

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 21 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Do you have a hard time investing in yourself and your business? Today, Julia Taylor and I talk about that and more when we discuss how she became a web developer. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Julia, welcome to the show.

Julia: Hi, thanks so much for having me.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Julia: So when I was five, I wanted to do exactly what my mom was doing. She was a flight attendant for Delta Airlines and I loved the idea of being able to travel and fly around in airplanes just like she did.

Kathryn: And how had that changed by the time you left high school?

Julia: She convinced me not to do it because it, for a number of reasons, but mostly because it doesn't pay all that well and she wanted me to go to college and kind of experience other things. And I think most parents probably say, oh no, don't do what I did, go and do something else. So, I didn't really know what I want it to do when I left high school, but that idea of being a flight attendant kind of passed, because she, she stressed that she didn't want me to do the same thing. She wanted me to experience other things.

Kathryn: And did you pursue college?

Julia: I did, yes. I went to college and I had no idea what I wanted to do and I bounced around to a number of different majors, when I was in college.

Kathryn: What did you end up graduating in?

Julia: So I graduated with a major in international relations and a minor in Russian and I ended up living in Russia, um, a year, the following year after I graduated.

Kathryn: Is there anything from those studies that you use now?

Julia: Let's see. Probably the kind of analytical thinking. I did a lot of writing when I was in college and when I got my masters and then in my previous career before I started doing what I'm doing now. And so I don't do that as much, but definitely the analytical thinking and problem solving, those are probably the biggest skills that I learned, um, from, from my studies in college.

Kathryn: And how did you get into being location independent?

Julia: Let's see. So it, it really started, almost about 10 years ago. I used to work for the US intelligence community and I was deployed overseas and I ended up meeting a guy and he was British. And the, the only option really was to, um, if, if we wanted to not have long distance relationship was to move to the UK. So I quit my job with the intelligence community and moved to the UK to get my masters and I kind of found myself, uh, he was military, so I was a military wife and we ended up moving every two years and I was bouncing around between one, nine to five to another.

Julia: And it was, it was a real kick in the pants because I had this great, progressing career with the, the US government and all of a sudden I was in these nine to fives and that's when I kind of thought, well, hang on. If I'm going to, if I have to move every two years, I'm going to take my own career into my own hands. And that's when I decided to, to try and learn a skill that I could, I could do anywhere because the only way that my career could, could progress is if my career was location independent because we as a family, were location dependent on his, um, his job and where the military sent us. So it was probably, um, probably about five years ago when I, I learned a skill and, and was able to kind of become location independent.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people who are just being polite?

Julia: I tell people I build websites. That's probably the easiest, easiest way to explain what I do. There's, there's a lot more kind of tech stuff that goes into it. And I feel like if I ever mention code, people kind of go, "Ooh, I don't know how to do that, or that's too complicated." Or "Oh, only people do that, that sit in their basements in the middle of the night," that, that sort of thing. So I build websites that's something that most anyone can relate to cause they've seen websites.

Kathryn: And how do you describe it when you're talking to someone who really wants to know?

Julia: I, I normally get really excited because if anyone wants to know more, uh, it means they're intrigued by what it is I do and how I'm able to be location independent with this career of my own. So I, I tell them about, um, how I taught myself how to code and then, dove into learning wordpress development, which is a content management system because I knew 30% of the world's websites use that software. So that means there's a lot of clients out there and you can, you can make money and turn it into an online business and kind of tell them about some of the things, like I'll mention malware because a lot of people know malware and I know how to remove malware from websites. And in that if people kind of know about that, they're like, oh, that sounds really cool. So depending on who's asking and how much experience they have, I can, I can normally kind of move the conversation. So it's something that they understand and can get excited about it as well.

Kathryn: You talked a little bit about this when you were talking about how you became location independent, but what made you choose web development when you were looking at different options?

Julia: Sure. I was probably the number one question I get asked all the time. I, it was completely random and out of the blue I was sat in my cubicle in a nine to five job and my boss walks up to me and he says to me, I want our website to do x, figure it out. And he just walks out and he, you know, he was one of the bosses where you, you kind of were given direction and you had to figure out how to do it or you were gone and I remember sat there thinking, I've absolutely no idea what he's just asked me to do much less how to do it. And my colleague who was sat to my right, he saw my paranoid face and he says, "don't worry, we'll, we'll figure it out together." And he had a bit of, bit of background in websites and, and [inaudible] system.

Julia: So we googled it and I'm, I, I googled exactly what my boss had just asked me to do and after probably about 10 minutes of kind of trying different Google searches, I came across this line of code. I had no idea what it meant. I'd never seen anything like it before. And, and I copied it and I pasted it into the back end of this website and hit save and it worked. And from then on out, I was completely hooked. I, it was so magical to me to see this is kind of foreign language almost, just copied and pasted somewhere and then all of a sudden it did the thing that you wanted it to do. There's so much more that you can do with just a bit of code and telling a computer to do what you want it to do. So I, from then on I just decided to start learning on my own. And that was, that was when I was like, okay, this, this could be a, um, a real thing. I could turn this passion into a job.

Kathryn: How did you find your first clients?

Julia: Clients are the hardest part of this whole, uh, this whole thing and it, it tripped me up many, many times. Um, I know that's what a lot of people ask me about. Um, yeah it's one thing to learn a skill but then to learn how to find clients as a whole nother skill in and of itself by my first client was actually, um, a non profit. Um, it's actually what I recommend to other people to do is if they're just getting started to, to work with a nonprofit and build something either for a very low price or for free for referrals and testimonials and to build your portfolio. And my first paid client was actually a friend, um, who just left the military and was starting up his own business. So that, those were the first couple that I found. Um, those were easy because I was, I wasn't charging very much and I knew them. Finding clients who I didn't know, and, and kind of where I went from there was, it was really quite difficult.

Kathryn: And how do you find clients now?

Julia: So now I'm, I'm in a very fortunate position that um, I'm 100% referral based, but that took years to take it to that point. So when I, after I had those first couple, it was, I kind of hit this wall where I couldn't, I couldn't find anymore. I would send cold emails out to local businesses. I would go and see local businesses. I would, I tried everything I knew how to do. And the one thing that I, I didn't know at the time I didn't know that you could leverage a social media. And I was very cheap when I first started learning. I didn't pay for any courses. I didn't pay for any memberships. I learned, I taught myself everything. I learned everything for free. And I came across this online community of other freelancers and service providers and there was a monthly to join. And I remember thinking one of the things they said is, we'll, we'll help you find clients or

show you the techniques in order to do it. I thought, well, I need to do something because nothing's working.

Julia: And I joined this community and it was literally the best decision I ever made because it skyrocketed my business because I was opened up to all the strategies and the techniques to, to leverage social media and Facebook groups to find really good solid paying clients, um, and, and to build a, build a business from there. So that's how I, um, did, did it between that and I learned some other marketing skills that I could offer to local businesses for a very small amount to then say, oh, by the way, I also build websites and then that would lead into the higher priced service that I was offering. So 100% social media, specifically Facebook groups that I used to, to find clients. And I still to this day have a number of clients that I still work with that I found that exact way.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Julia: It was, um, clients again, I'll go back to this again and again. The first couple, as I said, we're pretty easy to find, um, because they were family and friends. And then after that, everything just seemed to dry up and I can remember so many times wanting to not try anymore and to kind of just go back to a plain old nine to five because I just couldn't find any clients. And it was, it was really frustrating and it took a long time. But as I said, once I figured out how to do it, then all of a sudden they came in droves.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Julia: So that will definitely be my first kind of real client that wasn't a friend or a family and paying and I'll never forget. I, I, I found the, um, I saw the announcement in a Facebook group and I reached out and I explained to my, what I knew and what I could do and, and um, she called back later that day and offered me, um, I say the job, it was a contract job and it was an hourly rate. And of course she couldn't guarantee how many hours I would have a month. But I didn't care, I will, I would take anything. And she said yes, and we, we were kind of, okay, well we'll get started in, you know, the following Monday, and I think this was a Friday. And my husband wasn't home from work yet, but I remember I went out to the store and I bought some champagne because I knew it was, it was such a big thing to kind of have that first, first person to say, yes, I will, you know, let, let's, let's do it. Let's go for it. I'm going to pay you X. And then that turned into, I, I worked with her for probably about a year. Um, and then I had a lot of referrals off the back of that as well. So it was a very worthwhile relationship.

Kathryn: If you could fresh today, knowing everything, you know, is there anything you would do differently?

Julia: I wouldn't try to do it alone. Um, the learning and I, I would invest in myself and my business earlier. So I, as I said, I was very cheap and I, I wouldn't, I didn't spend any money on courses. I didn't have any community, uh, to, to kind of support me or to, um, help me troubleshoot tech issues and code issues. And that was, it took me so much longer to, to learn and be successful. Um, because I just didn't invest in myself. I didn't, I didn't take a chance on myself until, um, it, this was probably about a year long process

and people ask me, well, how long would it, you know, could it take? Oh, it, you know, it could take a month or two, um, much, much shorter if you're, if you invest just a little bit in yourself in time and money, um, and you have a community of fellow online freelancers and entrepreneurs and service providers that know what you're going through, the know, the struggles of, of working for yourself and, and, and can help you troubleshoot some of these kind of difficult tech issues. Those are the 100% what I would do differently.

Kathryn: Are there any specific groups you recommend or courses would you recommend?

Julia: There's, well I have one and as I said, the, the people always say to me, because they know that I can travel full time and they say, how, how is it that you're able to do that? And that's the only reason why I created a course. It's because I had, I had people asking me "that sounds cool. I want to learn how to do that." And I'd point them in the direction of free resources and, and then it was a, okay what actually people wanted to learn more. They wanted to um, you know, know how to find clients. They wanted to have a community. And I knew that the, it's not just learning a skill. In my opinion, if you want to have a successful online business, no matter what the, what it is that you're doing, I think you need three things. I think you need the skill. I think you need the community. And I think you need to be willing to invest in yourself and, and, and know that you're going to come out on the other end and, and, and be able to know the skills to find clients as well. So that, that's the big thing that I focus on is, is those things, is the community, the clients, finding the clients and the skill because you have those three things and you're, you're golden.

Kathryn: Odds are, there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Julia: Let's see. Well, I guess today's a good example. I did some work first thing in the morning. I have a couple client calls this afternoon. I always, as I said, I've got a course in a, in a community, an online community, and I, I spend probably a good hour in there at least a day, back and forth throughout the day, answering people's questions, helping them troubleshoot. I do a lot of video tutorials. So if someone comes into the group and says, "Hey, I've tried to do x, but it's not quite working. Or I've googled this, but I can't quite figure it out." Then I'll, I'll shoot a short little video and show them how I would do it. It's probably a mixture of client work focusing on, on my course and community, I have a full time team member, so I send a lot of stuff back and forth with her, particularly client work.

Julia: And then of course I try to finish it at a decent time and get out for a hike. I got a dog, so he gets a couple walks a day and I'm always out and about. And the thing that I love the most about my, my job and being, being location independent and not working Monday to Friday, nine to five is I can take random week weekdays off on, on Thursday, I'm taking the whole day off just because I can, we're going to go down to the lake and sit by the, by the lake rather than doing it on a weekend. So being able to pick and choose when I start my day, when I finish my day and, and what, what that looks like. But you're right. No, everyday is very different. I kind of plan my day the night before and then I know what's happening the next day.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Julia: Let's see. Nothing formal in the sense of like, uh, a degree, college or, or, or masters. Um, but informal. Yes, absolutely. I, I literally try to learn something new every day and I, I will never consider myself kind of being done learning particularly in the web development, in the Wordpress space because things are always changing and it's constantly kind of updating stuff. And of course with my course and community, I need to be on top of all the new changes and updates to make sure that I can pass that on, so that they are just as up to date so that they can make sure that the clients are taken care of. So, yes, absolutely. I try to learn every day.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in web development?

Julia: Oh gosh. I think a couple things, I'm probably most excited about the fact that web development and coding isn't so much of a, of a bad word or a word that kind of puts people off or it's a lot more accepted nowadays that anyone can do it. And I feel like there's still a lot of people that kind of hear the word code and think, Ooh, that's, um, that's not something I can do or that's too hard, or I don't like math or I'm too young, I'm too old, I'm too female. All these misconceptions about what coding and web development is. And I think there's, there's a real shift in seeing a lot more people kind of accepting that it is something that they can do.

Julia: And it is something that can, that can earn good money and they can do from anywhere. And it opens up so many opportunities. So I think across the board over the last, I'd say probably 10 years or so, there's, there's been a real push for getting more females into it. And children learning a lot younger than ever before. Well, because of course, you know, computers and, and, and iPhones and all that stuff is such a big part of society. And I heard something recently where someone said that teaching kids a coding language is just as important as teaching them science or, or English. Um, nowadays. So that's really exciting. It's not just going to be a guy in his basement at 2:00 AM eating Cheetos, who's coding. It could be a five year old girl, it could be a 65 year old woman. It could, it could be anybody. So that's what gets me most excited.

Kathryn: And now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your salary range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Julia: So let's see. I think the, the range, if you have a good, if you have a good skill set and, um, a good client base that you, you could be well over a hundred (thousand) easily. I'd say the range is probably somewhere between \$60,000 and \$120,000 a year and I've been doing this for four years.\$

Kathryn: And that's US dollars.

Julia: Yes ma'am. Yes.

Kathryn: Okay. So would you say that \$60,000 is a beginning range or is that once or once you're more established?

Julia: I'd say once you're more established, but so much is kind of comes down to um, where you, where you start out, an hourly rate and what kind of, how you price your projects and it's such a personal decision that it's really difficult to get right. I struggled with it for a long time too, to know. And of course your, your income every month is very different unless you can pick up some retainer clients where it's a consistent amount. Yeah. My income could, can fluctuate by thousands every month.

Kathryn: How do you handle that variability?

Julia: Um, I, how do I? I guess I've always been a saver ever since I was a kid. My parents always kind of made it a point to make sure that I, I saved saved money and I've always kind of kept up with that. So when I had a good month, um, I would put a lot of it aside and not do anything with it. I also hate to spend money, as I said before, I'm very cheap, so I rarely ever, there's not really an issue to, uh, um, to, to try not to spend money, but I, I would put my money away, when I had a good month. And then if I had a, uh, a lower month than if I needed to dip into that savings, I could. Um, but yeah, it is, it's, it's really difficult. And another thing is if you're able to plan out when projects are going to happen, I always struggled with this because a lot of times people come and say, oh, I need it done next week. Or, um, that sort of thing. So being able to plan out is, it is another great way to avoid that feast or famine kind of thing of the entrepreneurial lifestyle, if you're able to.

Kathryn: How do you decide what to charge, what goes into that?

Julia: So, um, I get, I get asked this all the time in the, I normally tell people that it depends on if you're, um, if it's an hourly rate to project or a, uh, or a project based, um, project and that all depends on what the client is looking for. And I'll, I'll get on a call with the client and kind of talk through what they say they're looking for. But nine times out of 10, they're actually, the aim of what they want their business to look like. Just a website may not be, the answers are then say, okay, yes, we can do this, but what about this, this, and this in order to grow and scale and get you to where you want to be one, three, five years from now.

Julia: So, um, the, again, my hourly rate is pretty well set now, when I first got started, I started very low and I increased it very, very quickly, that's what I, I kind of recommend to my students as well is, is once you get your, your first either project or your first hourly rate client, the next one you raise it and the next one after that you raise it again and keep doing that. And then you'll, you'll figure out a place that you kind of hit where people were, where people will always say yes. And then some people might say no. But of course as you start to increase your, your rate, you don't have to work as much.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to become web developers?

Julia: I would say to just give it a go to, to see what you, um, to just try a little bit of code and kind of see if you have that same magical reaction that I did. It's not for everyone and I, I know that, but I hear a lot of people say, oh, I'm, I'm very creative and crafty. So it's not, it's not going to be for me because it's, it's not creative. And I said, well, actually, if you

think about it, building a website is, is incredibly creative because you're, you're literally building something with your own hands and, and you, you kind of give it the, the, the base layer and then you add stuff on top and you, you create this awesome website. And that's to me, that is very creative. Um, so I, those are probably that, that's probably the, the biggest thing is just to try, um, and, and see, see what you think. And if, if, if you're hooked, like I was, then awesome. There's so many other resources to, to learn more from there. Um, if you give it a go and you think, oh, I don't really like this, I don't get it, then, then that's a pretty good indicator as well.

Kathryn: And what are your next steps?

Julia: So I've been, I've been a service based entrepreneur, so primarily just working for clients for the last four years. And while I, I do enjoy I mean, I love the doing. I love the actual, um, doing the work. Um, I, I've reached a point where there's only so much time in the day and I don't really want to scale my business to where on just managing people that are doing the work because I love doing it so much myself. And last year when we started traveling full time and everyone said to me, what, you know, how are you able to do that? That sounds so cool. I want to learn more. I decided to put together a couple of courses to see how that went and I'd never taught before. I, I've never been a teacher. I've never, never taught tech. Um, but I've, I've certainly watched enough tech tutorials to know what works and what doesn't.

Julia: And I, I just thought, well, you know, I might as well give it a go and see, see what people think. And you know, seven months ago I launched my course and I've got over 200 students now and I absolutely love every second of it. Um, I, there's nothing I want to do more than just teach more people and give more people an opportunity to work from home or work from abroad or, or, or work from anywhere if that's what they, if that's what their personal life needs, then that, that's the opportunity I want to give them.

Kathryn: And where can listeners find you?

Julia: So the easiest is, um, if, if anyone goes to [geekpack.co](http://geekpack.co) that is, um, as, as I mentioned earlier, the thing that I would recommend if women want to get involved with web development managers to dip our toes in the water and give it a go. And at that link it's a free five day coding challenge and it, it's entirely free. Everyday you get a new, a new challenge, a new lesson, and over the five days you will learn how to build a static two page website entirely from scratch. So we go through html and CSS, which are two coding languages. They're the backbone of any website that you see on the Internet. And um, and you'll get a really good feel for whether or not it's something you do enjoy. Because I don't want people to just to spend any money if it's not something that, that they are going to love. And I think that it gives people a good idea of what web development is. And if they love it, then there's, there's more to learn. If not, well, you've learned a little bit of, a little bit of code and how to build a website.

Kathryn: Great. And we will get that right in the show notes. Julia, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.



Julia: So yeah, thank you very much.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at [compasspod.com/insiders](https://compasspod.com/insiders) Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at [compasspod.com/020](https://compasspod.com/020), that's [compasspod.com/020](https://compasspod.com/020). Next week we'll be talking with Christina Gawlik, math writer.