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Online edition: https://complexsearch.com/reports/freelancer-gig-worker-income/

Freelancer & Gig Worker Income Statistics

ComplexSearch Research | November 2026 edition | BLS, Census Bureau, IRS and Federal Reserve data retrieved November 23, 2026

In a ComplexSearch model using tax year 2026 federal rules for a single filer in the 12% bracket, $1,000 of gross self-employment receipts leaves about $201 after tax-deductible business expenses and illustrative federal taxes for a rideshare or taxi driver, $262 for a delivery courier and $490 for a consultant, when each is given the expense ratio the IRS reports for profitable sole proprietorships in that industry in tax year 2023. The dollar figures are ComplexSearch model estimates, not observed take-home pay. Deductible expenses, including standard mileage, do not necessarily match actual cash outlays. They exclude state and local taxes and tax credits, and they are not tax advice. In every profile the model sets aside 23.1% of net profit for federal self-employment and income tax at the 12% bracket. In a second model, a freelancer whose largest client supplies half of billings, pays net-30 and pays 15 days late needs 2.25 months of take-home in reserve if that client leaves without paying its open invoices and new work takes three months to replace. With no client above 10% of billings, the same case needs 0.45 months.

The observed data describe filers and survey respondents. They do not count all freelancers. Census counted 31,985,874 nonemployer businesses in 2024. That includes 1,602,297 in taxi, limousine and ridesharing services, up from 166,801 in 2008, and 1,595,662 couriers and messengers, up from 180,924 (Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics[1]). In July 2023, 11.9 million workers, 7.4% of total employment, were independent contractors on their sole or main job (BLS[2]).

Observed data

Alternative work arrangements (BLS Contingent Worker Supplement)

The July 2023 supplement to the Current Population Survey is the latest edition. It measures the sole or main job only, so it misses side gigs held alongside a wage job. BLS has not yet published the supplement's questions on digital platform (app-based) work. Its CPS page says the release date is "to be determined" (BLS labor force characteristics[3]). Evidence: observed.

1. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2026/2024-nonemployer-statistics.html
2. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/conemp.nr0.htm
3. https://www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm

Measure, July 2023	Value	Source
Independent contractors, number	11.9 million (7.4% of 161.9 million employed)	BLS release[2], Table 12 (PDF)[4]
Contingent workers (do not expect their job to last)	6.9 million (4.3%)	BLS release[2]
On-call workers / temp agency / contract firms	2.8 million / 945,000 / 862,000	BLS release[2]
Median usual weekly earnings, full-time: independent contractors vs. traditional	$949 vs. $1,132	BLS release[2]
Health insurance from any source: independent contractors vs. traditional	74.2% vs. 84.9%	BLS release[2]
Independent contractors who prefer their arrangement	80.3% (8.3% would prefer traditional)	BLS release[2]
Independent contractors working full time / age 55+	70.7% / 36%	BLS release[2]

Across seven editions, the independent contractor share of employment was 6.7% (Feb. 1995), 6.7% (1997), 6.3% (1999), 6.4% (2001), 7.4% (2005), 6.9% (May 2017) and 7.4% (July 2023) (BLS[5]). The survey month changed from February to May to July, and no supplement was run between 2005 and 2017.

Self-employment (BLS Current Population Survey)

Annual averages, thousands of people, from BLS flat files (BLS LN database[6]). The incorporated self-employed are counted as wage and salary workers in headline BLS tables. Evidence: observed; shares derived.

Year	Unincorporated self-employed	Incorporated self-employed	Combined share of employed
2000	10,214	4,459	10.7%
2019	9,539	6,183	10.0%
2024	9,920	6,822	10.4%
2025	9,836	6,937	10.3%

The 2025 annual averages cover 11 months. BLS did not collect October 2025 data during the federal government shutdown (BLS[7]). In October 2026, seasonally adjusted unincorporated self-employment was 8.743 million in nonagricultural industries and 668,000 in agriculture (BLS Employment Situation, Table A-8[8]).

4. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/conemp.pdf
5. https://www.bls.gov/blog/2024/contingent-jobs-and-alternative-work-arrangements-what-you-need-to-know.htm
6. https://download.bls.gov/pub/time.series/ln/ln.data.1.AllData
7. https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat15.htm
8. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t08.htm

Nonemployer businesses (Census Bureau)

Nonemployer Statistics count businesses with no paid employees and annual receipts of $1,000 or more ($1 or more in construction). The counts come from IRS business tax records, mostly Schedule C, and Census adds noise to receipts to protect confidentiality (Census Bureau[1]). Each record is a business, not a person, and a filer is counted whether the work is full-time or a small side activity. Industry codes follow NAICS 2007 (2008-2011), 2012 (2012-2016), 2017 (2017-2021) and 2022 (2022-2024). Files: Census nonemployer datasets[9]. Evidence: observed; averages derived.

Industry	2008	2019	2024	2024 average receipts
All nonemployers	21,351,320	27,104,006	31,985,874	$58,194
Taxi, limousine and ridesharing (NAICS 4853)	166,801	1,330,311	1,602,297	$29,924
Couriers and messengers (NAICS 492)	180,924	496,796	1,595,662	$14,874
Management, scientific and technical consulting (NAICS 5416)	640,829	920,324	1,187,781	$60,339
Independent artists, writers and performers (NAICS 7115)	696,472	969,978	1,115,783	$32,015

In 2024, 60.4% of all nonemployer businesses reported receipts under $25,000. The share was 62.8% for taxi and ridesharing and 83.3% for couriers (Census 2024 file[10]). Courier filers rose from 496,796 in 2019 to 967,206 in 2020. Rideshare filers fell from 1,330,311 to 1,133,877 over the same years.

Schedule C profit per $1,000 of receipts (IRS Statistics of Income)

These figures come from tax year 2023 nonfarm sole proprietorship returns (IRS SOI Table 1[11]; IRS SOI page[12]). Across all industries, 31.1 million returns reported $2.06 trillion of business receipts, and 68.8% reported a net profit. Net income is before income and self-employment tax. Deductions include vehicle expenses, often at the standard mileage rate, so they are tax deductions, not cash costs. Evidence: derived.

Industry (TY2023)	Net income per $1,000, profitable returns	Net income less deficit per $1,000, all returns
All nonfarm sole proprietorships	$314	$183

9. https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/nonemployer-statistics/datasets/2024/historical-datasets/
10. https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/nonemployer-statistics/datasets/2024/historical-datasets/nonemp24us.zip
11. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/23sp01br.xls
12. https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-nonfarm-sole-proprietorship-statistics

Industry (TY2023)	Net income per $1,000, profitable returns	Net income less deficit per $1,000, all returns
Management, scientific and technical consulting	$637	$502
Couriers and messengers	$341	$90
Taxi, limousine and ridesharing	$261	$63
Construction	$204	$148

Survey measures of gig work and uneven income (Federal Reserve)

- In the Fed's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), fielded in October 2024, 20% of adults did gig activities in the prior month. Thirteen percent sold items, 9% did short-term tasks and 4% did short-term tasks arranged through an app or website. Of those doing gig activities, 70% spent under five hours a week on them and 21% said gigs were their main job (Federal Reserve SHED 2024[13]).
- In the same survey, 41% of adults who did gig activities said their income varied at least occasionally from month to month, compared with 26% of those who did not. Fifty percent of adults doing any gig activity had savings to cover three months of expenses, compared with 42% of those doing platform tasks and 56% of those doing none (SHED 2024[13]). The short-term and platform task questions went to a randomized half of respondents.
- The 2025 SHED (fielded October 2025, published May 2026) has no gig-activity section. It reports that 58% of self-employed adults had income that varied month to month and 22% struggled to pay bills in the prior 12 months because of it. Among people working for someone else, the shares were 28% and 10% (Federal Reserve SHED 2025[14]).
- In the Federal Reserve Banks' Small Business Credit Survey of nonemployer firms (fielded September to November 2025), 43% of nonemployer firms reported uneven cash flow, including trouble collecting receivables, in the prior 12 months (N=4,980). The share was 47% for firms that work as independent contractors (N=2,012) and 40% for those that do not. Among firms with financial challenges, 64% used personal funds and 19% made a late payment or did not pay (N=4,617) (SBCS appendix[15]; chartbook[16]). The SBCS is a convenience sample weighted to Census counts, so its results should not be read as estimates for all freelancers.

ComplexSearch model: take-home per $1,000 (modeled)

The model follows $1,000 of gross receipts through business expenses, self-employment tax and federal income tax. It uses tax year 2026 rules for a single filer and treats the $1,000 as marginal income on top of earnings that already use the standard deduction. Rules: SE tax rate 15.3%

13. https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2024-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202505.pdf
14. https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2025-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202605.pdf
15. https://www.fedsmallbusiness.org/-/media/project/clevelandfedtenant/fsbsite/reports/2026/2026-nonemployer-firms/sbcs-nonemployer-firms-appendix-2025.xlsx
16. https://www.fedsmallbusiness.org/-/media/project/clevelandfedtenant/fsbsite/reports/2026/2026-nonemployer-firms/2026-chartbook-on-nonemployer-firms.pdf

(IRS[17]) on 92.35% of net profit, with half of SE tax deductible (2026 Schedule SE[18]). The qualified business income (QBI) deduction of up to 20% is included (IRS[19]), and 2026 brackets are 10% to $12,400, 12% to $50,400 and 22% to $105,700 of taxable income (IRS TY2026 adjustments[20]). These simplifications are listed in the research materials. They are not tax advice.

Profile	Expense ratio (basis)	Expenses	SE tax	Income tax (12%)	Take-home
Low-overhead freelancer	10% (assumption)	$100	$127	$80	$693
Consultant	36.3% (IRS consulting, profitable returns)	$363	$90	$57	$490
Delivery courier	65.9% (IRS couriers, profitable returns)	$659	$48	$30	$262
Rideshare or taxi driver	73.9% (IRS taxi/ridesharing, profitable returns)	$739	$37	$23	$201

Sensitivity: take-home per $1,000 by expense ratio and bracket (modeled)

With the QBI deduction. The 0% bracket column shows SE tax only.

Expense ratio	0%	10%	12%	22%	24%	32%
0%	$859	$784	$769	$695	$680	$621
10%	$773	$706	$693	$626	$612	$559
25%	$644	$588	$577	$521	$510	$466
36.3%	$547	$500	$490	$443	$433	$395
50%	$429	$392	$385	$348	$340	$310
65.9%	$293	$267	$262	$237	$232	$212
73.9%	$224	$205	$201	$181	$178	$162

Without the QBI deduction, take-home at the 12% bracket falls to $672 (10% expenses), $476 (consultant), $255 (courier) and $195 (rideshare). At the 22% bracket, the federal set-aside rises from 23.1% to 30.5% of net profit with QBI. The full grid is in the research materials.

17. https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/self-employment-tax-social-security-and-medicare-taxes
18. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1040sse.pdf
19. https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/qualified-business-income-deduction
20. https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-releases-tax-inflation-adjustments-for-tax-year-2026-including-amendments-from-the-one-big-beautiful-bill

ComplexSearch model: payment delay and client concentration (modeled)

The model uses months of normal take-home as its unit and assumes spending equals take-home, so any missing income has to come from savings. Payment delay D is the invoice terms plus days paid late, in months. The base case is net-30 paid 15 days late, so D = 1.5. The largest client's share of billings is s, with a base of 50%. Replacing that client's work takes R months, with a base of 3. To express billings as take-home, this model assumes the client accounts for the same share of take-home as of billings. It assumes steady monthly billing and the same payment lag for replacement work.

Case	Formula	Base-case buffer
New freelancer or all-new client list: no cash until the first invoices are paid	D	1.5 months
Largest client leaves, pays open invoices, replacement takes R months	s × R	1.5 months
Largest client leaves without paying open invoices	s × (R + D)	2.25 months
Largest client stays but starts paying 30 days later	s × 1 month (one time)	0.5 months

Sensitivity: buffer by client share and invoice terms (modeled)

Case: largest client leaves without paying, replacement takes 3 months, invoices paid 15 days after the due date. Values are months of take-home.

Largest client share	Due on receipt	Net-15	Net-30	Net-45	Net-60	Net-90
10%	0.35	0.40	0.45	0.50	0.55	0.65
25%	0.88	1.00	1.12	1.25	1.38	1.62
50%	1.75	2.00	2.25	2.50	2.75	3.25
75%	2.62	3.00	3.38	3.75	4.12	4.88
100%	3.50	4.00	4.50	5.00	5.50	6.50

At a 50% client share and net-30, a 1-month replacement period gives 1.25 months, 3 months gives 2.25 and 6 months gives 3.75. the research materials also varies lateness (0, 15 and 30 days) and covers the case where the client pays its open invoices.

Sensitivity: month-to-month volatility (modeled)

The model simulates 200,000 twelve-month paths in which each month's take-home is independently drawn as normal with mean 1 and a given coefficient of variation (CV), floored at

zero. The buffer is the largest cumulative shortfall over the year in months of spending, and the table shows the 95th percentile (seed 18).

Income CV	Spending = average take-home	Spending 5% below	Spending 10% below
10%	0.63	0.25	0.10
20%	1.26	0.83	0.52
30%	1.88	1.47	1.11
40%	2.49	2.09	1.72
50%	3.00	2.65	2.30

Methodology

- the research materials reads the saved public files in raw/ and writes every research dataset in data/. Run `python3 the research materials --download` to refresh the BLS flat files, the Census nonemployer files (2008-2024), IRS SOI Table 1, IRS tax pages, both SHED reports and the SBCS appendix. the research materials draws the four figures from data/.
- Values from www.bls.gov[21] and ssa.gov pages were read with a page reader because those sites refused scripted downloads. They are transcribed in the research materials and hard-coded in the research materials with their URLs. These are the Contingent Worker Supplement figures, the October 2026 Table A-8 values and the Social Security wage base. Time series came from download.bls.gov, which allowed scripted access.
- SHED values are checked in the research materials against the text of the saved PDFs before they are written. SBCS values are read directly from the Fed's appendix workbook.
- IRS expense ratios equal 1 minus net income divided by business receipts for returns with net income. Using profitable returns avoids letting losses on unprofitable returns push the ratio above 100%. All-return figures appear in the CSV.
- Every research dataset row carries source_url, retrieved (2026-11-23) and an evidence label: observed, derived or modeled.

Limitations

- No source counts "freelancers" directly. The BLS supplement covers the sole or main job, nonemployer counts are businesses filing taxes, SHED gig questions cover any activity in the prior month, and the SBCS is a convenience sample. These figures do not add up to one total and should not be generalized to all freelancers.
- BLS has not published digital platform estimates from the 2023 supplement, and the 2025 SHED dropped its gig questions, so the latest survey measure of gig activity is from October 2024.

21. http://www.bls.gov

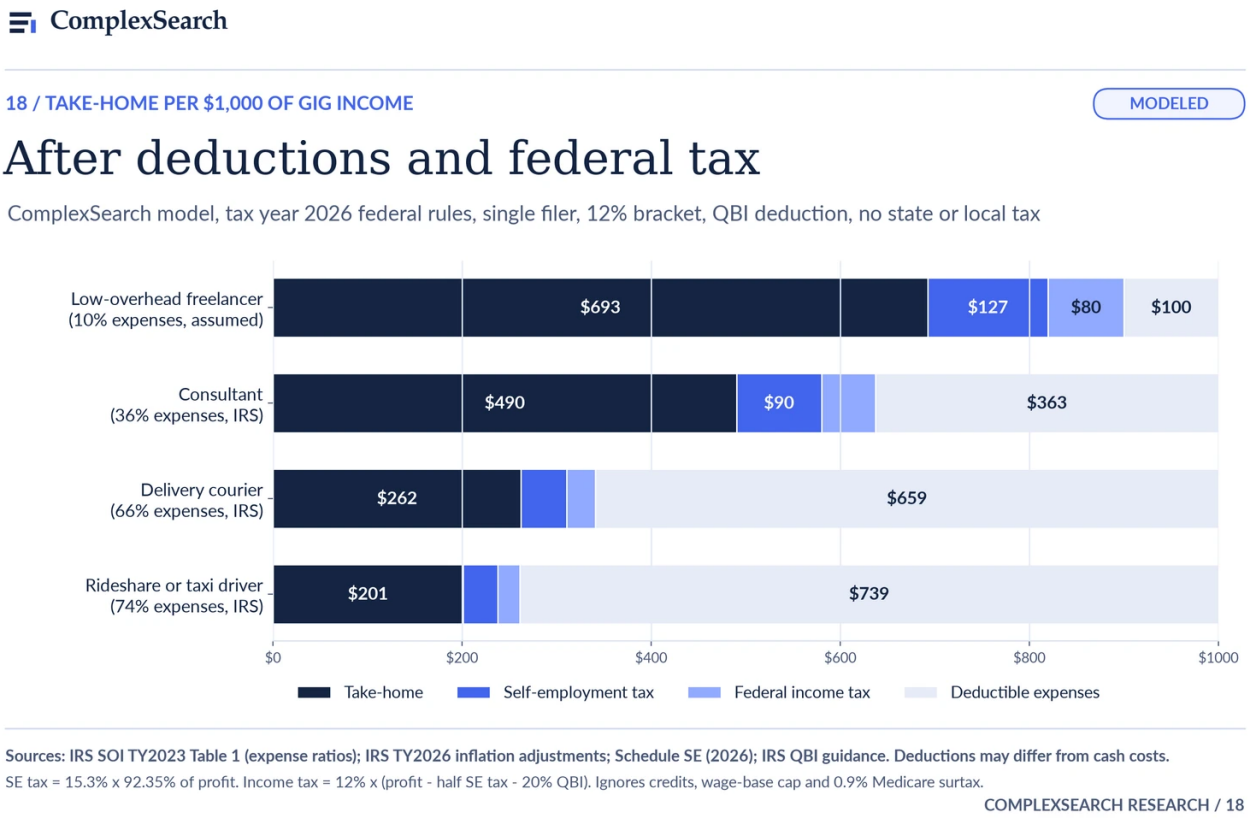
- Nonemployer receipts include noise infusion. NAICS revisions in 2012, 2017 and 2022 affect industry comparisons, including the 2019-2020 swing between ridesharing and couriers, which may partly reflect how filers classified themselves.
- IRS expense ratios are averages for tax deductions, including standard mileage, not cash costs. One driver's costs can differ widely. IRS industry rows are approximate NAICS groupings.
- The tax model ignores state and local income tax, credits (including the earned income tax credit), the Social Security wage base, the 0.9% Additional Medicare Tax, QBI limits and phase-ins, the 2026 minimum QBI deduction, health insurance and retirement deductions, and estimated-tax penalty rules. It assumes all $1,000 falls in one bracket and that annual SE earnings are at least $400. Results are illustrations, not tax advice.
- No public IRS SOI tabulation of Form 1099-K amounts was used. The 2026 1099-K reporting threshold for payment apps and marketplaces (over $20,000 and more than 200 transactions) is listed in the research materials (IRS[22]).
- The buffer models use assumed inputs, not observed payment behavior. They assume steady billing, no seasonality, spending at break-even and independent monthly shocks in the volatility model.

How to cite

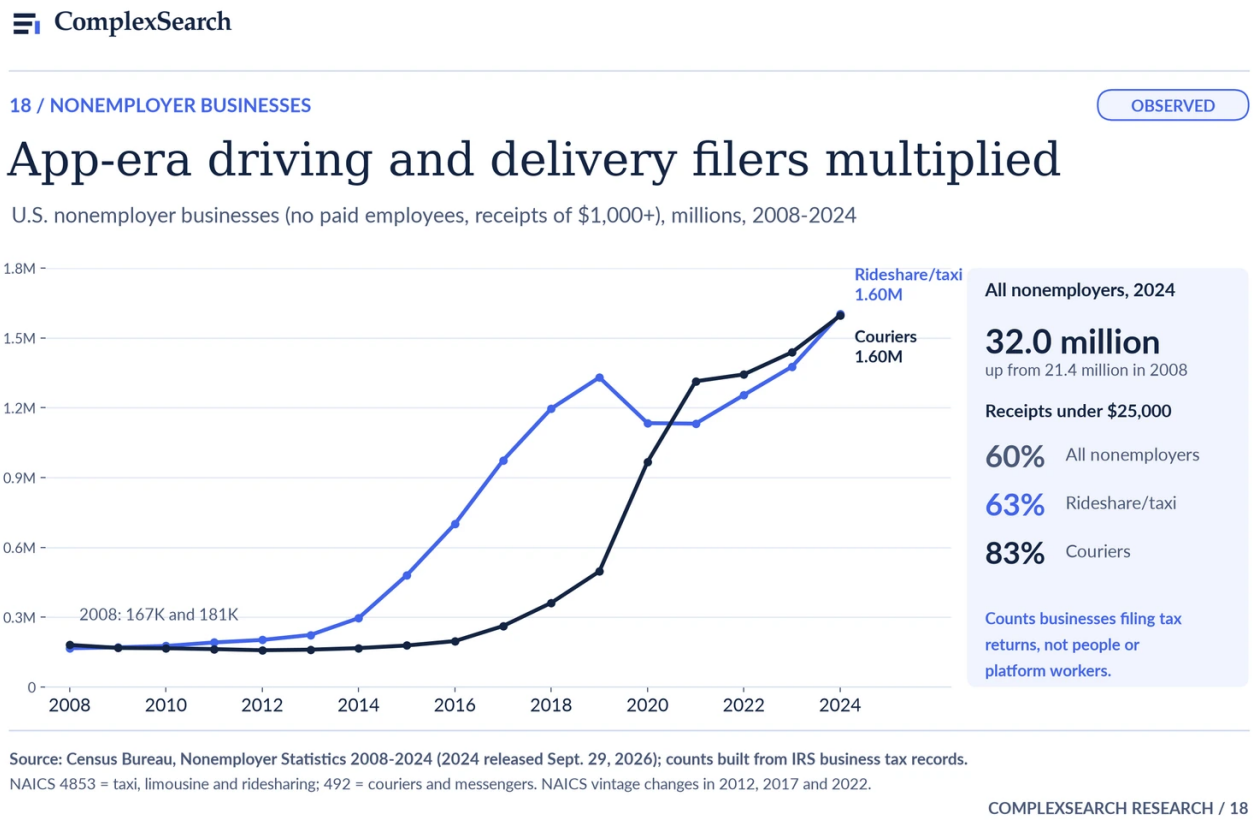
ComplexSearch Research. "Freelancer & Gig Worker Income Statistics." November 2026 edition. Data from BLS, Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics (through 2024), IRS Statistics of Income (tax year 2023) and the Federal Reserve, retrieved Nov. 23, 2026. When quoting a take-home or buffer figure, say that it is a ComplexSearch model estimate and name the profile or scenario.

22. https://www.irs.gov/businesses/understanding-your-form-1099-k

Report charts



Modeled amount left from $1,000 of receiptsTax deductions can differ from cash costs. These illustrations use a single filer, a 12% marginal bracket and an assumed QBI deduction, and exclude state and local taxes.Source: ·



Nonemployer firms in transportation and deliveryCensus counts businesses, not individual freelancers or workers doing app-based gigs.Source: U.S. Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics ·

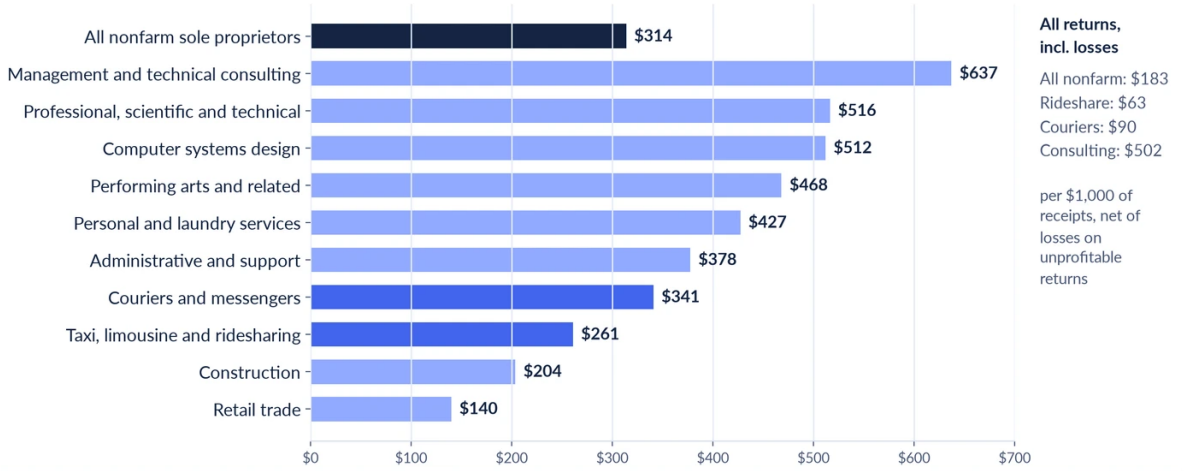
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18 / WHAT GROSS RECEIPTS LEAVE AS PROFIT

DERIVED

Taxi and rideshare: $261 in pre-tax profit

Schedule C net income per $1,000 of business receipts, profitable nonfarm sole proprietorships, tax year 2023



Source: IRS Statistics of Income, Nonfarm Sole Proprietorship Statistics, Table 1, tax year 2023 (23sp01br.xls). ComplexSearch calculation.

Profit is before income and self-employment tax. Deductions include vehicle costs (often the standard mileage rate) and cost of goods sold.

COMPLEXSEARCH RESEARCH / 18

Reported pre-tax net income by industryThe main bars describe profitable nonfarm sole proprietorships. Their Schedule C deductions are not necessarily cash expenses.Source: IRS Statistics of Income, tax year 2023 ·

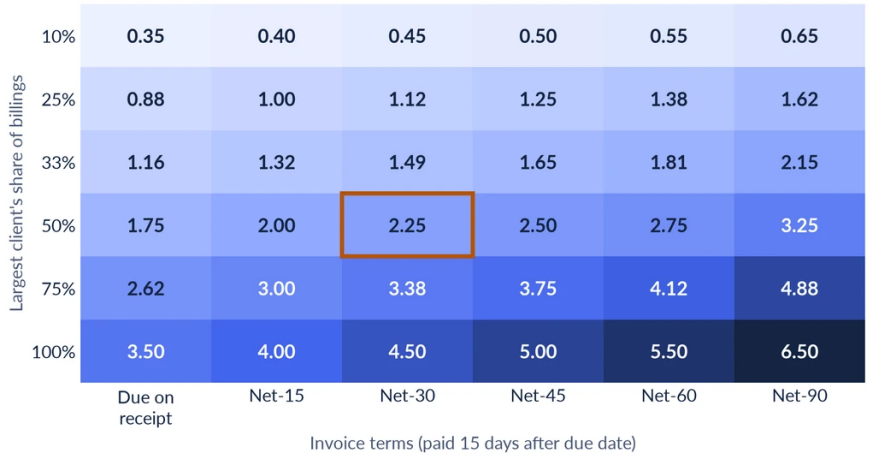
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18 / PAYMENT DELAY AND CLIENT CONCENTRATION

MODELED

Client concentration drives the cash buffer

Months of take-home needed if the largest client leaves without paying open invoices and replacement work takes 3 months



Base case (outlined)
50% client, net-30, 15 days late

2.25 months

Same client leaves but pays
1.5 months

Brand-new client list, net-30
1.5 months before first payment

Small-business survey context: 43% of nonemployer firms reported uneven cash flow in 2025 (Fed SBCS, convenience sample, N=4,980).

Source: ComplexSearch scenario model (see assumptions.md). Inputs are assumptions, not survey estimates of how freelancers are paid.
Buffer = client share x (3 replacement months + payment terms + 15 days late). Assumes steady monthly billing and spending at break-even.

COMPLEXSEARCH RESEARCH / 18

How invoice timing and client concentration change the bufferThis is a conditional cash-flow stress test, not general advice on how much to save.Source: ·