

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

# Just a Click Away

For years I used a local graphic designer, Melanie, to create my shop's business cards, lesson collateral, rate sheets, flyers, window graphics, staff shirts and logos. Melanie's office was close by, so I could stop in and see how the progress was going and make revisions as needed. Although I sometimes considered her pricing a little expensive for certain jobs, Melanie did excellent work, so I thought it was well worth the costs. She would often do as many revisions as it took until I thought it was perfect.

I emailed Melanie one afternoon to discuss possible designs for our window posters, and she emailed back that her husband had taken another job and they would be moving to another state. Her husband's new gig would allow her to stay at home with her boys and not worry about opening another brick-and-mortar graphic design shop. She hoped to take on some clients online, although she hadn't really figured out how to set it up just yet.

While I was genuinely happy for Melanie and her family, it was terrible timing for me as we were entering the holiday season. I needed those new holiday window signs soon, and I had intentions of changing our rate cards for our lesson department as well. I like to freshen things up for our staff at the start of each year, so I even had a few ideas for some really cool t-shirt designs for our company shirts. Melanie did

have a few recommendations of other graphic designers that might work out until she could figure out her online business, and I tried a few of those designers she recommended, but I was not really impressed with their work.

A month or so passed, and then one afternoon I opened my email to find a message from Melanie with the subject line, "I'm Baaack." I was elated because we needed lots of design jobs completed, so I was eager to get

caught up on that backlog. However, Melanie hadn't moved back to town and reopened her brick-and-mortar studio. Melanie did what so many others in the "new economy" have done — she signed on as a freelance designer with Fiverr.com. Within a day we were back up and working on designs for new staff t-shirts and summer camp

flyer designs from four states away.

## THE GOOD, THE BAD & YOUR \$5

While estimates vary from 600,000 to an astonishing 14.4 million workers, there's certainly thousands of folks now making some sort of revenue in the "gig economy" as anything from an Uber driver to a freelance graphic designer. Melanie's joining their ranks seemed like a win for me, even though she was no longer a block away but a click away.

Melanie's profile on Fiverr.com shows samples of her work for other clients and, as most others offering services on the site, her prices start at only \$5 for simple work. As you need more services, such as source files or various revisions, and many times you need those extra services, the gig extras start to add up. Even though, when I hired Melanie through Fiverr.com to do a simple update for my staff's shirts and paid for her gig extras, I still came out hundreds of dollars ahead of what I would have paid her when she had a physical location down the street from my shop.

What's more, as I looked around the site I started to find all sorts of freelancers offering different services I didn't realize I needed. At only \$5, plus maybe another \$10-\$15 for a few gig



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extras, why not go for it? I hired another freelancer to design a few old school vintage logos to celebrate our 20th year in business. I then hired another person to work up a cartoon drawing of one of our long term staff members as a birthday gift, and I had another person I found on the site write and record a great little birthday song parody to go along with it. In all, I had paid under \$75 for the two logos, cartoon character and birthday song parody, and it was pro-level stuff at fast turnaround times.

While those experiences were good, I also found there are lots of folks that are not so good to deal with, no matter what their reviews say about them. I had to ask for a refund on a few orders because what was delivered was beyond bad and not at all what I ordered. The interesting thing about Fiverr.com is that if you post a negative review about the seller that door can swing both ways. The seller can also post reviews about the buyer, so keep that in mind if you decide to write something publicly unfavorable.

Luckily, all I had to do was ask the seller directly to cancel the order and refund my money, which they immediately did.

#### FROM CARTOON CHARACTERS TO COUCHES

While Fiverr has been great for my graphic design tasks, I use another option to find deals from freelancers in real estate. We've probably all heard of AirBnB, but for a few years now I've used another site, VRBO.com, to locate housing when attending both NAMM shows. Over the last few years I've rented amazing houses (with heated pools, full kitchens and theater rooms) directly from the owners that were located within blocks of the convention centers in both Anaheim and Nashville. Each property easily accommodated the five or more people in our group and at almost half the cost of what we used to pay for hotel rooms in those areas. Couple the housing with a few Uber rides and you'll realize some pretty significant savings over the course of your NAMM trips.

Our civilization is rapidly adapting to the new realities of what employment means and what technology can make of it. The good news is we are all recipients of the benefits. Cheaper services, and on-demand access to these services with faster delivery times is becoming a new normal. Those that may not have been successful finding employment in the last five years in what we consider traditional settings can now make money, and in many cases, lots of it in the new gig economy.

Look at Melanie for instance. Recently, we were discussing by email how her work on Fiverr.com has been going since she started, and she disclosed that she makes more money now than she did when she had a physical shop down the street from mine.

Melanie admitted that lower overhead was a big part of that equation, but she also disclosed that she gets on average 10-15 new gigs per day, seven days a week and almost all of those contain the gig extras. The average order for her work on Fiverr.com is \$55, and that adds up to some serious dollars, folks. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell owns and operates Progressive Music Center. He's a customer service, management and lessons expert.

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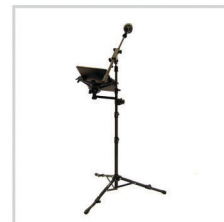
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