

Figuring Out the Gig Economy



The media abounds with mention of gigs—types of gig work, the number of gig workers, and the future of gig jobs. What hasn't been the focus in most cases is what Americans actually think of this latest workforce term. Are they aware of or do they even reference the "gig economy?"



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By Cynthia Poole

When asked specifically about it—and how they see the gig economy shaping the future of work—

here is what Americans had to say about everything “gig,” according to an ASA Workforce Monitor® survey, conducted by Harris Poll among more than 2,000 U.S. adults. These findings provide staffing and recruiting companies with unique insights that can fuel strategic conversations with candidates or help shape recruiting tactics. >>>

Exclusive Industry Research & Data

This issue’s research-focused article summarizes the findings from a recent ASA Workforce Monitor® survey, which explored Americans’ views on the so-called gig economy. As the industry’s research and data leader, the American Staffing Association reports on timely industry data in every issue of *Staffing Success*. Tell ASA what you think of this article on Twitter—follow @StaffingTweets and use the hashtag #ASAresearch.



How ‘Gig’ Entered the Scene

The term “gig economy” was originally coined during the peak of the Great Recession when many unemployed Americans made a living by working several part-time jobs (also referred to as “gigging”) to help in weathering the financial crisis, according to the *Financial Times*. In 2015, use of the term grew exponentially with the growth of gig apps such as Uber and Airbnb.

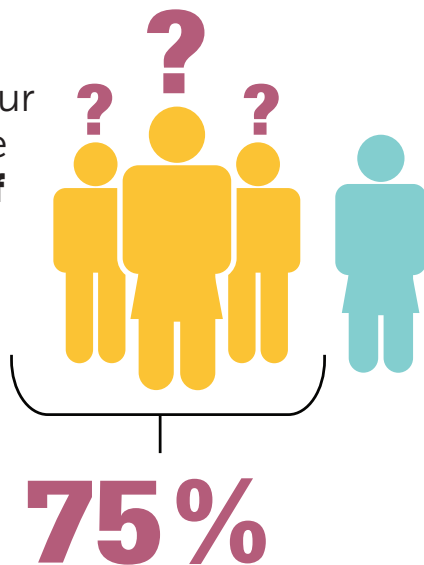
Despite all the headlines and research surrounding the so-called gig economy, there has been no consensus definition among policy makers, businesses, or economists. Furthermore, there is often confusion about what is or isn’t, and what should be, a part of the world of gig work.

78% of Americans surveyed say **the term “gig economy” is just a new way to describe nontraditional work arrangements** that have been around for a long time.



‘Gig Economy’ Is Obscure

Three out of four U.S. adults have **never heard of the term “gig economy.”**



29% of Americans **don't know how to define “gig economy.”**

31% **can't identify** specific types of **gig work.**



Identifying Gig Work

When asked their level of familiarity with the “gig economy,” three out of four U.S. adults (75%) say they have never heard of the term, according to the ASA Workforce Monitor survey results. Interestingly, adults age 18-34 (40%) and men (33%) are more likely than women (19%) to have at least heard of the term.

Regardless of whether they were familiar with the term “gig economy,” roughly three in 10 Americans (29%) don't know how to define the term, and can't identify specific types of gig work (31%).

Without a definition, most U.S. adults (85%) say they may have performed work one might consider “gig” at some point in the past. However, after being given a definition that describes gigs as various forms of small-project, freelance assignments typically facilitated by an Internet platform or app, the percentage of Americans saying they have gigger drops to 20%, the survey results show.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans have very little or no interest at all in giggering, with younger adults (49%) more interested in gig work than older adults (17%).

Defining the Gig Economy

With each new research study defining the gig economy and the types of work it includes in a different way, ASA wanted to know what Americans believe comprises the gig economy. Their responses varied—from independent contractor and freelance work, to seasonal jobs, day labor, piece work, work through Internet platforms and apps, and staffing employment; but no particular type of work arrangement dominated responses.

How do Americans generally view the gig economy? A large majority (78%) say the term is simply a new way to describe the kind of nontraditional work arrangements that have been around for a long time.



Similarly, more than two-thirds (68%) say that the gig economy is just a buzz phrase to describe types of work that have been around awhile. And more than half of Americans (53%) disagree that the U.S. will evolve to a predominantly gig economy within the next 20 years.

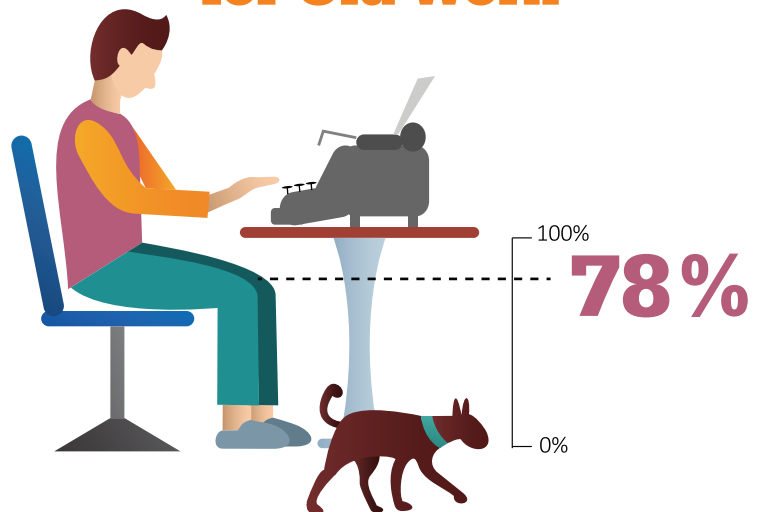
While the gig economy will likely continue to be a term of choice to conveniently describe a collection of different types of nonpermanent work arrangements, with temporary and contract staffing employment being a part of that mix, the survey findings make it clear that Americans view it all as just jargon.

Nonetheless, the gig economy conversation presents staffing and recruiting companies with the opportunity to engage in strategic discussions with clients and candidates, share ASA Workforce Monitor findings, and continue to present themselves as thought leaders in the world of work.

To learn more about the ASA Workforce Monitor and to download high-resolution infographics on survey results, go to americanstaffing.net/workforcemonitor. ■

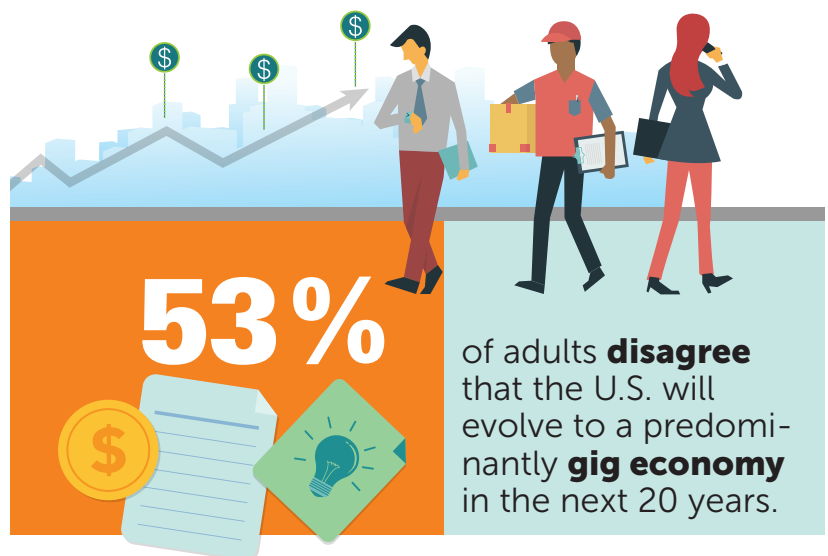
Cynthia Poole is the director of research for ASA. Send feedback on this article to success@americanstaffing.net. Engage with ASA on social media—go to americanstaffing.net/social.

'Gig' Is Just a New Term for Old Work



Majority of Americans say “gig economy” is **just a new way to describe** long-existing, nontraditional work arrangements.

Future of the Economy Is Not “Gig”



Methodology: How the Survey Was Conducted

The ASA Workforce Monitor® survey series focuses on current U.S. workforce trends and issues. Harris Poll conducted the survey online within the U.S. on behalf of ASA, Dec. 20–22, 2016, among 2,067 U.S. adults age 18 and older. Results were weighted on age, education, race/ethnicity, household income, and geographic region where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the U.S. population.

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