

How it feels to...

...make a career from extra-curricular projects

Young workers are giving up the idea of landing a job for a life in favour of building a portfolio career. The broadcaster/podcaster/journalist/speaker/consultant/author *Emma Gannon*, 28, explains how she did it

When I left university eight years ago, I just wanted a job. I didn't care what it was. I wanted to be paid, and I wanted to live in London. I knew the market would be competitive and I didn't expect it all to happen straight away. The country had just emerged from a recession and I was so fearful of what my future would look like — thanks to warnings from my tutors — that I was grateful for any job offer that came my way. I didn't feel I was in a position to choose what fulfilled me, or daydream about doing something I loved. The idea of being paid to be creative was beyond me.

After graduating, I ended up working in a PR company: it mainly consisted of hitting the phones and packing boxes. The

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blog I wrote by night started to gain momentum. I managed to sidestep into working at a magazine and landed my dream job at Condé Nast.

It took a while to shake the feeling of workplace gratitude that some companies foster: this idea of simply being happy to be employed in any way, shape or form. These companies aim to keep employees feeling thankful for their jobs so that they will remain locked in for years with the prospect of minuscule pay rises and not much career progression. Feeling grateful means that you will hardly ever ask for more. Feeling grateful means that you might turn down other job offers. But after six years I realised that my biggest fear was looking up from my desk one day, realising that another five years had whizzed by and I was still banking the same amount of money each month. I realised that the word "success" had come to mean something entirely different to the meaning my parents' generation ascribed to it — that of sitting in one job and climbing a pre-existing ladder. Turns out, success looks different for everyone.



The companies I worked for had a bums-on-seats mentality, but I found myself to be more productive in quieter spaces. I asked for flexibility (one day off a week): it felt controversial as I didn't have kids or a substantial reason for the extra flexibility. But on my day off I found I was extremely productive, because I was designing that day myself.

At first, I never expected to earn money from side projects, so I kept my full-time job for years alongside my outside-of-work "experiments". I blogged for companies, created my own blog, designed my own logos, built a social media presence and started



to create a body of work outside my main job — all on my day off and in stolen pockets of time (evenings, an hour on a Sunday, for example). Back then, I was too scared to become self-employed because of fears over job security. But the meaning of job insecurity has changed for me. Quite a few of my friends have been made redundant from household-name companies over the past few years, so who can say what's truly risky? I was struck by an idea. What if I could design every working day from scratch in a way to suit me?

Fast-forward to now: I'm a 28-year-old broadcaster/podcaster/journalist/consultant/

WHAT A WAY TO
MAKE A LIVIN'

13%

of Brits believe
they will be working
in traditional 9-5
employment by 2025

RECRUITMENT & EMPLOYMENT
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speaker/author. I earn more and work less. I feel safer than I've ever felt, because if one income fails, I have five others that are still there. The idea of having just one salary is what feels risky now, especially if the company is fairly old or rigid in its structure.

The term "portfolio career" was coined by the author and management guru Charles Handy in the 1980s. Millennials have not invented this way of working (far from it: people have been doing it for decades), but we've certainly rebranded it. We've given it a modern twist — a digital upgrade. Our new digital world has made it easier to be a portfolio worker, or,

as I call it, a multihyphenate. We can earn money in so many new ways while being more flexible, but society still seems to have one foot wedged in the 9-5 mindset.

Tech and digital tools have enabled us to leap the traditional goalposts and go for it, without the need for permission from the gatekeepers of the past. We can embrace a more fluid, less linear career, rebelling against the status quo and unpicking the things we've been told we should do.

You could argue that it is both necessity and generational timing that have made millennials define success differently and seek more from their careers. On the one ➤➤➤

hand, we are a generation with many financial obstacles (the housing crisis, huge student-loan debt), so that extra income is not something to be sniffed at. We are also the generation that grew up online. It might have looked like we were messing around on MSN, but really we were learning skills as we coded our MySpace pages and built our brands.

Tech has given us tools to have more freedom in our lives. We swipe right on Tinder, we order food that arrives in minutes, we have access to billions of people all over the world, and yet flexible working or side hustles still seem innovative. We have so many tools now to connect, make money, work remotely and do our jobs better, in a way that suits us individually. Tech has evolved at a rate of knots and yet, for all the progress, society's working patterns haven't changed much.

In the UK, we are told to whittle down our subjects to A-levels and then pick one area to study at university. I still remember people judging me for picking a joint degree. In America, though, you are encouraged to major and minor in different subjects. For me, the idea of limited choice at university level and having one job for life couldn't be more old-school.

Millennials — those aged 18 to 34 — are getting on a bit. Yes, we are the generation who seem to be living in perpetual adolescence, unable to get on the housing ladder, but according to Business Traveller we account for about one-third of all spending on business travel. This suggests that we have at least carved out some exciting careers that enable an element of adventure. A lot of us have created jobs that previously didn't exist. We might still try to keep up with the Joneses on Instagram, but it's clear we want different things when it comes to success, money and lifestyle.

The term "portfolio career" might have been coined 30 years ago, but the idea of multiple careers and income streams has been given a refresh. This working style, which has more flexibility and personal branding but less pigeonholing, shouldn't suit only millennials. It's a way of working that can benefit everyone. Age doesn't matter when you are a multihyphenate. You are at the centre of your own career choices. Your options can be limitless ■

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How to build a portfolio career

Set up your side hustle

Millennials are the most likely of all age groups to pick a job for its flexibility, with 70% looking for a flexible career lifestyle, compared with 47% of over-55s, according to research from Powwownow. Here's how to carve out some time on the side.

- Put your request in writing.
- Describe the change you would like to make to your working pattern.
- State your preferred timings: day of the week, start date and so on.
- Explain the effect (and benefit) the change would have on the company.
- Reference the fact that you are making a statutory request.
- Mention if you have made a request previously.

How to work from anywhere

Young freelancers are often stereotyped as slackers with a MacBook and a man bun, but more and more people are catching on to the fact that, so long as there's wi-fi, they can work from anywhere.

- Stay social: join a members' club. Marguerite starts at £15 a month, while some co-working spaces are free. Working remotely doesn't have to mean working alone.
- Set boundaries: even if you're not in an office, plan your office hours. Although a multihyphenate career enables flexibility, you still need parameters. Make sure you have a timeframe within which to work.
- Treat yourself nicely: if you worked one day over a weekend, take a day in lieu during the week.

How to build a personal brand

Having a personal brand online used to be seen as a fun thing to try out — now, it's crucial. Social recruiting is done by companies who look at Google, blogs and social media to spot talent.

- Build a reputation. Your brand online is worth something: your connections, your content, your outlook, your experiences. Make sure you are searchable.
- Have a USP — so many Instagram accounts look the same these days. The key, in

the coming years, is to be easily distinguishable. Don't be afraid to showcase what makes you different.

- Check your privacy settings — if it makes you more comfortable, separate your personal and professional accounts so you don't feel like you need to blend the two.
- Self-promote: there are many ways to do it without feeling icky. Talk about your projects or start a newsletter.

How to make your side hustle work

Having a side-hustle project doesn't necessarily mean you must have a burning desire to build an award-winning start-up and take over the world. It's simply a project on the side that enables you to dip your toe into another industry. It can be a learning exercise, a bit of fun or an extra money-maker.

- Don't put too much pressure on it. The reason a side hustle works is because you want to do it.
- Stay focused. The academic and author Cal Newport swears by what he calls "deep work", which is sitting down and working on something for 90 minutes before taking a break.
- Be more open about money. Join the movement to break down the taboo. Create WhatsApp groups, join private Facebook groups, find other people who are self-employed or have side hustles and share resources.
- Set out your payment policy. If the company or client pays you late, ask for late-payment compensation, in accordance with the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. To figure out how much interest you can charge, go to londonfreelance.org/interest.html.
- Virtual PAs: gone are the days when only corner-office CEOs had PAs. You can hire virtual or remote assistants to help you with invoicing and administrative tasks, which frees you up to do the bits of your job you're best at.

The Multi-Hyphen Method: Work Less, Create More, and Design a Career That Works for You by Emma Gannon (Hodder £19) is published on Thursday