



A Wripple 2024 Team Up Report Deep Dive

# The Professionalism Deficit Revisited







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# Introduction

As part of our continued exploration of how freelancers and the companies that hire them come together to get great work done, we're taking a deep dive into the five recommendations that came out of our [2024 Team Up Report](#).

One of the major findings of the report was that freelancing is being held back from realizing its full potential by a complacency mindset—blended teams are functioning well enough for freelancers and companies to be satisfied, but freelancers are not currently managed as a core part of the workforce and operational challenges exist.

In this report, we'll look at where professionalism is currently an issue and how freelancers and companies can come together to build more professional and successful partnerships.

## Recommendations for Status Quo Busting

- 1 Reduce the Professionalism Deficit
- 2 Modernize End-to-End
- 3 Wipe Out Persistent Process Pain Points
- 4 Capitalize on Freelancing's Multi-Dimensional Nature
- 5 Commit to Core Values Across the Entire Workforce

# About the Research

## The Surveys

Wripple partnered with MDRG, an independent research company, to conduct two surveys in October 2023. One targeted freelancers and the other focused on the marketing and HR leaders at enterprise and mid-market companies who hire freelancers. In total, we collected 414 completed surveys.

In May 2024, Wripple conducted a survey across the freelancers on the Wripple platform. These freelancers typically have five or more years of experience and have worked across many clients. We collected 19 responses.

## Definition of Terms

**By Freelancer**, we mean an independent professional who works for themselves rather than for a company. They could technically be a freelancer or a contractor.

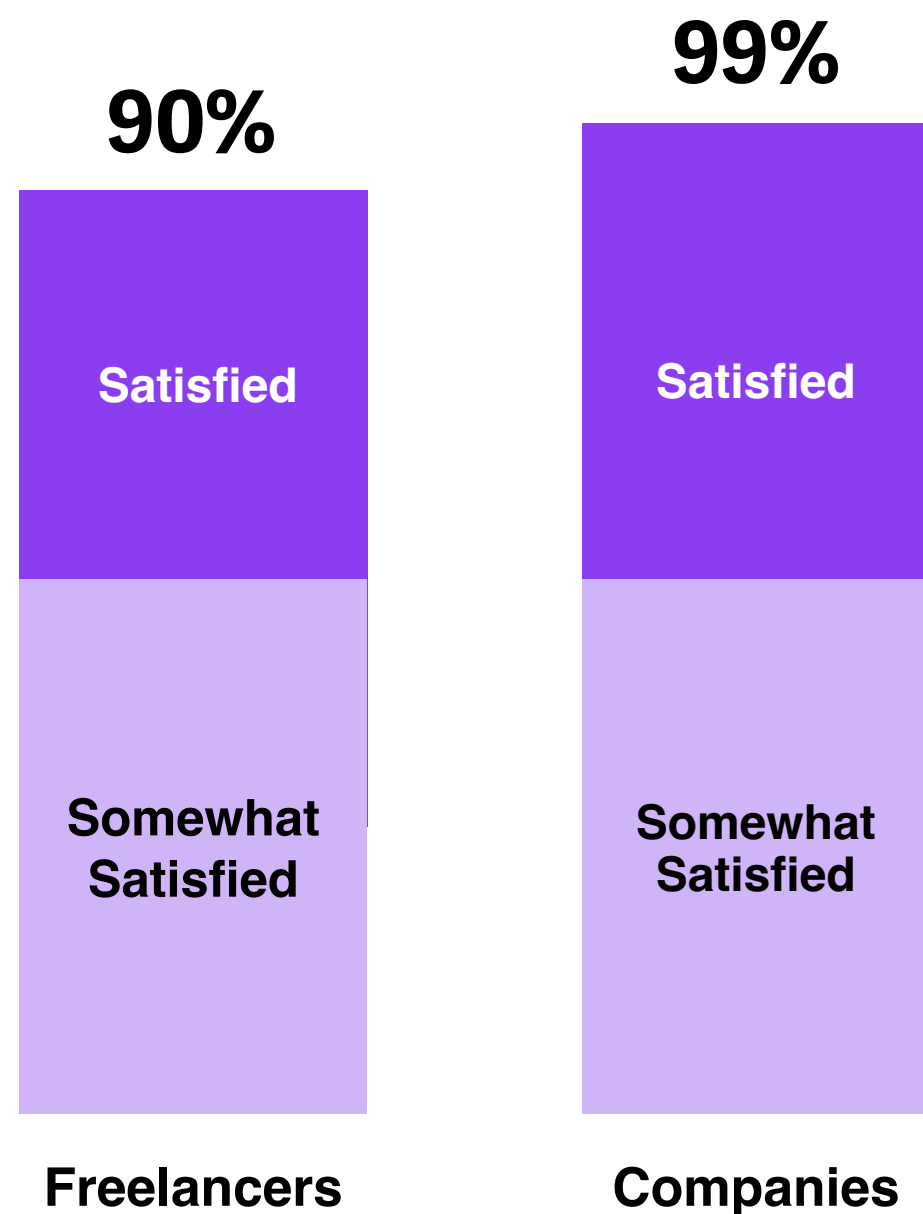
**By Company**, we mean the full-time employees who work with freelancers.



# Setting the Stage

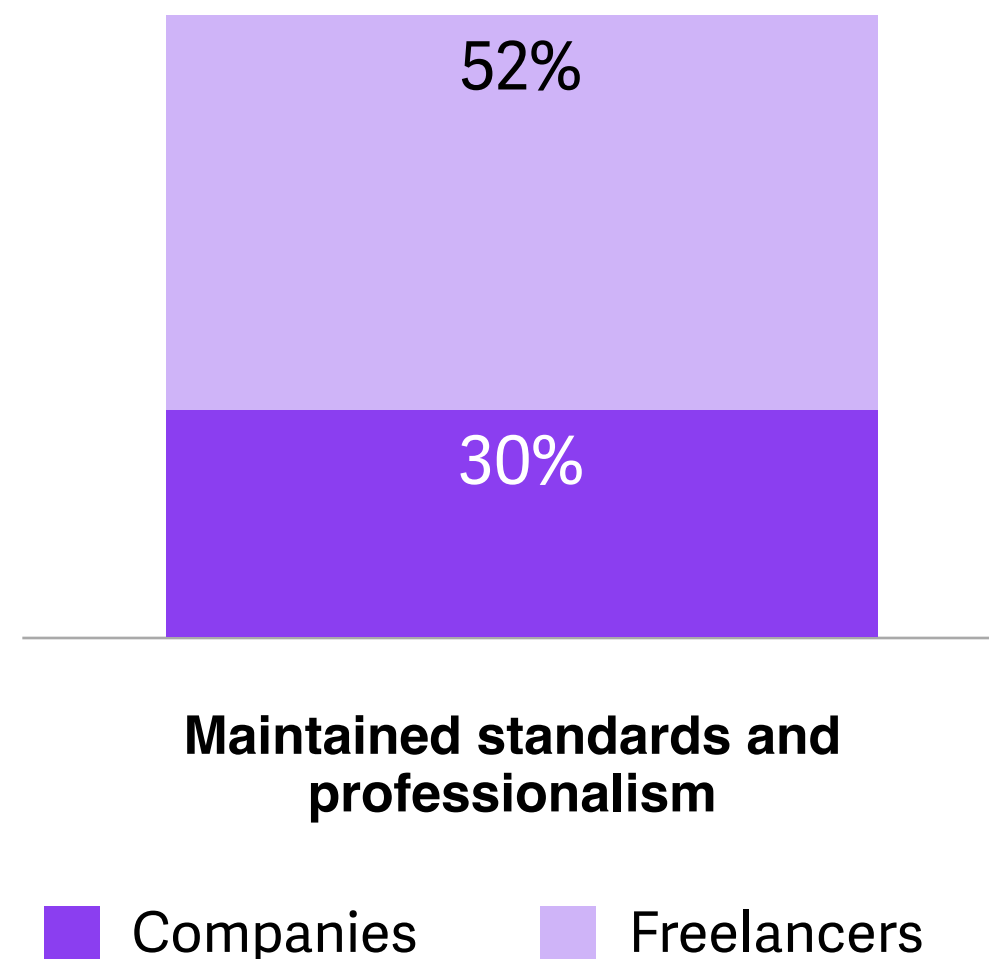
Wripple's 2024 Team Up Report revealed a freelance economy full of satisfaction. This was the case for both freelancers and companies. Almost all freelancers and the companies that hired them were somewhat satisfied or satisfied with their freelance engagements.

**Overall satisfaction with the work is high.**



Despite all this satisfaction, as we dug deeper, one significant challenge freelancers noted was the need for companies to maintain standards and professionalism. Over half of freelancers said this was an issue, compared to 30% of companies.

**The biggest area for improvement was professionalism and standards.**



“ I once had a client who hit the trifecta: First, she didn't give me a third of the input I needed to do the job and changed directions a couple times. Second, she was thoroughly disrespectful and unprofessional throughout the process. And third, to cap it all off, she didn't pay the second half of my fee even though she used my work. ”

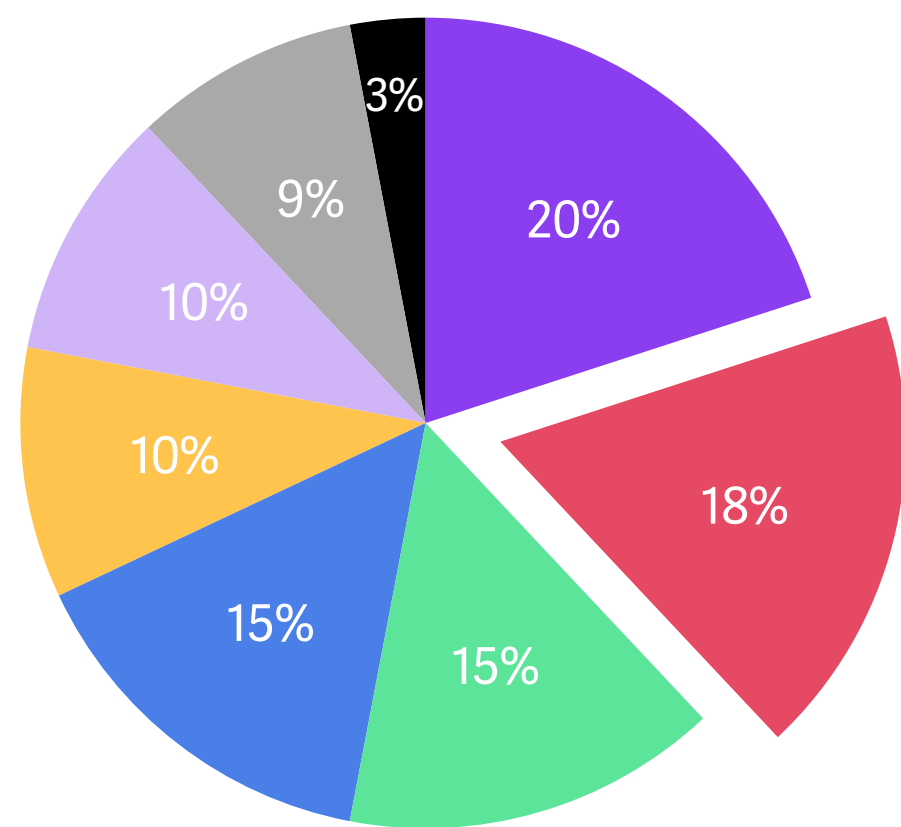
**Curt Westlake**  
Freelance Creative Director



# Setting the Stage

This theme showed up across all stages of the engagement. Case in point: when freelancers were **assessing project opportunities**, "professionalism" was the second most important factor.

**Most Important Factor for Assessing Opportunities**



- Thorough job description that aligns with my interests
- Professionalism of the clients
- Informative interview where I can ask questions
- Good team / cultural fit
- Interesting / challenging assignment
- Ability to build out portfolio & case studies
- The compensation
- Ability to work from home

**Once hired**, the top reported challenge was lack of professionalism and partnership. This was noted as a "top challenge" by 42% of freelancers.

**Top Reported Challenges**



There's no question that for companies looking to hire the most talented freelancers and get their best work, this warrants a closer look at how freelancers define professionalism and what they expect from their clients.

And seeing as how 92% of companies expect to increase use of freelancers in the next 24 months, having a trusted pool of freelancers with whom they have a strong relationship will be critical to their team's performance.

“ Professionalism does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive. ”

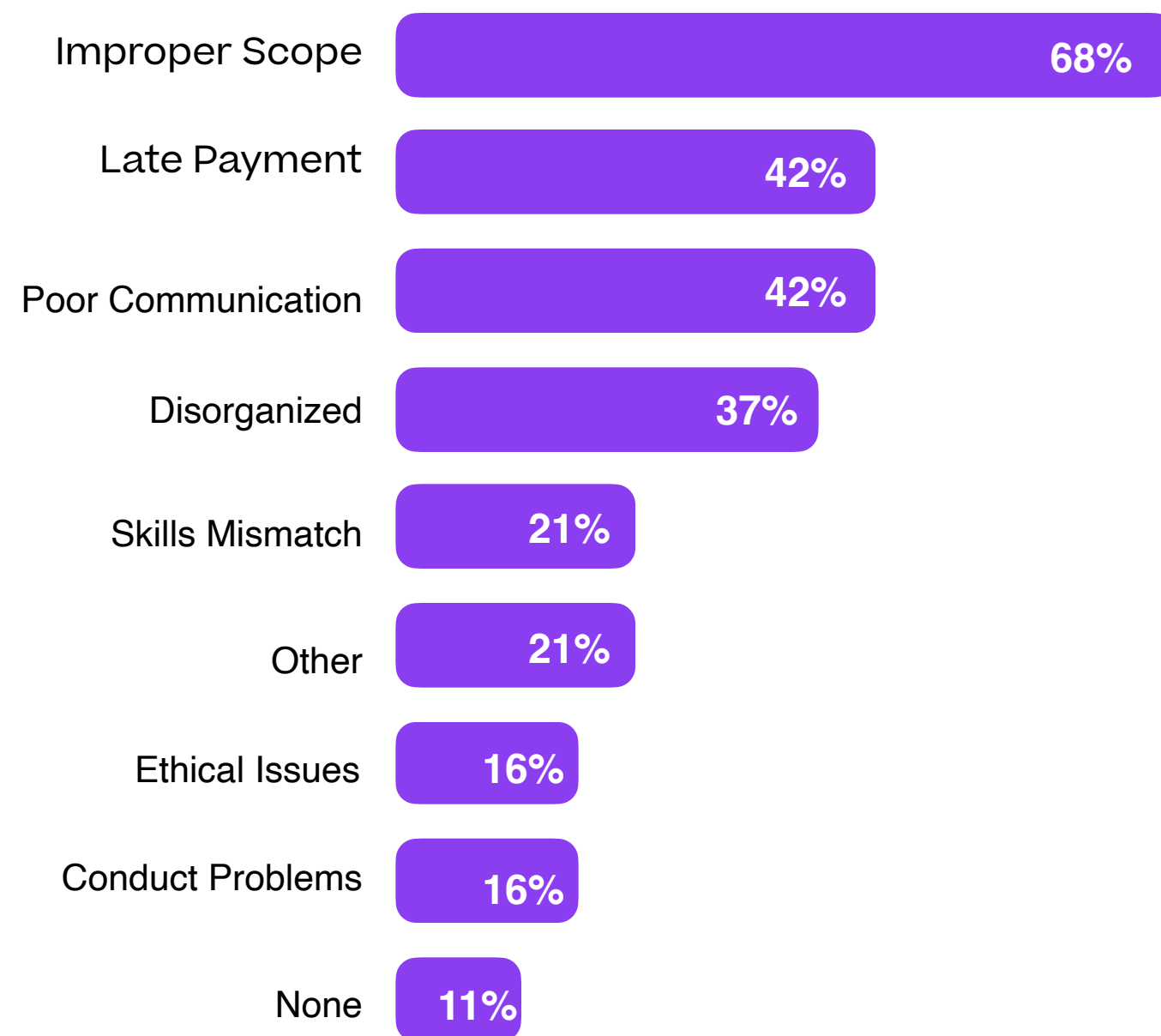
**U.S. Department of Labor**



# Professionalism Challenges

Professionalism can mean different things to different people and can change over time. After all, there was a time when not wearing a suit to an interview might have been considered unprofessional. According to our deeper dive survey, when it comes to how freelancers see professionalism today, it's about operations—especially scoping and payment—and communication.

## Professionalism Issues Encountered by Freelancers



## Getting Paid Shouldn't Be Hard

Two of the biggest issues were **improper scoping** of work—promising more or fewer hours than needed—and **late payments**. As we know from [previous research](#), income fluctuations are one of the downsides to being a freelancer, so when they can't predict their income from a project—or worse, aren't paid on time—this can be a major hardship.

## Communication Breakdown

Communication was tied as the second biggest issue. Both the need for **open, honest communications** and the need to provide **clear direction** were highlighted in the survey responses. When asked about their most unprofessional client experience, Project Manager Joseph L. Sandmeyer said, “Not being told to stop work when the client was unsure whether they would be able to pay me.”

Creative Director Curt Westlake provided this advice to clients, “Be respectful of people's time and don't ghost people if a project has been delayed or killed. It's okay to deliver disappointing news. It's business. I get it. Just don't leave people hanging.”

## Organization Matters

Another top issue was a **lack of organization**. Digital Marketer Scott Jacob suggests using a quality PM tool to help with this. This is also an area where combining standard processes and good communication can go a long way.

“The most challenging experiences have been when I've had to hound clients for payments for months.”

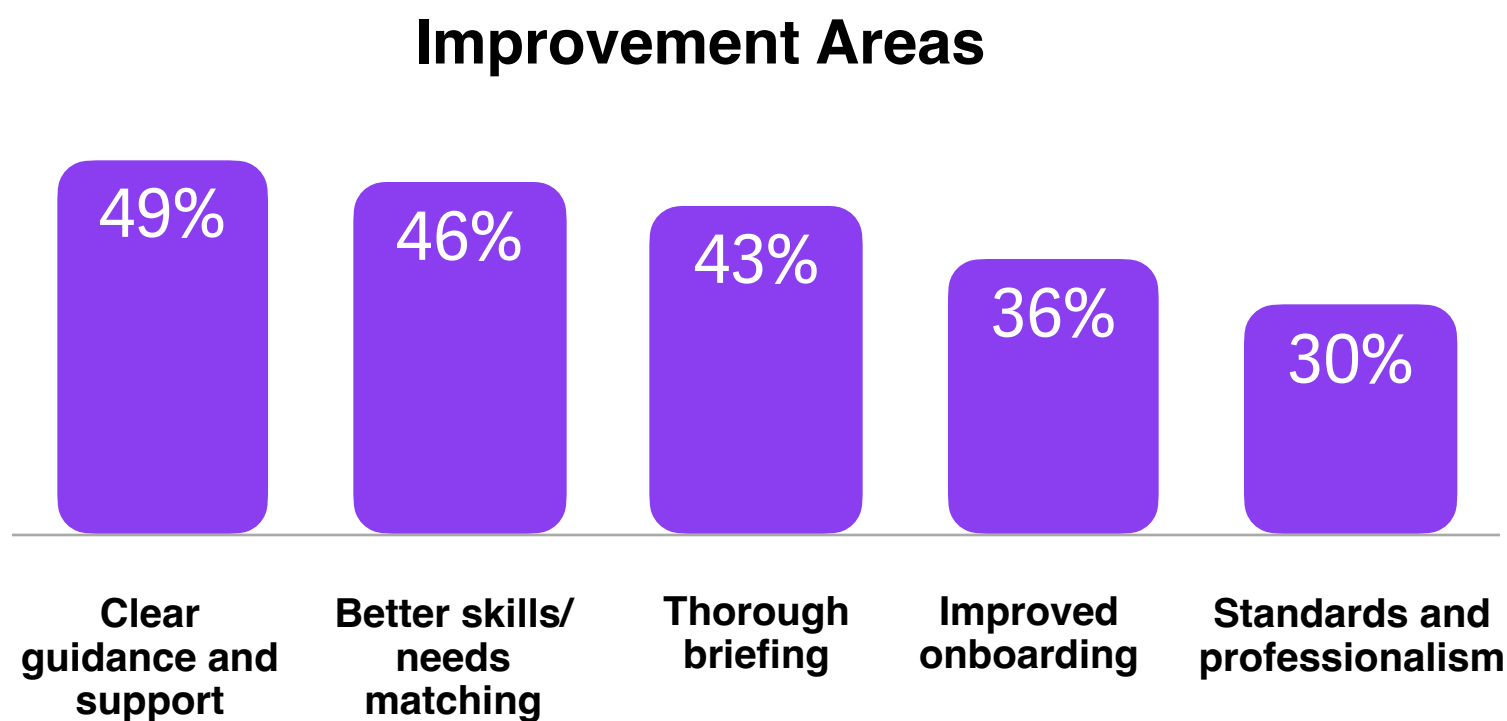
Evelyn Creekmore  
Freelance Copywriter

At the end of the day, **freelancers want to be treated fairly and given the best chance to be successful**. This is how to build a long-lasting partnership that drives positive outcomes. Creekmore offers this note, “There's also a misperception that freelancers will do anything for money. We may for a while, but we'll leave a bad situation the first chance we get, even for less money. We probably won't tell you why for fear of burning a bridge. Consider checking in weekly and proactively asking us how it's going.”



## Professionalism Challenges

Companies are definitely aware of what they could do better to improve blended teams, and they noted many of the same operational imperatives that freelancers did in the Team Up survey.



While freelancers were more likely to note professionalism as a challenge, nearly a third of companies also said they run into professionalism issues when working with their freelancers.

When we talked to companies, we heard that some of the issues were the basics—**being on time, not missing deadlines, and generally being organized and engaged.** What freelancers might not realize is that they may be coming across as unprofessional in how they present their work and respond to feedback.

Greg Kerns, SR Director, Creative Services at Mohawk Industries, noted that a preliminary presentation of work can be rough sketches, but it should be organized, and they should provide a solid rationale. He also said, “The biggest thing is how they respond to feedback. Do they acknowledge the feedback? Were the notes and direction taken or disregarded, or even ignored?”

### Communication is the Cornerstone of Collaboration

Again, we see communication as a key part of professionalism for clients too. Kerns added, “It’s important for freelancers to speak up. I appreciate when freelancers are open and direct and it’s a true collaboration. Don’t suffer in silence if there’s something that’s stopping you from doing your best work.”

### It All Starts with the Interview

At Wripple we interview all of the freelancers as part of the application process. The biggest opportunity area we see for freelancers to enhance their professionalism are basic video etiquette and engagement in interviews. It’s important to treat interview calls with the same respect you would a face-to-face interview. To start, be prepared to be on-camera and take the call in a quiet environment, not a communal space or from your car.

Kim Kurtz, a member of Wripple’s talent acquisition team, had this advice, “When interviewing, be on time. Please don’t be in a pajama top. Be dressed and ready with a proper background and look alert and engaged.”

“**In my role, I try to vet freelancers with the same process as if I’m going to hire them full-time. I’m looking out for signs like work ethic, making sure there’s a level of professionalism there in the beginning.**”

Greg Kerns  
SR Director, Creative Services  
Mohawk Industries



## RECOMMENDATIONS

# So How Do We Move from Professionalism Deficit to Surplus?

By addressing this professionalism deficit, everybody wins. There's more trust, confidence, and respect throughout all aspects of the relationship.

So how do companies and freelancers come together for a more professional partnership? Here are our recommendations:

### For Companies:

- 1 Communicate with transparency**, making sure everyone has the information they need to succeed. Have regular check-ins to be sure you're aligned on priorities and expectations.
- 2 Commit to process standards**, especially when scoping the project. Be clear on deliverables, tasks, and timing to properly set expectations and manage changes throughout the project.
- 3 Pay in a timely manner** and based on the contract. If you know your company is slow to pay, let freelancers know and emphasize sending invoices on time. When delays happen, move quickly to resolve them.
- 4 Foster an inclusive, respectful environment** where freelancers feel like they matter and are true partners in success, rather than just a vendor.

### For Freelancers:

- 1 Deliver work to the best of your abilities and by the agreed upon deadline.**
- 2 Practice good business etiquette** – be on time, be organized, be respectful.
- 3 Present and respond to feedback with thoughtful ideas and rationale.**
- 4 Manage client expectations early and often.** Speak up about any potential changes to timeline or other issues so there are no surprises.
- 5 Maintain an updated online profile that accurately represents your capabilities.**



## ABOUT WRIPPLE

# Marketing's On-Demand Talent Platform for the Modern Marketing Workforce

Wripple is a breakthrough on-demand talent platform that transforms how companies build and manage a modern marketing workforce with greater speed, flexibility, and efficiency. Powered by an advanced algorithm, Wripple's private talent marketplace matches companies with vetted freelancers, in real-time. Clients can find individual experts or cross-discipline project teams to tackle a wide range of marketing challenges.

### Wripple makes it easy for teams to get down to work faster.

- **Staffing:** Extend your team, short-term or long-term, with individual experts across more than 45 roles. Curate a team that meets your exact needs.
- **Projects:** Select from over 35 marketing projects with configurable, ready-made teams and deliverables, for a fixed price.
- **Micro Agency:** Get matched with a boutique agency when you need a collaborative team with specialized expertise and a nimble mindset.
- **Software:** Move with speed and ease. Access automated hiring tools, online talent operations, and customizable talent pools to manage all freelancer relationships in one place.

Wripple is designed to help blended teams thrive in the future of work.

### Let's Get Started.

[Request a Demo](#)



MDRG is a market research firm that takes a white-glove approach to helping organizations like Coca-Cola, T-Mobile, and Microsoft craft custom research that answers the most complex questions.

Their insights inform strategy and planning across brand, product, experience, and advertising.

MDRG is a member of Wripple's Agency Portal where independent agencies with specialized expertise can be matched with clients across a range of marketing needs.

Learn more at [mdrginc.com](https://mdrginc.com)



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