

ICBA \ 45 Fabulous Freelancer Apps and Tools You Need To Know

From invoicing to workflow management, these apps and platforms help you wear all those necessary independent contractor hats.

Bookkeeping



Unless you have the cash to hire someone to do your books on the regular, you likely need an app to manage your moneymaking. You want a bookkeeping platform that does it all: invoicing, profit-and-loss tracking, expense management, project estimates, and time tracking. Apps like [Freshbooks](#), [Wave](#), [17hats](#), and [Quickbooks Self-Employed](#) do all of these things for you seamlessly. You can send electronic invoices with links to credit card payment processing so you can get paid faster. And you can set up payment reminders, so you don't have to do the unpleasant work of hassling clients for outstanding invoices. Link your business credit cards or checking accounts for easy expense categorizing. At tax time, you can run profit-and-loss statements, create expense reports for itemization, and more—all of which makes filing less complicated.

Communication/Collaboration



Our email inboxes get overloaded fast with product newsletters, spam, back-and-forth messages with clients, app notifications, and more. That's why email isn't always the most effective mode of communication. If you work with a team or communicate with specific clients regularly and extensively, a messenger or chat app like [Slack](#), [Chanty](#), or [Flock](#) might be your best bet. Slack has some great channels for freelancers to communicate with one another if you're looking to collaborate, get advice, or just enjoy a little camaraderie throughout the day. A great feature of these chat apps is their integration with other services or platforms. Slack integrates well with workflow apps like Asana and Trello, for example.

Conference Calls



Working independently or remotely might require you to jump on conference calls with clients or subcontractors. If you're in charge of coordinating the phone meeting, you'll want a sophisticated system that goes beyond the "add-a-call" and "merge" buttons on your smartphone. If you make infrequent group calls, the free version of [FreeConference](#) call might suffice. Or you can upgrade to a level with more features like video recording or YouTube streaming. [GoToMeeting](#) is another popular virtual meeting app with all the bells and whistles if you're in need of a platform that's more feature heavy. One great aspect of GoToMeeting is its no-hassle "call me" option. The system calls you when it's time for you to join, eliminating the need for you to dial in or use a PIN.

File Sharing



Working remotely would be difficult if we didn't have advanced methods of sending work to clients or collaborating with other independent contractors. Email attachments, especially if they're large or you're sending many pieces at once, can bog down inboxes. Plus, they can get lost in the fray. File sharing and syncing systems like [Dropbox](#) and [Google Drive](#) solve these issues. Dropbox works well for sharing everything from photography to PDFs, and its Paper interface allows you to create and collaborate right in the system. Google Drive, along with its Docs, Sheets, and Slides interfaces, has even more creation and collaboration options plus cloud storing, version control, and syncing across your devices.

Meeting Scheduling



An email chain just about scheduling a meeting can bog down your day and distract you from completing actual work. [Calendly](#) gets around the scheduling hassle. Just send your client or collaborator a list of times that work for you and let them choose. If you're a Gmail fan, [Assistant.to](#), another meeting scheduling platform, is free and seamless to use. [Xoyondo](#) is the browser-based tool you want if you're coordinating a meeting with several people. Just let them vote on times that work and find a consensus. You can add additional questions to your survey, like which coffee shop to meet at, for example. Got clients across different time zones or even in other parts of the world? You need [Time Zone Ninja](#). Getting the meeting scheduled is just part of the battle; keeping one on track is just as essential for productivity. Use [Less Meeting](#) to create agendas and follow-up notes.

Mind Mapping



If you like the visual aspect of mind-mapping for taking notes, brainstorming, or project planning, [MindNode](#) wins out. It's like a mobile whiteboard for your ideas. But it's not overwhelming if you're new to mind-mapping techniques. You can hone in on something specific or get a big-picture look by using the folding function. In addition to text, you can also map with documents, hyperlinks, and images. Advanced mind mappers might like [iThought](#). This app has some fun customizable features, and it incorporates an in-app browser, so you don't have to open one separately to do your research.

Note-Taking



Paper notebooks and sticky pads are great, but their features are lacking organization and search efficiency. Now that we have apps for jotting quick notes, we can find the tidbits of info we need exactly when we need them. [Evernote](#) is one of the most lauded note-taking apps on the market. You can back up your notes to the cloud, sync across all of your devices, and categorize content by subject. That way you can rest assured your notes are safe, can be accessed from anywhere, and don't require a lot of configurations on your part. [Simplenote](#) has similar capabilities. A cool function of this app is its go-back-in-time feature. You can review previous versions of a note just by moving a slider.

Schedule Management (Calendar)



A simple calendar app, even the one on your phone, can be useful for setting reminders for meetings, conference calls, and any other scheduled items. If you want a feature-rich calendar that helps you block schedule your entire day, try [Fantastical 2](#). It's one of the best-rated calendars on the market and shows multiple views so that you can get a handle on your work time and free time. Android users rave about [CloudCal](#). The “magic circles” feature loops a clock face around your days to show when you're tied up with meetings or tasks. You'll have a better handle on when you've got free time or when you're booked to the max.

Social Media Must Haves



Whether you're in marketing or you just need to promote your own business, you need tools to manage your social media outreach. Platforms like [Hootsuite](#) and [CoSchedule](#) let you plug in your posts and pre-schedule them so they can be sent out automatically. Plus, you can gain valuable analytics. CoSchedule's clean calendar view eliminates the need for any clunky spreadsheet planning, and it has collaboration features, but Hootsuite delivers more integration across different social media platforms. If you're a prolific Instagram user, you'll want [Linktree](#) in your arsenal. Currently, Instagram only allows for one link in your profile. That means you either have to link out to a website or portfolio or keep changing your Instagram profile to showcase your most relevant work or product. Linktree provides a workaround by allowing a link that takes viewers to a “tree” of additional links.

Time Tracking



Your clients may require you to time track to bill an hourly rate. You could use a basic timer, but if you move between tasks for different clients, keeping tabs on it all can get tricky. Check your bookkeeping app or platform to see if it includes a multi-task time tracker. [Toggl](#) provides a handy desktop widget and mobile app for quick starts and stops. It will even provide alerts if it thinks you've forgotten. Include your hourly rate, and Toggl will do the math for you on what to bill. You can also use Toggl to track your team members' time if that's a pain point. [Harvest](#) has even more tracking features and report-creation options to help you with providing accurate estimates, project budgeting, etc.

Transcription



For freelance journalists, transcription is one of those necessary tasks that can quickly eat up valuable writing time. If you're not a reporter, you might still find yourself in need of transcribing audio after a conference call or a meeting. [TranscribeFiles](#) is a web-based app that allows you to upload an audio file and pay for a professional transcriptionist to create your transcription and return it to you in as little as 24 hours. Pricing varies by turnaround time, the number of speakers in the audio, and whether you require timestamping. But you can estimate at least a \$1 per minute. If you're looking for a cheaper option or you're just in a mega hurry, [Temi](#) and [Trint](#) provide an almost immediate (a few minutes) transcription of your audio. Because these apps use AI software, the resulting text won't be perfect. But both apps feature a transcription-editing platform that plays back the synced audio. You can use this to quickly clean up any areas of the transcript that need work before you export it. Pricing for these apps are pennies per minute. You can also use the Temi or Trint smartphone apps to record audio and upload.

Traveling/Driving

If you travel for your work, keeping track of itineraries, expenses, vehicle mileage, and more can be a drag unless you have some tech tools to do the job automatically. For just one trip you might have airline, hotel, car rental, and other confirmations. Use [Triplt](#) to corral all your reservation info in one spot. If you're looking for some of the best deals on hotels, ICBA members get exclusive discounted rates through the Hotel Engine app. (Our members save an average of 26% more with Hotel Engine than on other booking sites.) The app has built-in spend-tracker tools to streamline budgeting. Plus, the intuitive search option lets you skip out on playing travel agent. Your invoicing software should have a great expense tracker, but if you need something with even more functionality for logging travel expenses on the fly, try [Expensify](#). Need directions? [Waze](#) is a hands-free, turn-by-turn navigation app. The beauty of Waze lies in its real-time community-curated info about traffic snafus you'll likely want to avoid while en route. Based on crowdsourced data, Waze will offer you re-routing options to avoid stop-and-go traffic, accidents, construction backups, and more. The [GasBuddy](#) app will help find you the best nearby deal for a fill-up when your tank is low.



Website DIY

Creating your own website might seem daunting, but applications like [Squarespace](#) and [Wix](#) make it easy, even if you're not tech savvy. These services are user-friendly and offer different templates to fit your needs. You can feature your portfolio, bio, blog, contact info, announcements, and e-commerce in one place. Wix has more templates to choose from than Squarespace, but Squarespace allows for easy switching between its templates without having to rebuild your site from scratch. Squarespace templates convert well on mobile devices, whereas you may have to do some tweaking with Wix.



Workflow Management

You might need to experiment a bit to find the project- or task-management app that best fits your business and your personality. If you like to keep it simple with a basic to-do list and due dates, [todoist.com](#) works wonders. If you prefer Kanban board software to visualize workflow, try [Asana](#) or [Trello](#). Trello is a fab tool for getting started in the Kanban method. Whatever your industry, your workflow likely has some consistent steps. Trello allows you to drag your tasks (cards) through those workflow processes. That way you always know at what stage in the game each task is in. Both Asana and Trello have team-communication capabilities that tie messaging and documents to specific tasks, helping to eliminate email clutter. If you need a big-picture overview of what's on your plate in the weeks and months ahead but also like detailed daily tasks with the ability to take notes, try the linear and flexible [Bullet Journal Method](#), created by Ryder Carroll. Instead of using a paper journal, however, download the [Workflowy](#) app. Here's a [tutorial](#).



Writing Wonders

Maybe you write for a living, or your job requires a lot of written communication. These apps will boost your productivity and help reduce errors. [Grammarly](#) integrates with your Safari web browser so that when you're typing on social media or elsewhere, you're aware of any spelling or grammar snafus. You can also load documents into Grammarly for a quick proof. The free version is like your word processor's spelling and grammar check on steroids, and the paid version offers even more features like highlighting overused words. If you frequently have to answer the same questions to new clients via email or type the same string of code, you need [TextExpander](#). With this tool, you'll have your most often used phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in one place, and you can insert them via a keyboard shortcut or your choice of an abbreviation. No need for a clunky copy-and-paste routine. [Scrivener](#) will be your best buddy if you write long documents that require a bit of planning. Authors use this app for crafting chapters and scenes and creating in a less-linear fashion, but Scrivener works well for building any piece of content that involves smaller chunks that you may need to move around. For annotating PDFs or compiling research, [LiquidText](#) will meet your needs. This iPad-specific app gives you a parallel workspace on which you can drag and drop portions of text from other documents and make notes as you read. Are you obsessed with outlining for planning meetings, speeches, tasks, reports, or anything else? Then you need [OmniOutliner](#) to do all your indenting deeds.



We hope these apps help make your workday easier and allow you to focus solely on your passion.

Do you use an app that could help other independent contractors? We would like to hear from you, contact us at cs@icbassociation.org.

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