ABOUT A YEAR AFTER co-founding the mobile messaging service Tango in 2009, CTO Eric Setton needed more customer service help. So he turned to the then dominant freelancer platform, oDesk. “We were a tiny team, getting thousands of questions every day,” he says. Hiring freelancers helped his full-time employees dodge unappealingly repetitive work, thus improving both “service for our customers and company morale.”

No matter what sort of high-volume work or specialty one-off task you need done, there’s probably a freelancer platform that can help. Increasingly nimble technology is enabling the spread of the gig economy, allowing businesses to “access the exact right skills and people they need at the exact right time,” according to an October report by the nonprofit Freelancers Union.

oDesk, now merged with former rival Elance and renamed Upwork, is facing a growing field of competitors, but it’s still the go-to platform for Tango, which has 250 full-time employees. In addition to customer service, Tango now regularly uses freelancers for marketing design work such as presentations and email graphics—anything that could distract Setton’s full-time workers from their core goals. If you’re looking for freelance help but don’t know where to start, you might consider these online agencies. —KALEE THOMPSON

**UPWORK**

**A Big Temp Buffet**

The merger of Elance and oDesk created what new Upwork calls “the largest global catalog of freelance talent,” at least by the amount of business conducted there: Upwork processes about $1 billion annually, for 10 million freelancers with about 3,000 distinct skills. Programmers are the largest single category of “Upworkers,” followed by designers, writers, salespeople. There’s a wide array of skills: Washington, D.C., real estate developer Aaron Hirsch has hired a freelancer in Pennsylvania to produce a 3-D rendering of a housing project, a designer in Washington State to build a site plan for an outdoor beer garden, and a graphic designer in Chile to create a brochure. Hiring locally, Hirsch says, would have cost him three times as much. “If you go to a local firm, they may say, yeah, we’ll get on it in three weeks,” he says. “These people are ready to go.”

**THE BILL**
The site takes 10 percent of what you pay the freelancers you find there.

**BUYER BEWARE** With such a huge network, there’s a lot of chaff. Expect to cull, and possibly to use trial and error, to find a perfect hire.

**POWERTOFLY**

**Coders With Two X Chromosomes**

If you’re looking for tech-savvy help, PowerToFly has binders full of remote workers at the ready. “You hear all these big companies say they don’t have enough women in tech, but they’re kicking the can back 10 years” by focusing exclusively on STEM education, says Katharine Zaleski, a former Huffington Post manager who launched this women-only platform in 2014 with Mileina Berry, former CTO of online activism site Avaaz.org. The co-founders, both mothers, have collected more than 62,000 women like them: experienced professionals with tech skills who prefer to work remotely. Programmers, engineers, designers, and web developers populate the pre-vetted network; clients include BuzzFeed, Hearst, and The Washington Post.

**THE BILL** There’s a 3.25 percent markup on the fees of American freelancers (2 percent for international workers).

**BUYER BEWARE** Use this if you need help with big or ongoing projects; the platform isn’t designed for jobs involving just a few hours of work. Hiring can take three or four weeks, an eternity compared with some other sites.
WORKING NOT WORKING
Top Design, at Top Dollar
Co-founders Justin Gignac and Adam Tompkins come from advertising, and their pre-screened pool of 5,300 freelancers is heavy on designers, art directors, photographers, copywriters, and illustrators (think: creators of Super Bowl spots and the Pinterest logo). “Are you doing work that makes us jealous? The bar is high,” says Gignac, whose four-year-old company accepts just over 10 percent of applicants. Each worker’s availability is immediately evident from his or her online profile; 40 percent come from the ad world. Apple is the company’s biggest client; others include Google, Airbnb, Facebook, and Kickstarter. But Gignac says his team has been surprised by how many small businesses are using the site, as new founders realize that “I can’t afford to hire all-star talent, but I can afford to rent it,” he says.

THE BILL Gignac isn’t a fan of commissions: Companies pay a flat fee of either $275 a month or $2,750 per year to find and hire all the talent they want.

BUYER BEWARE This is not a site for hagglers and bargain seekers. Around $100 an hour is not unusual for these über-hip creatives.

---

TASKRABBIT
Live and In-Person Support
Moving help, handyman work, messenger service, home cleaning; TaskRabbit specializes in the type of job that requires a warm body. “The lines between business and personal are constantly blurring, especially for small businesses and entrepreneurs,” says VP of marketing Rob Willey, who lists admin help, copywriting, transcription, and data entry as some business-oriented services and says that almost every job is confirmed within five minutes. Founded in 2008, TaskRabbit long used a competitive-bidding approach; about a year ago, it switched to a fixed-price model in which “Taskers” post a set hourly rate. The shift reduced friction in the hiring process, and the past 12 months have been record-setting in terms of business, Willey says. (Mechanical Turk, Amazon’s crowdsourcing site, still lets employers set rates, with some workers performing tasks such as data verification at dirt-cheap rates.)

THE BILL The average standard service fee is a steep 20 percent for freelancers.

BUYER BEWARE Though Willey says the average Tasker now makes $35 an hour, the site still has a reputation for low pay, which may affect the level of skill you can find there.

---

FIVERR
Bargain-Basement Help
Founded in 2010, Fiverr is a catalog-like site with four million listings, including copywriting, web design, video production, and blog writing. Until November, the site required every seller to price something—though not always much—for just $5. “A lot of our most effective sellers know how to price themselves so that $5 is not a problematic starting point,” says Constantine Anastasakis, Fiverr’s senior director of business development. (The company has now eliminated the $5 rule, though many workers still use it as a starting point.) More than 75 percent of sellers are Millennials, and they appreciate that they don’t have to spend time soliciting business, according to Anastasakis, who says freelancer profits are increasing 30 percent year over year in the U.S.

THE BILL The company takes a 20 percent cut of a freelancer’s fee, meaning that some of those Millennials might start off making just $4.

BUYER BEWARE If you’re really paying five bucks, accept reality. Most of the time, you do get what you pay for.