

TIW38 - Alp Sezginsoy

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 Juri. I'm growing the freelance market at Freelancermap, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Alp Sezginsoy, a future of work enthusiast, TEDx speaker, and founder of Expertera, where he connects organizations with more than 1,000 pre-qualified, highly skilled experts worldwide, who's passionate of building global talent pipelines while enabling new ways of working.

So welcome, Alp.

Alp Sezginsoy: Thank you, Juri. It's great to be here, and thanks a lot for inviting me. And, thanks a lot for, great pronunciation of my name and surname.

Yurii Lazaruk: Super happy to have met you through the Freelance Unlocked and in real life, and [00:01:00] finally we have this conversation. I can't wait to ask you all the questions about the independent talent market.

How did you join it? What do you feel about it? And let's start with the easiest one. Like, tell me more about Expertera, and why did you start building this platform?

Alp Sezginsoy: So I used to work with, I used to set up offshore research centers or, top investment banks like Deutsche Bank, UBS, et cetera, international ones.

And, we used to ex- utilize lots of, external experts, you know, from hourly to longer term. And, and actually the, the matches were not great at all. So I began working with those, with those, teams, to match better experts, actually. It was much more manual back then. and then, I used to, work for, Deutsche Bank's, internet team in, in Chile.

I was, running their, Chile offshore research center, with a great team. And, then, you know, basically offshore research centers are, the first frontier with the evolution of internet, you know, like [00:02:00] building kind of remote, workforce solutions.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah.

Alp Sezginsoy: I didn't know, but I was actually right in the center of it.

Back then I didn't know that such a bigger, disruption and revolution is taking place. In addition to that, they sent me, one platform as I was working with Deutsche Bank internet team. They said that we were working on the HomeAway's IPO, and, they asked me to, search for this company, which is called Airbnb.

And it was up and coming back then. So kind of, the things connected, like sharing economy, new workforce, how, the expertise will flow. So it kind of intrigued me. I didn't know exactly where it's going, but it intrigued me and I couldn't stop myself,

I think it's one thing, like if you can't, stop your self to find a solution to a problem, then, I think you become a founder. That's one of the things, I guess. And, then I founded Expertera, and, I started with, connecting companies with top experts. We started mostly with [00:03:00] consulting MPs, but, we always had in mind that, bigger, larger enterprises will utilize, expertise and, independent professionals more.

We were, among the early movers on that globally, one of the first ones. Especially for our region, I think we kind of maybe moved too early. It had its advantages and disadvantages. But, since the pandemic, independent professional usage has been, steadily increasing and, people are showing, more interest from Fortune 500 or, Fortune 1000, for this region.

So yeah, I think we are still in an interesting phase for this, as you know, companies becoming more conscious and people becoming more aware of how they can be utilized is very important. So I think we are, still in an exciting phase. So in a nutshell, that's how I started and where we are very shortly.

Yurii Lazaruk: I feel like, if we are talking about big organizations, there are so many decision-making layers that sometimes no matter how [00:04:00] hard you want to hire independent professionals, no matter how hard you believe in working with external experts, sometimes it just stops you. You just can't go-

through all the bureaucracies that happen, and you just can't get all the approvals and all the resources you need to do that. So from your experience, what are the main blockers to work with independent professionals in such corporations?

Alp Sezginsoy: Look, I think, the primary blocker, and, it's not only my opinion.

I mean, we are friends or partners or, you know, just, industry peers. And, primary, blocker is always the mentality, the mindset. let's say education, trial and error. Like, I think people are, very compared to... You know, like, we talk about a lot of tech adoption, AI adoption, right?

Digital transformation- Yeah ... for almost two decades now, from digital transformation to AI transformation. I think people are still aware and, more curious and, more open to trial and [00:05:00] error. but when it comes to workforce and new ways of working, in general, people are still, kind of more traditional, and we are, trying to stick to industrial revolution, kind of way of work.

But industrial revolution is now being replaced, as you well know- with a new, information and AI revolution. So I think the first one is definitely mentality, and leaders wanting to explore not only on the tech, pure tech space but, the workforce, reflection on, what's coming with the tech disruption.

So I think the first one is, definitely mentality and leadership and trial, error, on the workforce space. Because once you do the trial and error, then you create the champions. AI and the, I mean, not AI, digital transformation plus AI is basically unlocking access to global expertise, very fluently, very rapidly.

And it just strikes me that, leaders are, not as keen [00:06:00] as exploring the human expertise as much as the, technological, developments, you know? So I think, because the ones that, can do that, I mean, actually you have to combine human expertise with, tech disruption. So yeah, that's number one.

Number two, Definitely systems, legal infrastructure. So, you know, procurement, legal systems, they are not, they are not ready. Like, still, for a platform to get vetted, it's very likely that it will take you months, months. And you can even count in, sometimes in years, like one and a half year it takes a platform, or six months if it's three...

but at some companies it can take two weeks, Jurie. but in some companies it can take eight months, you know? And eight months is normal. Two weeks is also normal, really, So, procurement, people, consider buying, an external top expertise or top talent or a talent in general, in the same category as, buying detergent, detergent raw [00:07:00] material, and it's different, you know?

and also legal, in terms of legal infrastructure, of course, look at, like, as platforms, like, obviously you have to have, top NDAs, documentation, everything. but regardless if someone is, working for you, internally, it poses a risk. And at the same time you, defend yourself with the legal, and other ways of, infrastructure and it's not much different.

people are also, going from one company to another. So, obviously it is different, but at the same time it's not. And that's the second one. And the third one is, again, it comes to, once you get over these barriers, then you have the talent coming in and you have to know how to, as a leader or as an organization, how to work with that talent.

because, like, for, onboarding a full-timer, you have lots of, onboarding structure, you know, orientation, training, authorization, et cetera. But when you have someone external, like, in many [00:08:00] tasks it's not like, okay, here is, the output you show us. Yeah, in some tasks it is like this.

But for many value added tasks, it requires involvement from, the team, it requires work distribution, who's in charge of what. And that, I would say that's the third part. Maybe fourth part, is the payment part.

payment sometimes, but it's similar to, number two, which is, like, procurement. Like they want to, pay like, detergent raw material, but the thing is these are, independent people, so they need, their payments similar to a regular employee. So I would say that's the fourth, but that's kind of in line with the second one.

So, yeah. These are the main barriers.

Yurii Lazaruk: So we have mindset, we have payment and compliance, and we have onboarding and preparation as all the internal process. And once again, sometimes payment included in procurement, sometimes it's not. It's like, dependent on what company you're working with. And also it's interesting that you mentioned, two weeks versus eight months as [00:09:00] timeline.

And what is the difference? Is it the size of a company or a decision-making structure or, like, type of collaboration? Like why, how is it possible having like two weeks versus eight months?

Alp Sezginsoy: one of the reasons, from our perspective, I don't know if it would be the same for a, more mass scale platform like Upwork.

But from, our perspective, which is top experts, top independent professionals, boutique, expertise or, top consultants, we usually, fix, very key bottlenecks or dive to top opportunities, et cetera. So they need it, quick. And if you are working with a business unit, then they have authority to move things forward.

But if it's a company, let's say, thinking more maybe large scale, but, doesn't have a certain, solution and, that doesn't require a certain solution And don't need the kind of, don't need the solution as, or not aware o- like, [00:10:00] they cannot, kind of

plug the solution to their system. Like, if it goes to, the legal and procurement without, influence from the business or, business unit or the leadership team, then, most likely it will take a huge time. It will take huge time, yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: So the difference that you have to have, this leadership buy-in or,

Alp Sezginsoy: Yeah

business

Yurii Lazaruk: push- Yeah ... because otherwise it will just stay there forever.

Alp Sezginsoy: Because it's not a priority for legal and procurement teams, and they usually need to customize systems or try to understand, or they want to build things, et cetera. So, I think that's one of the main differences.

Yurii Lazaruk: So basically your partners within the company is business side who you have to kinda, recruit to your team so that they work internally with recruitment, procurement and, compliance to ensure that you will get things faster.

Alp Sezginsoy: I think that's one of the key differences.

I think it makes a difference that, the business unit, wants it badly and [00:11:00] quickly and works together with the legal team and the procurement team to get things moving. Because most probably they don't have standards in place, but standards usually platforms can help with the standards because they implement it together with, different companies.

I think that's the main difference.

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Yeah. And they do not have time to actually screen them, so they kinda, have to trust you as a talent provider that you screen this talent and you know that this [00:12:00] exactly someone they are searching for, not just someone who generated their, CV with AI and sent it in a very beautiful way. So I'm curious, since this process of recruitment of independent talent is much faster than if we are talking about full-time, how do you ensure that you have, this selected talent on your platform?

Alp Sezginsoy: beginning is, So there are multiple layers, right? First of all, you have to understand the project brief well. then we have the algorithms, the matching systems- then we have past data, like, who worked how well.

like if you didn't deliver good results more than once, then it's obviously not a great flag. so we look into all of these. In addition to that, then there are the, preliminary questions and then next comes, a company, having a on-site interview.

not necessarily on-site. On-site or [00:13:00] remote interview. And, so after all these layers, the-- huge difference, between, you know, like, If you are hiring, someone internally, then you are making an investment for a long term. in the other one you are making, So in hiring externally, you are making an investment, on a company skillset to hire externally.

So, you are not necessarily building a leader for the company, so you are not doing the same investment. So, what we recommend is always starting fast, rather than, you know... so you have all these layers. And when you start, you still, can, even for a hourly, you can cancel, in some minutes without paying.

Or if it's a longer term, you can cancel in, one, two weeks without paying. So there are also these layers, and then you can try someone else, right? so speed and, seeing things on the go is a very important part, of, on [00:14:00] demand.

And if you have the right systems and, So here the match is usually between, obviously with the expert and with the top, professional, independent professional, and with the company, or with the freelancer and the company, but also with the platform and the company. if the platform knows you well, in terms of its algorithms, in terms of its service layer, it's a higher likely a good match.

Yeah. And, so then like, let's say you got someone on board for three months, you know? In one week or two weeks, in two weeks maximum, you will know if it's a good fit or not. So instead of, spending weeks and weeks trying to sort out the right person, so you have to decide, you have to trust the algorithm, the service layer- Yeah

that you can end, things quickly. The previous reviews and ratings of the expert, right? Or of the freelancer- So I would say, yeah. And, I think, the [00:15:00] thing here is, you know, with all the screening and vetting processes, I think it's important to start fast and, understand if, if you get the results fast.

because now, the tests are very result-oriented rather than, time-oriented, especially with the recent developments. So yeah, I think, I still think it's the best way is, okay, obviously you have many vetting, screening and, cancellation procedures. I would say, try fast and if things are, going well, because these, most of the freelancers, they already have, previous, vettings.

and then if you see if it's a good fit. Yeah. Yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: it's interesting that you mention that because I feel like companies are still using the process that they use for full-time hire, and they use the same process for freelancers. Mm-hmm.

And they want to go specifically through, like, six round of interviews to make it long-term, but, like, at the end of the day, it doesn't make any difference. As you've said, you can hire someone, like, in a week or maximum two weeks, and

then you can try and test, and then if something is not working, as you've said, [00:16:00] again, you can see it very fast, and then you can move on- Yeah

But once again, people are not, actually open to having this try and test part because they want to do one shot and immediately find the best talent. Yeah. And also you ta- you talked a lot about algorithms, but I'm curious, where is the human part? Like, in, in, in the moment, like, what are you working with in the talent that you are including to your platform and how you, propose them to companies?

Is there a human part involved? And if yes, where exactly? On what steps?

Alp Sezginsoy: sure. I'll tell you. but I just wanna add, one thing to that. I think it's very important companies understand this is not a full-time hire. it can be a full-time hire, by the way. You will see it along the way.

this also happens. It doesn't happen very often, but it can happen.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah.

Alp Sezginsoy: basically what you are doing is, you are insourcing the leadership and outsourcing the execution in these, aspects. I saw in, one of our very recent, business this concept, and I really, like it.

But I would say, for fractional work, for [00:17:00] independent work, you are not, getting a full-time hire where you have to train them for leadership, too much of culture alignment, et cetera. but you are basically outsourcing some, execution, where your leaders will, handle the rest.

So I think, that is important. in terms of, look, I think for platforms, it's not very different from, many other, Look, right now you saw, Did you see the news on, Anthropic acquiring McKinsey kind of, dialogues, et cetera,

Hmm. Maybe you didn't. No. Okay. but it's a rumor. I don't know how true it is or not. But the thing is, this discussion is on, leveraging, human, basically, you know, like, their connections, their engagement. So I think it's very similar for platforms, right? it's not very different.

So understanding the client better, you are forming a human AI layer now, Like, so whenever there is something like, our service data is, very much, reachable to our clients, they [00:18:00] understand it better, right? I mean, think about it, like, in a way you can consider it this way.

you are, speaking to a Claude, or a ChatGPT, but, you also have your prompt engineer next to you. That would be good, right? So that's what our service layer is doing. But to be a good prompt engineer, you have to also know it has to... A good prompt engineer has to know you really well to get the right results-

and the platform well. So that's what our service layer is doing right now. So, I can say, you know, like understanding the platform and its capabilities better, and understanding the client and capabilities better, doing the more, more, human and soft touches on it and, you know, enhancing the experience for both sides.

I mean, both the clients and the experts. Yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: I feel like you are being in like a project manager in between the client and also, like, the talent because you talk to both sides, [00:19:00] and then you kind of like- make it happen and make it work.

Alp Sezginsoy: Yeah. I mean, look, it's also s- it's very similar. Like, what we did by, like years ago we were doing all the scheduling, et cetera.

Scheduling is, Not necessarily very value-added human work, right? So, once you leave it to the platform, then there is more time for... Or when you do, you know, like checking, experts' previous, reviews, ratings, skillsets, like if AI does 80% of it, the 20%, you know, then, you have more time to, understand the other parts of the client, of the expert.

So that's what our service there is doing right now. Mm-hmm.

Yurii Lazaruk: Oh, i- in the beginning, you told that you were joining this industry without knowing where it's going, and I'm curious, do you know where it's going now?

Alp Sezginsoy: talent platforms.

Yurii Lazaruk: Talent platforms, future of work, working with independent talent, because as you've said, after the COVID, it, jumped-

more and more, and I'm curious, like, how do you see the future of work from the independent talent side?

Alp Sezginsoy: it's a huge [00:20:00] question. I think first of all, need for independent talent, independent professionals is, gonna increase more and more.

So I will speak more on the top professional, top expert, like, consulting and the independent professional segment. So, as AI is automating, enhancing... So I used to be a consultant too, right, I did the analyst work, et cetera, and I also worked in, trading, forex trading, commodity trading.

most of this is already being replaced by AI algorithms, et cetera. But, what is not being replaced is, and it's very important, that it's the last-mile expertise. AI may be doing lots of work, but human expertise and touch, especially on the last mile, the final frontier, is, very critical.

So when you say last mile, it could be, understanding a market better and then, when AI is doing all the analyst works, et cetera, but, you do the final touches, but also the human touches. So, I think this is [00:21:00] being needed more and more, especially on the top, top expert side.

So I think, also, from an industry perspective, more and more, I think we will see more independents coming forward, going forward, doing this type of, work in the, in the ne- near future. So we are talking lots of, you know, one person billion-dollar companies now. So for that to happen, like, okay, you need a- you will have agents, et cetera, but I think you will also have, quite some human in the loops or experts in the loops, et- et cetera.

So, I think we will be seeing more of that in independent work. yeah,

Yurii Lazaruk: Am I hearing this correctly? So it's kind of like more of real expertise needed, so kind of like more junior roles are replaced by AI, but then as you've said we need more and more experts, and they will be needed even, like, with all this AI stuff.

Alp Sezginsoy: I think this is, going to be one of the very key aspects, starting from today and, in the next decade.

Yurii Lazaruk: We were also talking about this main barriers [00:22:00] to hiring freelancers, like, mindset, procurement, onboarding,

internal processes. So if you could remove just one barrier from client side to make this smooth freelance collaboration, what would it be?

Alp Sezginsoy: I mean, it would definitely be first or the second. I think I would pick them together both. But if I had to pick one really, I would say, I would still pick, the mentality because still many platforms are, spending the

main, amount in terms of, marketing, educating the clients, showing them business cases, what could be done, right?

yeah, so yeah, I think it would be number one, the mentality.

Yurii Lazaruk: if someone who is listening to this conversation, they have this kind of like fixed mindset knowing that, hey, I want to hire full-time, I don't believe this independent talent, I don't know if I should hire them, like, what is one thing that they have to keep in mind to at least start this movement more into the independent talent world?

Alp Sezginsoy: look, it is [00:23:00] like saying I like the way, how I work at the moment, and I'm not gonna use AI.

Yeah. that would be my, suggestion. I mean, maybe you didn't use, ChatGPT or Claude three years ago, but if you're not using it today, you are possibly obsolete very, very near term. So, I don't think it's very different, you know, If you wanna do innovation, I mean, and you have the world's top, talent, top expertise, very accessible to you.

think about it, Jurie, independent, talent platforms are now, from, top independent, consultants to, designers, developers, doctors, drivers, delivery people, et cetera. In total it's like world's fifth or sixth economy

if you gather them in one country and make only an, independent talent platform, country, the country would actually work pretty smoothly in many aspects, right? and it would be world's, number six or something. I looked [00:24:00] into the figures, So, you have this accessible, and it's all, happened in the last, one or two decades.

Not two, but rather one decade. So if you are not using, such information, such execution, then you are probably missing out on something, and, you don't know about it. Like, look, I'm talking about top professionals, but, let me tell you a story of, like there is this, platform here, and, you know, where they have, they do, transportation.

Like when I was a student, I used to, I remember going down and, entering on a yard, with lots of cafes and just shouting, "Is there a transport guy around here?" and now I post it on the platform, and then I get, four top transport guys in the region, you know- Yeah ... with, 700 reviews and 690 of them are, successful, et cetera.

And if you are not, again, I talked about AI, but if you are just waiting for the taxi and not using Uber, these are no different, right? So, it's the same [00:25:00] with top talent. So once you, install Uber to your phone or once you begin to understand where you can use, top talent, just like where you can use AI tools, then it will be your superpower.

I think there is a great, Google guy, Do you know this, analogy, like you wear your Iron Man suit with the AI tools? I think the real Iron Man suit is with the AI tools and the talent platforms because then you have the tech expertise and the human expertise, and that's where the real thriving comes from.

Yeah. So, it is the next frontier. Like, the next frontier is, AI is a workforce, you know, it's an execution tool. It's a, decision-making tool. It's a workforce tool, so, also the, talent platform. So if you can combine these two together with your companies or your own skill sets, then, you are probably, you are unstoppable.

Yurii Lazaruk: Now, I really like how you phrased it, that AI is still a tool, execution tool, because you need still someone to deal with it. You need still someone- to check and to deliver this last mile moment. And you know- I, I wish to have the sky's the limit, but time is the limit. So the final [00:26:00] question.

What advice would you give to companies starting to use freelancers and to freelancers entering the market?

Alp Sezginsoy: okay, I'll start with freelancers. we work with top, professionals, so one thing we see, and we work together with, our professionals, I think it's important

It's okay to go custom, but think about your expertise in terms of, packages. That will help you sell your expertise, right? And that will help your client, to think about, how they can utilize you. make and think about it in, two ways. Think about it in, your outputs and time.

So it could be, okay, in two days I can give you this. In two weeks I can give you that. In two months I can give you this. Just think about this, put it out there, and, Then your client will understand, And then you will begin to customize. tell them, "This is what I do," you know?

It will make, things, easier for go-to-market. I say this because we are working with, former BCG McKinsey consultants, and [00:27:00] they are ... Like, once

they're out of their corporate job, they don't, Like, the freelancer mindset is also, like, also ... I think in the beginning. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm also

I have freelanced myself. so, when you leave the corporate job in the beginning and you're entering the market, many of the time, you have to get into of the mindset that, a corporate owns the expertise here, or a corporate is the, How do you say?

you have your expertise valuable because of a corporation. Yeah. This is not true, because you have your own expertise. So when you begin to think about th- with that mentality of your own expertise, then you begin to, form your packages. So this is what I would, recommend. And for the companies, pick a right partner, pick a task, start fast, start small

Yurii Lazaruk: Very easy. Yeah Very straightforward. Just go try it and don't- Yeah ... don't worry about the deliveries because you need to do this, as you've said, test and trial, because [00:28:00] otherwise, how can you- Yes ... move forward with new, with something new, you know? You always have to think about it.

Alp Sezginsoy: John Younger, have you spoken to him?

Yurii Lazaruk: he was the first guest. Really? And I feel like we need to do the volume two with him, so it counts, of course.

Alp Sezginsoy: Okay. speak to my partner, Zeynep.

Yurii Lazaruk: Got it.

Alp Sezginsoy: I think, she was there in Berlin the last year. Yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. And, yeah, Alp, thank you so much for, first of all, for what you are doing for the economy, for the future of work, how you advocate for independent professionals, how you improve the current market, how you talk about the mindset change, about this last mile part, because I feel like that's exactly as you've said.

If we deal with mindset, everything else, else is doable, because, you know, we need to start somewhere. So thank you so, so much for all the passions that you're bringing to this world, and thank you so, so much for this conversation. I

was super happy to met you in real life, to meet you in person, and finally, to get and learn even more from you now, today.

So thank you so, so much for this [00:29:00] conversation. Thank you.

Alp Sezginsoy: Thank you. I also, learned from you each time your podcast, your very amazing positive energy that, contributes to this field. And, also thank you for, bringing together so many, different, minds and experiences, experts around the world, to, think about this.

I think it's very useful for, the community, for the industry in general, and, I'm very happy to be on here and thank you for making me think over these things, once again.

Yurii Lazaruk: Alp, thank you so much and, see you in the future of work. 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 talents. If you enjoy this conversation, subscribe to learn even more and share it with your colleague. And remember, the future of work is now.