

Meeting the challenges of freelance life.

How to make self-employment work for you

Introduction

With a large and growing number of people choosing to work flexibly and for themselves, it is time to have an honest conversation about the perks and the challenges of being self-employed.

Epson commissioned an independent research company to survey a representative sample of 1,000 UK-based freelancers about their working lives. In this report we look at the highs — and the lows — revealed by that study and consider how self-employed people can deal with these to maximise the freedom and flexibility their chosen lifestyle offers.



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Background

Self-employment is now a key feature of the UK's economy and, according to the Office for National Statistics, is a growing trend: the proportion of freelancers as part of the UK workforce rose from 12% in 2001 to 15.1% in 2017. And it is not difficult to see why this might be: choosing to work for yourself or freelance can lead to a more fulfilling, flexible and empowering working life.

However, our research revealed that there are pitfalls too that include loneliness, isolation and a fear of deskilling. Working for yourself can make it hard to set boundaries around your time, making social and relaxation time difficult to find and this can affect freelancers' sense of wellbeing.

Therefore, it is particularly important for self-employed workers to proactively plan their working lives in ways that free up time for them to nourish their own mental health and career progression.

A great way to do this is by using tools that give you the freedom to work anywhere, alone or in company and to limit petty restrictions. EcoTank printers are a good example; use the app to print from wherever you choose to be and because the printers have several years worth of ink included you can forget about buying or storing ink for years at a time.

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Who are the self-employed?

The number of freelancers is rising and some predict that by 2020 around half of the workforce may be self-employed.

So what do solo workers like about self-employment?

In our study 62% of respondents said that it gave them flexibility, 53% referred to a better work/life balance, 41% felt self-employment would give them the career they wanted, 39% did it to fit around family obligations and 33% said that freelancing was empowering. In our sample 74% said self-employment had made them less stressed overall and 81% said that it made them happier.

However, our sample group also acknowledged the restrictions and career implications of self-employment. Adverse effects included loss of friends (30%), a sense of isolation (45% had little human contact/interaction on an average day other than with immediate family), becoming deskilled (27%) and losing track of career progression (29%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly business-related costs are also a concern for the self-employed: 22% said that the cost of printing was an issue for them and 15% said they rarely printed due to costs such as ink and paper. A further 13% felt obliged to save their printing until they were in an office environment that let them print for free.

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The challenges of lone working

The loneliness and sense of isolation reported by our respondents reveals an aspect of self-employment that is often overlooked: the need to nurture mental health and sometimes to replace or replicate the camaraderie and support of the traditional workplace. In our study 32% of respondents missed office banter and 29% missed being part of a team. A substantial minority reported loneliness, isolation and even depression.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to combat loneliness and isolation. [National charity for mental health Mind has some excellent information and suggestions on its website.](#) The important thing is to make — and take — the time to reach out to others.

Office woes

Other barriers to successful freelancing include a lack of professional level equipment and easy access to training or other forms of upskilling. Once again time and cost are important — when you freelance you have to provide the time and money for equipment and career development and that can often mean cutting costs and time allocations elsewhere.



Freeing time

Our study shows that freeing up time is the key to solving many of the problems plaguing the self-employed — freeing time to socialise, to upskill, to focus on mental health. By planning their time and resource allocation with these in mind self-employed people can transform their working lives.

By taking the initiative and choosing equipment that saves them time and money without compromising results, freelance workers can minimise time spent on admin and maximise the freedom and flexibility that self-employment conveys.

Epson's EcoTank printers are a good example.

If you have an EcoTank you can use the app to print remotely and thus work anywhere alone or in company without having to waste time, effort, money and space buying and storing ink cartridges.

Our research suggests that if flexible workers want to get the very best from self-employment. It pays to plan intelligently and in light of a 'self-care' routine that allocates resource to mental and physical health care including a social life and training/upskilling. This can underpin business success and minimise adverse effects on mental health. An efficiently administered, well-run business headed by a relaxed and motivated individual reduces stress and frees up time to do more fun things, which is the very reason many people become self-employed in the first place.



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Summary

Epson commissioned an independent research company to survey a representative sample of 1,000 freelancers across the UK. They told us that while freelancing generally made them happy, and offered the freedom and flexibility they craved, self-employment was not without its challenges. In particular, feelings of isolation and fears of deskilling were troublesome.

By streamlining office processes to be as flexible and hassle-free as possible, freelancers can maximise resources, reduce stress and expense and generate better results for their business and their lives generally. EcoTank printers can be an integral part of this.

This is important, because freelance numbers are growing and the self-employed are leading the way to a new world of work. And at Epson, we're supporting them every step of the way.

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Methodology and sample

Arlington Research conducted 1000 interviews in the UK using an online methodology amongst a nationally representative sample of freelance workers. All respondents were employed/self-employed/a business partner or owner. Quotas were applied to gender, the age of respondent and the region in which they reside to ensure that the sample is nationally representative.