



FREE GUIDE · NO EMAIL REQUIRED

Your first ten clients.

How to get paid work when you have no portfolio, no referrals and no reputation. The sample-first method, the fifty-name list, and free work done deliberately.

The hardest part of this business is not the tenth client. It is the first, because everything that gets you clients later is something you only have after you have had clients. Here is how to break that loop without waiting to feel ready.

Write your niche sentence

One line, three parts: **who you serve** plus **the problem they have** plus **the proof you can fix it**. Not *I'm a videographer*. Something closer to *I make recap films for local event promoters who need footage online while people still care*.

WHO I SERVE

THE PROBLEM THEY HAVE THAT I SOLVE

THE PROOF I CAN POINT AT

That sentence decides everything downstream: what you shoot for your portfolio, who you contact, what you charge, and what people say about you when you are not in the room.

The sample-first method

This is the move that works when nothing else does. Instead of asking a stranger to imagine what you could do, you build a small piece of it first and show them. Not a proposal. The actual thing, or a slice of it.

1. **Scout ten local businesses** with a visible, specific problem you can solve. A dead booking page. No photos on their Google profile. A last video post from eight months ago.
2. **Pick one and build the sample**. A one-page site. A 20-second reel cut from footage you shot walking past. Three photos of their storefront in good light.
3. **Send one message** that names their problem, says who you are in one line, mentions the sample exists, and asks something tiny. Not *hire me*. *Can I send it over?*
4. **Follow up once** after four or five days, with no pressure and no expiry.
5. **Repeat weekly**. Ten scouted, one sample, one message, every week.

WHY IT WORKS

It inverts the ask. A cold pitch asks a stranger to take a risk on you. A sample asks them to look at a gift. The effort is already spent, visibly, on them. That is much harder to refuse than accept, and it proves your work in the only way that actually counts.

The fifty-name list

Write down fifty people who already know you. Not prospects. Anyone: family, old colleagues, teammates, church, people you went to school with. This list will out-produce five hundred cold emails, every time.

THE ALLY MESSAGE

Hey [name], hope you're doing well! Quick thing, I've officially launched my media company, [company], doing [service] for [niche]. I'm building my first client roster, so if anyone in your circle could use this, I'd be grateful for the connection. Happy to take care of anyone you send my way with launch pricing. Portfolio's here: [link]

It is written for two readers at once: your ally, and the stranger they will forward it to. You are not asking them to buy. You are arming them to talk about you.

Adjacent freelancers, the referral flywheel

The fastest-compounding lead source in this business is not clients. It is people who serve your exact customer with a different service. DJs and event planners if you shoot events. Web developers and copywriters if you design. Wedding planners, florists and venues if you film weddings.

- Build real relationships with five of them.
- Send work their way first, before you ask for anything.
- Agree referral terms out loud: a percentage, or simple reciprocity.
- One DJ who books cities on repeat, one planner with a full calendar, one venue that hands out your card. Each one is a pipe that flows all year.

Free work, done deliberately

Spec work is worth doing when **you** choose the concept, **you** keep the images, and it fills a real hole in your portfolio. It is not worth doing for exposure, for a business that is paying everyone else in the room, or because you were afraid to ask for money. The difference is entirely who is directing it.

“Skill is subjective. Networks are not.”

Build five to eight portfolio pieces that all point at one sentence

Not your best twenty images. Five to eight complete pieces that all say the same thing about what you do. A prospect looking at a scattered portfolio cannot tell what to hire you for, so they hire nobody. Spec work counts. Personal projects count. Consistency is what reads as professional, not scale.

Show up in person. Local business events, tournaments, markets, openings, with your gear when it makes sense, because gear starts conversations. *Are you filming this? Do you have a card?* has started more client relationships than any algorithm. Do not leave until you have met the room.