

Out on our own

We had another record turnout at the Freelance Business Forum in Ljubljana this year—more than 60 people attended—and we have already asked for a room for at least this number at Frankfurt later this year. The topics discussed are summarized in the report in this issue, and I pick out one to mention here: we have set up a Freelance User Group for EMWA with 6 volunteers in different countries because freelance members now account for more than 15% of the total membership. The first meeting of the group is in July, and you will be hearing more about it in the September issue. If anyone has issues they would like the User Group to discuss or feels there are issues that should be drawn to the attention of Head Office or the EC, please let Sam or me know.

Linda Liem tells us about a week in her life as a freelance writer after moving from the Netherlands to Norway with her family, and Phil Leventhal reports on two lunchtime discussion tables at the Ljubljana conference where freelancers and salaried colleagues considered which status is best, brought together with some thoughts of his own.

Our cost-trackers were active again at the Ljubljana conference. All agreed it was a great place to visit and that the conference content was as worthwhile as ever, but they were not unanimous in their opinion of the costs of attending this conference and EMWA conferences in general and had several suggestions for decreasing the cost. Read on!

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Report on the Ljubljana Freelance Business Forum, May 2009

More than 60 people attended the Freelance Business Forum (FBF) at the Ljubljana Conference on Wednesday 27 May 2009. The highest turnout yet, and we were pleased to see a lot of new faces. The topics discussed are summarised below.

1. Website

The format of the Freelance Listing on the EMWA website has now been revised. Thanks to Jo Whelan for co-ordinating this activity. Some requested changes still have to be made. Changing to an alphabetical listing will be done in the near future. Some requests for changes cannot be done because of software constraints. Additional comments or suggestions are welcome.

2. User group established

Currently, more than 15% of EMWA members are freelancers. The exact number is not known, but 25% of the respondents to the recent member survey were freelancers. To support the EC in better understanding how freelance members can be served by EMWA, a User Group was established at the meeting to represent the views of freelancers. The group will meet by telephone conference every 3 months to discuss freelance membership-related issues. Alistair Reeves or Sam Hamilton will then feed back to the EC with a short written summary. The following people volunteered to be in the User Group: Ingrid Edsman, Neil Fisher, Claudia Frumento, Debbie Jordan, Elaine O'Prey,

Diana Raffelsbauer. A report from the first meeting of the User Group will be published in *TWS* in September.

3. Training and training records

Freelancers do not always enjoy the intensive training offered by employers. Alistair Reeves suggested that freelancers can ask a client if they can join in-house training events. Within teaching hospitals, training events can be as cheap as €20 per day.

The importance of maintaining training records was stressed, as these are asked for during inspections. Jo Whelan reminded all that Certificates of Attendance are supplied at each workshop for training records. It was also suggested that a description of a workshop or its 'Abstract' could be attached to the Certificate of Attendance, since inspectors are interested in the contents of training events. Sam Hamilton reminded all that the onus was on us all to maintain our training record.

Robert Kahn was not happy with the 'artificial restriction to 4 credit workshops' at one conference and made several suggestions: decrease the workshop fee, increase the number of attendees per workshop, raise the number of credit workshops it is possible to attend at each conference to 5. John Carpenter (as a member of the Education Committee) offered to consider the issue again, but Rosie Bischoff (an ex-Education Committee member) felt that this was unlikely to be changed.

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GCP training for freelancers is now a regular event at each EMWA conference, primarily aimed at the freelance membership. Self-marketing was suggested as a further area for which freelancer-specific training could be offered at future EMWA events. Members were asked to submit further suggestions.

4. The FDF on the website

The FDF is clearly not being used, and not only the freelance area. One of the first tasks of the EMWA Freelance User Group will be to explore more attractive possibilities for an electronic discussion forum. The Freelance Email Discussion Forum (FEDF) may be temporarily resurrected to bridge the gap.

5. Accreditation

A few members have included the statement 'accredited' by EMWA on their promotional materials. Members are not permitted by the EC to claim that they are 'accredited' by EMWA because the term 'accredit' implies 'endorsement'. A member can state, however, that they have an 'EPDP Certificate' at foundation or advanced level, once this has been obtained.

6. Credit transfer between EMWA and AMWA

Robert Kahn asked that the EC consider the transfer of AMWA foundation credits. AMWA to EMWA transfers are accepted but the reverse does not happen. The 'reverse issue' has been discussed by the Education Committee but no statement has been issued. It was noted that an 'Advanced EPDP Certificate' can be pursued without doing the 'Foundation Certificate'.

7. Information accessibility

Ingrid Edsman would like a platform created for discussion of items raised at previous FBFs, for example: sharing hands-on experience such as content of QC checklists, time estimates for standard documents, useful software tools. Good freelance advice has been generated so far in previous FBF, FEDF and FDF discussions (and in *TWS*, added Alistair Reeves). *TWS* articles and other materials could easily be placed on a members' blog on the EMWA website. Ingrid offered to do this. Sam Hamilton noted that we now have more than 2 years of 'Out On Our Own' articles. She wants to make these readily accessible, and also information generated by the FEDF. The latter would have to be reviewed for confidentiality issues, as some contributors wanted to remain anonymous.

8. Economic climate

Both Neil Fisher and Ingrid Edsman were concerned about the effects of health spending cuts in the USA and the general economic situation. Susan Bairnsfather (from the USA) responded that the spending cuts are to be over several years, implying that there is no immediate concern. Alistair

Reeves added that although alerted to this information, there is little we can do about it. John Carpenter's experience of 2 recessions is that as work from 'pharma' reduced, agency work expanded, and more freelance work was available.

9. Unreliable clients

EC members present confirmed that EMWA cannot support the provision of information on unreliable clients. In the case of late payment, informing the client that you intend to 'seek legal opinion' usually produces a rapid response. Sam Hamilton stated that with clients who are persistently a few days late with payment, she calls them to suggest 2 options: a charge of 1% of contract fee per day late, or payment within 14 days instead of her usual 28 days. Margaret Gray believed that there is an EC or UK law stating one can charge interest for late payment (note: late payment legislation exists in the UK and most, though not all, EU member states).

10. Headhunters

Nelly Thomas stated that she receives weekly calls from 'headhunters' and wanted to know if this is usual. Many members stated that it is. Rosie Bischoff replied that she receives calls for short-term fill-in positions from 'manpower agencies'; she has prepared 3 proposals to fill interim positions but is not convinced that it is the right approach to finding work because fees are pushed downwards with having a 'middle man'.

11. Google analytics

Sam Hamilton explained using 'Google Analytics' to see who looks at her website, how long they spend, and what search term(s) are used to find her. These help her to understand the profile and geographic spread of those searching for her.

12. Online training

Claudia Frumento asked about the possibility of online training. Susan Bairnsfather replied that she thinks that online training is possible for any subject. Several other members doubted this very much. Wendy Kingdom added a note of caution: someone would have to design online training sessions; this would be very time consuming and would exceed what can be expected of volunteers. Face-to-face training is the optimum medium, although online training can be used as a means of becoming familiar with a subject.

13. Contributions for *TWS* Out On Our Own

Contributions are planned for the Out On Our Own section of the September issue of *TWS*. Contributions are always needed, and a call was made for articles and boxes relevant to freelancing, and also for ideas, even if the proposer did not feel they could write on the subject themselves.

Thanks to: all those who attended, Alistair Reeves and Sam Hamilton for chairing the meeting, and Barbara Grossman for doing the minutes.