



Ten questions for ...

Lutz Gegenheimer

by Lutz Gegenheimer

In 100 words, what is your background and how did you become a freelancer?

After studying medicine and psychology, I worked for 4 years in a clinical CRO in different positions. During the subsequent 2 years, I was engaged in preclinical projects in a pharmaceutical company. I finally decided to become a professional medical writer because I had come to the conclusion that this was a suitable activity for me, and that there was sufficient demand for medical writing services. After carefully weighing everything up, I also decided to become a freelancer because I had come to the conclusion that—for me, at least—there would be more advantages than disadvantages working outside a company.

What is your most important piece of advice for people setting up a new business?

It is useful to have a couple of years of experience in a company so that you can build up personal contacts to potential clients. Of course, medical and statistical expertise, writing proficiency, and, very important too, the discipline and ability to work on your own form a favourable basis.

What do you like about being a freelancer?

Compared to my previous job as an employee, I have more flexibility to organize my time according to my own needs. Based on this flexibility, I have been able to optimise my working processes thereby increasing my productivity. I have never regretted giving up fixed working hours.

What do you dislike about being a freelancer?

As a freelancer in a one-person business, you have no direct opportunities to delegate certain activities. You may not have access to specialists who can rapidly help you solve certain problems. It is also easy to lose contact with other colleagues and to miss out on new developments.

What are your main sources of work?

For many years I have been working for a fairly small number of clients, mostly pharmaceutical companies.

What are the most rewarding projects to work on?

From both the point of view of motivation and income, I prefer to be involved in long-term development projects. It saves time if you are familiar with a compound. And there are considerable benefits due to transfer effects. I specialise in study reports, protocols and summary documents relevant for regulatory purposes. For some clients I work as a medical advisor.

What are the least rewarding projects to work on?

Personally, I dislike writing literature review articles. According to my experience, they are time-consuming and are often not well paid. Maybe I just don't have the skills required—but we can't all do everything!

Do you have a preferred type of client? If yes, why?

I prefer to work for long-term clients. Once a stable working relationship with a client is established, it makes it very much easier to meet the client's demands and solve problems that may arise during the working process. Of course, to prevent dependence, it is advisable to have more than one long-term client. One important thing is to meet the client personally, and I try to do this with all new clients.

What is the best way to say 'No' to clients?

It is indeed not always easy to reject a job. With the years, however, I have become more selective. If, based on previous experience, I'm in doubt that I'm qualified for a job, or if I suspect that a job may not be satisfactorily paid, I usually reject it due to 'timeline problems'. With potential new clients, high cost estimates can be a successful way to reject a job (see note from Alistair Reeves below).

Would you ever consider working for a company (again) as a fulltime employee? If yes, why?

After 13 years of freelance medical writing, I could never imagine returning to company employment. I would accept jobs that require a personal presence on the client's facility, but I would always prefer to remain independent.

Lutz Gegenheimer

Mannheim, Germany
lutz.gegenheimer@medical-writing.com
<http://www.medical-writing.com>

Note from Alistair Reeves: Beware! I recently tried this by saying that I would only do a training event on a weekend for double my usual fee—and the client accepted!

A sign of embarrassment

Do you know the difference between fewer and less? Tesco did not before The Plain English Campaign put them right about a sign they had placed at their fast-track checkouts. The sign read "10 items or less" rather than the correct wording of "10 items or fewer".

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7590440.stm>