

46th EMWA conference: Barcelona, Spain

Report on the Freelancer Business Forum

Chair of the Freelance Business Group (FBG) sub-committee, Satyen Shenoy, opened the Freelancer Business Forum (FBF) by welcoming everyone in attendance. He introduced the agenda for the evening and provided an overview of how the FBG sub-committee operates and of its activities for freelance members.

Satyen thanked two ex-members of the sub-committee, Petra Pachovská and Paul Wafula, for their service and contributions, and wished them well in their future endeavours. Satyen then welcomed two new volunteers who have replaced Petra and Paul –

Laura Kehoe, Freelance Scientific and Medical Writer, Switzerland
Carola Krause, codeX-bioMedical Writing Services, Germany

Laura Kehoe will also serve as the Section Editor of OOOO (Out On Our Own), the freelancing section of *Medical Writing*, the official EMWA journal.

The current FBG sub-committee comprises the following EMWA members:

Laura Kehoe, Freelance Scientific and Medical Writer, Switzerland
laura.a.kehoe@gmail.com

Allison Kirsop, Rosswrite Medical Writing, UK
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Carola Krause, codeX-bioMedical Writing Services, Germany
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Satyen Shenoy (Chair), Describe Scientific Writing and Communications, Germany
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George Xinarianos, OncoMed Communications and Consultancy Ltd., UK
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Moving on, Satyen highlighted the relevant pages of the EMWA website which offer listing in the directory as well as online resources for freelancers. Satyen also announced that he would be delivering a presentation on the FBG and its outreach in the last week of September 2018 through EMWA's webinar series and asked the attendees to watch out for an announcement on EMWA's social media.

Invited Speaker

Our guest speaker for the FBF was Dr. Helen Baldwin, Managing Director of Scinopsis SARL. The gist of Helen's talk was on how freelancers could have a successful relationship with their clients. Helen provided excellent advice on freelancing successfully and gave her

insights into what she looks for in a freelance writer, emphasising the importance of maintaining a good working relationship. Helen's talk was well-received by the gathering, and I thank her on behalf of the sub-committee for accepting our invitation and sharing her views with us.



Table Discussions

For the final part of the FBF—the Table Discussions—our Table Leaders (TLs) had earlier selected a hot topic to discuss and took up their positions in the forum where informal discussions took place over drinks. Attendees are always encouraged at the FBF to move between the tables to get the most benefit from our excellent TLs and the conversations underway.



The discussions were as follows:

Advertising your Brand on a Budget

Sylvia Paz Ruiz

Members talked about their difficulties when applying for positions advertised via online platforms such as LinkedIn. As freelancers, the general experience appeared to be the same which was a resounding 'no response' from the agency or company advertising the post. Members wondered if these positions exist at all, or if agencies are scanning the market to see what the medical writing pool of applicants might hold. Alternatively, does it mean that you have to be willing to give up your freelance status and apply for full-time jobs to work in your preferred field or industry? Our TL suggested that these posts may indeed be looking to place full-time employees, but as a freelancer, you can use this to your advantage to advertise your brand. There is no harm in letting them know that you are available to cover their requirements short-term and that you are willing and keen to help them with their current workload until they appoint a full-time employee. Members agreed this avenue might be worth trying as a means of gaining interim work.

The Importance of Contracts and Starting in Regulatory Writing

Katarina Kolbe and Debbie Jordan

Our TLs both expressed the importance of medical writers to have legally drawn up contracts and insurance when working in regulatory writing. One good reason given for this was using an example of when your client is a large pharmaceutical company who stands to lose a great deal of money if you deliver late on a project, or if revisions push the work back with further delays incurred. They discussed what a limited company meant regarding liability and how this was expensive to set up in Europe compared with the UK. Switzerland

seems to have unusually high costs for freelancers looking to minimise their financial risk and freelancers based there are more likely to have professional insurance cover as an alternative.

Emphasising the importance of knowing how to read a contract, our TLs gave sound advice on when not to sign! For example, if the wording includes the phrase “consequential loss,” this is a red flag that should alert you to possible troubles ahead, and you are advised not to sign. TLs also touched on how to market your capabilities as a freelancer, and how you should put the emphasis on what you ‘can’ do rather than what you ‘can’t’ do. Go to the [EMWA Freelance Resource Centre](#) and look under ‘Legal’ to find out more about Personal Indemnity Insurance cover in Europe and the UK.

The TLs provided some excellent advice for freelancers working in regulatory writing, recommending that all freelancers request a sample from their client to ensure that you are working on their preferred template. Also, it is always worth asking old colleagues about becoming involved as part of a project, and freelancers should contact agencies for freelance work. The [EMWA Freelance Directory](#) is a database of available medical writers with extensive experience, and an excellent source for clients to find our members. EMWA freelance members are encouraged to subscribe to this service and add their biographies. Also, freelancers can use job adverts looking for full-time employees to offer their services in the interim.

New Avenues in Freelance Medical Writing

Maria Almeida

Members participated in a lively discussion where plenty of ideas were thrown into the hat for developing potential areas for freelance work. A good suggestion was the field of toxicology as a specialist area for freelancers with chemistry/biochemistry/chemical biology backgrounds, and ideas for other areas included specialty e-learning and possibly veterinary work. A good point raised was that animals get cancer too, so perhaps vets employ medical writers in this capacity. Health writing is also an area which is expanding rapidly, and good health writers are sought after by medical online platforms and websites.



Tips and Advice on Being a Successful Freelancer

Jane Marshall and Jacqueline Johnson

The TLs discussed ideas on how to use pricing to your advantage and on what might work with a new client to ensure future business. There was sound advice from personal experience of successful and failed strategies our freelancers used to attract new clients, and members were also offered advice on when to cut your price and by how much. Pricing structures that you agree with your client need to be set out at the beginning if it involves a discount, and there was advice on how to improve your hourly rate and the price of a job should the project become longer than the initially agreed time to complete. However, knowing how to do this well and without causing consternation with the client does come with experience. Members discussed the importance of time management strategies for enhancing productivity, setting time slots for different jobs, and how having a separate work area was vitally important.

What Your Client Expects From You

Alison Rapley

Here we discussed the importance of client satisfaction, providing excellent advice on avoiding the trap of working for free. Our TL talked about being clear on both content and scope of projects, and how good communication between writer and client is critical to a successful working relationship. Topics of interest and relevance included:

- delivering projects within agreed timelines
- keeping your client informed of progress and being upfront when you struggle
- subcontracting projects only after confirmation with the client
- provide contracts that both parties agree on

- the importance of having the software/access to databases prepared before starting the project
- announcing holidays/unavailability upfront

Work/Life Balance and Freelancing Dilemmas

Mariana Rickman and Carolina Rojido

This discussion covered how to create a stable client base and how to get started. Previous employers can be an excellent place to begin or getting hired by medical agencies and other medical writers. Members were interested in knowing if an accountant is necessary for freelancers, and on how to establish a routine when you have children to consider. One suggestion was for your office hours to be stated in your email address so that clients understand when to expect emails answered. It was also stressed how important it is to turn down jobs when you have time constraints on your working day, rather than producing a lower standard of work for the client. More experienced freelancers agreed that it was not necessary to explain why you are unable to take on a job and that you do not need to give reasons, such as child commitments. By stating that you have a business meeting or other work commitments you keep the relationship professional. Remember that your client may also be a working parent who may find it slightly irksome that you can postpone deadlines to take care of family matters, whereas they cannot. Therefore, avoid personal reasons for saying 'no' to jobs.

What clients appreciate when working with Freelancers

Bruno Walter

Bruno also teamed up with Jane Marshall and Jacqueline Johnson on some areas of crossover and picked up on the earlier talk by our guest speaker, Helen Baldwin, to discuss the importance of producing high-quality documents. As an employer, he emphasised why freelancers need to have quality control steps in place before submitting work to a client. This important part of your service might be achieved by asking the client if they provide QC checks in-house, or if there is something that you as the freelancer can provide to ensure high standards of quality. A good suggestion was made for freelancers to partner up to provide a quality check for each other, and this might work for anyone involved in writing academic or clinical manuscripts. Moving on from quality to the importance of keeping to agreed timelines, Bruno highlighted the importance of excellent communication between writer and client; something echoed in another of our discussions on the day. From the client perspective, a freelancer's work might be judged as poor quality and therefore unacceptable, not because of the writing style or content, but due to miscommunication. He clearly stated how instructions from the client are paramount to a successful working relationship.

The FBF event was brought to a close by Satyen, who thanked everyone for attending and for the TLs for providing their expertise and knowledge to what was an extremely successful event for all. He also expressed gratitude towards EMWA's Executive Committee and our staff at Macclesfield for all their help and support to the FBG.

Come and join the FBF at the 47th EMWA conference in Warsaw, Poland in November 2018!

If you would like any information about the Freelance Business Group or would like to contribute to OOOO, please contact any of the sub-committee members for information.

Dr. Allison Kirsop

on behalf of the FBG sub-committee