Why Freelancers Are Already 40% Of Your Workforce – Episode 18 Jack Spencer

Yurii Lazaruk: [00:00:00] 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. He will speak with CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders about how they work with independent talent, the wins, the challenges, and lessons learned.

My name is Yuri. I'm growing the freelance market at Freelancer Map, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professional with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Jack Spencer, a flexible workforce specialist. With over a decade of experience helping enterprises work smarter with freelance talent.

The founder of re flexor, co-founder of Cloud Redondo, who's also led enterprise partnerships and Uno, Juno, working with global brands across media, tech and finance. So welcome Jack.

Jack Spencer: Thank you, Yuri. Great to be here.

Yurii Lazaruk: Super happy to talk to you and once again, as we've talked before the recording, you are also connected with Human Cloud, with amazing Matt Mottola.

We had the conversation with him before and Tony Ham will have the conversation with him [00:01:00] a little later. So I feel like the world is intersected so. Yeah, it's all about this independent workforce. So let's, I

Jack Spencer: mean, you, you, you can't keep those guys off podcasts, so I'm not surprised. They, they probably live on there.

Yurii Lazaruk: You can't, you have to talk, you have to, you know, bring the world out. That's exactly what we're doing. So let's start with you. So walk me through your professional journey. Like what role. Do you play in the freelance ecosystem today?

Jack Spencer: Uh, well, today is very different to where it started. Um, something of an outsider.

I, I left Art College about 25 years ago, and my first sort of career move was actually as a freelancer, as an independent worker in creative. I worked for a large record label here in the uk, creating visuals for, um, for live shows. So that was a bit of a tangent. I, I got pulled into technology and media as a space for about 10 years, and I worked, uh, creating sort of native apps for live events, live environments, traveled the world, deploying those and managing projects.

And then my [00:02:00] sort of people and technology journey started in about 20 15, 20 16, when I was a very early hire at a company called, you know, Juno, um, at the time, a small sort of scrappy startup. Uh, above the South Sudanese embassy in Fitzrovia, uh, in a sort of really shabby little rental office, and now a global player on the freelancer management system side of things, and a really well known, um, freelancer talent marketplace as well.

So, so I was part of that very long journey. I looked after the, uh, enterprise customer base, so I was responsible of the sort of commercial side of it. Crucially, don't lose any clients. Uh, and then the implementation and project management piece as well. So how do we integrate? Um, I left, you know, Juneau in 2023, and I have started my own business, which really relies on one little sort of kernel of an idea, which was, um, how do we help businesses be more successful with their flexible workforce programs beyond technology [00:03:00] solutions, beyond sort of vendors coming into business, who owns that success internally and who creates the program around that to help businesses win?

Um, I, I think we live in a. Ecosystem that's filled with amazing solutions, but there's nobody that really typically sits inside a business that owns this stuff. That helps organizations sort of govern and manage a program of what flexible work looks like. And if we all accept, which I assume we do as viewers of this type of podcast, if we all accept the direction of travel is clear.

What organizations need is the same structure and rigor that they have with their permanent workforce, right? So that, that's the idea behind reflex. And

then as you said in your introduction, I've got my fingers in several other pies that we can talk about.

Yurii Lazaruk: Hopefully, hopefully this is the way, you know, to create it because I see like how my, how many processes companies has about like hiring a full-time person that has this and it, it, it goes and over and over again.

You can hire one person for like six months, sometimes even a year. And I see the [00:04:00] difference in the freelance world. I'm like, why the hell you don't have a process for hiring freelancers. It's so much easier. Yeah. You know, I talk to people like Steve Rader, er Lopez from different company from Meina, Basta, from Airbus.

They have clear process. It's so easy for them to hire freelancers. And I'm like, why the hell it's not the, the same way many other companies. So I'm curious, like from your perspective when you are talking to enterprises, organizations like from, from a side of reflex or what is one problem? That you are solving for them with, uh, this contingent workforce?

Jack Spencer: Honestly, the, there's a myriad of sort of small flags that give away this one singular truth, but almost invariably, every single customer I speak to, we're talking about ownership. Um, organizations don't have in situ someone who is responsible for this stuff, and we can argue about the reasons behind that.

For me, it's this sort of like organic creep. I think businesses traditionally had employees, and employees did the work. It's just not the world we live in anymore. [00:05:00] But it's not like there was an announcement, right? This stuff has been creeping for years and years, organically growing loads of different drivers and um, uh, sort of motivators behind not just why businesses do this, but also the workers themselves.

So, where we are today, I think is businesses are waking up to the fact that, oh shit, we've got 20 to 40% of our workforce. Uh, and they don't work for us and we don't have any governance. We don't know how to onboard them. We dunno how to find them. We hardly know how to pay them. We're not very compliant.

Like all of that stuff's just sort of mushroomed out of this idea of a slow creeping change in how work gets done. So yeah, you, you might get brought in for any number of reasons, be it compliance or budget or talent, but the reality is the, the, those are all, um, symptoms, right? And the cause is. No one owns it.

Yurii Lazaruk: It's crazy. I mean, like, okay. From your perspective, who must own it? Like maybe it's like a department or, I don't know, a [00:06:00] title or, I know it's like all, all over the place, but like in the ideal world, whose responsibility is to work with freelance? Okay. Let's not even use the word few answers. It's like independent workforce.

Jack Spencer: Yeah. Yeah. It's a good, it is a really good question. Um, and I, the way I would. Sort of start with a business is probably say, well, if you wanna look at it like that, who owns your workforce at the moment? 'cause it tends to be a company wide thing, right? Like sure, HR might govern it, but who's responsible for the budget?

Who's responsible for the legal, who's responsible for the productivity and innovation? That is a cross-functional, sort of senior board level decision making team. And if you think this like flexible work just rolls downhill into a junior talent executive or a junior HR exec, um, and then boom, you're, you are now responsible for 20% of the workforce.

I think that's, that's mad. Um, and this is only gonna get worse with AI by the way, because if, if we sort of count them as a emerging workforce category. And you treat it [00:07:00] like it's, I don't know, a LinkedIn license for the business or something like, no. It needs more rigor and governance than that. You have to have programs that manage this stuff.

To me, honestly, it always would start cross-functionally. So you would go in at the, the top level. 'cause it has to have everybody's buy-in around, not how do we manage this, but what are our aspirations? Um, maybe we'll talk a little bit around. Uh, like decision making and, and what are the triggers to like, get people to act on this stuff.

But typically when someone wants governance, it's 'cause something's gone wrong. And I would always encourage businesses to actually start at the beginning of saying, what are our aspirations around this sort of talent cohort, but also what are our business objectives that we're trying to unlock with it?

Um, those are the really. Almost existential questions that businesses should be asking around this type of talent.

Yurii Lazaruk: From your experience and experience of clients you are working with, who usually starts this process? Like who is going like and say, oh, we need a freelancer. We need help. Like, who is this person?

I know that [00:08:00] it's not one person, but like maybe like they paint several pictures here.

Jack Spencer: It, it, it's, so the reasons I've been brought into businesses might be, uh, we have a compliance issue, we're non-compliant on some regulation. Um, and we need help bringing that back into shape. So that might be tax and compliance.

That might be HR that's flagged it. It might be even a sort of talent exec that's seen some people on LinkedIn. It's like, oh crap, I'm not doing that. I should be doing that. So it could be anyone like through that chain, or it could be. Uh, like a hiring manager, it could be a department lead saying, well, we've won a big bit of business and, um, I don't have the resource for it.

So any of those, um, triggers can come from almost anywhere in a business. Uh, and it, it takes a bit of courage, I think, for organizations or people in those organizations to put their hand up and ask that question. Mm, I, I try to encourage businesses to be a little bit more proactive than that if they can.

And although all of those triggers actu, you know, they're completely reasonable and you should act on them. Let that be the [00:09:00] opportunity to build something more proactive, and rather than getting to. Uh, within a month of a really important deadline and thinking crap, we need to resource this and bring some people in.

Maybe start thinking a little bit earlier about, um, what your sort of business objectives and outputs for the next quarter to 12 months might look like. So the, the triggers are similar, that can come from anywhere. Um, but often it's to deal with a specific challenge. Um, and that's, yeah, that's a really common thread.

Yurii Lazaruk: After someone made this question, what happens next? Where, where do they go? Like, how to ensure that they actually will hire this person.

Jack Spencer: Yeah. Uh, where do they go and where should they go? Are different things to me. But I would say that, 'cause I, yeah, exactly. I, I try to implement programs, um, often where they go as a supplier.

So they'll outsource to a vendor, uh, be that, uh, um, something like a talent marketplace or a recruitment or staffing agency. Um, or they [00:10:00] might have like an internal skills marketplace. Like they'll try and, um, find a fix for that specific problem, typically, is what I find. So, um, in, in the UK we. The off worker, uh, off payroll worker regulations known as I 35.

And that's a really good example of an entire, uh, economy going, oh, we need to fix this one problem. So they all fix this one problem. Often outsourcing, uh, the sort of classification and insurance and risk behind it. Um, but they're not necessarily dealing with the fact that there's no sort of governance or strategy behind flexible workforce in a, as a broader trend.

So what, what I see time and again is if I have a problem, I try and immediately just fix that one specific challenge, um, often through an external partner because honestly, that can be easier than getting any sort of collaboration done internally.

Yurii Lazaruk: So, uh, before the, before the recording, I told you about the rich, about Rich Wilson who told me about [00:11:00] this, like different wordings, like freelancer, contractor, and consultant, and they go from different budgets.

So in your experience. What is your favorite word to use when you are talking to enterprises?

Jack Spencer: Whichever word, um, makes 'em comfortable with invoicing. I don't mind, uh, easy

Yurii Lazaruk: words that makes them comfortable with invoicing. I have no idea really.

Jack Spencer: Um, no, it's really interesting. I. The, the different words sort of come and go in and out of fashion.

Right. I think we're seeing a bit of a pushback on freelancer at the moment, which is interesting except for quite specific sectors. Um, I think there is a problem with not having a joined up sort of glossary or directory of terminology in our industry. I think people chuck everything under contractor.

Um, or people think statement of work is some sort of Magic g Jail free card for compliance. Um, or they think freelancers. Equals like designer or [00:12:00] developer, like, there's all these, um, sort of misconceptions and assumptions around what this different terminology means. Um, and, uh, you know, are we talking about the actual operating model or are we talking about the skills that are being delivered?

Are we talking about how the work's being done? Uh, there needs to be more clarity on it, but, um, typically the sectors that I work across have their own

very rigid terminology. Like, I'm not gonna go into a construction business and start talking about freelancers. They are very much subcontractors and tradies, so you have to like, stick in those, um, swim lanes.

Otherwise you're gonna blow people's mind.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, talking about minds. So, uh, as, uh, like currently we have already, uh, more than 15 conversations with, uh, other amazing experts in the, in, in independent workforce. And almost everyone talks about the mindset. So to start working with this independent, uh, experts, you have to switch your mindset from.

Not owning [00:13:00] people, but being open to delegate. And it's kind of like very, very weird thing because like managers usually they must delegate and they're delegating to full-time workers. And still it's a differently, uh, in, in delegating to, um, some external experts. So what, from your experience, like that main mindset blockers, like what, what, what blocks them?

Is it like a control part or, I dunno. Management or payment part or communication part, or as you've said about like. Taxation. Like what, what scares companies the most?

Jack Spencer: Yeah, no, really good question. Um, I, I sat in an I 35 forum, which again, for non-UK listeners is about, um, sort of disguised employees and, uh, off payroll workers.

You know, like, can you treat freelancers as you can employees? And the UK government has basically said, uh, if you want to do that, you can pay them like employees, and that means tax. So I was sat in an I 35 forum and. There was loads of organizations there that were like basically to summarize their points of saying, I [00:14:00] want to keep working with contractors the way I've always worked with them.

I don't want any risk. I do want to control 'em. Like employees. I don't want to pay tax. And you're like, yeah, that is a problem that. That's the exact problem they're trying to solve. Correct. So what's the mindset shift that needs to happen here to unlock what you want? Right. And, and I think the, the problem that organizations have is that they're deeply wedded and comforted by the status quo.

'cause they know how it works. And the idea of changing a mindset around saying, well, if we made things much more output based and we didn't, um, sort

of supervise and control them. Um, and we didn't micromanage 'em, um, and we treated them like peers who are capable of doing their work without, um, being scrutinized then, then we actually, this isn't a problem.

This is a huge opportunity and it unlocks a massive amount of, um, potential like innovation and capability for our [00:15:00] business. But the mindset of, but this is comforting and I know it and understand it. And when I did my. You know, personnel qualification in 1995, this was the how it all flowed. So I'm comfortable with that.

Like, unfortunately, the move, the, the world has changed, which brings me on to like this, my second part of this answer would be those businesses still think that this is a strategic decision, like a choice that they're making. Um, I push back on that really heavily when I speak to customers to say like, this isn't a choice.

The world has shifted underneath your feet. Um, this isn't something that's being solely dec decided by businesses. Businesses aren't choosing to engage, um, in freelance models. The workforce has chosen to engage in a freelance model, right? The data backs this up. You can see, um, things like salary aren't the only motivators for workers anymore.

Actually, workers want autonomy. Control, freedom. And those are the things that are [00:16:00] driving people to choose how they work. So the idea that your traditional sort of route of salary equals worker that's been eroded. Um, and you know, post pandemic, we've just seen a massive shift in people's outlook towards how work gets done.

Um, particularly in the uk we're seeing a real problem with redundancies and a fairly static jobs market. Um, and we're also seeing patterns around younger people choosing independent work. So moving away from traditional career paths, that straight diagonal line from junior to SVP and the golden watch is eroded.

Um, we, we are seeing 25 year olds going to freelancing. We're seeing kids coming outta college with side hustle. We've seeing kids not go to college 'cause they can learn it on YouTube for free and save themselves a hundred thousand pounds. So like the work, the way work gets done has changed underneath their feet.

So to some extent, going back to that I 35 example, it doesn't matter how you feel about it. It doesn't, it doesn't matter how your organization feels [00:17:00]

about it. 'cause the workforce is shifting around you and the organizations that get that and unlock it really quickly are gonna win because they're getting the brilliant talent in.

That's worked across numerous, like cutting edge projects, new technologies, different sectors. They bring all of this incredible experience out the box, ready to go. Um, and the organizations, they're still like, oh yeah, but can I tell them when their lunch break is? Yeah. Yeah. They're gonna miss the boat.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah.

Jack Spencer: Sorry, that's the end of my ran.

Yurii Lazaruk: You can, you can't tell them anything, you know, because otherwise they will report you or they'll just leave because that's how it works, you know? It sounds like adapt or die. And, and it's the funniest thing that, um, I've recently, like just, just, uh, this weekend, uh, watched with my wife, the movie her, about the person who fell in love with ai and I, I, I checked, this was a movie of like 2013 year or something like that.

Yeah. And you know, if I were watching those. That movie, like in 2017, I wouldn't believe it. Right. But now I was watching like, no. Yeah. It's like, yeah, it's, it's [00:18:00] possible. Maybe we're not on that level, but it's possible. And you know, people are always like talking about the years, like five years, 10 years, 15 years, blah, blah, blah.

So talking about, um, this future of work, so. If companies like, in, in what timeframe should companies adapt not to miss out? Like from from your, um, experience. How, how do you feel about that?

Jack Spencer: I, I try not to be too unilateral because, um, you know, when I tell people they've missed the boat and I don't think it is that, um, I think, you know, take everything I've just said into, into account, but also understand that what we're talking about is relatively simple.

Um, there's lots of different factors and moving parts to this, but one of the things I try to do with reflex is like de mythologize what good looks like and what success looks like. People often already have all of this stuff in-house, but they just put it, apply it to perms, perms and they don't apply it to anything else.
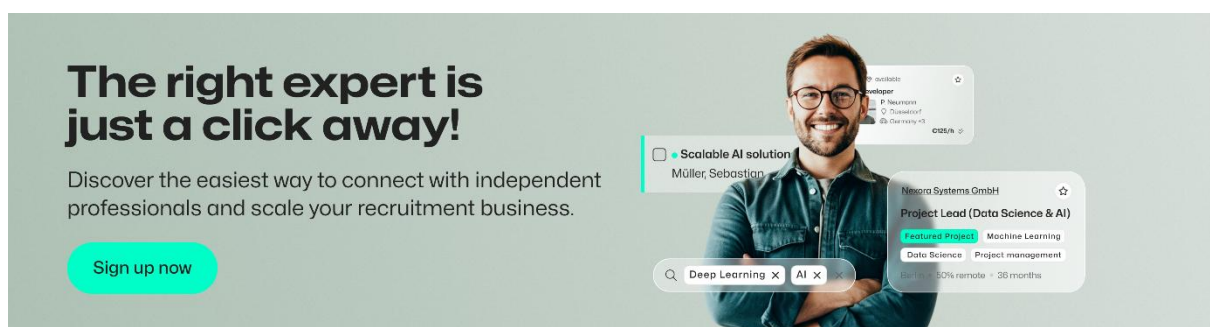
So actually a lot of the sort of governance and control that you need already probably [00:19:00] exists. Um, it is my belief that you can get. It's something

that really, really works. It stands up on its own, um, and, and will scale as you scale and sort of build on the future within 90 days. I don't think that this is 12 months of change management.

Um, if your company has the, uh, appetite for it, then absolutely. It's, it's something you can change really, really quickly. The, the problem most organizations have, as I said before, is that they start. Challenge orientated. They don't start with the opportunities. They don't start with what's the outcome we're trying to achieve?

They start with, how do I fix this one annoying bit of regulation or this one annoying finance problem I have. So yeah, it, it doesn't take a lot of effort. It doesn't actually take a lot of budget. It's, it's something that's relatively simple. But it does take the appetite to do it. So when I'm looking at sort of customers that would, um, want to work with Reflex or any of my sort partners, um, it's [00:20:00] actually not, what role do they do?

It's not how long have they been in their position? It's not what sector they're in. It's um, are they open to change? It's that, it's that personality piece. Are they open to it? And if they are, it's, it is really easy to bring them on the journey.

Yurii Lazaruk: This episode of The Independent Workforce is brought to you by Freelancer Map the Home of Freelancing.

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Today. No, I feel like it's also about talking to a right person because from my experience, yeah. When I talk to recruiters and tell them about the contingent workforce, about hiring freelancers. They ghost me and, and when I talk to

CEO, tell them about like what I'm talking about, [00:21:00] what we're building, what is happening in the world, they're like, okay, go talk to these people.

Go make it work. 'cause they are interested, they understand and also they make decisions. And I'm curious, like from your perspective, like two things. First of all, whom are you talking to? Is this like C-E-O-C-O, CIOs like. Who is the best person to talk to? And how do you persuade them to start this ma making these changes and working with independent workforce?

Jack Spencer: Yeah. Uh, it, it varies. It really varies. So, um. It depends on the type of business and scale of business. I love looking for businesses that are privately owned. Sometimes family, but like ideally you find someone who does a bit of managing director, they bit of marketing. HR might be under their remit. They are perfect for me 'cause they're just like, Jack, I'm too busy for this.

Like, what, what do you want? And how do I fix it? Um, and then the, the persuasion piece is find a trigger that works for them. You'll very rarely find someone that wants to bite off change management. [00:22:00] Um, that's like saying, do you wanna go to the doctors? You know, unless something's wrong, I'm not going. Um, and it's the same with change management, I think.

So find a trigger that works for them. Um, uh, I'm, I'm lucky in the UK 'cause the UK government's dropping loads of legislation on the, on the economy. Um, which obviously sort of pisses off business leaders, but for me that's a great opportunity to go into businesses and say, this is changing around liability in your supply chain.

Are you aware of it? Um, now's a really good opportunity to wrap your arms around it or this new, uh, employment rights. Uh, act is dropping. That's gonna change how you, um, contract and change how you treat employees once they're in the business. And it, it's not just compliance triggers. Um, you can find organizations that are, maybe they're restructuring or they're starting a new offering and they've got a new product or that launching into a new sector.

Any business transformation like that. To me, it feels like a great opportunity to involve flexible talent because [00:23:00] you can bring in people to innovate, you can bring in people to augment your existing workforce and like flex it up or down as needed. So you can look for signs of organizations that are ready to go for some sort of transformation.

'cause this goes like hand in glove with that stuff to, from my, from my perspective. Um, or then you can find other like, uh. You know, signs that business isn't doing so great and they will need to rely on, um, uh, flexible workers more as a, as a necessity than as a strategic choice. So yeah, there's loads of different triggers, but you've got to find something that says to that business leader or that department head, um, this is what's in it for me.

Um, as I say, just offering up transformational change is not, not the way.

Yurii Lazaruk: A little bit before we were talking about platforms that if company needs, uh, freelancers, they need to go to a platform or somewhere else. So I'm curious, if you are working with a client and they need freelancers and they ask you for help, where do you go?

Like what tools, networks, or maybe platforms do you rely [00:24:00] on most?

Jack Spencer: Um, I, I won't name drop, I don't think, but I would say. It depends on what their needs are. It depends on what their needs are. 'cause, um, I'm a big advocate for like teaching a man to fish and really owning this stuff. Um, if you are, if you're setting up your customers to be completely reliant on suppliers, there's all sorts of things that can go wrong there.

Like, change your business direction, changing business solvency, uh, like if you're completely propped up on, um. Yeah, external vendors, I'd be a little bit concerned. So part of what I do would be to help them build out what a freelancer, an engaged freelancer talent pool looks like directly. Um, there's some businesses that do this amazingly in the uk they're really, really good at it, and they actually do care about the freelancers on their bench.

Now the thing that like motivates freelancers to be part of a bench like that typically is, is there any work. And when do I get paid? And if you don't do those fundamentals right, then [00:25:00] you're not gonna be able to build out a direct talent pool. But, um, if you get them right, what you build is a really, really valuable little database of brilliant people ready to rumble.

They understand your culture, your processes, your work, and it's like bringing in just a sort of super sub and the 90th minute to come in and deliver some amazing work and score you some goals. Like if you can get that working for you, I would advocate for that. Um, and beyond that, I think it's, it's. Pick the partners like, and then strategically review them regularly to make sure that they're actually providing the, um, ROI that you're hoping for.

Uh, my work, um, with, with, you know, Juno sort of exposed me to how big some customer PSLs were. We'd be talking about over 200, um, recruitment and staffing agencies associated with one business. And to me, like once you've got to that point, what you don't have is preferred. It's not even an approved supplies list, it's just a list.

Um, and it, it doesn't provide any value to you 'cause it's not what you want [00:26:00] is a small number of partners that will work hard for you and deliver for you and in return what they get is high volume. I think the mistake a lot of businesses make with sourcing is they just sort of, um. Put out loads and those attenders except everyone onto their supply list and then just chuck out a brief, um, ad hoc to see what lands, uh, you know, I'm more for competition, but that you're not gonna get the best results that way.

You want someone that you trust and understands you. I think,

Yurii Lazaruk: you know, sometimes I have, uh, this. Stories when freelancers are getting contacted from different recruiters for the same opportunity. Yeah. Yeah. And it's kind of like so weird, like, why do you do that? I, I kinda understand, of course you need like things fast, but if you are like, you know, putting out there in the market and then waiting for who will be first.

Yeah. Kind of. Yes. Yeah. But like the way you build your relationships, I don't know. It's kind of like, feels weird. And also, you know, to a point I feel like. Um, what companies usually give full-time people. You have job, you have paycheck, you have office, you have insurance. What else do you need? So I feel like freelancers needs are a [00:27:00] little bit different.

So what should companies care about when working with freelancers to build this long-term relationships with them?

Jack Spencer: Well, I can tell you when I started, I can tell you what it was. You go into an office and they go, here's your laptop, there's the toilet, and then they walk off and that, that was it. And then sometimes the fire alarm would go and you go, oh shit, how do I get out of it?

Like there was nothing. People didn't, um, people didn't look after you. You are truly a hired gun and you're treated like it. Um, I think there's some wooliness now in the UK about can I treat freelancers, um, like employees. No. Can I treat 'em like humans? Yes. You can still be kind, don't worry. Um, I, again, it's not rocket science.

If you want somebody to perform in a, um, like high performance environment, you know, guess what you need to do. Are they comfortable? Uh, do they, do they have a cup of coffee? Uh, do they understand the [00:28:00] work? Do they understand the requirements? Have you properly briefed them? Have you spent the time with them to make sure that you know it's all gonna go okay?

It's amazing how many companies don't do those fundamentals. Um, onboarding is really, really important. Uh, I think in those senses, uh, making the processes easy to follow, making, uh, like the compliance and the payment stuff really easy to follow. And then at the end. Pay them, pay them quickly. Um, and then the second point is pay them and pay them quickly.

And then the third point is get feedback. No, I've never seen a business do that diligently. Some people say they do, um, but I've never seen a business. If you go in and challenge them and say, all right, well show me the feedback from your last a hundred, uh, flexible workforce engagements, um, and give it, like, give it to me in some sort of easy to assimilate data format.

No, no, they don't do it. And it, that's crazy to me because these freelancer communities or flexible workforce communities are so tight knit. Um, and they're way more powerful than [00:29:00] things like Glassdoor 'cause one bad review in one of those WhatsApp groups or Slack channels. And you are, you are sort of torched earth.

So I would absolutely do the offboarding and do it properly because even if things have gone horribly wrong. A grownup conversation can fix that.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, it sounds like a noise di nose dive episode from the Black Mirror when everyone were relate related on rating system and uh, I feel like companies are forgetting about this.

That's, uh, there are the word of mouse out there and if there are three influencers like shit, most likely they will, like the word will spread out very fast and most likely it'll be harder and harder for you to hire these people and then you will. Say that flu doesn't work because you treat them.

Actually, of course it doesn't work. So if you could remove one barrier on the company side to make working with flu answers better, what would it be?

Jack Spencer: Um, I don't know. That's a really good question. The most, [00:30:00] the common blockers I see are, oh, wait a second. Yuri, you've stumped me.

Yurii Lazaruk: That's how it works. You know, sometimes, sometimes,

Jack Spencer: um, the common blockers that I, that the, the.

The thing I see time and time again is that people aren't, um, proactively engaging and they're not sort of blending their workforce models to incorporate this stuff. Um, it's, it's still stuck in that. Trend of we need to do more of the same rather than we need to innovate or grow. And I, I suppose it goes back to that mindset thing that the blockers are all really easy to navigate if you've got the mindset and the, the appetite to do it.

But the, the thing that I find frustrating, I suppose, as a blocker is that constant sort of regard for the flexible workforce of it's, it's simply a resource solution. Um, uh, we're short staffed or we're busy, or we're not busy, we need to get shift. Some [00:31:00] heads, like it's just this flexible element to it, and I, I think the mindset blocker of not thinking about these people as innovators and specialists and people that can move the needle in your organization strategically or, um, financially or like, improve results.

I, I find that incredibly frustrating because often they'll be paying quite a decent. Right for a real specialist and then they'll get them to do the role of a business as usual X or whatever sort of function that they're fulfilling, rather than as a someone that's come in to really do something magic.

Um, that's the opportunity that is being missed. I dunno if that counts as a blocker, but it's all you're getting out of me.

Yurii Lazaruk: And, and, and what is the role of ai? Like how do you see AI and automation, uh, reshape in the freelance market?

Jack Spencer: Great question. So I'm, I'm on, um. Uh, founding committee for an AI committee here in the UK called AI and Media Institute.

Um, and I look after the work for Workforce Tranche and we [00:32:00] actually, we had a panel last year around, um, the sort of workforce and ai, so this is really relevant to me. Um. Uh, I, I think there's a huge gap between what's being marketed, what's on people's websites, uh, and the reality. I think it's huge. And I, I think that's mainly, mostly pedaled and perpetuated by AI companies, um, who are absolutely desperate to maintain growth despite sort of plateauing, uh, products.

Right. So I, I think there's this big push to sort of either FOMO people or scare people into acting. And what I see time and time again that boots on the ground reality is very different to the sales deck. And that's not just supplier sales deck, that's also business sales decks. We're enabling AI to do X.

It's like, hmm, you look under the covers and actually you're not. Um, but. The reality is if you look at how fast something like chat GBTs grown [00:33:00] in three years and what, three months or something, um, it's, it's pretty stark about like how much that's integrated into our day-to-day lives now. Um, and even businesses that aren't running official pilots around AI have to face up to the fact that there's this like phantom.

AI workforce already in their businesses. 'cause if you think your account manager's still writing their own emails, you're wrong. If you think even the commercial director's writing his own pitch proposals, you're wrong. Guess what? AI's really good at that stuff. 'cause it's, it's good at frameworks, it's good at research.

Um, so I think the impact it'll have on the flexible workforce specifically is. It's gonna be quite interesting. I, I'm expect to see waves. I think we're in wave one of people saying, I don't need to bring in a copywriter chat. GPT can do it. I think that's wave one. I think wave two is, uh, I've lost my client 'cause my copywriting was shit.

So I need to bring in, uh, I think we'll see that applied across, um, [00:34:00] multiple sectors and, and skills and talent, uh, talent bases because the idea that, um, AI is capable of creating. To a specialist level. I, I think we're, we're still somewhere away from that. Um, a, a good test for anyone that's interested in it, I think, is to pick a topic that you know, really, really intimately and try to get, uh, an LLM to expand the nuance of it.

And you'll pull it to pieces in seconds because it, it's, it's not there, it doesn't do nuance yet. Um. But yeah, it, it is gonna be a tricky couple of years for people in those industries. I, I've got friends in industries like transcreation and translation, like you can see how, um, uh, transcribing and translation work might be heavily impacted.

But again, going back to the point of, uh, is, uh, an LLM that can transcribe into Spanish the same as Mexican. Will it understand the nuance and will it end up really badly offending someone? Likeactually, you never

Yurii Lazaruk: know. You never [00:35:00] know.

Jack Spencer: A actually, the, the nuance is really, really important in language. So you can sort of push back on that idea as well.

Um, so it's, it's early days I think clients are already. Clients of businesses are already saying like, I want to see cost savings 'cause we can enable AI now. And businesses are sort of caught between a bit of a rock and a hard place. Customers saying prices should be coming down 'cause of automation, um, but also them having to invest a massive amount in upskilling and tools.

To try and like access the automation. All the while the technology's not actually got the capabilities that a lot of the sales decks say it does. So it is, it is a bit of a mess at the moment, but it'll, I think in the next sort of couple of years, we'll see the end of that. What first wave of replacement.

Um, uh, there's all sorts of perspectives on this from, uh, we'll all be gainfully employed. No one will ever have to do sort of, uh, desk work ever again, and it'll be utopia all the way through to, uh, the, the white collar blood bath notion of, [00:36:00] you know, kids will leave university of a degree and there'll never be an entry level job ever again, and they'll, you know, die on the streets.

So somewhere in the middle. Uh,

Yurii Lazaruk: you know, I, I, I'm still waiting for self tie in shoes and like flying boards, so, uh, yeah, we'll see what will happen next, but, uh, they promise it like in 2000, I dunno, twenties or something, that it didn't happen. I

Jack Spencer: know, I

know.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, I, I feel like AI is also really, really good in basing people, so it's like brings a lot of bullshit into our daily conversation.

All the things, and even to the. Point when people are creating job description and people create their, uh, cv, everyone is using ai and then you have to use AI to retranslate what was created with AI into like the human language back. And then sometimes it's like totally messing things up. You know, when you have this, uh, there are this videos on YouTube when there is like a line of.

I dunno, 50 people and one person in the beginning tells something to someone or show something to someone and then they like turn around and tell to each other. And [00:37:00] then you see, I feel like that's exactly what's going on also

with all this ai, AI world. But I feel like it's also making like people. Um, more experienced and to your point that, uh, on the topic that you really, really understand Well, yes, AI can be your help, but if you have no idea what you're talking about, nah, I wouldn't trust, at least now, I dunno what will happen in few months, but for now, no.

Jack Spencer: It's, it's an incredible tool. Like from my perspective, starting a, um, a business has been incredible. I didn't know about how to start a business. Um, I, I. I understand what my like IP is and how I can communicate it to people and how I can help people. But if I want something to help me, like create structure around what a proposal should look like, or if I want something to help me work out what a um, sales funnel looks like.

Brilliant. It's like having a really well-informed intern, but I would never deploy it to communicate on my behalf, like in a meter, in a sales deck because, um, it's my tone [00:38:00] of voice and it's my experiences and expertise that people are buying into.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. Yeah. You all, Jack. I wish to have the sky as a limit, but time is a limit.

So the final question, what advice would you give to companies just starting to use freelancers and to freelancers entering the market?

Jack Spencer: Okay, so for businesses, I would say, um, start with your objectives. Don't start with a challenge, right? Don't be challenge orientated. Um, what are, what are the goals you're hoping to achieve by engaging in flexible workforce and work backwards from there.

Um, treat them as you would any other, uh, work worker cohort. And, um, put the sort of attention and rigor and, um, budget. Behind that, that you would for any other part of your workforce? I think it deserves equal stake. The future is blended and I would love to see organizations think about it in those terms.

Um, it's not an augmentation, it's part of the, part of the fabric of your [00:39:00] workforce. Um, uh, budgeting is actually my answer for freelancers as well. I think if you're gonna go independent, think about your runway. Um, it's a really exciting world. It's a really scary world if you don't get your budget right.

Um, I think often people talk about all the benefits, the flexibility, the autonomy, um, working with great businesses, um, but I'm a bit of a realist and I

know that if you can't pay your mortgage, that's gonna put a lot pressure on you. So, um, uh, I should introduce you to someone that reminds me about, um, who, who does this stuff really, really well.

But, um, yeah, I, I would start with budget. Um, work out what, what your runway looks like and then proactively come up with a plan, like start everything with a bit of project management, um, and. You have to understand as well that the first six months is a sales cycle. It's just outbound

Yurii Lazaruk: and it's like a rollercoaster.

You either striving or you are like close to like zero or below zero. [00:40:00] So it's always a question of like building your pipeline.

Jack Spencer: Independent work is not, um, it's not about how skilled you are. It's an exercise in tenacity and resilience. I, I really believe that it's, can you keep showing up? Your skills will come, um, like you have to back yourself.

But if you don't give up, that's what separates a lot of people from success and failure.

Yurii Lazaruk: Last but not least, name two people. I should reach out to talk about the independent workforce.

Jack Spencer: Ah, well, I just mentioned, um. The chap in the UK that looks after, um, lepers, which is a, uh, freelancer and, uh, mental welfare organization.

He also really helps organizations unlock, uh, talent pool capabilities. Um, he's called Matthew, so I'll introduce you to him. Um, and then the second guy I can give you, oh, let's give you some really boring from. Side, the vendor scene. Do you wanna talk about VMSs

Yurii Lazaruk: out? Everything, everything?

Jack Spencer: Yeah. Let me, I'll connect you with someone [00:41:00] who's, um, supplier side, but someone, there's a, I've got a few sort of friends in that space and, um, the, their products amazing, but their exposure, the coalface to all these different organizations and how work gets done, I think is really, really valuable.

And I pick their brains quite a lot. So let I, uh, I, I'll connect you with him.

Yurii Lazaruk: Got it. Got it. And what is the best way to connect with you?

Jack Spencer: Uh, reflex.com is my website. Uh, or find me on LinkedIn, um, Jack Spencer. Uh, and then just add reflex. I'm sure I'll pop up. I pretty much live on there, so, uh, yeah, reach, you definitely

Yurii Lazaruk: pop up.

I, I check that so it works that way.

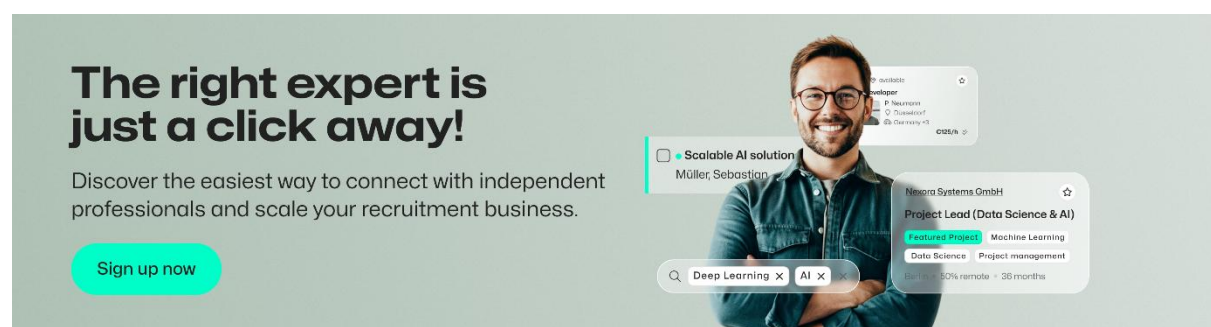**Jack Spencer:** I'm always, always up for talking. Um, and very rarely get around to selling anything.

Yurii Lazaruk: And yeah. Jack, thank you so much for not selling anything during the whole this conversation and, and also bringing a lot of fun. You know, I, I was like, you are bringing a lot of energy and I see that you clearly invested in what you're doing and I see that you clearly see the difference in the future of this blended workforce and why it's [00:42:00] important.

So thank you so much for your passion and also for I, I'm super happy to have met you. Yeah. So thank you for this conversation.

Jack Spencer: Same here. I loved it. Thanks for your time, mate.

Yurii Lazaruk: And see you in the freelance world. And for listeners, thank you for joining us on this episode of The Independent Workforce. I hope you've taken one step closer to working smarter with freelance talent.

If you enjoy this conversation, subscribe to learn even more and share it with your colleague. And remember, the future of work is now.