The Independent Workforce Podcast – Episode 3 with Maciej Koszyk

Yurii:

It's a little bit of warm warming out, it needs to warm up every time that I start, so I prefer to wait for a few seconds and then continue. And I feel like we lost this lag, yes? Do we have, do you think we have the lag?

No, it's better now. Yeah, it's all this internet connection, you know, like last week I had some problems with internet connection, I don't know and I even had to postpone some recordings, but it feels like it's getting better now, so let's hope for the best.

Maciej:

Exactly, fingers crossed.

Yurii:

Okay, so are you ready?

Maciej:

I am, let's go.

Yurii:

Let's do it. Three, two, one. Welcome to the Independent Workforce, the podcast where we explore the now and the future of work through the lens of temporary employment, such as freelancers, contractors, fractional experts, you name it.

Here we speak to CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders about how they work with independent talent, the wins, the challenges, and the lessons learned. My name is Yuri, I'm growing the freelance market at Freelancermap, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Maciej Koszyk, a leader who has been shaping recruitment strategies across Europe for more than a decade, from building high-volume teams for Tesla, to management contingent workforce programs for Uber, and now as head of Devire Center of Excellence for Recruitment and the Recruitment Process Outsourcing Delivery.

He helps organizations scale their operations across Poland, Europe, and beyond. So welcome, Maciej.

Maciej:

Thank you. Thanks for having me, Yuri.

Yurii:

Super happy to talk to you. We had so many in-person conversations, and finally, this egoistical way to get even more information from you. So here we are.

And tell me a little about your company and what's your involvement with freelancers?

Maciej:

Sure. So, as you rightfully said, my current role with Devire is as a delivery manager. So, I've been doing that for the past four years, but my overall recruitment experience, both in contingency workforce, but also in permanent recruitment, has been going on for 15 years.

And my involvement with freelance or independent workforce, as you describe it, is a two-way because I've grown up in an environment where I had largely to do with independent HR professionals and recruiters. So those were people that I've been dealing with and delegating them to several projects, seeking their help to achieve our big-volume recruitment goals.

And on the other hand, something that I also do nowadays is also more freelancing on the recruitment side of things, where we, for those clients who don't necessarily need to recruit any person or have someone full-time with them, but they simply need a certain service or product, for those clients, we cooperate with contractors, with recruiters, also with our own staff that is mixing in project teams and delivering the end result for our clients. And there is also this certain freelancer ingredient in that. So, I think I have the perspective of the freelancing world, both in IT and in HR, which is an interesting perspective because it has different shades to it.

Yurii:

Yeah, it's always 50 shades of gray and you never know what kind of you are looking at. And you have this experience on both sides, from full-time workers and also freelancers, independent workers. And from your perspective, what is the one main difference between those types of work?

Maciej:

There are like 50 different differences that I could name. But if I had to focus on just one of them, I would say that the client's expectation of working with a freelancer is to have a ready product. They are not looking into investing in that relationship with a person and their skill set and so on, that much.

They are expecting that as a freelancer, when you join a certain project, you know what you are doing, you have experience with similar stuff, you just get there, you just get your job done. And maybe you part ways with the company, maybe you do something else. But generally, the expectation is that an expert is being hired, an expert is being delegated, and someone who instantly clicks in with the customer's organization.

Yurii:

Sounds like buying a Spotify subscription, just click the button, play, and then you play all the songs that you want.

Maciej:

Exactly. But at least on Spotify, you have the possibility of the algorithm learning your preferences over time. In this case, the adaptation time is way shorter.

So, they won't give you 100 sample tracks to play, which you certainly like and some others you don't. And then based on that, the algorithm selects your favorite playlist. The freelancer has to be spot on.

So, someone is just joining the project, or a contractor is joining the project and is just expected to basically perform from day one. So, the initiation period is very, very short. And that's certainly a challenge.

And that's also something that has to be managed in terms of expectations of both sides.

Yurii:

I feel like it's both a challenge and a benefit because you still need to think and act fast to deliver a freelancer. And then freelancer has to think and act fast to start working from day one. And also, when you are looking for a full-time person, it takes months to get them, to hire them, to board them, and then just to move on.

So, I'm curious, how do you usually find and select freelancers for your client?

Maciej:

Yeah, the simple answer is quickly. But to expand a little bit more on that, every company, because myself, I've been basically a middleman for years between clients and the contingent workforce. So, my job has always been to create this talent river in which we can then fish and select the right people who would be available at a certain point and have a certain skill and being able to be delegated to the client quite quickly.

So, the turnover time is very short. It takes sometimes 24 hours, sometimes 48. Sometimes we have a couple of days for that, but it's usually a quick process.

And therefore, a base needs to be in place. So, I'm not speaking about a classical CV database, but some sort of pool where you can get those people from. So that's definitely the best source, our own contractors that we know, people that we've worked with before, people that we have in our database, and some sort of relationship.

We might have been on projects with them before, we might have not, or someone might have just told them they are good and worth trying to cooperate. Because the best thing about freelancers is that they know other freelancers and have worked with other people before. So, they are usually able to recommend qualified folks.

And on the other hand, we can use what's out there. So you know best about all those tools and platforms that are out there where you can post a job, post a project, and basically within a couple of hours, you have some qualified freelancers and independent workers who are ready to take on the challenge. So, this is something that I've been also trying always to utilize, knowing those platforms, knowing where the right people are, and just reaching out for them.

Yurii:

If you have, let's say five good fit talents, how do you decide whom to present to a client?

Maciej:

Sometimes I might present more than one. I mean, depending on the project needs, there are some clients who are open to meeting some more people because they know even though it's a freelancer relationship, they are not hiring them permanently, they still want to know the people before they work with them. Even if it's like three months only, they still want those three months to be perfect, to be like with people with whom they want to work, with people who they trust in, and with people who will just simply click with them.

Though sometimes I give the client the opportunity to meet maybe not with five people, but with three. Absolutely, yes. And when I have to make the choice, when I know that the project starts tomorrow, I just need to have one person that is an absolute star, then I would rely on a couple of things like technical skills and the hard background is like pretty obvious.

But other things that are equally important are just communication skills, because for someone who delivers a service in my or my company's name, it's just a key. I never want to be left out of communication, and I also never want to deal with clients who have communication issues with the people that I'm basically branding and I'm basically delegating to them. So strong communication would be definitely my top priority.

We'll probably talk about some challenging situations in a moment, but this is something that I really value. As much as hard skills, if we are talking about an IT person, someone who can program in a certain programming language, equally important I would say are the communication skills and the skills to work on a fast-paced project as well, to adjust to the client space and be able just to work in a way that is expected. So, a certain flexibility comes with that as well.

Yurii:

You know, you talked a lot about communications and I feel like it's important everywhere basically, but I feel like when you are hiring like this independent expert, it's like the bigger difference, because usually freelancers are business owners and you can't not have these communication skills if you want your business to survive, if you want your business to grow. You must be good at communications and once again... I wouldn't be surprised, Juri.

Yeah, I know, there are people and that's something I tell to a lot of freelancers like, hey, you are a great expert and you really need to work on your communication skills, like go test, go meet people, go talk to them, because it's not just because of networking, it's because you are investing in your skills and the more you can talk, the better. And once again, to your point that you are presenting, in this case, they are presenting you, your brand, your company and you have to be sure that it will be like good presentation, not just like crazy random conversation. So, I totally get what you're talking about.

Maciej:

Yeah, that's one thing, but also there is a second aspect to that, that I might lose the connection to what's going on the project at some point, because the freelancer might be such a great expert that they are doing everything on their own and everything is being delivered, but it's cool that it's being delivered. However, it's not cool when I don't know it is. So, it happened to me a couple of times that everything is going fine, but it's difficult to get hold of the progress that is being made on the project.

So, I would call them the freelancer myself, I would call the client myself, trying to figure out what went on. It's not always possible to be on top of everything and join every update call, join

every project call, join those scrum meetings or agenda meetings or whatever methodology is used. And I also wouldn't have the time to do that.

Therefore, this even very short communication, I don't mean like huge briefing calls where I'm told what's the progress on the project. I don't need that. Even dropping a simple line about what happened that day and what is expected about the next, if there is a challenge.

All those things are small, but really valuable.

Yurii:

And I feel like it's also about certain expectations. If you are telling freelancers that, hey, you will really help me to manage these relationships and to help you get projects in the future, if you will be able to give me this, this, this. I'm not asking you for a full one-hour report.

Just send me one sentence, two sentences a day so that we are in line and we are moving forward. I think it's also something that you have to do from your side to ensure that these communications are being held.

Maciej:

Yeah, there has to be a certain structure around it and probably the way you described it just too, before it really kicks off, just to set the boundaries, set the standards, and then just to move from there.

Yurii:

You know, it's something that I learned from freelancers that they have this thing called my personal instruction, where you create a list of likes, who am I? Like, where am I thriving the best? Like, what are my usual working hours?

What are the best hours for meetings? Like, how do I prefer to answer, ask, answer questions and all the stuff? So, and I know some freelancers who are creating this document and when they are talking with clients, first of all, they are explaining like, what is the best way?

Because some clients think that they can call freelancers any time of the day and freelancers are happy to jump on a call, whatever. But freelancers are also, they have the routine, they have their approach, they have blocked time for like, hard thinking for work, they have their time for calls. So, it's kind of like, you know, connecting two business sides and when people and freelancers are joining, they are doing this inner initial conversation like, hey, here is the best way I'm working.

Like, I can be like, 24 hours for seven for you, still please do not expect me to answer you like, in one second. If there is very urgent, here is my phone number, please call me, let's do it. So, kind of like, creating also boundaries and then sending this like, personal instruction so people understand like, what is the best way to work.

And it's not just about freelancers, I also heard that full-time people are also creating this kind of like, manual, personal manual, how to use me kind of like, in the best way and I feel like it's getting popularity here and there. So, who knows? Yeah.

Maciej:

Yeah, that actually, that requires a massive amount of self-awareness because some people think that they prefer something or, you know, it just feels good to them, but it actually doesn't affect their, you know, effectiveness in a positive way. So, but that's definitely something worth exploring and maybe even introducing as a formal thing for every future contractor that I work with because as you notice, I've been using simultaneously freelancing, contracting and all those terms because they are kind of intertwined and often the contractors that we have on our projects, they are not like, freelancers per se. However, they are not solely dedicated to one project.

So, they might have multiple things going on in the background and therefore, it's quite crucial for the clients to understand, okay, my guy is to be called only in the morning or only in the evening because he has some other project going on, only, you know, email, only phone call, only something. So, yeah, I also probably would think about making that for myself. I just saw someone call me a couple of minutes ago and my mind is already buzzing at what this person might want.

If he or she just wrote me a simple message, this call was about X, Y and Z, I would be so relaxed now and not thinking about what that was about. So, I probably will take that inspiration from you and also make a simple manual about myself.

Yurii:

Yeah, yeah. If you need some examples, just tell me. I'll send you a few.

So, coming back, coming back to matching freelancers with a project. So, what is the main challenge? What is the hardest part, like from both sides, from your perspective, what you see?

What is the main blocker from client side when you hire, when they hire a freelancer and what is the main blocker from freelancer side?

Maciej:

So, from client side, I would say that something we haven't discussed yet is the whole compliance and legal thing about hiring freelancers. That varies from country to country, obviously, but some companies, especially some larger ones, might have many procedures in place and many road blockers that are preventing this cooperation from starting quickly. So, they might have their procurement unit involved, they might have some legal stuff in the way.

So, getting rid of all of that is a real relief and we could start this cooperation. Fortunately, so, I mean, that's why I have a job, basically. The good thing about it is when, let's say, the buyer or a company like us has a relationship with a client already, we are able to already fill in our own freelancers, our contractors, our workforce and delegate to clients who might not be willing to close a deal with a freelancer they don't know, which is basically a one-person company.

So, this is always, sometimes it's just a mental blocker and sometimes it's a real legal issue for them. So, fortunately, we have freelancers, we have companies like ours that can help in the way, but this is certainly it. And there is also a certain stigma about freelancers that they are basically those loose neutrons somewhere on the market and we never can be sure of their quality and their performance on the project, even if it's a small project.

However, when there is a large brand attached to them and they represent a bigger company, even if there is no difference in their skills and their approach, sometimes their value on the market is seen in a better way. So, that's certainly from the company's point of view, the client's point of view. From the freelancer's point of view, there are a couple of things, but I would just name one at the moment, which would be the attractiveness of the project itself.

Because there is also a common perception among companies that when they advertise something, they will get a top expert immediately. However, those top experts might have like 10 other more interesting projects lined up and they might not be willing to drop everything and just join the client's project. Sometimes companies might need to settle for, I don't want to say mediocrity, but for not necessarily the top spot.

So, it's the situation everywhere in sports, in music, when there is just one, maybe like 10 top stars in a sport or 10 boxers that maybe every person knows. But then there are thousands of other athletes that nobody has an idea about. They are also great people.

They are simply not the top 10. And a similar situation is on the market where clients are looking just for those very, very best on the market, not always realizing how good the others are and how difficult it is to get those top stars like Michael Jackson and Beyonce off freelancing. They might not be available all the time.

Yurii:

And also, the top stars, you have to pay top rates. So, it's also the question. And the funny thing, I had a friend who called himself the second marketeer.

So, he was like, everyone is like, I'm the first, I'm the best. And he was like, I'm okay. I'm just the second.

So, it's totally good for me. I'm still having enough projects.

Maciej:

Yeah.

Yurii:

Yeah.

Maciej:

But it's great self-consciousness. I truly appreciate that. And probably because part of my job over the years has been also evaluating job descriptions and vacancies that we need to fill.

So, it's also important to see that, all right, for this particular job, I don't need some superstar to fill this position. It can be done by someone who is just solid and just knows their ways of working. And that's more than enough.

There's nothing wrong with that. Every one of us is unique in its own way and can meet a certain need that the client has. It's all about matching those needs.

Yurii:

I feel like it's also about all those AI tools and stuff. People who are not really understanding who they need, they can just go to and like, hey, Chad, GPT, can you give me a job description for this project? And then they have a job description with 20 skills with 10 things to know and all the stuff when they really need one.

And I feel like you are coming here to play very, very organically. And you are saying, you don't really need all those skills. You don't really need all those tasks.

You just need this one thing and this one thing. And then you kind of like being this translator from the client's language to real expert's language.

Maciej:

Yes. So, we are just entering an era of AI-generated job descriptions where the clients are putting everything they can think of. And then another list of things that they can't think of, but the AI is suggesting to them that they might have.

So, we have a fully AI-generated job description. And on the other hand, then you have a fully AI-generated CV to match that description because candidates have already figured out how to make a best matching CV of their own for a certain job. So, it's like complete detachment from reality and then from the true people skills.

So, I think at some point, there will be a good niche for companies and for people being able just to connect people on some other level, on some, you know, this mythical clicking level that nobody really can describe what it is that people just like to work with certain people and just match other people's needs in terms of business. But probably when AI becomes also not just artificial intelligence, but maybe AEI, like artificial emotional intelligence, maybe that, yeah, I don't know if we'll live long enough to see that happening on the market. But at some point, this might be the answer to the challenges that we are facing right now.

Yurii:

Who knows? Yeah, for now, people still need people. But who knows what will happen in five years?

Let's hope for the best. And coming back to this compliance part. So, how do you ensure compliance for freelancers you pay with clients?

Like, what is the process? What are the documents? How do you deal with it from your side?

Maciej:

So, if a company wants to go the easy way for themselves with engaging people, they will have just one contract in place with a middleman. So, with a company like us or with a company like Freelancermap or a company like that. And it's really the easiest way because nobody likes paperwork, especially those legal departments in corporations.

They prefer just to have one partner. And then it's the partner's job to engage those freelancers, those contractors, those independent workforce under certain other contracts. So, there are obviously ways to go with that.

They can be one-person companies. They can be engaged on B2B basis and have a strict contract defining what their role for the end client would be. So, there can be even the name of the end client in such a clause.

It's doable or there can be only the name of the middleman company such as the buyer on that contract. And I'm not talking just about B2B here because depending on the markets, there are different forms of those civil contracts that can be closed with people which are either protected under the labor law of each country wherever the service is being delivered or under the usual civil law which also works fine in terms of protecting the interests of both sides. So, because some companies have in their mind that there might be issues with security, let's say.

That's a common thing that they are thinking about. However, it can be well regulated, and those companies could be well protected. So, I don't have much experience with data leaks or crisis situations like this.

I hear about them from time to time from the market. However, it's definitely not something common. It's worth having it in mind that it needs to be made sure that someone takes care of that.

It's worth checking the paperwork. However, fortunately, I don't have too much experience in seeing that really happen in the case getting to court and all of that hustle.

Yurii:

I mean, it can happen everywhere. You know, it can happen with business partners. It can happen with full-time employment.

There are so many causes out there when someone goes from one company to another and gets their client's base or whatever. So, it's nothing new. I mean, it's really solvable.

You can just create an agreement, and you can just add some legal requirements inside and it's done. You know, so, I still don't get it.

Maciej:

From my 15 years of experience in the industry, I have seen way more cases being brought to court by people who are hired under a traditional employment full-time contract rather than contractors or freelancers under B2B or some other contracts. So, I know it's just an example, but yes, it really comes from many years and seeing those cases in the court and yeah. So, not trying to distract anybody from having a deployment contract.

Yurii:

No, no, of course.

Maciej:

However, if there is a certain formality around that, if there is a certain level of protection, some people obviously will want to benefit from that protection, and they are perfectly entitled to that. So, yeah, there is no simple answer to this question.

Yurii:

We've talked a little bit about speed, and you told us that usually you sometimes present freelancers in like 24 or 48 hours or sometimes within a few days. And how long does it usually take, like the whole process from opening a freelance position to actually start working?

Maciej:

It's usually a couple of days, I would say. So, sometimes it's really possible for the contractor or for the freelancer to start a job, like if the job is posted on Monday, they could start on Friday, basically. It's that quick.

But sometimes obviously, we're working towards a certain deadline and we have that luxury, I would say, of having like a week or two weeks notice before this person needs to start because usually it's with also the start of the month or with someone else's absence in the company where a certain gap needs to be filled or the project team is available for a briefing because, yeah, a freelancer might be a freelancer and maybe independent worker.

However, they are never 100% independent. They always depend on someone from the project team, from the client's team, that they need to have certain access, certain information before they start their own job. So, we need to adjust to that.

But as I said, it's rarely longer than a couple of days. So, this is a fast-paced market and it's nothing like the perm recruitment landscape where sometimes you would know in January that someone needs to start in July. So, six months, it's a luxury never seen in the world of contracting and freelance.

Yurii:

So, you talked a little bit about the database that you use in Devire that you have. You definitely have a huge database. You have a lot of people inside.

And if you can't find in person inside your database, what tools or networks or platforms do you use that helps you to make it fast?

Maciej:

So, the best way from my experience is very traditional, but please bear in mind that I'm a recruiter by heart. So, the first thing I would do is just network with people and get from those breadcrumbs to the actual bread by calling people, by looking in their network, by asking them for some recommendations. Sometimes also posting because recently also posting jobs became a much, much quicker way of exchanging information.

Definitely not waiting one week for like 100 CVs to be collected, but very quickly. Some specialty groups where I already know some forums where I know that the right people might be found by simply posting a one-liner, someone replies, and the connection is already made, and they can be engaged. And if that doesn't help, there are always obviously those platforms that we mentioned.

So, yeah, Freelancermap is obviously one of them, but I've had experience with using Fiverr in the past, also UseMe, which is like more Poland specific than the others. I've had experience with Upwork in the past. So, all those platforms are known to me.

Some are better in certain aspects, some are in others, but these are definitely helpful. There is obviously the challenge of going through unknown people because that's why we use our own database and our own network of contractors, because we know them, we know their quality. And even if we don't, we can ask someone else who knows them.

Here, in this case, that's a big challenge that I know also from other clients who work with freelancer platforms. They need to have a good way of verifying and quickly verifying their skill. So, especially if they're based somewhere on the other side of the world, there might be some certain communication issues, maybe even time zone issues, or anything like that.

However, they might be still great candidates, great professionals, and it's all about getting to know that they are those great professionals and the way of verifying them.

Yurii:

It sounds like it would be really helpful for you if you could go on that platform and just have like already pre-clearance of this person, like, oh, okay, it fits. They are not fitting. Okay, you can go like on this app, like swipe left, swipe right.

Maciej:

Some of those platforms do have this rating. You can see if a certain professional, they've done 100 projects, and 99 clients were super happy. But then we are getting back to this issue with superstars, where every platform has this bunch of top performers, top ranked people, and everyone wants to hire them.

And it's creating a barrier for those less experienced ones, or maybe not less experienced, but new to a platform, new to this market, where they might be not seen that well. However, they have also amazing stuff to offer and some amazing experience. So sometimes it's definitely worth looking at tier two, tier three, and below.

Yurii:

You know, so let's go to the next level. So, you placed the freelancers, they are working, and you already touched a little bit on this. So, you said that you are going to freelancers, you are going to clients and asking them for a little bit of feedback of like, how does it work?

So, tell me a little bit more about this system. How exactly does it work? Do you have a specific time band?

For example, I'm just asking freelancers every day, and I'm asking clients once a week. And what do you usually ask? And how does it help you?

Maciej:

So whatever the project is, it can be a HR recruitment related project, or it can be an IT project, there are always some certain goals, deadlines, some sprints, maybe that have to be executed on the project, and simple milestones that have to be hit. Sometimes those milestones are weekly, monthly, they can be even quarterly. And this is the most important part, like how close are we to hitting the next milestone?

So, if I could ask just one question, it would be this. And to see if both the delivery party, so I would say the freelancer or contractor, and the clients give me the same response. Because if not, then we are certainly having some communication issues.

If the client believes we are miles away from hitting the milestone, and we've done 10% maybe of that sprint, while the freelancer tells me, yeah, it's basically done. I mean, maybe one, two more days, and it will be fixed. Then we clearly have a communication issue there.

And this is something that I want to solve, because it also has to do with simple administration stuff. I mean, people have to be paid during those working hours. And it's rarely just one fee; it's usually some fee that is divided in those sprints or milestones.

There are sometimes some bonuses attached for overperforming. Because also, it depends on the relationship that there is between me and the client. We also have a contract in place.

And it might be formulated differently than my contract and the contract with the freelancers. So, it's all about leveling the ground and making sure we are on the same page.

Yurii:

You know, your system reminded me, there is a book I'm reading right now called Fight Right about like how couples deal in relationships. And they conducted an experiment asking like, so they kind of like, tried a fight, then recorded, like, how do they deal with this. And then like, they asked them to review and say, when was the right way and when was the wrong way.

And some couples agree that, okay, here we went to the right, here we went like deeper into the problem. And some couples had totally opposite things. So, it's like very similar, you know, when couples are agreeing on the same, like when a client and a freelancer are agreeing that they're moving in the right direction, everything is good.

When they're not agreeing, yeah, maybe you have to deal with some interventions. And also, to this point of challenges. So, have you ever had a freelancer relationship go wrong?

Maciej:

Of course.

Yurii:

Yeah.

Maciej:

So many times, because this couple situation that you described sounds very familiar. It also happens in business in this in this similar way. So, my favorite thing to say in a conflict situation is that let's stop for a moment and look towards the goal.

Because of the goal, surprisingly, we have the same, we just want to have the project delivered, everyone wants to go home happy here, someone got paid, someone got his job done. And everything is fine. And it just helps to, you know, make a step back, look towards a common goal, reset the situation, and then, you know, launch it again.

But when it comes to specific challenging freelancer situations, there are some classics that we know from the market, because this is also something that companies have in mind when working with contractors or freelancers. And first of all, there is the lack of safety of long-term engagement, because there is always the risk of a freelancer or contracting contractor saying during the project, sorry, I've got other stuff to do. Or maybe a situation of chance is just happening on the market, or maybe some accidents, anything can go wrong.

Just a crisis situation, where simply both parties part their ways. And this is a common conception. So, companies like ours, we mitigate that risk by having some people, you know, I don't want to say on the bench, but maybe someone on the background who is able to jump in and take over those processes.

So, it's also good to have everything the progress documented for a new person to be able to relatively quickly take over whatever has been done before. So, absenteeism is certainly one thing. Another thing is it doesn't happen that often.

It happened to me in the past a couple of times is just the thing of underperforming on certain projects. So, it can be mitigated in exactly the same way by replacing a person or a project team, even with another project team. It can work on some performance improvement plans; short-term performance improvement plans can be implemented as well.

We are not talking here about the traditional corporate style improvement plan where a worker has three months to, you know, pump up their KPIs or something like that. We are in a fast situation here. Things have to improve overnight, basically.

But it can be done. So, I've had situations like this. And sometimes it has to do with people overselling themselves when applying for a project.

They believe that they can do more. But when reality hits them and they see, let's say, the client's documentation, the process, the scope, the actual scope of the project, because there are always some question marks when you start, you never have the full picture. Once you start, some of them back off and say, well, okay, it's I got overwhelmed with that.

It's more than I expected. I'm out. In situations like this, obviously, there has to be a quick reaction and possibly mitigating those situations by getting to know as much as possible, even signing a contract and having someone get to know the client before they actually start.

It can be done with a simple NDA clause where just people meet together. They might even get to know the client's documentation before they started a certain project just to make sure what they're signing for.

Yurii:

Yeah, you know, it's something that I'm also know. It's this professional indemnity insurance that some people in IT sphere when they are going into a client's project and for some reason, if their actions can lead to some money losses or stuff, they usually have this insurance. So just in case, everything is covered.

I know just one of such companies is exali, our also partner, we are working with them a lot. And I can tell you that on Freelancermap, we even have this switch that shows if the person has professional indemnity insurance. And I feel like I don't really have data, but I feel like I can get this data.

But I feel like it still works better, you know, from the company side because, oh, okay, this person is like not just a professional, but they also think about us, so they got this insurance thing. So maybe it's also like one of them.

Maciej:

In some highly regulated industries, it is even a formal requirement for every contractor joining a project that they need to have this insurance. However, this insurance is a liability for damage or for potential damage that they might do or for security breaches or for just ruining something that is there. However, it's not insurance for someone just dropping out of the project, not delivering or delivering mediocre quality of the code or whatever they are delivering.

So, it works in certain situations. Obviously, the others somewhere in the middle, they have to be managed in some other ways.

Yurii:

Yeah. So how do you measure the success of a freelance engagement?

Maciej:

Well, the best universal measurement of success is just being engaged again. So, the best feedback I have ever heard from clients is feedback asking for more of such service. So, I think that it's just the best proof because a declaration is nice when someone is telling you that the cooperation went nicely.

However, it can be also just being nice. However, if someone puts their money in where the word is and goes with, all right, let's do this again. Let's do something similar again.

I think it's the best proof that the service has been great, and cooperation has been great. And probably that's why we are seeing those freelancers, some of them being way more successful than others because they have repeating business and it's just the best proof of their skill.

Yurii:

To your point, it's a business and they have to be like that because if they are doing a shitty work, nobody will go to them. They have a bad reputation. It's like the desk for freelancers.

If, for example, full-time employees can have a shitty reputation, they can just try and go to another sphere or try and do whatever else. But as a freelancer, it's like signing like a disagreement with yourself in delivering shitty work. But some people still do not think about that.

But anyway, it's their own problem. So, we have a lot of AI and automation, and things are coming, and we talked before about this automated job description and automated CVs. So, I'm curious from your perspective, how are AI and automation changing your approach to freelancer selection and management?

Maciej:

So, if you ask me today, I don't see that influencing it that much. However, I see a lot of hype going on. So, everyone in the market is getting fully armed, loading their magazines, preparing their ammunition for the times coming and everyone is seeing this change coming ahead.

And I see it as well. So yesterday, I was scrolling through LinkedIn and I saw a company, one of the leaders in the AI industry world, who will try in the next couple of years to replace LinkedIn

or at least to create competition for LinkedIn that will be fully AI-based. So, everything will happen automatically.

No job postings, no searches needed because the algorithm will find the right people immediately and attach them immediately to your jobs. So those deadlines that I mentioned, like 24 hours, 48 hours to find someone who can do your job, can be actually shortened to like five minutes. It will be happening instantly.

Everything will be happening instantly. However, I'm not so fully sure that it will work that well because we have seen other industry giants like Google before who are also trying to create these Google jobs things which didn't work out. So having the right algorithms and the right budget behind it might not be enough to revolutionize the industry.

We'll probably see LinkedIn for a couple more years, definitely. What I'm curious to see is if the freelancers and the contractors can actually use AI in their daily work to a larger extent because this is already happening. I don't know a person who wouldn't be using even simple chat GPT to accelerate their daily tasks.

So, it's something that they do on a daily basis. So if you can hire a contractor or a freelancer who is already equipped with all this knowledge and has already this full armor and all those weapons and know all the businesses, then you are basically hiring a one-person army capable to do way more than the freelancers of the past.

Yurii:

It feels like the original origination of the word freelancer is coming back to the historical times when there were people who were fighting for different countries and different kingdoms and stuff like by getting paid. And I can imagine there is a freelancer coming like fully like in just a short and like, I have nothing, but I'm a freelancer. And then another person comes like with full armor, as you've said, like, hey, I can do this for you.

So, it's like, I have this picture in my mind, you know?

Maciej:

Yeah. I'm sorry for bringing up this military thing, but yeah, sellswords used to be exactly what we understand as freelancers. So, one day you're fighting for one king, the other day for some other emperor and then both those emperors and those kings, they see that basically both armies are made of those freelancers and they're just fighting each other.

So, you know, on the market, the advantage of the companies on the market today is already coming from the fact that some companies can hire better people than other companies. And the same goes for contractors and freelancers. So, the better your contingent workforce is, I mean, the larger your competitive advantage.

Yurii:

How do you see the role of staffing companies evolving as freelancers become more mainstream?

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Maciej:

I think that's fluently slips in what we have just discussed right now, because, you know, companies are trying to build their competitive advantage by having greater people. So, what we are seeing on the market right now is a huge war for talent in the AI industry. So, the top AI people, there are just companies lining up for them.

Everyone wants to hire them, and the supply isn't there yet. So there is a huge demand for those people, but simply the market needs some more time to deliver the supply, because some of those people are still in universities, some are just mathematicians, they might not be engineers who are fully incorporated in the market yet. And also, few of them are freelancers at the moment.

So usually, companies want to acquire their skills and just keep them for themselves, not to release them on the market anywhere, because they are so hyper protective of their intellectual property. So, this is something that probably will adjust, but the market will need a couple of years before enough AI experts are qualified. And in the meantime, what staffing companies are trying to do is just to get ahead of the market.

And they've done it a couple of years ago when programmers were hot staff on the market, and companies being able to retain the best programmers and get them from the market were just at the top of the food chain. And the same situation is now with AI. If you call a staffing company that might have a database of a couple of thousands of these people, they are already highly sought after.

And so, this is a constant race in terms of being able to provide your clients with what's best.

Yurii:

And it looks like AI is not stealing anyone's job. I mean, it will steal someone's job, some very stupid and not very thoughtful jobs, but overall, it will just generate new types of jobs.

Maciej:

Well, I think you're optimistic here, because I'm sure you saw this meme or those funny pictures with people complaining that AI was supposed to do this simple labor, that cleaning or dishwashing and so on. And meanwhile, it's taking over poetry and art and those fanciful jobs that we wanted to do as humans ourselves, while AI was doing the boring stuff. And it happens to be so far from the other way around.

So yeah.

Yurii:

If you could remove one barrier to smooth collaborations with freelancers, what would it be?

Maciej:

Well, the first thing that comes to mind is obviously the legal and compliance bit. But I'm not a dreamer as much. I know that it will be in some form forever.

So, I wouldn't remove that. I would be thinking more about the way that companies can quickly engage with contractors. So first of all, quickly verify the suitability of the company, both in terms of hard skills and that human fit, those clicking with the people that they are supposed to work with.

And secondly, the mental barrier to preventing you from working with someone you don't know. Because when working with freelancers, you don't have the luxurious probation period, the onboarding time when you hire an FTE, because when a full time employee joins, he's being or she is being onboarded for the first two weeks, there's a trial period, there's plenty of time to get to know each other and see if this will click in the long run. With freelancers, you don't have that.

And it's quite natural, because it's just a human instinct not to immediately trust someone you don't know. So, if this barrier could be overcome somehow, or if people would be approaching maybe such cooperation with more open mind, I believe that, yeah, it will benefit both sides in the long run.

Yurii:

And I feel like also to your point, you know, like coming back to the role of staffing companies, it's exactly where it's really good fit. Because while collecting this database of people, you can still kind of like build in relationships with them like over and over and over again, the more they work with you with different clients, the more they know you, they might not know clients, but they know you and you know them. And you would like to vouch for them for the companies.

So, in this case, companies are not hiring random people they don't know what they have like, they understand that it works that this person is relatively reliable, and they can just do business with them.

Maciej:

That's spot on. And that's a, I mean, definition, basically, of what recruitment is and should be because the client, they just know the recruitment consultant, then they might have a great relationship with that recruitment consultant, and we trust that person. And then if the recruitment consultant presents someone that they say that they know themselves, and they have worked with before, and other clients have said great things about working with person, you know, a third person in the past, then the client automatically relates to that person, even if we if they haven't met that contractor or freelancer in the past at all, they might trust the recruitment consultant. And instantly, this is a friend of a friend, and then they are my friends. And the relationship gets so much easier.

So, I totally relate to what you just said.

Yurii:

You know, Maciej, I wish to have the sky as a limit, but time is a limit to our conversation. So, the final question, what advice would you give to a company considering hiring freelancer for the first time, I would say, just go with it.

Maciej:

So, I'm the type of person who likes to test out new things, even new business concepts. And before you try something, then you don't really know what it's like. So first, look for the right platform or look for the right partner to look for the right company that might guide you in

the process.

Maybe don't go out hunting for freelancers yourself, just wildly for the first time. Let's see how it goes. Let's make sure you have the right process in place the right preparation that you know what it's like from the legal perspective, that you remove those barriers.

And then just let yourself be guided by someone who has done it before and see how it works for yourself.

Yurii:

And last but not least, name two people I should reach out to talk about the independent workforce.

Maciej:

Okay, I might have dropped you the names before somewhere, but Karol Czajkowski is definitely such a person. And I can, I can recommend him when he also shared some brilliant tips with me in the past. And one other person might be yet if I only have to limit to two, probably Michał Baruch, who I also know, who is a type of person that even if he works a permanent position, he treats himself like a one person business and everything he does.

It's like coming from this thinking of treating the company that he's working for like it's his own. So, I can't recommend both guys enough.

Yurii:

Sounds amazing. Thank you very much, Maciej. And I don't know, I just learned so many things from you in such a small amount of time.

And I feel like I've just been living through the whole 15 years of your experience in less than an hour. And you made it like very, very clear to understand, very like straight to the point. And I just love that.

Thank you so much for sharing your experience so openly. Thank you too.

Maciej:

I hope we can repeat that someday.

Yurii:

We'll do have many, many more topics to talk about. And yeah, see you in the freelance world.

Maciej:

Perfect.

Yurii:

Thank you.

Maciej:

Take care.

Yurii:

Just like that.