

FREELANCING MATTERS



The voice of freelancing

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Recipe For Success

How food and freelancing are the perfect ingredients for chef Neil Armstrong



**SEVEN WAYS
TO BOOST
YOUR
MARKETABILITY**

**HOW
CROWDSOURCING
IS SHAPING THE
WAY WE WORK**

**PLUS:
PENSION V ISA
ACCOUNTANCY
GOES 2.0**



Project

Create an agency complete with website, animation, documentary and publicity

Deadline

48 hours

Team

Six freelancers – who've never previously met

INDIVIDUALLY, FREELANCERS PROVIDE a fantastic resource for organisations looking to fill a short-term requirement or specialised role. But imagine what could be achieved if freelancers worked as a collective. With a stronger platform, they could pitch for bigger projects and develop new strands to their businesses.

Alison Coward saw the potential for collaborative working while studying for an MA in 2005. A few years on, with wider spread connectivity using social media platforms, and the development of new online project management tools such as Huddle, she recognised that

the pieces were in place to launch an agency that uses collaboration to meet client needs. And what better way to find out whether collaboration works than to use it to create that agency? Over two days, Coward did just that.

"The two-day timescale was inspired by events like Hack Day or Bar Camp, where developers and designers pitch ideas for projects that require a web solution," says Coward.

"We were developing a prototype agency and the timeframe encouraged an intense way of working." This is how it evolved.



DAY 1

The team of six freelancers meet up at 9am for the start of the project. They are web developers Andrew Davey and Matthew Smith-Stubbs, copywriter Laura North, filmmaker Joel Somerfield, graphic designer Naomi Ray and illustrator Emily Wilkinson.

Having advertised the project via her blog, twitter and social media networks, Coward had received nearly 30 positive replies. She'd then spent the next two weeks pulling the team together based on their skills, but also on how they might work together.

"With collaboration, it's as important to think about people's personality skills as their technical skills," says Coward. "That's why I spent a lot of time thinking about the dynamics of the group. Sometimes a conflict of opinions can be a creative way to find a solution."

Although each freelancer had been sent a project brief, they'd been asked not to discuss ideas with each other before starting.

"First off, we just spent time discussing the process of collaboration – not the project itself," says Coward. "It was important to ensure there would be a facilitated process. Up until lunchtime, we started to identify the ideas that each person had and the shape of the project, deciding what we could and couldn't achieve in the time. This is where freelancers are brilliant as they can bring so much experience."

After lunch, the team identified the necessary workflow so that everyone could work efficiently without waiting for someone else to finish their task. At last, the individuals started to bring their technical skills into action – working as small groups or independently – and the project started to take shape. At the end of the first day, the group had a final 'check in' to update progress.



DAY 2

The morning started as the previous day had left off, with a dynamic intensity. Having spent most of the previous day in one office (albeit well stocked with food and materials), some of the team set off to assemble the photographic imagery and shoot various scenes for the documentary. Coward, meanwhile, was juggling the role of project facilitator and client.

"I couldn't be both at the same time," says Coward. "As project manager, I couldn't say 'I don't like those colours', but I could ask 'when will you get that done.'"

"The group worked together brilliantly. There's a famous model of the stages a team go through called the Tuckman. He proposed that it's inevitable that a group must go through phases of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing in order for the team to grow, face up to challenges, and to find solutions. Storming is the tricky part as that's where conflicts can arise. I was prepared, but it never really happened."

For the freelancers more used to working on their own, feedback of the experience proved very positive – they enjoyed and thrived on the intense process. It was also interesting to see how different solutions arose – the group dynamic enabling different people to pick up influences from one another that might not have come to them normally.

By the end of the day 2, Coward's fledgling agency BrakcetLab had a website (bracketcreative.co.uk), documentary, animation and publicity material. And all within a comfortable 9am–6pm timeframe.

"The concept worked better than I'd even hoped," says Coward. "It's not new, but I think this model makes it more transparent to clients and freelancers."

"It was great for a one-off prototype. But by utilising Skype, project management tools such as Google apps, Manymoon and Dropbox to store, sync and share files across teams, then freelancers could work collaboratively on longer-term projects from their own office.

"I've been getting advice on how best to draw up contracts and confirm employment status issues, but my idea is to keep it as transparent as possible.

"My aim is to increase the database of freelancers in terms of numbers and technical skills. It would be great to have an agency could draw not only on the skills of designers and copywriters, but also marketers, business analysts, engineers and even scientists. They would each bring a different dynamic and perspective to a project.

PCG is hosting a collaboration clinic with Alison Coward at theCube in London on May 11.