



The Work Pad

**10 of the Best
Online Jobs to do from Home**

E-Book Publisher

- Potential Earnings: \$30,000 - \$55,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$200 - \$2000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

In the last 10 years the e-book industry has mushroomed. This inexpensive form of publishing makes it possible for work from home authors and publishers to enter a market usually the domain of giant publishing houses and best selling authors. An e-book publisher offers all related services from marketing and sales to packaging, preparation and proof reading.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

Just as regular paper books reside in book stores, the internet is the home of e-books. Experience in e-commerce as well as marketing and design for the web is recommended. As you'll be screening and preparing e-books for final release experience in writing and editing is very useful.

That said everyone who is involved with online publishing or e-commerce had to start somewhere. If you're well read, have a good grasp of languages and are a savvy internet user there is no reason why e-book publishing can't be your first online business endeavour.

The Start-Up

To begin your publishing business you'll need a work space and computer with a connection to the internet, if possible get a DSL connection, you'll likely be doing all your work online. PDF is the standard format for e-books, to export e-books to PDF and format them in an appealing manner you'll need to decide between using software such as Adobe Acrobat or Macromedia's Flash Paper and specialized e-book software. If you're not a seasoned desktop publisher we recommend purchasing specialized e-book software that takes care of everything from covers and layout to security and copyrighting. A search on Google for e-book publishing software brings up dozens of relevant results. Do your research carefully and buy the package most suited to your needs and budget, don't get conned into upgrade packages with features you don't really need.

To complete the final sale of your e-books you'll need a website. If your budget allows for it, a fully developed site with an easy to use content management system is recommended. If you'll need to rob the local bank to afford this don't worry, get simple one page websites developed for each one of your books. If you have a basic understanding of programs like MS Publisher or Front Page you can even do this yourself.

Making it Work

Small e-book publishers can be successful by focusing their efforts on highly specialized niches. Don't try publishing books on every subject possible, your tiny marketing budget will never be able to compete with those of large e-book publishing companies.

Marketing

Marketing the books available on your site needn't be a very expensive exercise. Affiliate marketing companies such as Click Bank or Commission Junction allow you to sell your books through affiliate's websites in exchange for a percentage sales. This form of marketing requires no input on your side besides registration and can be very profitable.

Alternatively a pay per click advertising service like Google's AdWords can bring targeted traffic right to your website.

Don't Forget

Be careful when structuring your charges. Some authors might be very careful writers and have no errors for you to correct whatsoever while others might be very messy and have errors in every paragraph. Specify a maximum number of error corrections your standard fee covers, then charge per error beyond that number. This will ensure you're not losing money and authors double check their work.

Freelance Copy Editor

- Potential Earnings: \$15,000 - \$45,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$1500 - \$4500 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

The professional written material we read everyday, whether it's a novel or business advertisement has been checked and often times reworded by a copy editor. A copy editor ensures written materials in their semi-processed form reach the printers with perfect spelling, grammar and flowing sentences. If you love writing but don't necessarily want to write your own material this could be your new work from home job.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

As a copy editor you'll be expected to take partly finished writings and turn them into smooth and error free final publications. You'll need great writing, grammar and communications skills. Great writing skills go beyond simply being able to write well, you'll need to understand the goals of your client and ensure they are being correctly communicated in the text. A qualification in copywriting is not required but experience is essential.

The Start-Up

You won't be editing the new Harry Potter manuscript just yet, aim your skills at the small business community in your area. To do your job effectively you'll need a work space, desk, computer, printer and high speed internet connection.

The internet provides awesome opportunities for offering your copy editing services to a global audience. We suggest you start with a combination of offline and online services. Hire a web designer to build you a website, your site should be professional and easy to use. Trust is always hard to gain online so include a full biography of yourself, including your resume pertaining to writing. Your prospective clients will be judging you on your past work so include a portfolio of your best published works. Testimonials are also another way to gain trust online, have at least one testimonial on every page, constantly reminding visitors that you offer reputable service.

How you price your services will decide how competitive your service is. Give your customers as much choice as possible by offer various writing packages for different publications of different lengths. This will give your clients an easy way to pick out what's most suited to their needs.

Making it Work

How you price your services will decide how competitive your business is. Give your customers as much choice as possible by offer various writing packages for different

publications types and lengths. This will give your clients an easy way to pick out what's most suited to their needs.

Marketing

Market your website through a small pay per click campaign with Google's AdWords or Yahoo's Overture, such a campaign will drive traffic to your site with the highest possible return on investment. For your offline marketing efforts target local newspaper classifieds and business publications.

Don't Forget

This industry is deadline driven, work out how long an average job takes and carefully plan your schedule. Equally so, turning down business because your too busy can cost you return customers. Develop a good working relationship with other high calibre copy editors and pass work on to them if you get too busy.

Graphic Designer

- Potential Earnings: \$25,000 - \$70,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$5000 - \$9000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

With a good computer, design software and flare for design and marketing you could be a successful freelance graphic designer. While most firms still turn to large design houses to produce their marketing materials many a firm is seeking out a competent freelancer to handle their design work. Graphic designers produce an array of work from marketing materials such as print advertisements to branding materials such as logos and product packaging.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

Graphic designers need to have a good grasp of design programs such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. If you've never used any design software before don't worry, with time and practice they can be mastered. What is required is an artistic or design background; marketing, communications and branding experience are also very useful.

The Start-Up

A graphic designer's world revolves around a computer, don't go cheap here. You'll need a high powered system with a decent size monitor. Many design professionals opt for a Macintosh, Mac's provide great stability and computing power, if your budget allows it buy a Mac. Other essential tools include a scanner, digital camera, high resolution printer and a pen and tablet. You'll also need business stationery including business cards, a letterhead and an invoice, quote and receipt template.

Much your work will come from recommendations and word of mouth. That said the internet also provides a great place to sell your services globally. Market your services online through a well designed website. Include a portfolio of work, client testimonials and a list of services you offer. Your online portfolio will become the centre of your marketing efforts, make sure it's easy to update and search engine friendly.

If you've never done any graphic design work before starting out will take a little time and patience. Offer your services for free to family and friends with small businesses. Offer to design promotional materials such as flyers and posters or redesign their logo. Treat all your clients as if they were paying for your services. Most designers provide a proof of their work during initial rough stages, this gives the client an opportunity to provide feedback before you've spend time on the final touches. Treating your first few unpaid jobs as paid jobs will provide an excellent rehearsal for the real deal.

Making it Work

Much of your success will revolve around effectively communicating with your clients. Be sure to use a contract for each job and don't begin work until it is signed by both you and your client. Design work is usually constrained by deadlines, plan your work schedule well and always meet your deadlines. A reputation for timeliness will be invaluable for your word of mouth marketing efforts.

Marketing

Develop both an on and offline marketing strategy. A small pay per click campaign can drastically increase your website's exposure, also consider advertising in business publications. Register your services with design directories and freelance services such as getafreelancer.com. Also consider starting a design blog on your portfolio website offering free tools, tips and tutorials.

Don't Forget

Graphic designers either charge a monthly retainer or an hourly fee, hourly fee's should only be levied for specific jobs, once a client requests work on a regular basis a retainer is recommended.

Online Auction Consignment Service

- Potential Earnings: \$4000 - \$64,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$200 - \$2000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

Online auctions have created a new market for all types of goods to be sold; it's also created a space where unwanted goods can be sold with minimal hassle. Auctioning your product on a site such as EBay can however be a laborious and time consuming process which many people just can't fit into their hectic schedule. An online auction consignment service handles all the fuss for a typical fee of 50% of the sales price. This is an easy to run online service, with great potential for solid earnings.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

If you've never auctioned anything online before, this is a great place to start. To effectively run your own service you'll need a basic understanding and some experience of online auctions. You'll also need to be a savvy internet and email user with a knack for writing a good sales letter. If your sales writing skills are a little shaky there are many affordable e-books on precisely this industry.

To run your service from home you'll need a work space, desk and a computer with a high speed internet connection. A digital camera is essential; a simple white background with appropriate lighting will prove invaluable when shooting products. Finally a secondary desk to sort and package items for shipping will help to organise your workspace. Once your service expands a secondary storage area besides your work space will become necessary.

The Start-Up

To sell items on an auction website you'll require a seller account. Find out which are the major auction websites in your country, such as EBay and get an account. You'll also need a way to accept credit card payments, PayPal is the most common for online auctions. If PayPal isn't available in your country there are country specific services available all over the world. Be selective about which items you accept for consignment. Your income depends on products selling quickly. Before accepting any goods on consignment, sign a contract with the seller agreeing on exact percentages and sale conditions, the usual percentage for a consignment service is 50%.

Making it Work

Inform your clients that you only pay out once a month, regardless of when a sale was finalized. This will make your accounting procedures far easier to manage.

Marketing

Create a mix of on and off line marketing, advertise at local flea markets and in newspaper classifieds, supplement this with advertising on auction sites. When you decide to expand your online marketing presence, get a small website built. Having a website of your own creates numerous additional online market opportunities such as a pay per click campaign with Google's AdWords.

Don't Forget

Start small using the facilities provided on sites like EBay, once you are established look to purchase specialized online auction software to boost sales.

Online Marketing Specialist

- Potential Earnings: \$15,000 - \$35,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$1500 - \$3500

Introduction – Is this for Me?

Marketing a company online is a full time occupation. Most firms with a substantial marketing budget outsource this responsibility. Online marketing is exciting, constantly changing and highly competitive. Competition between online marketers themselves is even stiffer than the firms they represent. The responsibilities of an online marketer include setting up and running pay per click campaigns, establishing and improving affiliate marketing facilities, restructuring web sites to better communicate a company's online marketing strategy and provide general consultation.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

As an online marketing specialist you'll be selling yourself based on your knowledge and expertise. You'll need a thorough knowledge of pay per click engines like Google's AdWords or Yahoo's Overture, affiliate marketing and affiliate marketing companies such as Click Bank or Commission Junction. You'll also need to be familiar with other direct marketing methods such as email marketing.

While consulting with clients you might be asked to make recommendations slightly beyond your field of expertise. Search Engine Optimization or SEO is an entirely different field that you will not be competing with, however a basic understanding of how search engines work and what makes a findable website will be very helpful.

Finally search engines penalize web sites who violate their terms of service agreements, make sure you understand what constitutes acceptable marketing techniques.

If you'd like to be an online marketing specialist but have no experience we recommend the following. Search Commission Junction or Click Bank for a low ticket item that you might find interesting to sell, a good example is dog training e-books. Develop a simple website with free dog training advice and tips and use the platform to promote the e-books you've chosen. Take the opportunity to run a small pay per click campaign to market your site and the e-books you're selling.

The Start-Up

You'll need a work space, computer, permanent internet connection, printer, fax and copier. You'll most likely do a lot of consulting at your clients work place so a mobile phone and business stationary such as business cards, an invoice and quote template and a letterhead is essential.

Most online marketing specialists promote their services through a simple and easy to use business website. If you aren't able to construct one yourself hire a designer to do it for. Remember you're offering a business to business service, stick to a trend free simple layout and design.

Use your website to establish your credentials, past experience and most importantly the success you've brought to clients! Try to have a genuine testimonial on each page.

Making it Work

Build your business around yourself, your personality and your excellent marketing skills. For an additional credential to add your site Google offers a [certification](#) for Google advertising professionals. Upon completing the course you receive a logo that you can place on your site. If you plan on specializing in pay per click marketing this certification will improve your marketability. The certification is also a great place to start if you plan on running the type of learning campaign we suggested above.

Marketing

As an online expert you'll market your own services in the same way you would market your clients. Through the use of pay per click advertising, email marketing and other alternatives such as running a business blog to answer client questions right on your website. If you plan to target local businesses in your area then conventional advertising in newspapers or business publications is a possibility.

Don't Forget

The online marketing world is changing rapidly and will always do so. Dedicate a small portion of your day to staying current with the latest trends and web marketing news. Your current and up to date knowledge will allow you to provide the best marketing service possible.

Online Message Board/Forum Manager

- Potential Earnings: \$4000 - \$45,000
- Start-Up Cost: \$200 - \$9000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

Hobbyists and business professional's alike love to chat about their respective trades on message boards or forums everywhere. Banner, pay per click advertising or affiliate sales allow a small portion of a forum's traffic to be monetized. A forum can be added to an existing website, its most common application or alternatively be established as a stand alone site. The forum owner or manager will initially market and maintain the forum, with a little web know how the opportunities are abundant.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

A basic understanding of marketing for the web and monetizing traffic through advertising is essential. Basic web development skills will certainly help the initial setup but are by no means required. You'll also need a basic office setup with a work space, desk and computer. Since you'll be online during your entire working day a high speed internet connection is essential. Looking at a screen all day can also cause your eyes to take strain, invest early on in an LCD monitor and an ergonomically sound chair.

The Start-Up

Forums work best when applied to niches. A classic example of this is a forum for web masters of all types called Web Master World. Do extensive research on what is currently available in your field of interest. Don't re-invent the wheel, rather look for a niche which has forum facilities that could be improved upon.

When choosing forum software you have two routes from which to choose. There are numerous free forum packages of which the big five are phpBB, Invision Power Board, Snitz, Web Wiz Forums and IkonBoard. Alternatively you can purchase commercial forum software which is more stable and offers better support than free software. Commercial packages usually charge an initial purchase fee and a nominal yearly fee. Which option you choose will usually depend on your budget.

You'll also need a domain and hosting. Domains can be easily purchased from your internet service provider. Hosting is truly a case of you pay for what you get. Once again your budget will decide whether you'll start with a budget hosting package or a more expensive and better supported package.

Making it Work

The early stages in the life of a forum are the hardest. Initially you'll have to add content yourself and possibly pay several contributors to build your content. Forums are regularly spammed, so ensure your forum is always spam free and well organised. Once your forum is generating a small amount of revenue, pay a regular contributor to moderate user submissions and spend more of your time on marketing and monetizing traffic.

Once your forum is highly successful charging a membership fee is an option. If your ad revenue is sufficient for your time and expenses this is not a recommended move.

Marketing

Ensure your forum is optimized correctly for search engine traffic, initially add regular content yourself and attempt to get reciprocal links from similar focussed sites and directories.

Don't Forget

If your forum mushrooms over night, which is possible due to a popular article or high profile link, your bandwidth costs could sky rocket. Keep a constant eye on your bandwidth figures and adjust your package option before getting penalized for going over the limit.



Online Retailer

- Potential Earnings: \$5000 - \$95,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$300 - \$2000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

Just about every conceivable product is available on the internet today. Easy comparative shopping and delivery right your door mean shopping from home is fast becoming many people's preferred mode of buying. In every niche there is online retail potential. An online retailer manages every stage of the buying process and is responsible for product management, sales and marketing.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

As a work from home online retailer you'll be responsible for every facet of your store and every stage of the consumers buying process. Familiarity with online marketing techniques, a good grasp of the internet and email is essential.

The Start-Up

Before getting your store setup you'll need a work space, desk and a computer with a high speed connection to the internet. Since you'll be packaging and sorting orders at home another desk will be useful to keep your work space organised and efficient. Take the time to design attractive yet simple packaging slips and invoices for your orders. (Most commercial shopping cart software offers this function)

There are several options available to opening your online store. If you're a programmer or web developer and are starting on a tiny budget consider the free osCommerce and its offshoots Zen Cart and CRE loaded. These open source shopping carts can produce serious technical difficulties; if you do decide to start here you'll most likely progress to commercial software as soon as possible.

Your second option is to buy a commercial shopping cart and website template such as those available from ecommercetemplates.com. This is a great option if you have a basic understanding of PHP and web design. These templates allow you to start your shop for less than \$200. Alternatively you have the option of just purchasing the shopping cart software individually and integrating it into your own store front. If you would like to have a unique store front designed this is a good option.

Finally there are affiliate options available from Amazon and Yahoo Shopping. These super stores allow you to setup a store using their own software and market products they already have in their database. This is possibly the simplest way to begin your ecommerce career. These stores usually charge a nominal monthly fee and take a small percentage of sales. In

exchange you get to use their software to establish your store; in addition they provide credit card facilities.

If you've chosen one of the first two independent options your next big hurdle is, how to handle credit card transactions safely. The most traditional way is to open a merchant account at your local bank and integrate it into your store. The integration can be technical so you might have to hire a programmer to complete this step. Besides a merchant account numerous other options exist to accept credit card payments depending on what country you reside in. These include Google Checkout, Authorize.net, PayPal and 2Checkout. Do research into these and other credit card payment providers, just as with a merchant account there are costs involved in each transaction.

The level of service you are able to offer is heavily dependent on your suppliers, choose your suppliers carefully, ask around at other companies they supply and make sure they are reliable and maintain good stock levels. If possible choose a supplier near to your house, businesses in close proximity to a supplier usually receive orders before those located further away.

Finally to complete your start up you'll need to consider stock. As a small online retailer you have little access to capital and are risk averse. Carrying large amounts of stock is a huge financial risk, stock can get damaged or stolen (shrinkage) or become obsolete. Initially run your store without any stock what so ever, this is known as JIT (Just in Time) stock keeping. As an order is placed and confirmed you will then place the order yourself with your supplier. You'll always have to confirm with your suppliers that stock is available before accepting payment for an order. Once your shop grows and begins to do more regular business, begin to keep small amounts of stock for all those regularly purchased items.

Making it Work

The amount of orders processed manually is a good indication of your sites usability and trustworthiness, initially you'll most likely have to process a large percentage of orders manually. Take this time to build up a list of frequently asked questions and place them on your website. Learn from the established retailers like Amazon and answer as many questions as possible right on your website.

Credit card fraud is still rife on the internet; increase your sites reputability by purchasing a security certificate from a company like Thwarte. This ensures you're site is verified and all sensitive information is encrypted and can't be intercepted by hackers and fraudsters. Most hosting companies offer security certificate setup for a nominal fee.

Marketing

The most cost effective way to market your online store is a pay per click campaign with Google's AdWords or Yahoo's Overture. AdWords can be a little daunting at first so do a little reading before beginning, having read numerous e-books promising the moon and more we recommend Perry Marshalls, The Definitive Guide to Google AdWords for a solid grounding and a quick learning curve. Remember that pay per click campaigns require constant maintenance to ensure best results and prevent costs from sky rocketing.

Starting an affiliate marketing program of your own can be a quick way to sell to a much wider audience. A solid terms of service agreement and research into each affiliate before approval is essential to prevent your companies name and products being used or marketed in a negative manner.

Don't Forget

Keeping stock and stock prices up to date is a full time job; not keeping your store current is a quick way to lose customers.

Online Services Consultant

- Potential Earnings: \$5000 - \$25,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$3000 - \$5000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

The internet has a fast growing group of semi skilled website and online services owners. These individuals manage their own affairs but often need assistance with specific software or programming issues. An online services consultant is part online consultant, part software consultant and part programmer. This profession joins the best of the online and consulting worlds into one interesting and dynamic job.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

While not a pure programmer as an online consultant you'll often be asked to sort out database and search engine related issues. A thorough grounding in PHP and MySQL is required. Beyond programming related matters you'll often be asked to assist in the setup and running of specific pieces of software such as bulletin boards and shopping cart programs. A good understanding of the most popular versions of these types of programs will allow you to provide an efficient service to customers.

The Start-Up

If you already have a good grasp of basic programming and are familiar with popular service software such as bulletin boards, chances are you've already got a computer and office setup. If not you'll need a work space, desk and a computer and a high speed internet connection. As you might consult with people all over the world a headset is useful to conduct voice over IP or VOIP conversations (Skype is the most popular of these services and is free).

Dedicate a large portion of your start up capital to establishing a business website. Your website will likely become the centre of your online consultancy, it's the perfect place to procure new business and answer common questions.

Making it Work

Online consulting is potentially a massive field. Don't try to be a master at every facet, rather attempt to gain a basic knowledge in the most common issues firms may hire you for and master a select few of those.

Some firms may require your assistance for a limited time only and others may require ongoing support and advice. Most consultants charge an hourly rate for once off services and a retainer of about \$10 (USD) a month for those clients that like to have you available at a moments notice but don't necessary require your services every month.

Marketing

As mentioned in “The Start –Up” your website should form the centre of your online consultancy. . If you’re looking to expand your online presence a blog is an excellent idea. Use your blog to discuss current consulting jobs you’re working on and the general issues that affect all of your clients, Wordpress.org provides excellent blogging software.

Ensure your site is well optimized for search engine traffic. To promote your site even further consider running a pay per click advertising campaign with Google’s AdWords or Yahoo’s Overture.

Always carry several business cards with you, while consulting at firms you might often have the opportunity to network and gain new clients.

Don’t Forget

A monthly retainer is generally expected to cover any eventualities. The more firms that keep you on retainer, the greater your monthly income is from this source and the more offset your risk is that one firm may require above average attention.

Stock Photography Service

- Potential Earnings: \$20,000 - \$150,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$5000 - \$10,000 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

There is always high demand on the internet for affordable royalty free stock images. Whether for websites, print advertising or branding this industry isn't going anywhere. Stock images websites rely on sophisticated databases and programming, if you're an accomplished programmer this might be an affordable start-up, if not be ready to spend big when starting up.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

You don't need to be a photography expert to manage a stock imagery service. Most databases are too big for every image to be checked by a person, they rely on their software to ensure each submission is correctly formatted.

You will need is some experience marketing and promoting a smaller websites and start-ups. If you've never started your own online service before, consider starting with a smaller affiliate marketing or similar venture first.

The Start-Up

A website will be your largest start up expense. Do careful research into what goes into a great stock website. Your site should be as automated as possible, work with your web development company to program in all the necessary photo submission criteria such as format and size. Your site should be well integrated with a credit card system that accepts both payments for purchases and pays out commission to photographers. The standard commission is 50% of the sale price.

To run you're website you'll need a work space, desk, computer and high speed internet connection. Start your service without any employees, as your work load rises consider hiring reviewers and updaters on a commission basis.

Making it Work

There is hot competition in this market with big boys like stockxpert.com owning a significant share of all business. If you don't have the capital to establish a service that can compete with the more established sites, pick a niche, the major sites usually lack images of niche activities, events and areas. Also consider reading The Work Pad's article on being an [Online Retailer](#) in addition to this article.

Marketing

You're likely to start with a small marketing budget so consider the following; start a free stock imagery website along side your pay one. Ensure that when a search is conducted on your free site, several images from your pay site also appear. This is the model followed by some of the markets largest services.

Once you are able to calculate a visitor value also conduct a pay per click campaign using Google's Adwords or Yahoo's Overture.

Remember to market your service to both image buyers and sellers. As your service gets more established and well known in photography circles you won't need to market much to photographers, it is however essential during your start-up.

Don't Forget

There are numerous ways to structure your site, consider offering monthly or yearly memberships, as well as once of purchases. Also consider compiling similar and popular images into bundles and burning them to DVD. Web design and advertising firms often prefer to buy in bulk rather than hunt for single images. Finally don't forget to monitor your bandwidth costs as your traffic starts to rise.

Website Developer

- Potential Earnings: \$10,000 - \$145,000 (USD)
- Start-Up Cost: \$1500 - \$2500 (USD)

Introduction – Is this for Me?

The internet has changed the way we do business, communicate and advertise. At the heart of every company's online marketing strategy is a brilliant website. Website development brings together facets of design, marketing and programming into a single package. This market might be saturated but there is always room for one more talented and hard working developer on the net.

Before the Start-Up – Let's Not Get Ahead of Ourselves

Web development is not a job you can start over night, if you've never built a website before here's how we recommend starting. Buy two books, one for a graphic design program like Adobe Photoshop and another on XHTML (the language of the internet) and CSS. Once you have a basic understanding of Photoshop, XHTML and CSS, build yourself a website, it could be anything from a personal blog to an affiliate marketing site selling memory foam. (Don't waste your time with MySpace, it's great fun but isn't going to teach you what you need to know)

The Start-Up

Without much previous experience, starting out is a slow process so be patient. Start out building websites for a nominal fee to slowly build up your portfolio. Once you have a few solid sites under your belt you can start to charge more competitive prices. Your online portfolio will form the centre of your marketing campaign, create an appealing site with your target market in mind. If you're aiming at the small business community an overly arty site isn't going to get you more work.

Making it Work

Develop a standard questionnaire that you can send to clients before beginning work, this will ensure you have all the information you need to properly design their site. Also include a contract in the package; it should lay out the exact relationship between yourself and the company, including prices, future rates and deadlines.

Sticking to deadlines can be the hardest aspect of this job. Unexpected problems often arise that require hours of unexpected work so leave yourself breathing room when setting a deadline with your client.

Marketing

Most of your work will come from word of mouth. Always carry business cards with you and don't be afraid to encourage people to have a look at your portfolio. If you are struggling to find new work consider approaching companies with forgotten old websites and making them an offer. A pay per click campaign is an option to increase traffic to your website, but be careful to actively monitor your campaign to prevent unnecessary losses.

Don't Forget

Quoting the correct amount for a job can be extremely difficult. Develop a standard pricing system and stick to it. Most firms have an hourly rate for design and development and another slightly lower rate for updating content. Also calculate a standard time frame for designing a website and converting it into code. Finally keep in mind that most projects take longer than you initially anticipate.