



EMWA's 3-year strategic plan

by Helen Baldwin

EMWA has clearly come a long way in the last 18 years since its early beginnings when a handful of medical writers met at the pub for a few beers and exchanged tips on how to do their jobs better. Our association now boasts 930 members from 33 countries worldwide, an education programme of 95 approved workshops, and we are holding our 30th conference which 350 delegates are expected to attend in Lisbon in May. As we continue to grow, we need to ensure that EMWA is constantly improving in order to fulfil the expectations of the expanding and diversifying membership and that our association is truly achieving its goals and fulfilling its potential.

Of course, to achieve our goals, we need to start by defining them! With this aim in mind, EMWA's Executive Committee (EC) recently held three one-day strategy planning meetings in Frankfurt and London. At these meetings the EC considered EMWA's strengths and weaknesses,

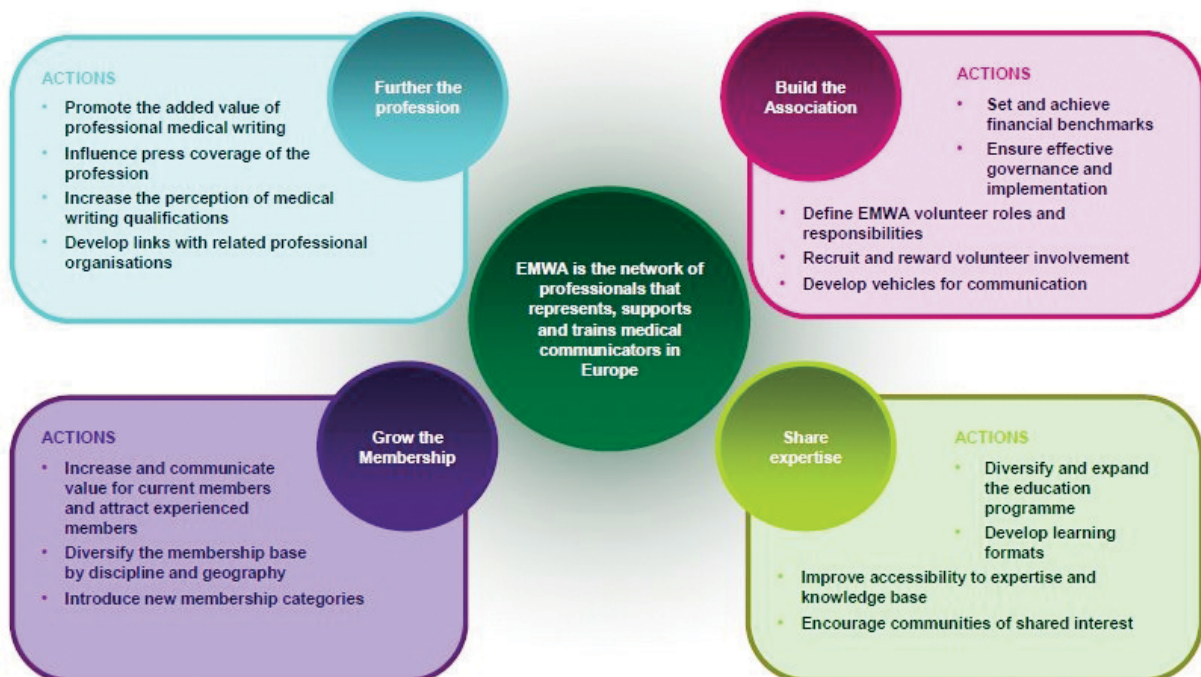
defined the association's mission and positioning, and identified the areas which we considered most important to develop in the next 3 years. This initiative led to the production of EMWA's strategic plan for 2010-2013 (see figure) which I would like to tell you about in this article.

EMWA's mission statement

EMWA is the network of professionals that represents, supports and trains medical communicators in Europe.

Yes, I know, it sounds rather serious and boring compared with the Star Trek mission statement ("to explore strange new worlds, seek out new life, and new civilisations, and to boldly go where no man has gone before"), but sadly medical writing and exploring space just don't seem to overlap much. Although I can think of a couple of 'spaced-out' members who would probably disagree! >

2010-2013 EMWA Strategic Plan



Message from the President

> EMWA's positioning

EMWA is an established European network of medical communicators (including medical writers, editors, translators and related professions) which champions professional standards, offers a wide range of certified training by experienced leaders, and provides diverse platforms and knowledge-sharing opportunities, through:

- *bi-annual conferences held throughout Europe,*
- *foundation and advanced certificate professional development programmes,*
- *a quarterly speciality journal providing topical, academic and thought-provoking articles in print and online,*
- *and a website offering online resources, services and networking opportunities.*

The above may seem obvious if you have been a member for a while, but potential EMWA members may not realise everything we have to offer and it is important to state these benefits clearly on our website and in our other communications.

EMWA's four strategic pillars

Once we had defined EMWA's mission and the positioning, we agreed upon the four main strategic areas which would require action over the next 3 years. These four strategic pillars are: further the profession, grow the membership, build the association, and share expertise.



We believe that one of EMWA's main missions should be to promote the added value of the medical writing profession. We all agree that medical writers bring enormous benefits—but what exactly is this 'added value' and how can we raise awareness of it outside of our sphere?

Here is a list of just a few of the many qualities that a professional medical writer generally has: scientific/medical training, excellent grammar and spelling, effective communication skills, accuracy, consistency and clarity, ability to summarise large volumes of data, effective data presentation and interpretation, professional integrity, and knowledge of guidelines and ethical principles. Does your boss realise that you bring all these benefits to your company? Probably not!

So our aim over the next few years is to increase awareness and respect for the medical writing profession in as wide an audience as possible including our customers and

employers, the media and the general public, medical journals, academic institutions, students, peer professions, and the public sector (e.g. government agencies).

Influencing the press coverage of the profession is especially important in the face of the public criticisms often levied at us by newspaper journalists. Medical writers are commonly portrayed by the press as evil, corrupt 'ghosts' who are paid large amounts of money to write lies for pharmaceutical companies. We plan to promote EMWA's anti-ghost-writing guidelines more strongly (<http://www.emwa.org/MembersDocs/GuidelinesCMRO.pdf>) and to send regular press releases putting the story straight whenever relevant articles appear in the news. We already started to put this plan into action at the end of last year when we sent a press release from EMWA to a long list of medical journalists and editors (<http://www.emwa.org/Home/Ghostbusting.html>) in response to the publication of the GPP2 guidelines (http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/339/nov27_1/b4330).

We also plan to continue to develop links with other related professional organisations. A couple of years ago we joined forces with the Institute of Clinical Research (ICR) to hold two successful joint symposia; the next event is in preparation and will take place in September 2010 in London. This type of collaboration is beneficial for members of both associations as it broadens their choice of events and increases their network of contacts. Furthermore it promotes EMWA and medical writing as a profession. We are currently in the process of building similar collaborations with various other organisations including the European Forum for Good Clinical Practice (EFCGP) and The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs (TOPRA).

Another strategic priority is to increase the perception of medical writing qualifications. With this aim, our Education Officer and his committee are currently investigating the possibility of developing a partnership with a university or other academic institution. It would be excellent if our foundation and advanced certificates were to be formally accredited by such an institution. Alternatively, our workshops could perhaps be integrated into a university Masters of Science (MSc) degree course. These initiatives and others will be the subject of discussions and negotiations over the next few months.



One of the points we agreed upon during our strategy discussions is that we would like to see EMWA continue to grow. Why? Because medical writing is a rapidly growing

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profession, new medical writers need training, and EMWA offers the best medical writing training courses in Europe. In addition, there are many untapped sources of potential members within certain European countries (especially Eastern Europe) and within related disciplines (e.g. medical education writers, clinical research personnel, medical translators etc.) By expanding EMWA to encompass these geographical and professional areas, and by encouraging new members to attend our conferences and workshops, we will continue to increase the quality of medical writing in Europe as a whole.

It is also important to increase the value of EMWA membership for you—the current members. As a starting point, we sat down and listed all of the benefits of being an EMWA member today:

- Membership of an organisation representing a recognised profession
- CV enhancement
- Opportunity to join subcommittees, working groups and other volunteer roles
- Journal:
 - Receipt of the printed journal and immediate online access
 - Opportunity to write articles for publication in the journal
 - Source of up-to-date information on new guidelines, techniques etc.
- Website:
 - Access to the members-only section of the website
 - Opportunity to have a freelance listing or reduced rates on a company listing
 - Opportunity to participate in member-led forums
- Opportunity to attend the biannual conferences
 - Foundation and advanced workshops on all aspects of medical writing
 - Plenary sessions, seminars, and discussion panels on different themes
 - Ability to enrol for foundation and/or advanced EPDP
 - Networking opportunities and social programme

I'm sure you agree that this is already an impressive list of benefits. Nevertheless, we plan to consider ways to increase this list in order to make EMWA membership even more attractive for current and potential members.



When an organisation grows quickly it is sometimes difficult to keep up to date with administrative issues such as writing Standard Operating Procedures (oh no, the dreaded

SOPs!) This has happened to some extent with EMWA, so one of our aims is to properly document our procedures in order to facilitate head office and EC activities and ensure that information is not lost when EC officers step down. Head office will also be helping EMWA's treasurer to set and achieve financial benchmarks in order to ensure that our finances remain healthy and that we don't spend more than we earn (something else that can easily happen when you grow too fast).

We also plan to clearly define EMWA volunteers' roles and responsibilities (EC officers, subcommittee members etc.) as this will help to organise the tasks of our volunteers and hopefully assist in finding more helping hands in the future. With this in mind, we also plan to find new ways to recruit and reward volunteer involvement. It is so important to remember to say "thank you". For example, if you look in the Lisbon conference brochure and on the website, you will see that we have listed the names of all of the volunteer members who were part of the conference steering committee. We are very grateful for their help in putting together this conference and felt it was important to mention them by name so that all the other members are aware of their input. Wouldn't you be pleased to see your name printed in there next time?

We also plan to develop vehicles for communication both within EMWA and externally. For example we recently sent all members an e-newsletter with all the latest information about what's going on in EMWA. This is more fun and reader-friendly than a plain e-mail and can include links to more detailed information on our website. We have also started EMWA groups on Linked-In (<http://www.linkedin.com>), FaceBook (<http://www.facebook.com>) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/OfficialEMWA>). I have to admit I don't understand much about this sort of 'new-fangled' way of communicating—but we need to do it if we are to stay ahead of the game and attract new younger medical writers who were born with a laptop in their crib!



The last of our four strategic pillars concerns the sharing of expertise—and this has in fact always been EMWA's primary goal. Our education programme is a wonderful system in which experienced members generously share their knowledge and expertise, on a purely voluntary basis, with less-experienced members. We plan to continue to diversify and expand our education programme in order to attract >

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> new members from other disciplines, as well as to satisfy the needs of more senior members. We have also started to investigate the possibility of other learning formats, such as e-learning. We are also exploring how we can facilitate knowledge-sharing through other channels, such as our journal and website. The journal has long been an invaluable point of reference for those in our profession. Plans are underway to revamp our online journal, improving accessibility to its content and making our current archive fully searchable. Furthermore, recently, thanks to the help of Ingrid Edsman and Neil Fisher, we now have an online Freelancer Resource Centre that brings together resources relevant to our freelance members. This is the first of a number of new website features designed to provide novel ways of sharing expertise online.

Next steps

I have really enjoyed my time as EMWA Vice President and President, but during my 3 years of office, I was sometimes concerned that the EC had so many tasks and details to deal with that we never seemed to have time to look at the big picture and ask ourselves questions like “Why does EMWA exist?”, “What do our members hope to gain from being a member—and are they getting it?”, “How can we convince the outside world that medical writers are highly professional individuals who bring enormous added value to their projects?”.

I am therefore very proud to say that, despite my initial concerns that we were so bogged down with work that we

would never ‘see the wood for the trees’, we did manage to make time to step away from our busy workloads and to succeed in defining EMWA’s strategic plan for the next 3 years. This plan will be an enormous help to head office, as well as to present and future EC members and subcommittee members, in guiding the direction of their efforts and activities.

I would like to thank my Vice President, Laurence, for her support over the last year and wish her every success in her position of President starting at the Lisbon AGM in May. Laurence has played a key role in our strategy discussions and it was a pleasure to work beside her. I would also like to thank the other members of the EC: Andrea, Elise, Gillian, Laura, Shanida and Stephen. All of them agreed to take 3 full days out of their busy schedules (in some cases on their own holiday time) in order to spend time thinking about how EMWA could best serve its members. Finally, my thanks go to our head office team, particularly Jennifer, Carolyn and Melanie, who gently guided us through this process.

I will be sad to step down in Lisbon, but I am entirely confident that Laurence will do a great job as our next President, and I believe that this 3-year strategy plan will be an enormous help to everyone involved and will ensure that EMWA continues to flourish and to fulfil its potential in every way.

Helen Baldwin

President

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We are delighted to announce that the venue for EMWA’s 31st conference will be Nice, France.

This beautiful city on the French Mediterranean coast is easily accessible from most major European cities, and the conference hotel, which overlooks the sea, is a perfect location for a our 2-day autumn conference, to be held from Thursday 11th to Saturday 13th November 2010.

Many workshops will be on offer covering a wide range of medical writing topics for those wishing to obtain credits towards their foundation or advanced EMWA professional development programme certificates or simply to update their knowledge and skills.

In addition there will be a chance to meet old friends and make new ones at the welcome buffet on the Thursday evening and the conference dinner on the Friday evening. These social events are excellent opportunities for networking with other medical writers from Europe and beyond.

Further details will be posted on the website at www.emwa.org.