

TIW37 - Natalie Narh

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. Here, we speak with CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders about how they work with independent talent, the wins, the challenges, and the lessons learned.

My name is Yuriy. I'm growing the freelance market at freelancemap, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Natalie Narkh, founder and CEO of Newcomer, a talent and discovery platform connecting business with African creatives all over the world, with a huge mission to make it easier for business globally to find and engage this untapped pool of creatives, and also shaping the future of the creative economy, who also runs Latch Productions, a multimedia company that specializes in photography, videography, graphic design, and web design.

So welcome, Natalie.

Natalie Narh: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Yurii Lazaruk: Tell [00:01:00] me more about Newcomer. So what is it, and what gap are you trying to solve in this global creative talent market?

Natalie Narh: Yeah, so at its core, Newcomer is a talent marketplace that connects African creatives based locally on the continent and across the diaspora to global businesses and opportunities.

So we do that through our portfolio builder, our applicant tracking system, our social feed, and of course, our offline events like our panels, exhibitions, mixers, anything that expands the opportunity surface area for both our creative talent pool and, of course, the businesses who are in need of them. We started building Newcomer because, of course, the question of talent on the continent isn't one that people should have because the talent is there in, in, you know, in, in an excessive format, right?

But everything that lives around said talent in terms of being able to consistently get found on global platforms, they exist on those [00:02:00] platforms, but in terms of being surfaced to actually be recommended for

opportunities, not as much. Once that happens, what does project management look like? How, how do you consistently ensure that the people that you're working with are producing to the quality that you expect, to the timelines that, that you expect, and having a proper team cohesion in a way that you expect?

And then finally, of course, payments. How do African creatives, no matter where they are in the world, get paid? That, that's always a consistent friction that we found. So we founded this to address discoverability, project management, and payments for African creatives, no matter where they're based, on the continent or across the rest of the globe.

So that's, that, that's us and, and what we do.

Yurii Lazaruk: What, how do you deal with payment? So you told me before the recording it's a very hard part and there are not that many working system and, like, easy ways, and that's exactly one of the main blockers that actually prevents companies from, uh, discovering this [00:03:00] untapped pool of amazing humans, of amazing professionals.

Like, what, what is the main, main, main thing and how to overcome it?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. So I'd say with payments, I'll, I'll start with how it, it could or should be ideally- Mm-hmm ... and then we can go into, like, the, the barriers that we have. So everyone, especially if you're a freelancer, you know, you decide on a price with a client, you do the job, you get paid.

That, that, that should be something that is straightforward and expected. Although we all, we all know that we typically take, typically chase our clients for our invoices as well. But even outside of that, at least here in the UK, if Newcomer was based in just the UK for UK-based creatives, at least we're all dealing with pounds, so it makes sense to collect in pound, hold said pounds in escrow, and then pay out to the creative in pounds.

That's, that's what an ideal payment pathway would, would look like in, in, in any transaction. Same for Europe with [00:04:00] the Euro block, same with the States with the dollars. But on the continent, our currencies are just as diverse as the people. You've got your naira, you've got your cedis, you've got your shillings, you've got your rand, you've got everything in between, right?

And it can become a bit more complex for someone who is based in the West who's trying to trade with the continent locally, because there's the, the fees and the transfers. There's the currency exchange rates. There's the actual, um,

payment, um, consistencies as well, 'cause if I'm paying you in pounds, how do I then get that payout locally in mobile money if I'm based in Kenya?

How do I get paid in cedis if I'm based in Ghana? Or if I'm in Nigeria, there's a massive crypto penetration in Nigeria at the moment. If I want to get paid in USDC, what does that conversion from pounds to USD, to, to USDC look like? And then when you add the complexities of payment terms and paying multiple people on a team, that's a co- That, that's a con- [00:05:00] that's a significantly bigger headache than just the stress of having to pay the creative.

And for creatives, it becomes, or for African creatives specifically on the continent, it can become even harder because you can already be chasing your client for a late payment. But when there's the friction of the difficulty in paying you, that is a factor that can make it a lot harder for them to actually pay you on time.

And when there's lots of fluctuations with how much you're getting paid, the exchange rates that you might expect to receive on Monday can be completely different from how much you actually get paid if the client pays just five days later on, on, on, on a Friday or Saturday. So those are all of the nuances that we are consistently working hard to implement and integrate into the platform as well.

Yurii Lazaruk: How do you deal with it, uh, in Newcomer?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. So the current model that we have at the moment is a listings model. So different businesses come advertise everything from full-time [00:06:00] roles to residencies to grants, open calls, everything in between. So at least from that perspective is one time, and they pay the...

The way it works on Newcomer Today is you pay the creatives off-platform, which means all of the issues that I mentioned before is still, um, are still issues that our clients face. And we're also a lot further from the transaction, which means that- There's lots of insights that we don't actually have at the moment in terms of if we don't follow up manually with the client, we, we don't have an automated way of knowing, like, the placements that we've had on the platform.

We aggregate all of that data manually. However, what we've been working on for most of 2026 is transitioning into a commissions-based model. So it's, you don't just find the creative on the platform, you manage the project management there, and you pay the creative on Newcomer. So obviously, the payment comes

through Newcomer, we hold that in escrow, and then it pays out to the creative at the end of the job.

And that also means that through our payment partners that we've been exploring, it also addresses the [00:07:00] friction of all of the issues that you have with not being able to pay your creative in various African regions. We basically take that headache off your head for, for, for, for that process. So we're due to start testing that towards the end of this month, August.

So that means people should start being able to test as well in September or October of '26. That is, that is the plan, at least.

Yurii Lazaruk: What if, uh, for example, a company found a talent from Africa and wants to work with them s- not through Newcomer, somewhere else, uh, with a word of mouth or the referral, whatever.

So they can go to Newcomer afterwards to make a payment?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. So we're, we're, we're going to set it up so the creative can even onboard existing clients that they have on the platform, 'cause for us it's not just about the payment, it's also about project management, it's also about discovery. So for instance, if I'm a filmmaker and I've been commissioned by an NGO to create a short [00:08:00] film about an initiative that they're working on, and I want to build a cast and crew for, for that project, I might a- already have an existing contract with the NGO as a filmmaker, but then I have to build an, I have to build an extended team to get that going, right?

So I would then onboard, um, my NGO onto Newcomer so they can curate their cast and crew, including myself. So as far as they know, everyone that they're paying for this project is aggregated on one platform, and at least they have one place where they can manage all of the relationships and payments, which for every producer would be such a dream, because half the work is actually trying to get everyone aligned in one place, chasing people for their deadlines or for their deliverables and all of that.

And if you had one place where, where, where you could see the status of everyone that you're working with, that would make the process a lot more efficient, especially if you're working with people in different locations. And for us, we're really big advocates of remote work, [00:09:00] and that's what this new process allows you to, um, to execute.

You

Yurii Lazaruk: also talked a little bit about the discoverability of talent, and I'm curious, what is the main challenge of finding African talent for global brands?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. So I'll start with a story that was personal to us as founders. So we, so my co-founder and I, we had like inverted experiences. I was born in London, grew up in Ghana, then moved back to London.

He was born in Ghana, but grew up in London, then moved back to Ghana, then moved back to London. So he, um, kind of had, uh Like, a bit of both. I also had a bit of both, but from different stages of life. And because we had that commonality, we wanted to start a documentary in Ghana that highlighted, um, local Ghanaian creatives who were right before the underground scene.

'Cause a lot of people think the underground scene are hidden, but to define the underground scene, they still have to be known right? To, to some extent. So we wanted to get the layer before that. So we [00:10:00] did two editions of that documentary, which went quite well, because we were able to engage the audiences that we already had, and we wanted to expand to the rest of the continent for that documentary.

And the reason why that was so important to us is because of the high school that we went to. It's called SOS Hermann Gmeiner. And the special thing about SOS was half of it was a private school, the other half was an orphanage, which meant we had people from all over the continent coming to our high school, that boarding school.

So we didn't just have a Pan-African theory floating. Like, we lived a Pan-African theory. I had roommates from Kenya, South Africa, all over the continent. And living with people from such different backgrounds in Africa meant that as soon as I'm thinking about something for Ghana, I'm like, "Ooh, what would this look like in Kenya?

What would this look like in Burundi?" And th- those were all natural thoughts that we had because we're thinking about our mates in school as well, and we, um, we wanted to be able to reflect that in the documentary after we, uh, left for uni. [00:11:00] And it was just so difficult to find other creatives on existing platforms like your Instagram, LinkedIn, of course.

It's not to say that there aren't Africans on there. Of course there are. But when you're trying to find people who are, like, at the beginning of their journeys, it's

so hard to find them all in one place who actually get surfaced in results, because they're, they're often eclipsed by other regions in the world.

And for us, it's, it was a case of people keep saying, "Yeah, they, they would work with more African talent if they could find them." So for us it's like, why don't we just get them all in one place, and then you don't have, uh, any excuse not to say that you don't know where to find them, because we have, we've already done the work of curating them for you.

Yeah. Yeah. So that's what that was.

Yurii Lazaruk: I feel like it's the hardest part to exactly collect people in one place. Yeah. And how do you do this?

Natalie Narh: Yeah, so we had, we had different, we had different modes. So I guess with every talent place, it's, it's like the classic, the classic chicken and egg situation, right? Do you, do you get the [00:12:00] creatives first, or do you get the businesses first?

And because we're creatives ourselves, we decided to focus on getting the creatives first. So that was through, like, our personal network. We also had a monthly microgrant that we gave every single month to African creatives, both here in the diaspora and locally on the continent. That was also another way of getting the word out.

We do lots of events, lots of panels, exhibitions, mixers, everything in between. Just so, as much as we're building a digital community, like- The, the tangibility of being at a physical event makes such a massive difference. So many people discover Newcomer through our events, through our partnerships, through our initiatives, through our sponsorships.

There's many levers that we, like, push and pull to ensure that we're tapping as many communities as possible, and it's really helped us to scale sustainably as well because we- I mean, of course, if we, if, if, if we had the luxury of a limitless budget, that would've been the case in terms of us [00:13:00] building massively and quickly.

But I think it's also kind of worked out that we're growing at the pace that we are because it's really allowed us to build the culture of the feed. When they come, uh, they know that certain things don't run automatically because they know no one else is doing it. The- there's this phenomenon called the Eternal

September, where pre-social media, it was more so, like, chat rooms and stuff like that, and September's, like, when the school year would start.

So in a lot of these chat rooms, you'd have new people coming, and o- and obviously they're coming from all over because they've never been in the uni, and everyone would come with their own cultures and, um, you know, like, pros and cons of, of, of those cultures. And, um, by October, it calibrates quite quickly because everyone else who was already in the community has done the work of saying, "We don't do this here," or, "We don't do that here," or, "This space is for this.

This space isn't for that." And, um, when social media reached critical mass, it became harder and harder for us, like, if we're looking at the larger social media platforms, for us to have that Eternal [00:14:00] September phenomenon because we just don't have enough time or patience these days to be able to, you know, extend the social etiquettes that could or should exist on the internet.

But because we've got, like, a, a bubble of people, we still have the luxury of having an Eternal September, so that, that's been a really great way of ensuring that the people who do align with us at Newcomer understand the mission and, and what we're trying to do.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, you're, I, I, I was also thinking about, um, the culture.

When you're hiring c- so you were talking about, like, di- uh, findability, like how to find talents, how to pay them, but also how do you feel about the cultural part? And, and why I'm asking, because, like, let's imagine there are, like, people in somewhere in Europe, li- for example, in Germany. Mm-hmm. I hear that they want to work with people, with other people in Germany.

And, um, sometimes, like locally, and sometimes it's also mentally because they are expecting so that the way they ask the [00:15:00] task, they will understand, the, uh, it, the task will be understood the same way. Mm-hmm. And th- also, I have this, like, feeling when they, like, work with people from India, from Asia, from Africa, there are different mindsets.

There are different cultures. So what should companies, like globally, in Europe, in the US, like all over the world, to understand, like how can they get the most out of working with African talent?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. And I, I think that's a really good question because I think the critical assumption that people make of Newcomer is the fact that we only focus on local African talent on the continent, whereas we focus on African talent on the continent and in the, and in the diaspora.

So even if you wanted talent who are based in Germany, there are also African people in Germany that you can work with who can help to enrich the work that you're churning out culturally. Because in a lot of these Western spaces as well, especially mainland Europe, there's a lot of African [00:16:00] representation physically, but they're not necessarily culturally in the work that they might see in advertising or in anything that is, like, linked to creative output.

And for us, the logic there is if you are looking for more, um- enriching work in terms of whether it's for your business or from your, like, creative agency, et cetera. That's also a problem that we are addressing in terms of filling the gaps of Black and African representation in the West through the diaspora, as well as locally on the continent through either remote work or, um, for businesses who want to activate locally in, in Africa.

So for us, it's, it's a bit of both. So it's being more intentional about the talent that you want to work with locally, but then if you are open to remote work, that's also something that we are addressing through the platform as well. So the, the bottom line is, regardless of if the person lives in your country or doesn't live in your country, you sh- you, you should ideally be having an intention to have more culturally [00:17:00] relevant outputs in your work, because it's not just, like, a social responsibility, it's also a commercial benefit as well.

You naturally stand out more and have more impactful work when you are more representative of your consumers. And if you are actively leaving people out, you are actively leaving money on the table.

Yurii Lazaruk: This episode of The Independent Workforce is brought to you by Freelancer Map, the home of freelancing.

Whether you are looking to hire top freelance talent fast or a freelancer ready to find your next big project, Freelancer Map connects the right people with the right work. No endless job boards, no guesswork, just direct access to verified experts and opportunities across the globe. Visit freelancermap.com and start building your next success story today.

It's super amazing how you frame it to enrich the world culture, and I, I, I had the experience of working with companies that are just people from one region, from one country, from one part, and they have, like, very, very fixed [00:18:00] mindset, and then working with international, global companies that's hiring people all over the world.

And also not just hiring them, but they have, like, very, very different teams. And as you've said, it's so much more beneficial financially because every person brings part of their culture to the table, and then you have such an amazing mix that basically, like, it's, it's, it's just amazing. And, you know- Mm

s- many people don't know this, and I- Yeah ... I still don't know why. But once again, I can tell you that while living in Ukraine for, like, around 30 years and being mostly there, I also had rather fixed mindset myself because I was surrounded by some people around me. Mm-hmm. And I didn't know that there is more than one way to be right.

Yeah. There was this, like, one way how everyone is doing, or, like, plus, minus. And then there is this culture, there is this culture, this culture, and it's totally makes us better as humans. Yeah. And it, I, I believe people need to understand this. And also when they understand this, they start trust more.

Mm-hmm. And I also believe that people do [00:19:00] not trust, they might not trust other talents just because they don't understand them. Yeah. So have you seen, or maybe you know how to- m- switch from this understanding to trust? Like, how to make this transition to ensure that companies are actually hiring global talents, not just to because someone told them that they need to be more diverse and, uh, equal and global, blah, blah, blah, but to actually improve their company and improve their culture inside in- internally?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. And I think for that to happen, there needs to be a baseline understanding of what the commercial benefit is, just, just rolling on from my last point. Because if that isn't embedded into the primary mission, you will always have literally a single person leaving the company, and then everything disintegrating because they don't necessarily understand why this is important for the commercial [00:20:00] value of the business.

Whereas a lot of people assume it's purely for, like, social impact. Of course, it is for social impact as well. However, I think the thing that people will consistently care about is the commercial benefit. So, so working backwards from there, what's, what, what is the commercial benefit of having talent that they might not have typically have worked with before?

How, how does that improve the value of their output? And- It's only just outputs in terms of the, the, the things that people interact with and see at the final execution of the work. Sometimes even down to the creative process, how often the team scrums are done, how the team scrums are done. Do we do small talk during team scrums?

Does that inform? Like, th- th- those are all tiny things that make such a massive difference 'cause, um, I know me on, uh, my team, a newcomer, I can count the number of times we've had calls with our cameras on, and I've realized that when I'm in other teams, we have cameras on all the time, [00:21:00] and those calls have two different kind of outcomes in terms of we might have less small talk on some calls, but we might have more talks in terms of how the work impacts our personal work, or we might spend more time doing small talk and not necessarily embed our personal lives into the work that we're creating, right?

And y- you would ... It's, it's interesting because you would expect one to map onto the other in terms of more small talk relating to more personal insights in the creative outputs, but it's actually the opposite. When you, or at least from my personal experience in the industry, the, the calls that have more small talk end up having less personal, you know, mappings into the creative output.

So even, like, something as little as that can make such a, a massive difference in terms of how your team is run and how they feel inspired to work and feeling empowered to embed their personal lives into the work, which makes it more relatable if it, if, [00:22:00] if it's a creative output. So starting from there, defining what the commercial benefit is and not- I was having this conversation with someone, not necessarily having, um, just having D&I policies, right?

Because if it's like a set of D&I policies, you need to then axe those D&I policies as soon as you decide that's not something that's important to your business. But embedding the values of D&I policies into your general policies so they are less likely to be, like, taken away or removed if one person decides that, "Hmm, I don't really care about that anymore," right?

And the other layer I would add to that is also being able to permeate those values into all tiers of the business, everyone from C-suites to the junior, empowering everyone to understand the importance of it 'cause what, once again, if one person leaves the team and they were the only person who cared about improving the work in that way, there's no one else to advocate for it, f- for it once they leave.

So it's being [00:23:00] able to have an expansive understanding or an immersive understanding of, of what those commercial benefits are and ensuring that they're actually embedded into the processes of bringing the work to life.

Yurii Lazaruk: What are the main values to include in general policy?

Natalie Narh: So I would say starting, starting with your existing, even, even, even before mapping the new policies, looking at your existing teams and assessing what they care about.

Um, I can't remember who. Ah, I remember now. It was, um, it was e.l.f., it was e.l.f. Cosmetics. There was a session they had during Cannes Lions this year on the program I was on, and they were talking about their company culture, and it was very much collaborative with the current employees that they had in terms of mapping what maternity leave looked like or amending their maternity leave policies.

And they [00:24:00] literally got three people who were just about to go on maternity leave and asked them, "What would be important to you?" And they used that to map what their new policies were. I think sometimes a lot of these policies are projected onto the employees when it should be the other way around.

They are the people who are going to be the like the most, the most impacted by them. So they might as well have a say in how they are formed. So the s- the first thing I would say is having a really transparent, um, communication path with the existing, um, employees in the business because they are the ones who are going to be impacted by them first, and they would be like your, um, testing ground more, more like for, for, for establishing this policy.

So- That's the one, that, that, that, that's the first one, having h- having your culture of transparency with your existing team. The second thing I would say in relation to those policies is also having a transparent window of, um, feedback. [00:25:00] Because once again, it's, it's, it's linked to the first point. Once you, once you have these policies implemented, if there's any gray areas or, or frictions with these policies, what are the most efficient ways of raising them to management or, or to, or, or to C-suite in a way that actually gets addressed?

'Cause one thing I really struggled with in ad land is the bureaucracy of things in terms of, oh, this person needs to approve, that person needs to approve. Oh,

but this last person needs to approve before this project goes forward or before this goes forward. And sometimes bureaucracy can be such a big barrier in terms of actually getting things done.

So that would be like 2.5 point, point, .25 in, in terms of that. And then another thing I'd add is also ensuring that these policies are actually reviewed as, as often as they can, and also in context, you know? Because I think w- the way a policy might be [00:26:00] applied to one demographic of people completely different to the way it would be applied to another, whether it's in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, all of that.

I think, um, those are all important facets to have. And also scoping those policies across the current demographics that are represented in your business. There was a survey that- Was run a few years ago in one of the companies I was working with, and it was on employee satisfaction. And, um, they used like greens and reds essentially to, um, depict the s- to, to depict the sensibilities.

And at face value it was a sea of green, right? But then when they broke these down in terms of the demographics represented at the agencies, you then saw the sea of red that suddenly emerged based on the demographic and focus, right? And as one would expect, the underrepresented demographics are those who typically had more of a sea of red [00:27:00] compared to the green.

So also being very intentional about breaking down the representation of your policies and how they're applied in different modes. And the reason why I'm giving quite generic answers as well is because, of course, policies differ based on the context of your organization, the size of your organization, the, the, um, the geographic location of your organization.

But I think these, um, three to four points are all key things that would apply regardless of where you are, who you're working with, and how you're working with them. Because I do truly believe that policy should be reflective of your business today, not necessarily your business 10 years ago. Even looking at how the world has changed in the last five years, I can't imagine policies being drafted in 2016 being absolutely 100% Applicable today, so that's what I'd say to that.

Yurii Lazaruk: And I bet in some companies you still have those policies drafted in 2016. And, you know, I, I also totally can relate to the size of company, because it's like a small startup, they're like, "Yeah, whatever. We just, [00:28:00] uh-" Yeah, exactly ... "encourage, we just love all the people.

We're just working together, and we're getting the best that we can get together."

And then you have, like, hundreds of thousand people working all over the world. Of course, you have to be very, very accurate. You have to, like, write down all the smallest details, and it's like the- Yeah ... but that's why you have the whole departments working on those policies, not just somewhere written, like, we just, uh, respect everyone, and we are listening to everyone, and they are moving together.

They have to, like, put all this 50, 100 pages documents. So I- Yeah ... I, I totally get it. And, you know, like, we are not talking just, just about, like, this cultural part, like trust and... We are also talking about independent talent. Yeah Which is like putting extra trust layer on top of everything. So I'm curious, like, from your experience, how do you help companies?

Like, we are not talking about, uh, talents, because I totally believe that you put all your heart and passion into working with talent and building this community and highlighting them, but how do you help companies feel confident that the talent that they find through [00:29:00] Newcomer are trustable, not just in a way of culture, but specifically in the independent talent way?

Natalie Narh: Yeah. So, um, there's, so, so there's things that we do structurally, like on the tech platform in itself, and, and then there's things that we do through, like, our actual client engagements as well. So I'll start, I'll start with the site. With the current model that we have in terms of the applicant tracking system, when you're putting up your listing, you, just, just as any other listing platform, you're able to put in your own descriptions, your dos and don'ts, your, um, your, your requirements, anything that you want for the role.

So at least at the point of people applying, they kind of filter out themselves as to whether or not they apply. But then in the a- actual applicant tracking system, there's different ways of manually vetting the creatives in terms of you reviewing their resume, their portfolio, and the screening questions.

So for us, we believe across those three things, you should be able to be able, you should be able to answer whether or not this person's a good fit for you, because they might have a [00:30:00] solid portfolio, but their experience might not be where it should be, or they might have great experience, great portfolio, but the specific questions that you ask them in the screening questions might not be up to standard or might not be within the context in which you need to work with them.

So that's from, like, a platform perspective. There's different ways that we surface talent based on, um, based on the different, uh, requirements of our, of, of our clients on Newcomer. But then also outside of that, we also segment a lot of the listings that we have in terms of if it's regionally or in terms of skill set or in terms of experience, and then at least we know that at the point of us sharing the opportunity with our audience, it's going to those whom would- who would most likely have the best fit for whatever the opportunity is.

So that's one thing. The other side as well is also hosting workshops for our creatives, having portfolio reviews. We literally just did a series of portfolio reviews at Somerset House over the weekend. Those are all ways that we ensure that our talent [00:31:00] pool is consistently working to improving and honing their craft, so by the time they do apply for opportunities, they've actually done the work of ensuring that they're putting their best foot forward.

We've got some tutorials that we share with our community. We have so many other ways of, uh, helping them make sure that they are aligned with the company objectives. But then from the company com- from the company side as well, we also do a lot of, like, preempting from their side in terms of, uh, with these new features that we are launching, having a brief writing tool which is supported by AI that helps them to properly articulate their brief to the creatives.

'Cause I always tell my clients, "I'm only as good as the brief you give me." So if, if, if the brief doesn't have everything that you're looking for, then you can't expect the creatives to magically also know everything that you're looking for as well. So that will help them properly articulate the things that they need, what the objectives are, what the, what the requirements are so by the time the proposal gets to the creative, it's- [00:32:00] It has everything that they're actually looking for, and also has everything that they don't want.

Because a great brief for me says what you're looking for, but an even better brief also tells me what you're not looking for. So at least when I'm, especially as a creative, I know that my answer could be anything, right? Because it's, it's, it's creative. But then also telling me what you don't like, it helps, it helps to narrow down my solutions in one that probably makes a lot more sense for you.

So that's one thing that we're doing as well. And then also helping to surface creatives that are within your budget, because that's also another misalignment that a lot of our clients have in terms of not necessarily knowing what to charge for every tier of creative or skill sets, especially if they work in a region they haven't worked in before.

So for us, data aggregation's a really big part of what we're doing to ensure that we can surface the creatives who fits the context in which you're working in, in.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, it's interesting that you mentioned the brief clarity, because it's something that, uh, I believe many, uh, companies are struggling when hiring [00:33:00] independent professionals because they got used to working with full-time people.

And with full-time people, you have, like, five meetings every day. Yeah. And then you keep talking and talking and talking, and you can spend just three or, like, four or five months as just talking about the task that you have to deliver. Mm-hmm. And if you are working as an independent professional, you have three or five months to deliver the task.

Yeah. Yeah. So you don't have time to talk, and you don't want to talk. You don't want to- Yeah ... spend time talking, you actually want to work. And that's exactly why a brief is super important. And, uh, yeah, I, I feel like, uh, AI part is also not adding to this. Uh, no, I mean, like, AI is adding more complexity to this process.

Yes. Yeah, exactly. 'Cause companies are creating briefs with AI, then, uh, professionals, they read these briefs. Sometimes to answer right, they also- Mm-hmm ... create an answer with AI, and then we have this, like, AI talking to- It's like the AI shotgun

Natalie Narh: paper. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I- I'm definitely of the thesis of [00:34:00] assistive AI compared to generative AI, because our platform, of course, we, we further human resource.

That, that's like our primary offering. So our use of AI on the platform is more so helping both the clients and cr- and the creatives communicate their expectations of each other. And then the actual work, the actual creative output is still owned by the creative. And especially on the continent, I think that that's, that's important because as much as, yes, there is AI use in Africa right now, our data just isn't rich enough for the LLMs to be able to regurgitate our culture in the way that it's actually lived.

So we need to keep working to these projects that- can train these AI models to be able to actually surface our work in a culturally accurate manner. So at least at this stage, assistive AI definitely over generative AI. I

Yurii Lazaruk: hope more people work exactly that way, because otherwise I don't know where humanity is [00:35:00] going.

Yeah. And you know, uh, we were talking about, once again, discoverability, payment part, and those are the frictions, the blockers that are not, let's say, managed by companies. So it's not like they are created, it, it just exists. You know, if they want to, they can overcome- Mm-hmm ... but it doesn't mean that they always want to.

Hopefully they want to more. Yeah. But where do companies create unnecessary friction from their side for independent talent? Like, what are the blockers internally for companies globally to hire all this independent talent?

Natalie Narh: Yeah, sometimes it's even, um, it's not even just finding the talent, it's onboarding, right?

It's, it's things like, um, onboarding and work management, and communication management as well. And I think before you engage remote talent, all of that needs to be considered, even with looking in the frame of time zones you, you would want to work in. Like, if, if, um, an hour difference works for your [00:36:00] team, sure.

Other teams, they work around the 12-hour time zone difference. That's also something that needs to be established from the very beginning, because that automatically determines what regions you can and can't work with. So for, for some, for some companies that, that 12-hour window works for them because it means they can have consistent workflows going.

For others, they might be so aligned with the team's processes that you can only have an hour max difference between the remote talent that you're working with. So I think that's definitely one thing to establish sooner rather than later in terms of what time zones you want to be working with, what, um, what skill sets you even want to outsource in the first place, because that also determines the collaborative, um, nature of these processes.

Because having a virtual creative strategist is completely different from having a virtual video editor. Because with a video editor, if you are Handling really large edits, you also need to factor in the [00:37:00] u- the upload time for those videos to be sent in for review, and even sending in the rushes to them in the first place.

You need to, you need to budget in the time of hours on, like, Google Drive, or, like, Frame.io, or wh- wherever else you're hosting the files to ensure that that upload time isn't eating into their edit time. Because if it's taking 10 hours for the file to upload and they have two hours to edit before the day ends, of course, that, that's not, that's not too fair to them, is it?

So, um, those are all things that are worth considering, especially if, if, if you're a smaller business, 'cause that will eat into your budget as well, especially if you're charging them per day. So those are all things to bear in mind before engaging remote talent.

Yurii Lazaruk: And I feel like it also fits in the communication bucket.

Yeah. 'Cause the more you talk, the more you share from both sides, like from company side, what are the requirements and, like, what are their expectations, and from the talent side, how good you understood the assignment, how can you deliver, [00:38:00] like, what is your, the way of working with you. The more people actually talk, the easier and the better work they will have get done.

Yeah,

Natalie Narh: exactly.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. I feel like sometimes it's, it's, it's really way to, way to go. And, you know, what would you like more companies globally to understand about African creative talent, and specifically the opportunities that they are missing when they are not working with such talent?

Natalie Narh: Understanding that new isn't always automatically scary, right?

And I think for a lo- a lot of people, it's the gray area that it's, like, deterring them from, from, from opening up to the African market. And also just being pragmatic and realistic about the fact that compared to the rest of the global market, Africa is still, um, developing what its narrative or what its outcome looks like.

I think, I think that's something that is very important not to shy away from. [00:39:00] We're obviously, um, still in a stage where there's a lot more room for infrastructural development, and I don't think that in itself is an excuse not to engage the market because then how else will they improve if they aren't being given the opportunities to engage the global market?

And there's so many conglomerates moving to the continent, and their campaigns aren't landing because they're not working with the people in the regions who actually understand the narratives that you're trying to draw. And it goes back to the commercial benefits. If you're looking to expand your reach on the continent and you want your campaigns to convert as excessively as they should, you should be working with a creative talent who understands the culture that you're trying to tap into.

And flying people in doesn't always do that. It might, it might be more efficient in terms of production, but it doesn't necessarily mean it ... The production value could be great, but the strategic insight and value or creative direction might be lacking in cultural depth. And if more people are [00:40:00] looking to expand into the continent, which they definitely will because over the next couple of decades we're gonna see the largest global youth population on the continent.

And the people or the businesses who are going to be winning in the next couple of decades are those who start building on the continent today

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. I hope that more companies will become even more globally, and not just saying that they're global because they are sell their products globally, but specifically engaging with more talent and working with different cultures, and mixing all those cultures in the product that they are selling to people, and they even adapting this product to people.

Because at the end of the day, like, consumers won't have it if you are not adapting it to people- Exactly ... to those who are buying it. And, you know, I really wish to have the sky is limit, but time is the limit. So the final question. Yeah. What advice would you give to companies just starting to work with freelancers, and to freelancers entering the market?

Natalie Narh: For companies, I would say stay as [00:41:00] open as you can, but stay as precise as you can throughout the process. Staying open doesn't necessarily mean kicking the deadlines like, further and further down the line. Staying open means, like I was saying before, being, being, um, being aware that certain processes might look different working with a new person, or your output might look different working with a new person.

But different can be good, and sometimes that's the whole point of hiring, um, remote resource in the first place. For freelancers entering the market, be very specific and, once again, precise. I think precision is the consistent thing between both of them. Be very precise about what your value proposition is,

and why you specifically are the person to render that service, because the market globally is quite saturated at the moment, especially when you look at creatives and creators, right?

A lot of, a lot of creatives have been [00:42:00] pushed into becoming creators to find new work, because that's just what the social media climate looks like today. So you having a USP, your unique selling point, is going to be even more important today to set you apart and to set what your objectives are apart.

And also defining what your impact is. In the portfolio reviews I was hosting last weekend, that was a consistent thing I've said. Yes, show the work you've done, show the process of how you brought it to life, but then also include what the impact of your work was, because that's what clients care about at the end of the day.

The whole reason why they're investing in creative resources to ensure that they hits the KPIs and objectives that they've set. And if you as a creative understands that, they know that they're more likely to garner the value that they're looking for from your work.

Yurii Lazaruk: To keep the conversation going, name two people I should reach out to to talk about the independent workforce.

Natalie Narh: I would say the first is Tola Alade, who is one, who is a [00:43:00] founder of Marmalade Collective, and Marmalade is all about, also about furthering African narratives, but then he's also very embedded into the creative strategy, and remote work, and the creative direction space, and absolute trailblazer in the space.

Tola would be number one. And the second person I'd say is Delaine. Delaine is an amazing creative director who has a really large grounding in developing campaigns with an African narrative and context that also look visually stunning. So Delaine, Delaine and Tola are, are the, are the two people I'd recommend to speak to.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah, thank you so much, Natalie. Thank you so much for doing what you are doing, and actually opening the world to being more global, to... And not just from the way like, "Ah, we're global. We're selling our products everywhere," but to being more open culturally, to hearing all the voices, to seeing what other people see through their eyes, not just how you think they [00:44:00] might see, or feel, or hear something, but specifically to talking to them, and working with them, and encouraging more and more and

more people to showcase what you are doing, not just sitting somewhere, uh, underground that no one can find you, but actually highlighting them, and for connecting these amazing humans, and for all those passions that you are bringing for- to the African talent and, uh, even beyond this.

So thank you so, so much for what you are doing and for this amazing conversation.

Natalie Narh: Thank you so much for having me. I think that, that, this has been really insightful as well to, to hear, to hear, like, a bit more about how we should be working with remote talent and hearing from yourself and your community.

So yeah, this has been great. Thank you so much.

Yurii Lazaruk: Natalie, thank you so much. And, uh, yeah, see you in the independent talent market. 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 enjoyed this [00:45:00] conversation, subscribe to learn even more and share it with your colleague.

And remember, the future of work is now