

2020/2021 SA Media Industry & Rates Report released

Safrea (Southern African Freelancers' Association) released its fifth annual Southern African Freelance Media Industry and Rates Report during a national webinar where researcher Jude Mathurine unpacked the key findings. The 2020/2021 report, which is a critical benchmarking tool for self-employed and part-time freelancers in the communications industry, contains a few firsts.



Source: www.pexels.com

The study covers a period marked by the turbulent influence of Covid-19 and the increased digital disruption in the communications sector. It revealed that one in five freelancers (22%) increased their income over the survey period, but many cut their rates to survive. Two out of every three freelancers reported losses between 25% and 100% of their income.

Freelance performance – industry aligned

“The study found that freelancers who were already oriented towards remote work and worked for industries that supported the Covid-19 response e.g. health, information technology, science and education, were not as badly affected,” said Mathurine, who is a lecturer in the Media, Culture and Communications Department at Nelson Mandela University.

Freelancers who supported vulnerable sectors like tourism, retail, hospitality, events and entertainment bore the brunt as their industries were crippled for months by successive lockdowns.

Home regimes and women

Work from home regimes, including disruptions to education, meant that paid freelancing gigs had to be sacrificed for unpaid care work or homeschooling. Women were affected unequally in this equation. However, the study also showed that women freelancers who earned above the average South African salary may have fared better than men.

More employed South Africans become side hustlers

The study also confirms findings from other studies by BrandMapp and Old Mutual that employed South Africans are undertaking side hustles thereby increasing competition in the freelance space. The Safrea report found that one in four freelancers (28%) are 'side hustlers' – having some form of employment and moonlighting as a freelancer.

A few firsts

New in this report was the identification of the most popular customer relationship management, marketing and productivity tools used by freelancers. The rates section of the report also introduces a new feature with a "fair" rate listing.

"The 'fair' listing is an important addition to the report because low sample sizes in the past meant that the rates reported could be unrealistically low or high, depending on who participated. The 'fair' listing overcomes that," said Lynne Smit, Safrea chair.

Trend to reduce and outsource permanent labour

Based on international research, the study suggests the prospect of an uptick in opportunities for media, marketing and communication freelancers if more businesses follow the trend of reducing and outsourcing permanent labour to save costs. Upwork's 2021 Future Workforce report found that remote work, due to the pandemic, led to 53% of businesses indicating their willingness to use freelancers. A Gartner Study found that a third of USA-based human resource leaders are looking at replacing full-time employees with "contingent" workers to save costs.

Vulnerability and legal protection

Freelancers generally have little legal protection and carry the burden when agreements are cancelled. Few charge retainers and kill-fees when projects are shelved or mothballed. They seldom use the Small Claims Court and are reluctant to name and shame bad clients.

Key findings

- Freelancing is the primary income source for 77% of the freelancers.
- Slightly more women than men earned above the national average salary of R23,122.
- Black freelancers are the lowest earners.
- About a quarter (28%) of all freelancers are "polyjobbers" or "slashers" who freelance part-time.
- One in five (22%) respondents have an account with a work-on-demand service like Upwork.
- 4.5% of freelancers earn most of their income from a gig platform.
- Most freelancers (63%) discount their rates at least some of the time – but especially during the pandemic.

- Freelancer earnings improve exponentially based on work experience in a primary specialisation.
- Few freelancers charge retainer fees or deposits.
- One in five freelancers increased their income over the survey period.
- More Safrea members earn higher than the average national monthly salary than non-Safrea members.

The full report is available at <https://safrea.co.za/sa-media-industry-rates-report>

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>