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Summer 2015

Take a Step Back to Take Two Steps Forward

Growing a freelance business means taking stock of where you are so you can plan where you want to be.

By Bryan Bechtel

Having a successful freelance business is no happy accident. Achieving more with your career might mean taking time to critically analyze where you are currently so you can plan for where you want to go.

In a presentation at the AMWA-DVC Thirteenth Annual Freelance Workshop held March 28, 2015, in King of Prussia, PA, Laura J. Ninger, of Ninger Medical Communications, LLC, suggested that successful freelancers are not simply good writers and editors. Successful freelancers are as mindful of back office operations as they are diligent of the quality of the work product.

In a talk aptly titled "Making 2015 Your Best Year Ever," Ninger said that good recordkeeping is an absolute must, and that there may be a difference between good recordkeeping and recording the right kind of information needed to succeed. In addition, a freelance wishing to maximize his or her potential should have a clear plan for the future.

Taking Stock

Getting clients and producing quality work are essential components of running a freelance business; yet, these factors mean very little if the freelance is not achieving a reasonable income. But, as Ninger said, freelancers need to assess not only the total dollars coming in but also whether those dollars make sense.

Ninger said that she tracks effective hourly rates for each client: total dollars paid by a particular client, divided by the number of hours worked. In essence, this calculation reveals an hourly rate; it also provides a common denominator to compare among clients. This becomes

fruitful, Ninger said, when you two clients send you work but time only permits completion of one project; consistently accepting the project from the client with the highest hourly rate will help you boost your total yearly income.

Armed with that information, Ninger said, the freelance can make informed decisions about what is in his or her best interest about working with certain clients.

Assessing revenue is a tangible metric for judging one's current state of affairs, but other less concrete metrics are also worthy of attention, Ninger said. For example, a freelance can review the client list for the number of new clients coming in, percentage of retention of older ones, the ease of working with each client (timely feedback, number of revisions, reasonable deadlines, timely payments), and satisfaction with the work performed for each client.

Finally, a freelance should be fluid in his or her marketing metrics, recording not just how much and where. To assess the prospect of continued efforts-whether an ad placement, a newsletter, or direct marketing campaign-requires knowledge of the response rate relative to cost or effort and what the best methods were for attracting new clients, Ninger said.

Future Planning

Once the freelance is equipped with the requisite data, it is time to make an action list. This list should start with a clear and focused objective. Do you want to improve earnings? Get new clients? Change your project mix?

Although each freelance has his or her own career goals and objectives, and there are many roads to success, the ability to effectively market one's services is a common trait of successful freelances, Ninger said. If a freelance is not reaping benefit from his or her marketing efforts, Ninger said, it would be prudent to seek help in this area. The elements needed to grow one's business-earnings, clients, and projects-are largely a byproduct of effective marketing. Essentially, marketing is the "key to everything," Ninger said.

Growing one's business is not a one-time commitment, however. According to Ninger, down time is an opportunity to update resumes, business cards, and writing samples. Ninger said she regularly updates a project CV, which is a client list with bullet points with details of each project. The project CV helps with assessing the business, but it is also helpful in responding to ads for new work if you can anticipate what a client may be expecting and what you can offer based on prior services rendered.

The business side of being a freelance is, for some,

decidedly less interesting than doing the actual work of writing and editing. Yet, paying attention to the details of the business side-being as fastidious about earnings reports as you are with correct grammar and syntax-can mean the difference between success and failure.

Bryan Bechtel is currently a part-time freelance medical writer with experience in several medical subspecialties. He will be putting many aspects of this article to the test when he launches his own business in the coming year.

Networking for Success by Giving More, Taking Less

By Kathy Molnar-Kimber

AMWA-DVC and its members thank University of the Sciences Medical Writing Program for sponsoring the Keynote Speaker, [Ilise Benun](#), author of "*The Creative Professional's Guide to Money: How to Think About It, How to Talk About It, How to Manage It*". Ilise Benun coaches creative professionals (writers, graphic designers, artists) on marketing their services. She indicated that self-employment likely will increase to 59% from 30% today by the year 2050.

Benun gave an inspiring talk on applying the four cornerstones of marketing to your business by using the five top marketing tools with key perspectives on networking etiquette. She wove humor and examples into her key message-focus your messages to your customers'needs and desires at each opportunity. She discussed not only the "what" and "how to" but also those nagging beliefs that may hinder you from achieving your best efforts on self-promotion.

The 4 Cornerstones of Marketing for Creative Solopreneurs

First, choose the optimal target audience for your services. What services are you offering? Which clients need your services? Are your optimal clients the overbooked scientists or medical affairs professionals, the biotech or hospital marketing professionals, or clinicians who are non-native speakers?

Second, connect with your ideal clients by introducing yourself and discussing common interests. Great places include live conferences, including AMWA's Freelance Workshop, professional conferences discussing one of your therapeutic areas; and online forums, where you can offer valuable insights to ongoing discussions

Third, cultivate your relationship by staying in touch with

articles that may interest them. Some people clip articles and send them to their potential clients. Alternatively, offer a monthly or quarterly newsletter with articles that address clients' needs and are related to your services.

Fourth, her new word, "credibilitate" means to demonstrate your expertise. She emphasizes that many clients look for service providers with experience. She suggests becoming a "thought leader."

Five Marketing Tools That Connect, Cultivate, and Expand Your Network of Colleagues and Clients

Your marketing approach can provide multiple doors to connect with people and potential clients. The tools can be useful for brief chance meetings in an elevator (elevator pitch), to reconnecting with your colleagues (network), to helping your colleagues and peers in online forums (LinkedIn profile and your contributions), to providing useful articles on relevant topics and a list of your samples (client-focused website), and your newsletter (remaining connected and useful).

As you compose and polish your marketing message, always keep your client's needs in mind.

Networking Etiquette

Two of Benum's key messages were to focus your efforts on how you can help new acquaintances and turn them into friends (ie, skip the soliloquy on your services). Your active listening can help you decide whether the new friend prefers just an "ear" or may be open to new ideas and your perspective. Getting to know a few people well may be more productive than just passing out business cards to many. She emphasized that "Asking the right questions is more effective than talking" in many cases. For more information, visit her [website](#) and sign up for her free tips.

Kathy Molnar-Kimber PhD, director of Kimnar Group LLC and KMK-How-to-Write.com, specializes in development of manuscripts, posters, reports of clinician working groups, medical conference coverage for professional audiences, and their summaries and implications for general audiences. She lives in Worcester, Pennsylvania.

Needs Assessment Survey Highlights Shifting Priorities

By Michelle Dalton

Medical literature reviews, clinical practice guidelines, and interviews with key opinion leaders (KOLs) are the top 3 sources of information consulted when experienced professionals write needs assessments (NAs) for accredited continuing medical education (CME) programs, according to results from a new survey. Ruwaida Vakil,

MS, and Don Harting, MA, ELS, CHCP, presented their findings during AMWA-DVC's 13th Annual Freelance Conference held on March 28, 2015, in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Yet respondents also believe medical literature, evaluation reports from previous activities, and clinical practice patterns surveys are "most essential to include" from a client/employer perspective, they said.

At their heart, NAs are decision-making tools used by continuing medical educators when planning activities to offer, they said. NAs are also sometimes referred to as "gap analyses," they added. But most importantly, NAs serve as the core component to a grant proposal.

"When it comes to best practices in CME today, the medical lit review clearly holds a central place in the assessment of educational needs," said Vakil, principal medical writer at ProMedWrite LLC in Somerset, New Jersey. "However, today's lit reviews are shorter and more targeted. Exhaustive reviews that were meant to impress readers with the writer's command of the subject are a thing of the past."

"We now have a substantial dataset from which to draw inferences about best practices, and to set a baseline for future research," said Harting, a CME specialist with MCM Education in Newtown, PA.

Among the other key findings:

- More than half of the 103 respondents have been writing NAs for more than 5 years
- Almost 70% spend less than 2 days a week writing NAs
- 87.4% formulate learning objectives from both professional gaps and medical literature searches

Quantitative data from the 10-question SurveyMonkey survey were supplemented with qualitative data gathered from a Google hangout and a dinner focus group.

"What we found was that the use of outcomes data is now common, and will likely continue," Vakil said. "The patient's voice is becoming more important as well, with writers now including patient interviews, stories, and advocacy groups in their research."

The two plan on continuing their research to include what type of writing style is best suited for NAs (highly clinical or more conversational), what best practices exist from the client (ie, grant provider) perspective, and what pricing/scheduling is most common, Harting said.

Lori De Milto, MJ, is a freelance medical writer specializing in

Editing: Tips and Tricks

By Jason Vian

Like any other writer, I do not like having to see my work rewritten extensively. During DVC's Annual Freelance Conference in March, I attended the editing roundtable to pick up a few "Tips and Tricks." Roundtable facilitator Melissa Bogan did not disappoint. She imparted many tips to our group based on her vast experience over the years.

The group was composed of editors and writers with various backgrounds but with the common interest of improving their editing skills.

She shared her checklist for editing documents and manuscripts. The checklist begins with a quick review of the file itself. Then it is time to move on to edit and format the following areas: references, figures, tables. After those steps are completed, one moves onto formatting the file to the client's requirements while checking for consistency. Next, one can move onto figure and table callouts, as well as the references that need to be double checked to ensure that they are in proper order. The final step is to edit the paper from beginning to end.

Simple Steps: The Key to Preventing Major Problems

Peppered throughout the session were simple tips that can bypass a great many problems. One suggestion was how to save and date versions of a file. This process can avoid wasted efforts by ensuring that editing work is saved at regular intervals. If something happens to the manuscript and a file ends up with a problem, the next most recent version can be used.

Bogan also highlighted a few resources that may make work processes easier. Stedman's Medical Dictionary, Editorium, and PerfectIt were discussed. [Stedman's Medical Dictionary](#) offers the ability to add on to the Microsoft Word (MS Word) dictionary. This expanded MS Word dictionary can help decrease the number of passes and corrections needed for a manuscript that has many medical terms that could be flagged as misspelled by MS Word.

[Editorium](#) offers several useful MS Word add-ins that can help an editor save time. The programs offered have built-in macros that enable one to perform several functions in a more timely fashion. According to the Editorium, this can

include "finding and replacing multiple items, cleaning up common editorial problems and extracting embedded footnotes."

Another application that is used as an MS Word add-in is **PerfectIt**. It allows the user to rapidly make changes to formatting within the document. The program can help make changes to tables, and check for inconsistencies in the use of abbreviations within a document.

The programs that many of us use are typically capable of more than we realize. Often, it is simply a matter of exploring the options that are available. Bogan went through several options available within Word that have been there for a long time but that can easily be overlooked when using the program. She presented several simple features that can be used to save time and decrease frustration for the user. When is the last time many of us have explored some of the 'preference' options in MS Word? In the "Word Options" section, there is a "Display" option that enables the formatting marks to be displayed or hidden. This one change may help to correct formatting problems slightly quicker. In editing a large file, those small time savings can add up quickly.

This session proved to be very useful in several different ways. It introduced the attendees to several new resources. In addition, it served as a reminder to use the tools already available in a slightly different way to help us work more efficiently and effectively.

Jason Vian is a freelance medical writer/ instructional designer living in Nazareth, Pennsylvania.

Generate YouTube Videos: Propel Your Freelance Medical Writing Business and Be of Service

By Ciranna Bird

Mary Agnes Antonopoulos, a branding expert and copywriter, kept her audience spellbound at the AMWA-DVC's 13th Annual Freelance Conference held on March 28, 2015 in King of Prussia, PA. Her talk, *The New Social Media: Using YouTube to Run Your Entire Social Media & Brand in 4 Hours a Week*, challenged attendees to create videos of themselves to expand their social media presence.

Being present on social media not only expands our business but also helps disseminate the knowledge that only we as medical writers can provide, she said. When Antonopoulos' husband became sick, she began searching on

the internet for information that could help her understand his disease. She found like-minded people who are looking to medical writers to transform dense medical terminology into usable information.

Three Advantages of Video

1. At live events, such as the AMWA-DVC Freelance Conference "magic happens." The next best thing to being there in person is sharing information via video.
2. Navigating social media is challenging because each forum uses a different language and has its own culture. YouTube transcends the differences. With a click of the button, you can share the same video on your website, LinkedIn profile, Facebook, and author-centered pages on Amazon, Google+, and Twitter.
3. YouTube is owned by Google. Having videos improves your social grid and search engine optimization.

Overcome Video, Technical, and Self-Conscious Concerns

All that one needs to create a video is a smart phone and someone to transcribe your video. To find affordable and technical savvy people, Antonopoulos recommended visiting rev.com or fiverr.com. She uses one magic phrase to help her overcome her fear of being on camera, "I will not let fear and vanity be a roadblock to being of service."

Formula for 2-Minute Video

Because viewers lose interest within the first 5 seconds of a video, Antonopoulos suggests the following formula:

1. Avoid lengthy introductions
2. Say your name, company name, and spell out your website address
3. In 1 or 2 sentences, state what you do or your mission statement
4. Provide your interesting tip of the day,
5. End with your name, company, and upcoming event/product.

To obtain a copy of Antonopoulos slides, visit her [website](#) and enter the code "AMWA" in the Stay in Touch section of her homepage. An audience member, Sarah Zimov, PhD, who is the president and principal medical writer of SZ Creative Group in New Hope, PA, left the following feedback: The presentation on using YouTube for simplifying posting on social media was excellent. It was practical knowledge that medical writers don't often encounter elsewhere.

Ciranna Bird is a freelance medical writer specializing in data analysis in Raleigh, North Carolina.

New AMWA Certification Exam

Set the standard in medical writing excellence
Bring your professional expertise to the forefront by becoming a member of the inaugural class of Medical Writer Certified (MWC™) credential holders. The first certification of its kind, the MWC™ demonstrates that you possess the foundation of knowledge required for medical writing across all disciplines.

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- A minimum of 2 years of full-time work experience or the equivalent (eg, 4 years of documented part-time work at 20 hours/week) within the past 5 years. Experience must be in a paid capacity in the field of medical writing

Apply now! The application deadline for this year's September 30th exam is June 30th.

AMWA's 75th Annual Conference

September 30 - October 3, 2015 San Antonio, Texas

We look forward to celebrating AMWA's 75th Anniversary with fellow chapter members in beautiful San Antonio! The AMWA Annual Conference is the ultimate resource for medical communicators around the world, offering educational and networking opportunities beyond compare in the field. Registration is **open**!

DINNER IN SAN ANTONIO

Join us for dinner at this year's Annual Conference in Texas for a DVC Chapter "Greet & Go" to dinner. Barbeque, Tex-Mex? Restaurant **suggestions** are welcome! More details to follow!

AMWA-DVC ELECTION

It is time for AMWA-DVC members to elect the next President-Elect and Treasurer. Our candidates for President-Elect and Treasurer are:

- President-Elect: Michelle Dalton, ELS
- Treasurer: Mark Bowlby, PhD

AMWA-DVC chapter will use an online voting system and ballots were emailed on June 20th. The voting period will be 10 days between June 20th and June 30th. Please vote electronically using the link provided in the ballot.

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