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Find legitimate work-from-home opportunities online

By Kim Komando

Carol is the proud new mommy of a baby boy. She isn't ready to return to her customer service job, but she needs the income.

Dave is a project manager for an outsourcing company. His company is planning layoffs. He suspects he will soon be unemployed.

I hear stories like these every day. Many people are ready to take control of their careers and work independently.

TECH TIPS:

No matter your education or experience, the Internet can help. There are plenty of scams, but you'll find many legitimate work-from-home opportunities. I've rounded up some of the best. Find links to sites mentioned at www.komando.com/news.

Freelancing

A wide variety of sites list freelancing opportunities. Freelancing isn't limited to writers and designers. You'll find opportunities for administrative assistants, accountants, computer programmers and other professions.

Major job boards and small, niche sites post freelance opportunities. I recommend Elance, Guru and FreelanceSwitch.

You can post a profile and portfolio. Then, browse projects and submit proposals. You'll get a limited number of free bids. You get more bids with paid memberships, which start at \$10 monthly.

Customer service and sales

Experienced customer service and phone sales reps can also work virtually. You'll need a quiet environment, a computer, high-speed Internet and a landline. You may be required to pay \$10 to \$50 for a background check.

LiveOps, Alpine Access, West at Home and Working Solutions list opportunities. Pay varies, but

expect to earn \$6 to \$30 hourly. You set your hours.

Virtual concierge

Are you resourceful? Do you have high-end customer service experience? Then you could be a virtual concierge.

Virtual concierges book reservations and find answers to questions. Or, you may get wacky requests. You may need to find a dress worn in a movie or hire animals for a child's party.

Pay for a virtual concierge with VIPdesk starts at \$14 hourly. You need a home office, a dedicated landline and high-speed Internet.

Direct sales

If you enjoy selling, consider direct sales. You're not limited to home decor and kitchen products. Many companies have programs; you're sure to find products that match your interests.

Visit the Direct Selling Association's site for advice and information. There's also a directory of direct selling companies. You can visit a company's site to learn about its program.

You may be required to buy products to sell. Don't invest more than you can afford to lose. And make sure the company buys back unsold stock. Profits vary, based on the product.

Shopping and surveys

You've probably heard about mystery shopping and survey taking. These opportunities won't keep food on the table, but they can supplement your income.

Mystery shoppers pose as customers and review stores. You earn \$5 to \$100 per review. The Mystery Shopping Providers Association offers an extensive database of opportunities.

Marketing companies will pay you to answer questions or join focus groups. You may earn a dollar or two per survey. In rare cases, you'll earn a few hundred dollars. Try SurveySavvy, SurveySpot and American Consumer Opinion.

Telecommuting

You don't have to be your own boss to work from home! You just need to find telecommuting opportunities.

Regular job boards often list telecommuting work. Use "telecommuting" as a keyword. Or, visit Telework Recruiting or FlexJobs. Membership starts at \$15 monthly.

The National Telecommuting Institute helps individuals with disabilities find telecommuting opportunities. It offers listings and advice.

A warning

Work-from-home scams abound online. Research any opportunity diligently. Be especially wary of get-rich-quick offers.

Check companies at the Better Business Bureau and on [Google](#). Enter the company name along with "scam." This can alert you to others' bad experiences.

Except as noted above, don't buy kits or pay for opportunities.

Kim Komando hosts the nation's largest talk radio show about computers and the Internet. To get the podcast or find the station nearest you, visit www.komando.com/listen. To subscribe to Kim's free e-mail newsletters, sign up at www.komando.com/newsletters. Contact her at gnstech@gannett.com.