

DELAWRITER

The quarterly newsletter of AMWA-DVC

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Spring 2012

WINNING STRATEGIES FOR FREELANCE PRICING: HOW TO PRICE YOUR NEXT PROJECT

By Dawn Salamon

Pricing a project as a freelance is difficult whether you are a novice or a veteran, especially as no two projects are exactly alike. Laurie Lewis, award-winning author of *What to Charge: Pricing Strategies for Freelancers and Consultants*, presented her "Winning Strategies for Freelance Pricing" at the 10th Annual AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop held in King of Prussia, PA, on April 14, 2012.

Pricing a Project

According to Lewis, the best way to price a project is to decide on how much you want to earn each hour for that particular project based on its scope. For Lewis, the best method for determining this is to use a "task-based log" for pricing, especially if you are using a flat-rate fee for the project. To do this:

- Make a list of all the tasks the project entails, no matter how small.
- Estimate the time needed to complete each task.
- Add each task and the estimated time to your log.

Once the project is completed, Lewis recommends updating your log to include the actual time spent on each task, what the hourly rate actually was based on the time spent on the project, and any additional comments regarding the project that are relevant to its completion. Over time, this log will allow you to better estimate the amount of time based on the ease or complexity of any project. Lewis suggests using a time management program, such as Cashboard, to keep your log, but a notebook can be just as effective.

Another strategy that Lewis uses is to determine three different rates: the rate she would like to make on the project; the "cheapskate" rate; and the rate that "top of the line" medical writers make. The price is generally somewhere in the middle, but this method is obviously less accurate, does not provide the detail or history that a log would, and may result in underpricing a project.

Negotiating the Fee

Lewis also cautioned not to "talk money too fast" because it is very important to know the scope of the project before negotiating a fee. If the client is reluctant to agree to your fee, there are strategies you can use to compromise with the client instead of lowering your fee, such as agreeing that the client completes revisions and/or annotations. If the client does not budge, you can try negotiating a byline for the work; even though there is no monetary compensation for this, it will add to your credibility and body of work.

Signing a Letter of Agreement

Once the terms and rates have been determined, Lewis recommends that both parties sign a letter of agreement that states the payment terms (including installments) and details the expectations of each party. Both parties must sign the letter of agreement for it to be valid.

Dawn Salamon is the owner of HopToad Medical Writing, LLC, based in Port Murray, NJ. She is a freelance medical writer and editor specializing in Continuing Medical Education.

DEVELOPING YOUR FREELANCE ECOSYSTEM: A PANEL DISCUSSION

By Dawn Salamon

Freelancers all know how challenging it is to run a successful business single-handedly. At the 10th Annual AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop held in King of Prussia, PA, on April 14, 2012, Wendy Horn, PhD, moderated a panel entitled, "Developing Your Freelance Ecosystem" to discuss the different tools, tips, and services every freelance needs to effectively run a business while maintaining a work-life balance.

Running "Me, Inc."

First was Robert Levin, owner of Robert Levin Productions, Inc, and a freelance who has written, directed, and produced numerous medical, pharmaceutical, and other healthcare-related programs for companies such as ABC, Disney, and Discovery Channel. According to Levin, the key to a profitable freelance business is to run it as if it were named "Me, Inc." The best way to do this, Levin said, was to identify, maintain, and grow an ecosystem through:

- Assembling the best people and/or resources to achieve goals
- Building a network of reliable resources to assist in work-life balance
- Becoming a "team captain" through motivation and instruction.

Levin advised that building a reliable network of resources is a continual nurturing process since finding resources to trust is essential. He recommended establishing a network "forensically" by looking for resources who strive for excellence in their work, not just who are capable of completing the task. Lastly, he cautioned that freelancers must know their limitations in order to supplement them where needed.

Levin finished by showing a poignant 2-minute clip of a documentary he produced about a young girl named Macey living with type 1 diabetes, a documentary he claimed could not have been completed without the ecosystem he had carefully built over the years.

Social Networking

Bonni Scepkowski, president of Stellar Meetings and Events, an event planning company for large corporations, was the next presenter. According to Scepkowski, social networking was crucial to building her ecosystem -- most of her best resources came from meeting someone who "has a guy" -- with the caveat that vetting carefully was essential.

In her experience, a lot of business is through word of mouth. It is important to adopt an "everybody is important" attitude as one never knows where a conversation or project can lead and resources tend to be reciprocal. Scepkowski also said that most skills needed to run a freelance business are learnable and she recommended surrounding oneself with the people and/or resources that can assist with correcting any personal flaws.

Financial Planning

Edward Naphor, a registered representative with Cornerstone Wealth Management, LLC, explained that although finances are the most important component of a person's life, they are the least discussed and understood. Only 50% of people actually reach their personal financial goal and of these, 90% follow a plan. To develop a plan, Naphor recommended:

- Make a list of actual lifestyle expenses based on 3 consecutive months (omitting one-time expenses)
- Determine what the gross amount of income will be each year (including any sources of income at retirement) and adjust for taxes
- Index for inflation.

The result is usually a shortfall that needs to be covered. Naphor provided practical advice to help cover the shortfall. Small businesses can use an executive bonus to pay for disability insurance as well as a Simple or SEP IRA for retirement purposes. He advised everyone to consult with an accountant and/or financial planner to discuss the options. Lastly, Naphor stated that it was imperative to know and understand where the money is to fill gaps in income since "money equals freedom in life."

Ecosystem Checklist

Wendy Horn, PhD, owner of Insight Communications Group LLC, finished up with an "Ecosystem Checklist" of the essential people and services for a successful freelance business and maintaining work-life balance, including accountants, attorneys, web designers, office/personal assistants, printers, editors/writers, and services such as FedEx, UPS, Staples, and the Post Office. The checklist also included research Web sites such as eMedicine, UpToDate, and PubMed, as well as technologies such as smart phones and backup power sources.

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AMWA-DVC CELEBRATES ITS LONG-TERM MEMBERS

Congratulations to the 50 AMWA-DVC members who have belonged to AMWA for 10 years or more and reached an

40 years

Gerald Bernfeld

35 years

Mark Dana

30 years

Michael Umen

25 years

James Kesslick

Scott Koppa

David MacDougall

Nancy Priff

20 years

Charol Abrams

Sena Berkowitz

Terri Goshko

Elizabeth Hillyer

15 years

Jonathan Cargan

Lori De Milto

Daniel Di Paolo

Maryjo Dixon

Richard Feldesman

Laureen Klein

Maria Larson

Reina Marino

Deborah Matour

D. Scott Metsger

Mary Prior

Joanne Rosenberg

Christine Shimp

Patricia Walsh

10 years

Kira Belkin

Cynthia Borda

Jocelyn Colquhoun

Ann Davis

Kelleen Flaherty

John Gates

Anita Gogno

Theresa Hoffman

Regina Jurewicz

Gerald Keister

Frederick Kohler

Diane Lombardo

Thomas Lynch

Alisa Mayor

Janet Novak

Barbara Robleto

Marie Rosenthal

Donald Samulack

Loretta Spotila

Peggy Stansfield

Dorothy Tengler

Mary Thomas

Cindy Toso
Jo-Ann West
William Yarnall

TECHNOLOGY FOR MEDICAL WRITERS: GADGETS, APPS, AND THE CLOUD

By Bonnie Schultz

At the 10th Annual AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop, Jeanne McAdara-Berkowitz, PhD, discussed the benefits and downsides of some new technologies of interest to writers. She shared firsthand information on cloud computing and the applications and gadgets that are especially helpful with medical writing.

Berkowitz described herself as a recent PC-to-Mac convert. "Why should freelancers spend money on what are essentially toys?" she asked. "The reality is that sometimes you need to spend money to make money. Technology can improve your productivity, your ability to provide great service, and your image as a forward-thinking businessperson."

Benefits of the Cloud

Berkowitz said that the reason the gadgets and apps work so well is that they use cloud technology. She described the cloud as the natural evolution of digital access and storage.

She used photographs as an example. "Way back in time, we stored our photos in photo books that we could only look at with a physical book in our hands, making them tough to store and access." Now someone can store photos in the cloud and access them from a desktop or laptop computer. Berkowitz described how someone can also use the cloud to store music, documents, and software applications to be accessed through a Web browser without being loaded onto a computer.

"The cloud gives you remote access and sharing," said Berkowitz, "along with platform- and location-independence." For example, storage through Dropbox allows you to store a mirror copy of any document on the internet. Storage on Web sites such as box.net is HIPPA-compliant.

Berkowitz said that since most Web sites have mobile applications, you can access information from anywhere at any time and from any platform, and you can get news and information pushed to you. You can search both primary and secondary sources.

The downside of using the cloud is that "the internet can be a scary place." It may allow access to sensitive information. To ensure cloud safety, Berkowitz recommended doing research on reputable vendors, finding out how companies handle security issues. It is also imperative to use secure networks, SSL encryption, and secure and unique passwords, as hackers keep dictionaries of passwords.

For reference organization, reading, and annotation, Berkowitz suggested products such as Zotero and Mendeley that can convert scans to editable documents or allow you to markup PDFs. You can capture inputs from scanned documents or through voice recognition (such as Dragon and Dictate).

As alternatives to Adobe Acrobat, you can use PDF pen, Nuance, Corel and Nitro. For editing features, you can synch marked-up PDFs through Dropbox.

There are cloud-based products or apps that work like electronic note cards, that let you auto-correct and auto-replace as you type, that help with time and expense tracking, finance, and invoicing, and that let you take a photo of a receipt and upload it. Others let you manage project teams, create shared Gantt project management charts, and collaborate on documents.

For online meetings and presentations, Berkowitz suggested "cloud-based alternatives to PowerPoint" such as Prezi. For capabilities presentations, pitches, and content reviews, products such as GoToMeeting or Webex are useful.

Evaluating Tablets and e-Readers

When evaluating tablets such as the iPad and e-readers such as Nook and Kindle, Berkowitz said to consider how you will use it, measuring versatility versus cost, application availability, and the longevity of the product line.

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