

# Here's How Much It Really Costs To Be An Online Sex Worker

Sex work is much more complicated, demanding and expensive than it may seem.



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VONKARA1 VIA GETTY IMAGES

In the middle of a global pandemic, money is tight for everyone. Many people who find themselves suddenly unemployed need cash quickly, and some might be considering a side gig in online sex work. Starting an OnlyFans page or dabbling in any form of online

sex work might seem like a viable option, especially when it seems like everyone is doing it anyway.

However, whether it's selling nude clips or performing live cam shows, online sex work is much more complicated, demanding and expensive than it may seem.

Even for experienced, full-time sex workers, “just making an OnlyFans” doesn't always pay the bills. Online sex work requires an entirely different skill set than in-person work like escorting and stripping, and it can pose greater risks to privacy and anonymity that many might not be willing to take.

I started dabbling in sex work about five years ago, when I was a broke freelance writer recovering from a severe depressive episode. I needed cash to support the work I *wanted* to be doing, so I started sugar dating. I decided to try exploring online sex work a couple of years after that, hoping for a side gig that was just as flexible and didn't require me to leave the house.

The first time I performed a live cam show, I had an ancient MacBook and spotty Wi-Fi. I'd been naked on the internet before, and though I still felt nervous and a little awkward, I thought the show mostly went off without a hitch. My viewers disagreed. My internet was too slow, my camera sucked, and I didn't have enough toys. They thought I was pretty, but few were willing to tip for a pixelated nipple flash. I made a little less than \$100 over the course of an evening — not much, but better than nothing.

I studied the other women on the site for weeks and noticed that the top-earning performers had one thing in common: production value. If I wanted to earn anything close to sustainable income, I would at least need a webcam (\$70 for a basic model, \$250 for ultra HD), professional studio lights (at least \$50), and a faster Wi-Fi connection (high-speed routers start around \$150). If I was really serious, I would need more dildos, *bigger* dildos (body-safe silicone sex toys can range from \$20 to almost \$200), better lingerie (\$100), and a teledildonic sex toy that allowed viewers to interact with me via Bluetooth (\$125). Just *being* a sex worker costs much more than many people realize.

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I needed to spend money to make money, but I didn't have much, if anything, to spend. Almost all of my first paychecks from camming (and a few from my day job) went toward new equipment, and it was months before I actually broke even.

Even with all the bells and whistles, it's tough to make money online without a following, and building a loyal, reliable one can take years. It was a full year before I started making a somewhat steady income, and despite working full-time hours some weeks, the money I make is only supplemental to my freelance writing work.

Beyond all the props and equipment, online sex work requires incredible patience, persistence and a thick skin. Cam rooms can fill up with hundreds of demanding viewers who each want to be seen and feel special, sometimes argue amongst themselves, ask for services without offering payment, ignore rules and boundaries, or make negative comments about performers' bodies.

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Not everyone can perform with unshakably positive energy, chatting for hours in front of anonymous viewers who don't respond or refuse to tip, or keep up with the never-ending work of self-promotion on social media. For all the people who are willing to pay for nude content, there are plenty of others who will never follow or subscribe — but who will continue to harass models with unsolicited dick pics and DMs. Rejection hurts, and when there isn't much cash coming in, it can be tough not to let it show.

It's not impossible to make money as an online sex worker, but the likelihood of getting rich overnight selling grainy foot pics is incredibly low. Most sex workers aren't rich, and some barely make enough to survive. The money won't be quick or easy, and it won't be

tax-free. I pay thousands of dollars in federal self-employment taxes every year, and because I'm a sex worker, I'll probably be self-employed for the rest of my working life.

My income often fluctuates, and there have been days when I've made a whopping \$10 after spending hours on cam. Even if I managed to rake in a six-figure sex work salary, it still wouldn't come with health insurance or job security. And I would still have bad days. A sex worker's income can vary and fluctuate depending on a number of factors that have nothing to do with how "good" they are at their job. Sex work is incredibly difficult work, it's even more difficult to strike it rich.

Most of all, sex work will cost time, energy, and, sometimes, self-esteem.

Self-promotion, chatting with fans, even blocking messages from time-wasting viewers who refuse to pay all take time that often goes uncompensated. There will still be people who refuse to pay for porn, who ask for free stuff, or who even steal content, and that can be a distressing reality that takes a toll. Additionally, sex work is never truly anonymous — and being naked on the internet, and the stigma that comes with it, can't be undone.

Money talk isn't sexy, but for sex workers, it's especially important. It can be tough to admit when we're struggling financially, and it's even more difficult to talk about money and when we don't have much because online sex work can be so isolating and stigmatized. It may be uncomfortable and complicated, but financial transparency in sex work is critical and makes some of us feel less alone. With so many sex workers struggling financially due to COVID-19, it's more crucial than ever.

For those considering entering the industry, it's important to know how much the job will actually cost. There's nothing wrong with dabbling or doing your best to make ends meet, because sex work can be necessary for basic survival. Just don't expect it to make you rich, and don't expect it to be easy.