



# Earning Money Online: What's Your Time Worth?

It's hard to ignore the appeal of making real money online—after all, we live in a world where bloggers land book and movie deals, where top YouTubers are multimillionaires and where celebrities collect thousands of dollars in exchange for a single sponsored tweet.

While some of us dream of a wildly successful Internet career, the rest of us are happy to settle for online earnings that are a little more modest. Thousands of money-making opportunities are just a web search away. Whether you're selling your old stuff, scoping out freelance opportunities or running your own digital storefront, there are tools and resources to help you along every step of the way.

In recent years, a new approach to making a quick buck online has been gaining traction: online rewards programs where you can earn money by performing a variety of online activities. Some sites are based on consumer activities (e.g., online shopping, submitting product reviews, watching video promotions), while others are geared towards data-related activities (taking surveys, image tagging, transcribing information). Though the sites vary in nature, they share some commonalities: they are built around “microtasks”—online activities that do not require much time or experience to complete.

Microtask and shopping rewards websites are appealing because of their perceived easiness. Most of their paid activities can be completed in mere minutes and almost anyone can do it—it doesn't get much better than that, right? Other ways of making money online suddenly seem slow and labor-intensive by comparison. Why spend time and energy getting a freelance gig when you can sit around filling out surveys instead?

Well, before you go signing up for every free trial and installing every search bar plug-in, consider that the selling points (Easy! Fast! No experience necessary!) on these websites also serve as red flags that this type of money-making may not be worth your while. The following questions can help you weed out the underpaid clickbait from the better-paid gigs:

## **1) What's the “hourly wage”?**

This might seem like an obvious first step, but comparing the real hours you're spending to the real money you're earning is an incredibly helpful tool in determining whether or not an online pursuit is worth your time. Many rewards sites use point systems in which points need to be accumulated before they can be redeemed. Point systems are really great at obscuring how much you're actually earning, so take the time to figure out the approximate cash value of a single point. If it takes 500 points to redeem a \$5 gift card, for example, a point is worth roughly \$0.01. Completing a survey for 25 points sounds decent, but (following this example) if the survey takes 10 minutes to complete, the reality is that you're working at a rate of \$1.50 per hour, which sounds a lot less decent.

## **2) How much talent or expertise does the gig require?**

When considering joining a microtask or shopping rewards website, evaluate the sort of activities you'd be engaging in. Do any conditions or restrictions apply, or can anyone with an Internet connection do the task? As a rule of thumb, online gigs with the fewest barriers have the most people competing for them and therefore tend to pay less. A little know-how can go a long way, so look for opportunities to complete slightly higher-paying activities: for example, submitting a video product review will likely earn you more credits than watching a 30-second ad.

## **3) What are you willing to compromise?**

Sometimes the ease and convenience of microtask and rewards sites comes at the price of your personal data and online identity. How much is your personal information worth to you? Would you be okay with a fuller inbox (and mailbox!) as a result of filling out surveys and promotional offers? Are you comfortable linking your social media accounts to the product reviews you submit? Are you willing to sell out your 'likes' and 'faves'? Taking stock of your web presence and browsing habits can help you figure out how much you're willing to compromise for some extra spending cash.

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Microtask and shopping rewards sites, although increasingly popular, generally aren't practical options for any substantial level of online income. That doesn't mean they have to be avoided completely—if you're happy clicking around and then redeeming a gift card every couple of months, then all power to you! As with all sources of online income, it's important to have realistic expectations and to treat your time as a valuable resource. If you do consider trying out any of these services, be very careful with sharing your personal information online even with websites that seem popular and trustworthy.