Let Freedom Ring!

Highlights + Top Tips for Being an Independent Information Professional

@theinfohound1

Jennifer Burke, IntelliCraft Research
WHAT IS FREEDOM FOR INFO PROS?

@theinfohound1

Jennifer Burke, IntelliCraft Research
You aren’t free ...

YET
MY PATH TO FREEDOM

@theinfohound1

Jennifer Burke, IntelliCraft Research

Circuitous
Eclectic
Continuous learning
Evolving
But finally my own
Fits in a way I didn’t know could be possible
I started in NYC in marketing and ad world. Mad Men and Women. It took a turn to sales and customer service management. Then a light bulb ... and the LIS possibility lit a fire and interest. I loved my MSLIS time. My experience with digital libraries, reference, information behaviors ... Enough that I was convinced to STAY in LIS-land for PhD research. [An IMLS grand for my studies and research helped ... ] But I was struggling to make a difference. No interest in theory, only in how to REALLY help libraries and info pros. Was I really suited to chase a traveling teaching position? No. So I left academia, leaving the PhD undone. Needing new letters to describe how “ABD” I was..

Some wandering. Wondering.

Another light bulb ...

I didn’t have to take a library job to make a difference with and for libraries. I didn’t have to forget and forsake my marketing background any longer.
I had a Super Skill ... my background and experience means I speak Marketing + Library – a rare combo.
So going Independent = Flexibility to combine my skills, interests = FREE TO BE ME
WHAT WILL YOUR PATH BE?
• Can’t take the politics, the cuts, the stress?
• You’ve given a lot, learned a lot but maybe aren’t ready to ‘retire’?
• You want more flexibility than you have?
• You want to do more than one thing?
• You have tons of experience, know how to give great value and want to share with others in a new way?

ALL = Good Reasons to Go Independent
But...
Are there obstacles or stumbling blocks to making the indie leap?

Are you having these thoughts sitting here?

Well, that’s probably why you’re sitting in this QuickTake!

- You think you’re only suited for library-based roles
- ‘Retirement’ looks boring. And expensive.
- You aren’t sure if there’s business to support that flexibility
- You don’t know about going independent
And the good news is that I have tips for you. Not just MY tips .. But tips from dozens and dozens of my independent info pro friends and colleagues. I crowd-sourced this presentation a bit – created a survey and sent to a few hundred other IIPs. My peeps. and got back around a hundred comments, tips, advice and suggestions. See info pros love sharing! And the independent info pro community I’m in is strong with the sharing spirit.

I asked what they wish they knew when first starting ...
What they thought they had to know or do .. And turns out wasn’t important
And what the best advice was for new info pros ..

Here are the TOP TIPS and some direct quotes from other IIPs to help you
You need to remember that you have experience and expertise that are valuable. You will work on projects that bring tremendous value to your clients – and you should not underestimate or undersell yourself.

You have to think like a business person – and not just a librarian or researcher or info pro. You’re a one-person show (and while you shouldn’t try to DO it all) – you do need to know about it all.
You have to have a handle on financial aspects, scheduling, proposal writing, setting your fees/prices, basics of accounting, client nurturing and ..

MARKETING. It’s the TOP TIP and #1 Biggest part of being a business owner. It’s what will make or break you.
I’m not just saying MARKETING is #1 KEY b/c that’s my background. Ok, that’s part of it!
But in my survey of other IIPs it consistently came up as the top piece of advice, what they wish they knew, what they wish they’d spent more time on at the start, and what they STILL spend the most time on today.

You may think that doing good work for clients will be enough. Sorry. It’s not. It’s HUGE – but you still have to market. ALWAYS.
And when starting prepare to spend 25-50% (or MORE) of your time on marketing related activities.
You have to create a plan, execute it and be consistent about your marketing efforts.
You will need to network more strategically – you have to go where your clients (or prospects are) and not just where other info pros hang out. When there, be able to clearly state WHO you help and WHAT results you help them achieve.
Being a generalist is hard business. It’s really really hard to market when you can’t pinpoint what you do, what results you achieve, and for whom. You won’t see true success by trying to serve everyone – or lots of industries, different types of clients, businesses small and large plus nonprofits, etc.

Your prospects need to know who you help. They need to see themselves in your message and know they are in the right place.

You have to know the viability of your business- that REAL potential clients exist and are ready, willing and able to pay for X, Y, Z.

Who is your ideal client?

Who’s in that niche you have in mind? Who has the need AND the budget for the services you have in mind? Who is already paying for services like yours and knows the value an info pro could bring (those are the easy targets!). Who you like working with! Have good projects. Who is in your network - your extended network?

You can – and will – evolve [Most info pros I know have. I surely have! Less research, more teaching and marketing]
They say when you own your own business that your time is yours …
That you will be your own boss …

Really .. Your clients are your boss and your time belongs to them.

BUT. You still have flexibility. You choose your projects and your schedule. Yes, choose. Do NOT feel compelled to take every gig, little project (or big), request, or job that comes your way. Especially don’t keep taking jobs that underpay and undervalue you. Don’t fall in that trap!

Learn to be patient in growing your client base and business. But be disciplined and work at it – spending more time than you think you will.
It’s ok to figure our your nice and test the waters as a part-time business owner, a super-freelancer or consultant on the side. Build up experience and a client base – as well as cash reserves. Build results, a prospect or client list and solid testimonials. You can achieve success and flexibility – part-time with perks. But know that most success comes with making the leap and dedicating yourself to your business fulltime. It really takes full-time work to do proper business development, marketing, networking and raising your visibility.

It does also help to have a supportive partner or spouse with a job that can carry costs – because you aren’t very likely to be self-sustaining (at your prior salary level) right off. It may take time to replace 100% of your salary or get to a level you’re comfortable with.

Be able to weather the ups and downs that come as you build your business and ride out economic twists.
Hire out – you can’t, and shouldn’t, try to do everything yourself. But you will be tempted to!
Hiring someone to do your taxes is an investment in your biz .. And a tax deductible!

Wish I knew that I didn’t have to “do everything myself. We all feel that due to control issues or costs. But we really can’t afford to do certain, or all, things.”

Make an investment in yourself and your biz – hire an accountant, get a bookkeeper if you need one. Hire someone for your logo, graphic design or basic website design and setup.
Subcontract work to other infopros if a project falls outside your specialty.
You may become a solo-preneur, but you are not alone.
Freedom isn’t solitary. In fact, business freedom might take an ‘army’.
You will still need professional development, continued learning, tech help and moral support
And it will probably need to come from more than one professional (and personal) community +/- or organization.
I’m a member of 3 info orgs - a long time member of ALA (back again b/c I do strategic marketing consulting with/for range of libraries) and a member of SLA (b/c I’m ‘special’!) with the LMD and Consultants section. Plus, in full disclosure, I’m currently serving on the Board of Directors for AIIP (the Association of Independent Information Professionals). AIIP serves ONLY those who are independent, owning some or all of their own info-centric business. But many of the members are also members of SLA (and of other orgs – where their clients are, or their original background is/was).
As a solo-preneur you need those various communities.
You will need to connect with other consultants, independent researchers, solo CI specialists, and primary researchers because they will ‘GET’ it. You need a virtual water cooler, virtual tech support, and virtual confidence builders and business builders.

Tap into the communities that exist to foster and support the Indie Info Pro – who have been there, done that, and are still doing it. Loving every minute.
“I wish I had known the kind of lifestyle being independent would afford me! Yes, challenges abound and there are times of stress, but overall ... it has been a great privilege to have the freedom and flexibility on top of sometimes demanding deadlines. Oh I only wish I’d made the move sooner!”