3 Ways to Utilize Gig Economy Freelancers to Transform Your Business

Gig economy workers can help you grow and scale your business with the proper strategy in place.

January 2, 2020 5 min read

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American companies already rely on freelancers for plenty of heavy lifting. As the gig economy continues to boom, nearly every company will have an opportunity to expand its talent pool by working with the alternative workforce. In Upwork's 2018 Freelancing in America survey, more than one-third of American workers said they'd freelanced recently, pointing to a trend that doesn't appear to be slowing anytime soon.

Though working with outsourced contractors may seem simple on the surface, getting the relationship right requires forethought. Otherwise, gig workers and employers can run into issues, including misaligned expectations and managerial snags. It takes proper planning for organizations to realize the full potential that can come from working with expert freelancers.

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Unfortunately, such planning is hardly the norm. Deloitte's 2019 Global Human Capital Trends report indicates 41 percent of executives think prepping for engagement with freelancers is important. At the same time, a mere 8 percent of survey

participants said they'd already established a process for incorporating freelancers. The Deloitte snapshot indicates a disconnect between what companies feel they need in terms of onboarding alternative workers and what they've achieved thus far. It also shows that companies have more opportunities to tap into the growing freelance talent pool.

Whether your business has already taken the gig worker leap or is considering taking the plunge, setting your team up for success is crucial. Start by implementing a few key practices before connecting with contingent workers.

1. Sell your leadership on the gig economy

If your leaders are reluctant to work with freelancers, you'll have trouble making a gig relationship fit into your operational flow. "Some managers might not yet understand that the modern workforce is changing, and many talented individuals prefer freelance work," writes Tania Fiero, vice president of human resources at Innovative Employee Solutions. Though their hesitation may be understandable, "it needs to be addressed if the company wants to grow," she adds.

Instead of assuming managers recognize the benefits of engaging freelancers, educate them on why seeking talent from non-traditional sources makes sense. Help them see the myriad ways they can engage gig workers while managing their full-time employees successfully and staying within tight budgets. Their improved understanding of the gig economy will only be a boon to your brand as a whole. Plus, freelancers who have great experiences with your managers will come back again and may refer other top talents to the company.

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2. Offer freelancers benefits

Although 70 percent of freelancers in a 2017 Freelancing in America Upwork survey said they were willing to buy their own benefits, 35 percent of them were hesitant to become full-time contract workers – they worried about losing their current perks. Freelancing individuals may appreciate the stability and certainty of engaging with employers like Uber and Etsy that offer benefits such as the ability to buy reduced-cost health insurance, CNBC reports.

It may be worthwhile to add a line item to your budget that includes benefits such as professional development or even a monthly stipend for regular contingent workers. Benefits don't just make you competitive in attracting talent; they also make it easier to retain that talent. But you don't have to go it alone when it comes to creating a benefits plan for freelancers. Caitlin Pearce, the executive director of Freelancers Union, notes, "There's a lot of new financial startups right now that are finding ways to cater to freelancers and help them with everything from planning their finances to saving to sending invoices."

3. Give gig workers access to the resources they need to do their best work

Nothing ties a freelancer's hands like only having a portion of the information necessary to get a job done. Focus your attention on giving contractors access to any items they need so they can do as well as full-time staffers. For instance, many companies pay to be able to use private data platforms or view certain research materials. Giving freelancers passwords to those information sources will help them perform on par with everyone else on the team.

Because you may not realize that your freelancers are missing key resources, consider surveying them or having one-on-one conversations regularly. That way, you can best meet their needs. As for internal company resources, you won’t want to simply open your books to contingent workers; that could put vital, sensitive documents at risk. Instead, figure out ways to gate access to specific areas of your corporate systems while leaving other avenues wide open.

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Properly engaging the gig workforce is more important than ever. As the office becomes more virtual and project parameters become more specialized, freelancers could be the key to building your business and expanding your reach. But before you bring aboard a team of contingent workers, be sure to have processes in place that ensure you’ll get the most from every freelancing arrangement.

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