

“Do the job when it’s suitable for you”

Engaging a worldwide freelance workforce presents unique problems. Read on to find out how it can be done.



“Employee engagement [is]... about helping you enjoy and participate in the success that you’re helping build”



Employee engagement isn’t simply about paying people to do a job. It’s about helping them enjoy and participate in the success that they’re helping to build. But that’s tricky when people are all across the world – say, in the States, in the Far East, and Australia.

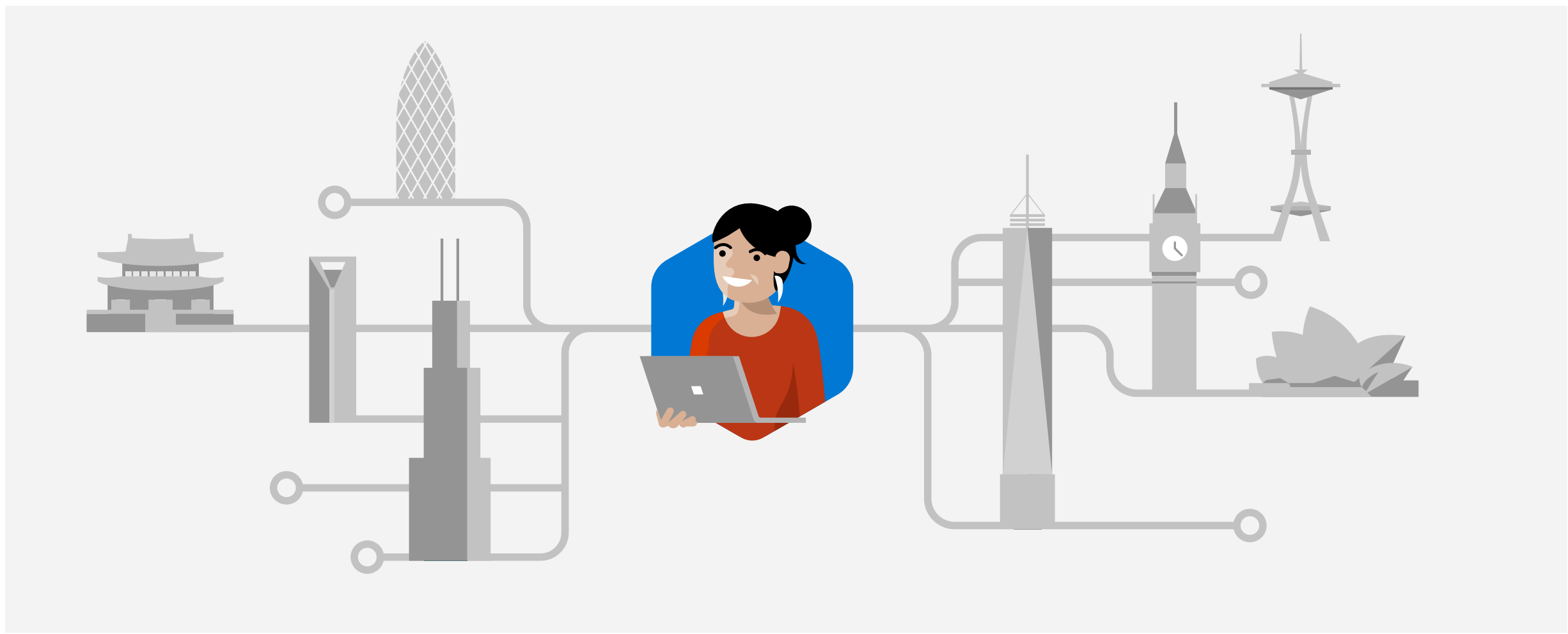
They obviously can’t physically all get together, so collaboration is a major problem anyway. But the biggest issue is time. It’s worthwhile looking at which platforms and tools can bridge that time zone gap. Traditional collaboration tools such as Teams can often be the right choice but there may be some specialist ones as well.

“They don’t feel they’re just selling their hours; they’re actually contributing to something”

Companies often find themselves competing for talent with lots of organisations that offer similar services. In those cases, selling your vision to your prospective workforce is essential. You have to make the work and pay attractive to them, but you also have to be open and transparent about where you are going as a business. That way they don’t feel they’re just selling their hours; they’re actually contributing to something. Geraint believes, for

instance, that even when your workforce mainly comprises freelancers, you should try to give them the responsibility for running a project. That also means giving them the tools, documentation, and so on that they need. If you treat freelancers and independent contractors as though they are employees, with the same rigour and level of care, they’ll feel good about working with you because you’re treating them like a member of your team.

When people understand the vision, engagement rises exponentially. It’s useful to put together documents that talk about the purpose and the vision of the business, the business plan, and its future. Then, if you share them with your core teams, you’ll find that you have to stick to that vision. They’ll turn from a batch of documents on a server into things you constantly refer to and use in meetings.



“It can be quite lonely being a freelancer”

Younger workplace members aren’t like their parents, who expected the employer to tell them what to do. They have a higher expectation and feel they should be participating in the business, other than just simply doing their job.

On the whole, better contractors and freelancers want to be involved. However many employers they have, they will prefer the ones who appreciate their skill set and encourage them to participate. It can be quite lonely being a freelancer, so a lot of them want to be part of something. Many freelancers build informal networks with the employer, and with other members of the team.



“If you deliver when it needs delivering, everything else is up to you”

There are some rules for dealing with freelancers, especially when they’re spread across different countries. For instance, many companies feel it’s important for them to be available in a traditional business time setting, particularly if they’re dealing directly with a client or a customer and that’s their work style. You and your freelancers have to be there when clients need you to be there.

However, in those circumstances, companies tend not to buy time, they buy value. A west coast copywriter might find it difficult to work between nine a.m. and five p.m. UK time. Instead, you’re better off asking them to do the job when it’s convenient for them. If they work best at 2 a.m., when their children or babies have gone to bed, let them do that as long as they deliver work when it needs delivering.

“Be clear, be transparent, tell them why”

Small businesses need to be clear about their workforce’s objectives. In other words, be transparent and tell them why. There are a number of good reasons for this but one that’s often overlooked is this. A lot of people start small businesses with good intent, but they lose sight of why they got into that business in the first place. Repeat your vision often and frequently, and show that you’re living by it. People take a lot from your actions when you run a small business. If they think you’re living what you believe, they’re much more inclined to believe what you’ve got to say.

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