

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 23 of compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Do you ever take on too much but feel like you have to do it all for it to be done right? In this episode Mary Tomasso and I talk about that and more in our discussion on her path to becoming a content creator. 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. Mary, welcome to the show.

Mary: Hi Kathryn, thank you. Thank you for having me.

Kathryn: So, 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?

Mary: Well, I think I didn't have a name for that, but I know that I, I wanted to study languages. My parents had French friends back in Italy and they, they had kids about my age. So I started to speak French at that age. And I know that I wanted to study, to study languages. So it's actually what I, what I did. I started high school, well started, I started actually to study English when I was in primary school, I would say. I didn't study French because I kind of practiced it with my, with my friends. And I did study languages at high school and later at university. So yeah, I think it was pretty, I was pretty consistent with what I wanted to do when I was a kid.

Kathryn: And did you graduate with a degree in languages?

Mary: In translation, yeah, because then when I started to study languages, at high school I, and I also started to travel more with my, with my parents, with my family, I, I kind of fell in love with the tourist guide or interpreter profession. So I knew that I wanted to study languages and I understood that it was because I wanted to travel. So, I thought I wanted to be an interpreter and, and that's what I studied. Then when I was at university and I actually tried how hard it was to be a conference interpreter. I thought, maybe it's not for me. Maybe I can still travel the world without having the stress of being an interpreter. But I still pursued the, the path of translation and that's what I, I began to do when I graduated.

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

Mary: Languages I think that is, um, yeah, not, not only languages, but just also the, the ability to transform texts. Because studying translation is different from studying languages. When you studied translation, you actually are supposed to know very well, the language that you are translating from because you are translating into your native language. So what you, what you study is actually, you know, like the gift, the, the creative art of transforming a text in, in a language so that it keeps the meaning that it had in its original language. And I do that a lot. Well, content creators have to do that constantly.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Mary: I understood that I was tired of working for other people. So the first, my first need was to, to build something to, for myself to work at either as a freelance or as an entrepreneur. Uh, I wanted to be in free first of all. And I am, I get to know the virtual assistant profession and I thought it was kind of easy to start from there because I didn't have any skill, let's say, in entrepreneurship. So I didn't, because I always worked for, for somebody else. And, uh, when I started with virtual assistance, I understood that I, that it was a job that I could do from anywhere in the world. And I understood that it was just perfect. Eventually I didn't continue to be a virtual assistant because, it's not what I, what I liked to be an assistant, but it's really helped me. It taught me how to go location independent and how to start my own, my own business. So I'm, I'm grateful for that.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people when they're just being polite?

Mary: I say, sometimes I say that I am a writer or that I am a web writer that I, I write content mainly to be used online.

Kathryn: And when you're talking to someone who really wants to know the details?

Mary: So then I try to go more specific. Actually what I'm doing now with more specializing is instructional content. So, I can tell them that I can help them to create content that can explain to their clients what their business is about or I can help them with content that can help their employees to be always updated on, on what's happening. I mainly work with, with software companies. So, there's a lot of instructional content to be, to be created in that sense.

Kathryn: How did you get started with content creation?

Mary: Well, I understood that content and writing with really what I wanted to do and it was a natural evolution from a virtual assistance, because I had many clients who needed just that. So I just stopped being a virtual assistant and became their content creator and then I continued education in, um, so that I, I could always deliver the best to my clients.

Kathryn: So your first clients were originally your virtual assistant clients?

Mary: Yes.

Kathryn: How do you find clients now?

Mary: Well, mostly on social networks, like LinkedIn. Sometimes I look for job postings in specific platforms for location independent professionals. And since I've done a lot of inbound marketing, clients just find me.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Mary: Well, I think it was, burned out because I, when I first started with virtual assistance, the business began to grow. And I think I wasn't really very good at managing everything because I was, I think I was struggling with control and it was kind of funny because I

was teaching my clients how to delegate and I wasn't able myself to delegate. So what happened was that I just had too much work. I was all over the place. I was doing, accountance, I was doing content or I was doing marketing and, all the admin tasks and working with clients. So, I think that was a very, very hard, but I learned eventually how to, how to manage it and while I basically learned how to be less controlling. Yeah, that was I think the, the hardest struggle.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Mary: I think it was when I created the first digital course for, virtual assistants in Italian. It was actually the first, the first time Italians heard about virtual assistance. So I've, trained about 400 professionals. It was, I think when I, when I sold my first course, I was so proud and then when I actually saw that people were, obtaining, well, getting results and I still have people writing today and telling me that they are grateful because they changed, they were able to change their life because of my, of my course. I think that part of my business was, the one that gave me really more, satisfaction.

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

Mary: I think I would start from the beginning, to better organize my time and my, my business so that I don't have to get burned out. Yeah, definitely.

Kathryn: So more delegation and...

Mary: Yeah, I think it's not just about delegation because there has to be something that has to come from, from us before we delegate, before even before we create systems and processes. There has, has to happen something that, that will allow us to, to delegate. Because I mean, delegation itself, it's easy. But the, the hard part is understand what you can delegate, how you can delegate and especially let go. That, that is the hardest part to like let go of the need to control, which is, you know, not just in business. It's something that if we do it with our business, then of course we do it with, with everything else in our life. And I think it's very important to learn to let go.

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?

Mary: Yeah, sure. Um, well I try to do my, most of my work in the morning because when I started with the practice of Yoga and just study of Yoga, I learned that in the morning we have more energy to perform mental work. Where,, I think the afternoon we have more energy to perform physical activity. So, I decided that I wanted to do most of my work in the morning and have spare time in the afternoon for yoga practice or just to go for a walk. Because after my experience with burnout, I decided that I have to have at least one hour, if not two hours every day for a yoga and/or for a walk. When I wake up, I try for one hour not to check emails and not to switch on the phone. And I try to sit and have a very slow breakfast time and then yes, I am, I of course I switch on the phone, computer, check the emails and, and then I start to write and I try to, to write, I

use the tomato technique so that I can stay focused on, on writing for as long as I need. Well, most of the time, I, of course I have some other work in the afternoon, but I try really hard to not to work after. Let's say after 5/6 pm.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education?

Mary: Yes, absolutely. I always study something, if not something new, which sometimes I do just because I, I really love learning new things. And also when, you know, with, with content and with marketing you always have to be updated. So I always study, I always take courses. I have a budget assigned to my education every year. So I, I take a least two, three courses per year.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in content creation?

Mary: Right now I'm excited, um, about the, the content I'm creating because what I like is the, the useful part. Of thinking that I, with instructional content, I can help companies or even professionals to spread their message to, to create content that can reach other people. So, I think I'm more excited of this part of content creation rather than copywriting because I, you know, with copywriting, it's always the, the persuasion and the sales. I feel more tuned into the instructional part of content. So I think I'm excited about that.

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

Mary: In my case, since I also have a digital product, it's different. I mean I have my income also comes from what is, what would be called passive income, which is, well I can say that now it is passive income because I created this course couple of years ago, so I don't do anything more right now. And it's just very passive income. I would say that the, the content creation, activities, it's probably about €50,000, €60,000 per year.

Kathryn: That's Euros?

Mary: Yeah.

Kathryn: What would you say the beginning range would be for someone just starting out?

Mary: Well, it's difficult because I've seen something, you know, almost outrageous like there are, there's a lot of competition. There are companies looking for, the best rate, well the cheapest rate. And I know that there are professionals who charge maybe \$10 per hour or per article. So it's difficult to say, but I would say with, for somebody who tries to keep it professional and who actually has experience and, and who has chosen was able to choose a specific niche, it will be probably around €15,000, €20,000.

Kathryn: And what do you think is the top income range?

Mary: I think it, it depends. I, I don't think it can be over 1000. I think 1000, I'm sorry, €100,000 would be really a lot, so probably about €80,000.

Kathryn: How do you decide what to charge?

Mary: There's a minimum that I have to charge to make ends meet. That is, basically I, I decide according to calculation and while sometimes it also depends on, on the job and it fits on the market. I know for instance, the Italian market, you cannot charge at the same that you would charge in the US. You know, there are some markets that have different, different rates. So, I also try to refer to the, to the market standard rates because some rates, rates that would be normal in, in the US would be maybe too high in Italy. And if it's South America even worse, it would be really, really expensive. So I try to, to charge rates according also to the, and to the standard rates. And if it's something, if I know that the client, the company wouldn't pay me what I, what the minimum rate that I want, I don't even consider it. So I, I never, of course I never lower my rates to, to work with, with a client. I just, decide that it's not the right client.

Kathryn: Being self employed, there's a lot of variability in income. Is there anything you do to keep that stable?

Mary: As I said, you know, because I have a digital product, I have a kind of stability. What I would like to do is have even more digital products so that because I'm convinced, I, I really believe that that is, the trick. You know, the most important thing is having several income sources. Otherwise, of course if you just have one, it can be complicated. When I didn't have the product and I, when I started as a virtual assistant, I remember that once I had 10 clients at the same time and in a few months I didn't, I maybe had one. So it is, this kind of job is really unstable. What I'm trying to do is create more, digital products. And it's actually, you know what I feel I would suggest to anybody, there's always a digital product that you can create no matter what your job is. That's what I, what I think.

Kathryn: Are there any programs or tools you recommend for beginners?

Mary: I cannot think of one specific tool. Maybe I would say, a project management tool so that you can be more organized. Yeah, that is um, what I, what I use, I either use Asana or Trello, depends on, on the client and well, the tomato technique if you need help with, with staying focused on, when writing. There is actually on, on my website I have a page one with a collection of tools that I find and they are not specific to content creation, but you know, tools that can be helpful for any location independent professional.

Kathryn: And what's your number one tip for women looking to become content creators?

Mary: I think I would say what, what Steven King said, which is "write". Basically when you have to write, when you have to produce content, there's, of course you can study, you can read. But the most important thing is just practice writing.

Kathryn: And what are your next steps?

Mary: I am presently studying conversation design, which I found very interesting. Well, of course there's a lot of content to be produced. It's something new that the part that I like is the idea of helping machines, let's say, helping artificial intelligence communicate with humans, that is what conversation design is about and it really fascinated me and this is what I'm doing next.

Kathryn: And where can listeners find you?

Mary: I am everywhere with, my name Mary Tomasso and my website is marytomasso.com. I am using linkedin and Instagram more at the moment, but that might change. So my website will always be there.

Kathryn: Very, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Mary: Thank you, Kathryn. Thank you for having me.

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 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/023, that's compasspod.com/023.