

Publication Planning: The Role of the Freelance Writer

FROM THE 2008 FREELANCE WORKSHOP

By Joseph Breck

To writers with experience in publication planning, the process is detailed, challenging, and at times very rewarding. For new converts to the medical writing world however, it can seem like a long road full of many turns just waiting to confound and confuse.

At the AMWA–DVC Freelance Workshop held on April 12 at Normandy Farm in Bluebell, PA, Tania Dickson, PhD, Director of Editorial and Medical Services at Carus Clinical Communications, did her best, in a short time, to expose the complicated world of publication planning to the light of day, and how freelance writers fit into the process.

Tania's presentation started with the realities of the market, noting that agencies usually expect a 12-week cycle to produce a fully developed plan, where 4 to 6 months would be preferred. Best case would also dictate that a plan should be developed years in advance of product launch, whereas in practice, it's sometimes necessary to deliver in mere months.

That notwithstanding, pub plans grow from a short list of driving forces that, according to Tania, include:

- Maximum dissemination of research data
- Clear and consistent communication of messages
- Competitive product differentiation
- Need for share of market increase
- Single document for all non-CME pub activities

Approaching the process with a focus on achieving these goals helps build plans that push out product information efficiently and consistently across regions and markets.

The Role of GAP Analysis

The process begins with a GAP Analysis, then a Clinical Development Plan, a SWOT Analysis, and on to decisions on target audiences, journals, and events. It finishes with a market analysis, development of communication strategies and messages, and specific strategies and tactics.

According to Tania, a well-executed GAP Analysis is critical not only upfront, but also at several points in the product lifecycle. Finding out just what the client expects out of the analysis can make or break the project, however, so this is the point not only to ask critical questions, but also to get solid answers.

If executed correctly, the GAP will lead to several things:

- Evaluation of strategy and tactics
- Identification of needs for increased publication exposure
- Measurement of competitive activity
- Evaluation of gaps in the drug's publication portfolio
- Determination if clinical data has been used to best effect

Preparing a solid Clinical Development Plan then comes next, with an assessment of the data available from clinical trials. The scientific facts that flow from the trials are then used to construct the key communication messages for the product, or the “walk away” message that the audience receives. Tania stressed here that the data must support the messages and the messages must be consistent.

Strategic and tactical recommendations for message communication round out the plan, and range from the development of specific tools (abstracts, manuscripts, etc.) to journal selection. Here Tania cautioned that premier journals may sometimes take up to 40 weeks to get an article out in the market, a fact that must be factored into the overall timeline.

Freelance writers add to the overall publication plan in various ways, including writing support, review and documentation support, and strategic/tactical support. Tania ended her presentation by noting that, as in most areas of marketing, developing a solid publication plan all hinges on communication and building an effective working relationship with all members of the team.

Resources for Writers

International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP)

www.ismpp.org.

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