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Jam Session for Early- to Mid-Career Freelancers

Session Moderator

Jennifer Minarcik, MS / Principal, Jennifer Minarcik Biomedical Communications, LLC, Moorestown, NJ

By Suzanne Morris, DVM, MWC

About 15 freelancers and freelancers-to-be gathered at the AMWA 2022 Southeast Regional Conference in June to share their early freelance career experiences. Some of the participants had just decided to take the freelance plunge and were eager for tips on setting up a new business whereas others with more experience were wanting to share lessons learned. Session facilitator Jennifer Minarcik, MS, started the discussion by divulging some of the assumptions she had when she first started her freelancing career. She spoke to the misperception that freelance medical writers are all in competition with each other by pointing out the diversity of medical writing genres represented by the session's participants.

Acknowledging that the varied nature of freelance medical writing lends to camaraderie rather than competitiveness among freelance medical writers led to a discussion of networking. Although making connections with other freelancers may not translate to immediate work, networking can develop leads, elevate a freelancer's marketplace presence, and unearth other benefits. One of the more valuable of these benefits may be finding a good mentor. The more experienced session participants extolled the benefits of mentorship in guiding their early freelancing careers. But how does a new freelancer go about finding a mentor? Those who had who have benefitted from mentorship described a relationship which naturally developed from a networking connection.

Another early career misstep Minarcik discussed was the compulsion to take on every project, and the consequent erosion of the work-personal life border. Minarcik and the other more seasoned freelancers agreed that project selectivity fosters a reasonable work schedule and, potentially, better clients. Because part of cultivating a work-life balance entails supporting work hour productivity, the discussion then turned to productivity strategies. For example, creating a schedule with built-in time to respond to distractions like emails supports productivity during work hours. Protecting work time also may require establishing boundaries with clients by responding to clients only during set work hours or at set times during the week.

The conversation turned to some of the other nuts-and-bolts of running a freelance business. As with most freelance medical writing discussions, the topic of contracts arose, albeit briefly. The take-home message for new freelancers was to carefully review contracts, particularly with respect to payment parameters. Some of the freelancer participants who were just forming their businesses asked for advice on insurance and accounting. The responses from the more seasoned participants were mixed—few had insurance, and several used accounting services and software. But the consensus was that some form of accounting assistance was very helpful.

Inevitably, the discussion turned to what may be the most daunting aspect of freelance medical writing or freelancing in general: marketing. The importance of presence online, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn, was discussed at length by several seasoned freelancers. For introverts averse to overt self-promotion, a less intimidating approach may be simply posting about topics of interest, which creates an online presence and can garner attention. Another strategy was to investigate companies associated with relevant forms of medical writing on LinkedIn and make connections with their employees. Whether to solicit potential clients through email was a point of debate, with the more experienced freelancers advising that if done, it should be targeted and could backfire by annoying the targeted client. The discussion of marketing repeatedly circled back to value of networking, which can be done online and in person through, for example, AMWA events. And in keeping with its overriding theme, this AMWA session ended with participants exchanging their business cards.

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Public Relations in Medical Communication

Speaker

Katrina R. Burton, BS / Public Relations Program Director

By Lisa Kuhns, PhD

According to the Public Relations Society of America, organizations and their publics use public relations as a communication strategy to build relationships that are mutually beneficial. Medical communicators help educate the public by sharing relevant health information through their own writing, and those with a marketing and public relations