



Ten questions for ...

Wendy Kingdom

by Wendy Kingdom

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

I am a pharmacist with a PhD in pharmacology. I started working in the pharmaceutical industry as a clinical research associate in the days when we did the medical writing ourselves, as well as identifying investigators and monitoring studies. My next step was into project management, which I didn't enjoy. Fortunately, I was made redundant, married, and relocated, all at the same time. I was lucky to get a good job working from home for a great contract research organisation. Seven years later, the company was sold and became awful to work for, so I launched into freelance work. That was 5 years ago.

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

Get as much experience as you can before you become a freelancer. Getting clients can be difficult at the beginning and you don't want to lose the ones you do get because you didn't know enough about what they were asking for.

What do you like about being a freelancer?

Freedom! Freedom to accept the work that I want to do and freedom to turn away work that doesn't interest me. Freedom to decide to have my hair cut during 'office' hours and get the work done later. Freedom to set my own priorities. Freedom to decline to attend a meeting when I know that it will be a waste of time. Freedom to take time off when I'm tired because I've been working hard. Freedom to send myself on training courses that interest me, and to attend EMWA meetings without any justification. Need I go on?

What do you dislike about being a freelancer?

Nothing. The only time I have thought that being an employee again would be nice was when I was unwell. I had deadlines to meet and I was struggling to work. It would have been nice if I could have phoned my boss and said that I was off sick. This thought came and went over a period of about 2 days, which isn't bad in 5 years of working for myself. I also think that as a freelancer you are an easy target for the office types who like to make themselves look better by running other people down. But these people are the way they are, and at least you don't have to work with them every day, or beyond the end of the project.

What are your main sources of work?

Repeat business, word of mouth, and the EMWA freelance register.

What are the most rewarding projects to work on?

For me, it's not so much about projects as about people. If I feel that I am part of a team and that I am appreciated for my contribution, then I usually feel good about the project whatever the work is. However, I have gradually spent more of my time working on the regulatory side of the medical writing spectrum rather than in medical communications because it motivates me to think that my work is contributing towards making new therapeutic agents available to people who need them.

What are the least rewarding projects to work on?

Apart from working with horrible people (for as short a time as possible), I have been known to turn down writing standard operating procedures because I couldn't face it.

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

I like to work with CROs. They are usually well organized and they focus on getting the work done. Obviously there are occasional exceptions, but it's rare to work with a pharmaceutical company in which anything happens when they say it's going to happen. It's also common for people in pharmaceutical companies to assume that you are only working for them, so if they send you something 6 weeks later than they said they would: "You can start the work straight away, can't you?"

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

I'm very bad at this. Sometimes it's easy. If the work has to be done in the next 2 weeks and I'm already panicking about how I'm going to cope, then I can say sorry, but I really don't have the time. If there's any possibility that I can squeeze the work in and I hesitate, they've got me. I have had to work late and at weekends many times because I didn't manage to say no.

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

I like to keep my options open but I have yet to hear of, or to imagine, a job that offers me more than I get from being a freelancer. If my personal circumstances change then I might have to consider becoming an employee again but I sincerely hope that doesn't happen.

Wendy Kingdom

info@wendykingdom.com
www.wendykingdom.com

Wendy is EMWA Treasurer and served on the EMWA Education Committee from 2000 to 2005.