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HR Joins The Freelance Revolution

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Careers

I write about the freelance revolution and the future workforce.



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How involved in the freelance revolution are independent human resources experts? It would make sense that HR expertise is well represented among online talent marketplaces. After all, HR is a key function around the world, and the difficulty of attracting and retaining top talent is certainly a critical global challenge.

But, I wondered if the ubiquity of HR would moot the utility of online talent marketplaces for both HR consultants and their potential clients. We know that online talent marketplaces facilitate *talent discovery*, the ability to identify critical, non-local, expertise. But, local shouldn't be a problem for HR consultants, certainly not in the U.S. where there are over 43,000 HR consulting businesses and revenues estimated at around \$25 billion.

HR support isn't just large and local, it is also mature. Unlike the tech world, consultancies like [Mercer](#), [Willis Towers Watson](#), and [Aon Hewitt](#) have been around for many years. Traditional management consulting firms increasingly see HR as an important future offering: [Deloitte](#), [PwC](#), [EY](#), [BCG](#) and even [McKinsey](#) sees leadership, talent, and HR transformation as growth channels. Traditional executive recruiting firms have broadened their capabilities: firms like [Korn Ferry](#) offer well-resourced practices in talent management and executive development. And, human capital consulting is obviously not limited to the U.S. The big international firms like [Egon Zehnder](#), [Wavestone](#), and [Infosys](#) all operate globally.

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Finally, as a mature field, HR is a good example of how most freelance work is still not contracted through online talent marketplaces but rather engaged through local relationships. For example, the HR guidance provided by business school professors who “side hustle” as a consultant or corporate educator. Many, in turn, have create their own boutique consultancies.

With these caveats in mind, I was pleased to recently speak with Emma El-Karout, the CEO and founder of [One Circle](#), a new online talent platform in South Africa focused explicitly on HR consultancy. It's a new startup, and it's interesting. And what I subsequently learned from a number of other online talent marketplaces is that One Circle is on the right track: HR freelancing is a large and growing enterpris for platforms.

Emma arrived in Johannesburg South Africa by way of an HR career in Lebanon, Qatar, and Dubai. As she put it, “It was impossible to ignore that HR played a key ro in each company, whether it was growing by double digits, reorganizing to establish more efficient shared services, implementing technology, or dealing with a down-sizing.”

In building One Circle, Emma has focused on a strong international cohort of HR specialists, combining full-time freelancers and experts looking for side gigs. And, sh has structured the community to focus on the life cycle of the organization and the employee's experience: HR strategy development, organization design, total rewards; talent management and leadership coaching. As a new marketplace, she is still assembling the platform community. While the majority of freelancers are South

African, she is focused on building a service that can operate on a pan-African and eventually a global scale.

Learning about One Circle raised my interest in how HR consulting is doing in “full stack” digital talent marketplaces. The answer is, very well. Here are some examples

Chandrika Pasricha, the CEO of [Flexing It](#), the India and Asia based talent marketplace, mentioned that approximately 10% of the freelancers on Flexing It, are HR or organization experts. She reports that two thirds of the clients of their HR freelancers are large companies or high growth startups. Interestingly, an additional 20% of HR experts are hired by professional services firms to augment their teams with specific areas of expertise required by their clients. She also notes that 50% of the HR project work is delivered entirely remotely, or through a mix of onsite and remote work. Pasricha forecasts strong continuing growth, particularly in these five areas:

- HR planning and policy
- Total rewards
- Talent acquisition and recruitment
- HR analytics
- Employee and leadership development

Jody Greenstone Miller, CEO of the [Business Talent Group](#), a well-respected U.S. and European freelance consultancy, describes a similar trend: the contribution of HR experts in her markets freelancing as large and growing. She notes, “As stewards of talent strategy, HR leaders see the way the workforce is changing. They also see the impact that high-end independent talent makes in other areas of the business. So it's no surprise that they would turn to this powerful resource when tackling their own top priorities.” She also points out that “The majority of projects we serve are still largely a mix of onsite and remote, and HR is no exception. Remote-only projects make up just 16% of this work.” And, as Miller observes, among the 3,000 HR freelancers working with BTG, the expertise in greatest demand was similar in some respects to Flexing It, but differed in other areas:

- Organizational design

- Project management
- Communications
- HR and culture transformation; change management
- Leadership development; recruiting and talent strategy

I also talked with Hamish Grant, VP of marketing at [Expert360](#), a talent marketplace for highly skilled independent professionals based in Australia. He points out that 12% of their 25,000 plus independent consultants are HR experts. Grant describes the business this way, “The majority of our HR demand comes from clients planning digital and agile workforce transformations. This impacts traditional workforce structures, so our HR consultants are being offered a great deal of work.” In Expert360’s case, most of this work is done on site vs remotely. Grant sees growth at double digits in a wide range of HR project areas, but describes the following five areas topping demand:

- Change management
- Talent strategy
- Organizational design and restructuring
- HR planning
- HR policy and process development

A final conversation was with [Fiverr](#), the Israel based global talent marketplace. Fiverr’s analysts shared that the marketplace almost doubled the number of HR experts on their site within the past year. They also reported that orders for HR services more than tripled in the same period as did earnings for HR services. Gali Arnon, CMO of Fiverr described the trend this way, “We’re finding that that more and more people in the HR field are freelancing, or using the platform as a side hustle. Clearly, the demand for HR services is increasing and the amount of money people are willing to spend is also increasing.”

The takeaway: although HR is a mature profession with a well-established ecosystem, and many local alternatives, it certainly looks as though a new doorway to HR expertise is opening and very welcome. With large and continuing growth in

startups, new technologies that torque HR effectiveness, and big corporates driving transformation, HR service needs are growing, and the freelance revolution is on the job.

Viva la revolution!

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