). Some freelance platforms make this very easy, and on LinkedIn you can use the #OpenToWork badge to show that you are ready for new opportunities. Recruiters do pay attention to this, so make sure your profile is always up to date.

Networking

Many projects don't come through platforms but through personal contacts.

- Reach out to your network: friends, classmates, former employers.
- Pitch a specific project idea: for example, "I could refactor your backend to make XY run faster."
- Be bold: Most people react positively when you are proactive. And if someone says no? That's part of freelancing. Over time, you'll learn that rejection is normal and nothing to be afraid of.

In the long run, you should work on becoming more visible. You can achieve this through both online presence and personal connections.

- **LinkedIn:** Post regularly about your projects, learnings, or tech insights.
- **Twitter (X):** Short, direct, and a strong reach in the developer community.
- **Communities:** Communities like Reddit and platforms such as GitHub can also be valuable spaces to connect with other developers and showcase your work.

Meetups and conferences

Personal networking often has a more lasting impact than dozens of online applications. Over time, don't just join meetups and conferences as a participant, but also consider stepping on stage yourself. Giving a talk at events such as DevFest Vienna or other developer conferences is a great way to position yourself as an expert.

You don't need to be a freelancer to do this, as it can be a strong motivational factor at any stage of your career. Whether attending or presenting, visibility in these communities helps you stand out and strengthens your professional reputation.

Hackathons

Hackathons are a great way to build experience and visibility. They let you solve real problems under time pressure while working with new people. This sharpens your technical and teamwork skills and provides concrete projects you can showcase in your portfolio.

They are also valuable opportunities to grow your network and meet potential clients or collaborators.

Win your first projects – stay realistic

Your first projects might be smaller in scope or less well paid than you expect – or they might not! What matters most is to stay flexible and see each project as a way to find out what kind of work and technology truly suit you. Think of these first steps as your entry ticket into the freelance market: an opportunity to test the waters, gain experience, and build connections.

Approach these projects with realistic expectations and an open mind. Be ready to negotiate, learn, and ask yourself: What do I want from my first project or job? Maybe it's stability, maybe learning a new tech stack, or maybe just understanding how freelancing feels in practice. Each project should bring you something valuable, whether that's new skills, references, or insights into what kind of work motivates you most.

Even if some tasks seem simple, every successful delivery strengthens your credibility and builds trust for future clients. Over time, as your confidence and visibility grow, you'll naturally be able to negotiate better rates and take on more complex, higher-value projects.

It's also worth understanding how larger clients operate. Many big companies prefer working with established IT service providers instead of hiring freelancers directly. Partnering with such providers can open doors to projects you wouldn't be able to access on your own, combining the freedom of freelancing with the structure and reliability of corporate work.

Stay patient, keep an open mindset, and treat every project as an experiment and an opportunity to grow. The first steps may not always be perfect, but they're building the foundation for bigger and better opportunities ahead.

Start Freelancing with openDEVS

Taking the leap into self-employment can feel overwhelming: new responsibilities, new opportunities, and sometimes new uncertainties. **That's exactly why we're here.** Here's why you profit from collaborating with us:

Project matching

We connect you with companies looking for your exact skills.

Contract management

We handle the legal and financial framework so you can focus on coding.

Security

You gain access to long-term projects that provide financial stability.

Community

You're not alone. We offer exchange, advice, and ongoing support.

Your advantage: less bureaucracy, more focus on what you do best: developing great software.

Checklist for every Phase

Phase 1

- ☐ Clarify your reasons and motivation
- ☐ Check your savings and fixed costs
- ☐ Create a financial plan
- ☐ Set measurable goals (income, clients, hours)
- ☐ Build a portfolio with 3–5 strong projects
- ☐ Collect testimonials from former teammates or clients
- ☐ Create a 30-day plan with tasks and deadlines

Phase 3

- ☐ Register your business
- ☐ Check the tax basics (tax office, small business regulation)
- ☐ Clarify social security (SVS)
- ☐ Start a simple accounting system (accounting tool or Excel + receipts)
- ☐ Select and set up a project management tool (Trello, Asana, Notion)
- ☐ Set up a time tracking tool (Toggl, Clockify)
- ☐ Define communication channels with clients (channel + frequency)
- ☐ Establish feedback processes (e.g., ask for feedback after each milestone)

Phase 2

- ☐ Write and practice your pitch (max. 30 seconds)
- ☐ Decide on a pricing model (hourly or project rate, set your initial range)
- ☐ Prepare a standard contract
- ☐ Reconnect with your first 10 contacts (e-mail, LinkedIn, personal message)
- ☐ Attend one meetup or networking event
Get active in at least 2 online communities

Phase 4

- ☐ Create profiles on at least two freelance platforms (e.g., Freelancermap, Upwork, Malt)
- ☐ Reach out to 5–10 direct contacts and share your plans
- ☐ Formulate a short pitch: "I help [target group] by solving [problem] with [service]."
- ☐ Write your first blog or LinkedIn posts to increase visibility
- ☐ Attend at least one meetup or event and actively network
- ☐ Collect feedback after each project and add it to your portfolio



Freelancer Bingo

Have some fun and tick off what you've already experienced

		<i>announced, that you're freelancing now on LinkedIn</i>	<i>deep-dived into Stack Overflow at 2 AM</i>	<i>realized scope creep is a real thing</i>
<i>first client paid</i>	<i>signed your first contract</i>	<i>a network contact brought you a project</i>	<i>had no idea what to charge, so you guessed</i>	<i>created a fresh LinkedIn profile</i>
<i>double-booked yourself by accident</i>	<i>gave your first nervous pitch</i>	<i>sent your first invoice</i>	<i>client sent tasks via WhatsApp or random emails</i>	<i>rebuilt something from scratch because "it'll be faster"</i>
<i>it worked in staging!</i>	<i>got ghosted right after sending a proposal</i>	<i>realized not every "lead" is actually a client</i>	<i>first call that actually led to a project</i>	<i>over-apologized in a client email</i>
<i>quoted a price and immediately thought "too high?"</i>	<i>sent a cold call on LinkedIn and hoped for the best</i>	<i>spent more time tweaking your desk setup than coding</i>		



Ready to make the leap?

Freelancing doesn't have to feel overwhelming. You've got the roadmap, now it's about taking your first step.

Your freelancing career won't build itself, but with structure, focus, and the right people by your side, you'll get there faster than you think.

Take the first step now. Maria and Barbora are just a message away.



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