

Out on Our Own

Section Editors:

Alistair Reeves
a.reeves@ascribe.de

Kathryn White
Kathryn@cathean.co.uk



Editorial

In these dark winter months, how many of us have day-dreamed about moving to an exotic, sunny location? Janet Davies describes how she did exactly that when she resigned from her job in Holland and moved to the Azores to start a new life as a freelancer. Alistair Reeves and Suzanne Geercken provide more useful language resources for non-native speakers in the final part of their series, which has filled our bookshelves with many helpful references.

To ensure the long-term success of our businesses, marketing is a fundamental skill that freelancers need to establish early on to attract potential

clients and contracts. Following on from his recent webinars, Matt Craven from The CV and Interview Advisors will share his top tips for writing effective CVs. In this the first of a series of articles, Michelle Storm Lane gives her advice on how to build our business profiles, and Fiona Higgins describes how to use social media to our advantage and improve our online presence. Finally, if you're feeling over-worked as you desperately try to deliver pre-Christmas deadlines, take a short break and have a chuckle at our Freelance Foraging photo taken by Kathryn at an equestrian event where they clearly think horses can read.

Kathryn White

Kathryn@cathean.co.uk

Alistair Reeves

a.reeves@ascribe.de

Calling all freelancers!

Don't miss this issue in the main journal:

Sam Hamilton's article describing progress to date on the EMWA-initiated 2-year forensics project on ICH E3.

Out on the ocean: Freelancing in the Azores

I live and work on a volcano in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean. Well, not exactly in the middle, but almost. Check it out on Google Earth, or an old-fashioned globe if you prefer: coordinates 38°35'5"N, 28°48'34"W. There you will find the Azores, a dispersed group of nine volcanic islands – each consisting of several volcanoes – that emerge above sea level where the North American tectonic plate meets the Eurasian tectonic plate at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

Rather unimaginatively, I called my business Atlantic Medical Writing. I suppose I could have gone for Volcanic Medical Writing, but then I'd be at the bottom of all alphabetical listings! Here I

share with you my experiences of setting up business as a freelancer in a new country.

How did I come to be working as a freelance medical writer here?

The dream began some 7 years ago when my husband and I were pondering our next move. We wanted space, land, better weather than is generally available in Northern Europe, and a good internet connection. We had been looking at central and northern Portugal, then we went on holiday to the Azores. We didn't visit all nine islands – just Faial, one of the central group of five. There we saw houses and ruins for sale, with land and a

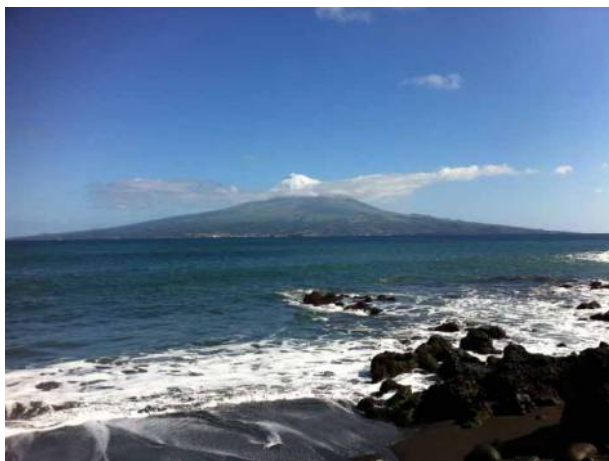


Figure 1: Pico from Faial.

sea view. Prices were a little higher than those on mainland Portugal, but still pretty low compared with anywhere else we had considered. The Azores are part of Portugal, but they are governed autonomously and are in the Eurozone (Figure 1).

Finding our dream home and office

Although we didn't see the house for us on that first visit, we decided that this was where we wanted to be. On our return to the Netherlands, where I was working full time as an Editorial Project Manager for a medical communications agency, we put our house on the market.

Within a week we had a buyer. Within a month the sale had fallen through. Then the financial crisis kicked in, and it took until October 2013 to sell the house.

In the meantime, we had obtained our Portuguese fiscal (tax identification) numbers, which are required for buying property in Portugal, and opened a Portuguese bank account. We kept

looking at (and coveting) several houses on Faial, while we were there house- and pet-sitting and meeting lots of new people, building our circles of friends and acquaintances.

Then we saw our house: a ruin (walls mostly intact, no roof) with 8000 m² of land, overlooking the sea. We purchased the house and land at the end of 2011 and, early in 2012, employed a local builder to start clearing the debris (and more than 30 years' growth of brambles) from inside the house, rebuild part of one wall, and install steel and concrete reinforcement to keep the house standing during earthquakes. (Did I mention the earthquakes? All part of living on a convergence of tectonic plates. Ours are still moving apart.) Our savings were now all gone and our Dutch house was still not sold (Figure 2).

Setting up the business

In February 2014, we finally moved into a rented cottage on the island, just a minute's walk from our property, so I can work while we establish the kitchen garden and keep an eye on the house renovations. Our ruin now has a roof (Figure 3). I made it clear to our new landlady that the internet must be up and running by the time we arrived, because I already had work booked from my previous employer. So, I plunged straight into freelancing during our first weeks on the island. At that time, storms were battering most of Europe, and many parts of the UK were being flooded. Our weather was just as bad, if not worse, and not conducive to internet connection or even electricity! We got to know our telecoms technician, Antonio, quite well, and amazingly we managed to communicate despite my limited Portuguese vocabulary. Yes, we should have learned Portuguese a long time before we arrived!



Figure 2: The ruin.



Figure 3: The ruin acquires a roof.

More language challenges

In a brief break between projects, I took a Portuguese-fluent friend with me to the tax office to register my business. The tax official referred us to an accountants' office, where we were told I could register as a straightforward single-person business or as a single-shareholder society with 'limited' status. After much deliberation and calculation, I chose the latter option, and my business is officially called Janet R Davies Unipessoal, Lda. I think Atlantic Medical Writing has a better ring to it, but that wasn't allowed by the Portuguese business registration authority. Still, I could register it as my trade name – for an extra fee.

In Portugal, you must specify your business activity precisely, choosing from a long list of possible activities. 'Medical writer' is not one of them. After some discussion, we chose a definition incorporating science, editing, research, and consultation, given that the only 'writer' options come under the 'arts' category. Now that wouldn't do, would it!

My Portuguese-speaking friend was essential at this point because neither the tax official nor the accountant (Sandra) spoke English. The consultation with the accountant was quite a challenge: my friend's Portuguese doesn't stretch to financial jargon, but I suspect I would not have understood any better had the meeting been conducted in English! I was left feeling that I had placed a great deal of trust in people I barely knew. Still, so far – so good.

Paperless office, anyone?

My business was registered through the use of an efficient online system. This was done by a solicitor. The next step in the process – registering at the social security office – was very much less efficient. I went there with Sandra and waited patiently as the guy at the desk used one finger to type in my information. He entered the same information three times. He

then photocopied the business-registration document printed out by the solicitor, and finally, once the computer had generated the required social security number, he printed that out and then photocopied it. One for the file and one for me. I discovered later that, despite using an efficient online invoicing system, I too have to print out my invoices and keep the paperwork for 10 years.

Next, off we went to the stationery shop, fiscal and social security numbers in hand, where Sandra instructed me to buy a hardcover, bound notebook (*livro de actas*) in which she proceeded to write four pages of text, which I had to sign. Apparently, this is some kind of legal declaration about how my business runs – Sandra will have to update it (by hand) every time I make a change to my business (for example, if I decide to give myself a pay rise). Another job done, and I rely on trust yet again. But Sandra is a gem. Our communication is aided by Google translate, and that way I get to spot typos in her Portuguese!

So the administrative aspects of setting up the business have been quite trying. Not only tricky to understand, but also a very slow process involving an odd mixture of old and new technologies and of flexible and totally rigid attitudes of government officials. Perhaps it is the same everywhere.

Still, I am up and running, work is coming in, and I am now in the throes of designing a website and updating my Linked In profile. Although I am not at all confident about marketing my business (and I confess this activity is often pushed to the bottom of my to-do list), I do know one thing – I am probably the only freelance medical writer based on a mid-Atlantic volcano. Could that, perhaps, be my unique selling point?

Janet R. Davies

atlanticmedicalwriting@gmail.com

A writer's 'best friends' – Recommended language resources for (medical) writers (3)

Admittedly, a self-employed medical writer's job mostly consists of spending hour after hour in the relative isolation of his or her office trying to make sense of puzzling data and converting them into an easily comprehensible, readable (English) text. In the previous contributions in the 'best friends' series, we recommended resources that help you achieve this goal. There are, however, occasions when 'knowing the language' alone will not be

enough. What if you have to attend a meeting with your business partner or need to negotiate a contract? In these situations knowing the local rules of conduct, your business partner is likely to observe will be as important as fluency in English.

Susanne remembers, for instance, a situation at her very first EMWA conference:

We were having lunch and the conversation at the table naturally started with people commenting on

the food that was served. This gradually evolved into a discussion about food and cooking in general. The Italian lady I was sitting next to and I as well as several other people at the table got quite involved in the subject, exchanging recipes and calling up memories of fine dishes we had cooked and enjoyed. When I later shared my satisfaction with this inspiring lunchtime conversation with an English colleague, she replied something like: 'Well yes, but I don't actually understand why people in Europe always make such a fuss about food'. This remark made me feel quite self-conscious – since the English colleague had apparently not shared our enthusiasm at all – maybe talking about food and cooking was not as suitable subject for small talk in a multicultural context as I had thought.

In today's instalment of the best friends' series, Susanne would therefore like to entice you to go beyond language alone and explore some of the aspects of intercultural interaction:

To be consistent with the 'best friends' format, restricting my choice of recommended books on intercultural awareness to the English and US cultures is necessarily subjective and prejudiced. Suggestions for further reading involving other cultures are more than welcome.

*Watching the English. The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*¹

Watching the English was recommended to me some years ago by a fellow German translator who is married to an Englishman. Since I am more familiar with US than English culture, I found the book to be very helpful in understanding the English and to appreciate the cultural differences between the UK and the US.

Watching the English is intended to provide us with what the author and anthropologist Kate Fox calls 'the "grammar" of English behavior' (*Watching the English*, p. 2). To be consistent with Kate Fox, I also use the term 'English' rather than 'British' or 'UK' culture. As to a rationale for her choice, please see *Watching the English*, pp. 20–21).

In the introduction, she explains that her analysis of English culture is based on a research method called 'participant observation, which essentially means participating in the life and culture of the people one is studying, to gain a true insider's perspective on their customs and behaviour, while simultaneously observing them as a detached, objective scientist' (p. 3). This method is usually applied to the study of alien cultures, but Kate Fox uses it 'at home'. The result is a charming and highly entertaining mixture of fond personal involvement

paired with a well-structured, detailed analysis of English behaviour in everyday situations. She covers every aspect of social life – rules of introduction and of saying good bye, pub talk (quite a long chapter), rules of humour (of course, a must for any foreigner trying to understand English culture), dress codes, rules at work, and everything in between. If this sounds like dry reading, believe me, it is not. Despite her scientific background, Kate Fox's style is unpretentious and entertaining; her vivid descriptions of typical everyday English social interactions make you smile or even laugh out loud. At the same time, she successfully teaches us to deeply appreciate this unique phenomenon called Englishness.

I, for my part, have taken away valuable learnings from reading this book: in the chapter on Weather Talk, for example, Kate Fox explains that blunt disagreement with any statement about the weather or even open criticism of the English weather is considered a breach of etiquette – I blush: unaware of this rule, how many times have I broken it? In the section on rules of introduction, she mentions that there is a certain reluctance in the English to readily give their name when first introduced (this cultural peculiarity, by the way, is also corroborated in Jane Walmsley's 'Brit-Think, Ameri-Think' described below). This fact may be useful if you want to avoid uncomfortable situations at your next business meeting.

Not surprisingly, there is also a chapter on food rules in the book, where we read: 'Food is just not given the same priority in English life as it is elsewhere' ... 'No-one wishes to be seen as too deeply fascinated by or passionate about food' (pp. 296–97). I suppose this helps in explaining what happened at the EMWA lunch table all those years ago.

*Brit-Think, Ameri-Think – A Transatlantic Survival Guide*²

Non-native speakers of English often tend to forget that the British and Americans, while they share a – largely – common language, differ greatly in their cultural attitudes and customs. Jane Walmsley's *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think* is an eye-opening book about this cultural divide. Jane Walmsley was born and raised in the US but moved to Great Britain as a student, married an Englishman, and stayed on to live in the UK. Being familiar with both US and UK thinking, she often found herself taking the role of a translator or mediator trying to bridge the transatlantic cultural gap. In *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think*, she presents her experiences with this 'translator' role; the book impressively juxtaposes US and

UK attitudes towards fundamental issues like choice, money, consensus, perception of heat and cold, business attire, success and failure, goods and services, and humour. Walmsley's descriptions of the cultural peculiarities of both nations are interesting, succinct, and funny. Unlike Kate Fox's more scientific style, this book uses informal writing including jargon and cartoons. *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think* is a valuable resource for medical writers dealing with business partners from the UK or the US, since it helps them recognise and avoid potential transatlantic cultural blunders. The book is instructive, entertaining, and also relatively short so that I would even recommend it as a light read on your next holiday or business trip.

Alistair's selection this time covers three books that are also not language works: *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*, *Goodman and Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*, and *How to Report Statistics in Medicine* by Tom Lang and Michelle Secic.

*Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*³

It is not a language work, but one of the foremost textbooks on medicine in the World in the English language. And that is where the 'language resource' comes in: If you don't know *Harrison's* as it is known throughout the world, you should, and if you have it on your bookshelf but don't often take it down, then you should try doing so a little more. Unless, of course, you use only electronic resources – but even then, that doesn't prevent you from using *Harrison's* these days.

Harrison's has been a valued companion throughout my entire, now almost 40-year career in medical translation, writing, and editing. I am not ashamed to admit that I am old-fashioned enough to still prefer the paper version, now in its 18th edition. Sticking to a few reference books on paper gives you valuable respite throughout the day from the monitor, Wikipedia, and other exclusively electronic resources. I remember in the first few years in this business, when we were still using electric typewriters, I used to sit and read *Harrison's* for hours with great enjoyment to familiarise myself with terminology and style. It was obligatory reading every time I was faced with a new indication. And an obligatory reference work together with medical dictionaries when looking for the exact meaning of a word or term in a particular context. The search for a single word sometimes used to take hours, but that didn't matter, along the way you came across all sorts of other fascinating terms, definitions and turns of phrase that meant that the time was not

wasted – and this contributed to your general knowledge of medicine too!

The contributions to *Harrison's* are, quite simply, a delight to read, and gave me a real feel for what you can do with language in our context: especially indication-specific terminology, plain medical English, collocations, the correct choice of verb for different medical and surgical procedures, avoidance of distraction, and how to compose paragraphs in medical texts. Like all medical textbooks, *Harrison's* is not cheap. If language is your prime concern, however, you don't need to have the most up-to-date edition, and second-hand copies are very reasonably priced.

Things have changed as far as reference works are concerned, and users now expect answers at the click of a mouse or at the most after a few keystrokes. *Harrison's*, unlike me, has moved completely with the times and for US\$220 (about €160) you can subscribe to *Harrison's Online* which makes this possible: 'Backed by the authority of *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*, 18e, the world's most trusted medical text, [it] delivers information on the diagnosis and treatment of more than 4700 diseases and disorders', is continually updated, and is fully searchable. It also offers a drug database, videos and animations, and 'much more'.

This is a staggering resource that every medical writer, editor, and translator should be familiar with, whether you work primarily as a regulatory writer or in medical communications.

Susanne would like to add that the book has also been translated into many languages (she has a copy of the German translation in her office). Together, the English and the translated versions provide an invaluable source of high-quality, closely reviewed translations covering the full array of medical indications.

*Goodman and Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*⁴

This has been one of my favourite reference works for the past four decades, now in its 12th edition. While *Harrison's* focuses on the disease entities and their various treatments, *Goodman and Gilman's* focuses on drug classes and treatments, and the disease entities they are used for. They therefore complement each other perfectly. With its 'landmark text', it falls into the same category as *Harrison's* for me: an indispensable reference work that I also used to sit and read, sometimes with a specific term in mind, sometimes just to fill in a quiet half hour, always learning something on the way, about language, pharmacology, or medicine. And one I still often refer to today, again, as

far as I am concerned, preferably on paper. A rewarding resource to any medical writer, editor, or translator, and those working in the area of clinical pharmacology will find it especially useful, if not indispensable. As a language reference work, I have learned as much from it as from *Harrison's*.

It is an expensive book, but again, unless you really do need the latest information, you don't need the latest edition and can go for a second hand (earlier) edition. If you need the latest information or prefer staying at the monitor, you will probably be interested in an online version, but as far as I can see, this is only available as part of a very expensive package (more than US\$800 [€590] per year or US\$50 [€37] to use it for 48 hours). So I expect most of us, especially freelancers, will be sticking to the paper version.

*How to Report Statistics in Medicine*⁵

What is a book on statistics doing in an article about language resources for medical writers? Quite simply, you can find a definition and explanation of any statistical concept you will come across in medical writing in this brilliant book by Michelle Secic and Tom Lang. And the title says it too – how to *report* on statistics ... in other words, how to *write about* statistics, which means it is a very worthwhile investment at about €30.

Most medical writers have no special qualifications or training in statistics and find it difficult to penetrate the baffling terminology of statistics. It is not easy to find simple, straightforward explanations of basic concepts that we need to understand in our everyday work. Michelle and Tom have put together a book that you can sit down and read to learn from, or use as a reference work from time to time. While reading, you learn the *language* of statistics, and that is what we writers are interested in:

only if we ourselves understand the terminology we use than we feel confident that the reader does too. This book is a must for newcomers to the profession because, as a non-statistician, you can actually understand what the authors are talking about.

The book finishes with a 43-page guide to statistical terms and tests as a quick reference to what can be found in greater detail in the earlier chapters, which are prefaced by a detailed consideration of the differences between clinical and statistical significance. We all know the blurred line that often exists between the two in reports and publications – and this is usually because the implications of the concepts themselves have been misunderstood, not a deliberate attempt to misrepresent an outcome. This difference is explained using simple language, which is the hallmark of this entire work.

Alistair Reeves

a.reeves@ascribe.de

Susanne Geercken

susanne.geercken@pfizer.com

References

1. Fox K. Watching the English. The hidden rules of English behavior. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.; 2004.
2. Walmsley J. Brit-Think, Ameri-Think – A transatlantic survival guide. New York: Penguin Book; 2003.
3. Longo D, Fauci A, Kasper D, Hauser S, Jameson JL, Loscalzo J. editors. Harrison's principles of internal medicine. 18th ed. New York: McGraw Hill Medical; 2011.
4. Brunton L, Chabner B, Knollman B. editors. Goodman and Gilman's the pharmacological basis of therapeutics. 12th ed. New York: McGraw Hill Medical; 2012.
5. Lang T, Secic M. How to report statistics in medicine. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians; 2006.

Treating your CV as a living and breathing document

So your contract or project is soon to end; the PC gets switched on, the lamp fired up, the coffee maker is set to 'constant' and off you go, CV writing in earnest! You say to yourself, 'I'll get this done tonight and I'll start applying for roles tomorrow'; then you realise, it's not a quick job; writing a list of duties and responsibilities is one thing but conjuring up a powerful professional summary that is going to sell your services is another. Writing case studies is definitely not easy; thinking about your value proposition and your brand takes some serious grey matter, and writing a

series of tangible and measurable achievements involves recalling all sorts of information long forgotten – and that's before you start worrying about key skills, education, professional development, publications, articles, and the rest.

The point I am trying to make is that a high-impact CV takes a lot longer than a few hours. From my experience, as a one-off task, I would suggest it's at least 15 hours' work. Yes, you can conjure up a basic CV in a couple of hours, but something truly worthy of a professional medical writer is and should be a much bigger undertaking.

Having said all this (and for the purpose of this article), there are some ways to reduce the late nights and coffee sweats: it's all about keeping a chart of your tasks and achievements *During* your contract so that when you get round to writing your CV, you have all the raw material to hand. This is also a great strategy for interviews or client pitches. Inevitably you will be asked a number of situational or competency-based interview questions, and recalling key events from your career is pretty tough if you haven't thought about these in advance.

We recommend something called the Career Autobiography Approach[®] which is all about getting into the autobiography mind-set. As a point of interest, let's just pontificate about how long it would take to prepare the raw material for an autobiography. Let's say that you've been offered €60k plus royalties and all you need to do is to furnish your manuscript with some interesting significant events from your life, sufficient to fill a 300-page book. How long is that going to take? Many hours I would suggest! Preparing for the freelance market is no different; to be effective, you need to know the main important events that have happened in your career. If you are able to recall things that have happened in your career, then handling interviews is so much easier. Questions like 'Give me an example of when you have handled conflict in the workplace' or 'Tell me about a situation when you introduced an idea that resulted in significant business benefits' become much easier to answer than trying to think of them 'off the top of your head'.

Now, the same applies to writing your CV. The more information you have at your fingertips when you start writing about each of your freelance contracts, the better your information is going to be. If you have documented your successes and the

business benefits that have occurred as a result of your endeavours, then it's much easier to sell yourself when the time comes to create this all important document. Scrabbling around for some kind of tangible and measurable outcome from something you did 18 months ago is not easy, but referring back to an up-to-date and reasonably detailed career chart makes it easier.

A simple career chart consists of several columns, each with key nuggets of information. Start by identifying the skills and competencies that are important to your profession and future roles, and make sure that you have evidence that you have demonstrated these skills. Then start mapping out events including major projects and achievements. Make a note of the situation or challenge that your client faced; make a note of the circumstances surrounding your involvement (your task); note down the key actions that you took and the reasons why you took them; and finally, make a note of the outcome, focusing on providing tangible and statistical evidence that you succeeded. What I have described here is STAR (Situation, Task, Actions, and Results), which is a fantastic tool for preparing, writing, and talking through pieces of work.

This living breathing document (career chart), over time, is going to become substantial; there may be as many as half a dozen achievements from each assignment, but what a great resource to refer back to when writing and updating your CV, or preparing for an interview. It's a very simple solution and if you can make a habit of noting down these nuggets of information, I guarantee you will find it much easier to effectively sell yourself next time you need to apply for a position.

Matt Craven

info@cvandinterviewadvisors.co.uk

Ways to boost your medical writing income

Marketing – love it or loathe it, your medical writing business can't flourish without it.

Marketing isn't just about getting more work; it also enables you to land better work. If you can incorporate some simple marketing techniques into your working life you are more likely to have a greater range of projects to choose from, which puts you in a stronger position to turn down any that could prove to be stressful and unprofitable.

Freelancer Mike Symes says he treats his own business as if it were one of his clients. If he has four clients, his own business counts as the fifth,

so he will spend one-fifth of his time on marketing and improving his business.

The key is to make it as targeted as possible to make the best use of your time and resources. Here are some ideas to give your freelance medical writing businesses a boost:

Use a recruitment agency

If you feel daunted by the idea of prospecting for clients yourself, you can 'outsource' the task to recruitment agencies specialising in Pharma, Biotech, Life Sciences and Medical Communications (for a list of IPSE Accredited Agencies, please see

www.ipse.co.uk/supplier-directory). The larger agencies have branches all over the world.

It is worth bearing in mind that agencies charge the end-client a commission on top of your fee, which usually means you have to work for a slightly lower rate than if you were engaged directly by the client. However, the upside is that agencies are often best placed to know where the opportunities are and can therefore provide you with a steady stream of work – this means that in the long run you could actually be better off by not having too many gaps between projects.

In addition, some large companies appoint agencies to handle all their talent requirements and refuse to deal directly with freelance contractors. Therefore, if you want to work with one of those companies, going via an agency is the only option.

When dealing with an agent, remember that they are salespeople, working in a highly competitive environment to earn their commission. Don't give away more information than is necessary for you to win the project – some agents under pressure to hit their sales targets may ask who else you have worked with or been interviewed by. Be wary of revealing your entire professional network or you could find agents using the information to promote their own business instead of yours! Additionally, try to find out as much as you can about the project from the agent before you give permission to send your details to the client.

Despite these caveats, if you do your research you will be able to find reputable agencies who take the time to get to know you so they can sell you effectively. It is worth registering with several agencies to increase your chances and it is important to meet each one face to face. Be sure to return their calls promptly and to follow up on every single project for which you have been put forward (for further tips on working with agencies, visit www.ipse.co.uk/advice/working-agencies).

Spread the word

Many freelance medical writers enjoy years of profitable work by using nothing more than the time honoured word-of-mouth technique. Relying on your network is one of the most effective ways of reaching end-clients directly, with no recruitment agency in between. This simplifies the relationship and gives you more control over your rate.

To fuel the word-of-mouth effect, make sure you tell everyone you know that you are working as a freelance medical writer, even your family and friends. Describe your areas of scientific interest in ways that a layperson can understand – leads can come from the most unexpected sources.

How else can you keep in touch with your network? 'Easy one. Christmas cards', says freelancer Kelvin Prescott. 'It just has to say best wishes and remind them that you still exist. Sounds too simple? It is, but the returns on investment are fabulous'.

You could also ask any past colleagues, employers, or clients to write you a short recommendation to use on LinkedIn or on your CV – people who respect you are usually very happy to do so. It also has the advantage of reminding them why they enjoyed working with you.

To go one step further, you can ask your existing contacts to introduce you to someone who has a need for your services. John Niland, patron of the European Forum of Independent Professionals, feels that too many freelancers miss prime opportunities to gain valuable referrals because of fear. 'Some of these fears do possess certain plausibility', he says. 'The usual excuses range from "good referrals come to me" to a genuine concern about not being seen to be too commercial in a trusted-adviser relationship. Nevertheless, it's useful to challenge ourselves here: are we acting out of genuine concern on the client's part, or out of sophisticated procrastination on our part? Do we simply lack the courage to ask?' (for more advice on how to pluck up the 'courage to ask' and an illustration of an effective referral conversation, please visit www.ipse.co.uk/advice/referral-conversation).

With all business conversations, it is important to remember the human angle. Ask the person about their holiday, their personal life, and their interests. One freelancer recounts how he noticed a replica sailing boat on the desk during a meeting with a prospective client: 'When I asked about it we both realised we shared a huge passion for sailing. At that point I knew the contract was mine!'.

Rethink your CV

If you work in a competitive field, your CV can be the deciding factor that gets you through the door to discuss a potential project.

The standard way of presenting a CV is to have a 'career history' section, showing your employment record in reverse chronological order. However, for freelance medical writers this presents a challenge: how do you convey the breadth of projects you have worked on?

Matt Craven, founder of The CV and Interview Advisors, recommends that freelancers should take a slightly different approach:

Write each major project you have done as an evidence-based case study and create a section

titled 'Portfolio'. This is the most effective framework for freelancers to write their CV – it breaks your career down into individual pieces of work. You may identify 30 pieces of work and decide that 15 of them are up to date and relevant. Once you have identified the key pieces of work, write them as short case studies, no more than six lines long, ideally using the STAR methodology (Situation, Task, Actions, Result).

The CV then becomes a portfolio of case studies and you are able to change the order around depending on what roles you are applying for. Of course, recruiters will still want to see your dates of employment or contract engagement, so put a career chronology section after the case studies with the date, company name and your job title. This framework will provide you with much more flexibility and allow you to tailor the CV to the roles you are applying for in a much more effective way. (Matt Craven runs regular free online workshops on honing a freelance CV – if you wish to receive event updates, please sign up to the IPSE newsletter at www.ipse.co.uk/events.)¹

Increase your rate

Ruth Adams says, 'I enrolled on a marketing course in which the presenter, Chris Cardell, suggested to the assembled crowd that we should double our rate the next time we were asked to quote. It seemed outrageous at the time, but I tried it anyway. To my surprise, the client didn't bat an eyelid and it led to a lucrative year-long contract. The client was delighted with my work and renewed the contract the following year'.

Of course, there will be times when a client decides not to go ahead due to price. However, it is important to experiment by trying out different price points, because your perception of what is expensive can differ radically from your prospective client's view. A popular rule of thumb is that you should be losing around 20% of your work due to price. If nobody ever challenges your rate, it suggests that you are at the bottom of the market.

Build your online presence

Do you need a website? Many business advice articles would have made you believe that it is an absolute must, but a surprising finding in a IPSE survey showed that clients ranked a website and/or online presence as the least important factor when selecting a freelancer. The top three things

they look for are qualifications, price, and evidence of training (attitudes to freelancing: freelancers versus business leaders, 2010, www.ipse.co.uk/research/freelance-sector-research).

Therefore, it may not be worthwhile investing large amounts of time and money on a website at the expense of the previous approaches discussed here. However, there are cost-effective ways to increase your web presence in order to enhance your professional reputation and build a thriving market for your services.

Some freelancers use their LinkedIn page instead of a website – you can set up a custom URL for your profile and publish the URL on your business cards and email signatures. You can also create a 'company page' on LinkedIn, which provides a powerful way to serve specific updates to selected audiences.

A free blog platform such as wordpress.com can also be used to create a simple website. If you are able to spend some time writing blog posts on your chosen therapy area, it helps to attract the attention of your network – whenever you create a new blog article be sure to publish a link to it on your LinkedIn page.

Another excellent way of signalling your expertise in your field is to include white papers on your blog, website, or LinkedIn page. If you have written a doctoral thesis, perhaps there are elements of this that could be adapted to create a white paper, or report that addresses particular scientific angles that your prospective clients are interested in.

Blog articles and white papers provide you with valuable and relevant content that you can use to email prospective clients (according to the EU anti-spam rules, it is ok to send unsolicited email to business owners and company employees without their prior consent, as long as you don't conceal your identity, you provide an easy (free of charge) way for the person to opt-out of receiving further communications and you provide a valid address for opt-out requests.). It is far more powerful to approach someone with a 'you may find this useful' message than with an email asking for work (if you need a list of potential prospects to email, you can find wide range of 'useful links' in the resources section of www.emwa.org).

This article has been adapted from guidance provided in the IPSE Guide to Freelancing. For more information please visit www.ipse.co.uk/guide.

Michelle Storm Lane
michelle.lane@ipse.co.uk

What is search engine optimisation and how can it improve visibility?

For most businesses, a highly visible presence online is increasingly important, and investing in the right search engine optimisation (SEO) techniques can go a long way towards achieving this. We asked HMA Digital Marketing, a top digital agency in the North of England, to share its top tips.

What is SEO?

SEO is the process of improving your website's visibility in search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing. SEO affects only a search engine's 'organic' results. 'Sponsored' results, where a company pays to have its organisation featured in a listing, e.g. Google Adwords, are separate.

Why is SEO important?

A website enables you to stay in touch with your customers and prospects 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, whether they are placing an order or simply finding out more about you or what you offer. However, in today's competitive landscape, having an online presence isn't enough, you need the right search engine strategy so that customers can find you. Around 75% of users never scroll past the first page of search results (source: MarketShareHitsLink.com), therefore, businesses that dominate the first page of results are much more likely to gain exposure to potential customers than those further down.

How does it work?

Quite simply, the content of your website is ranked according to what the search engine considers to be most relevant to the user's search query. Therefore, the way in which you create, manage, and update your content has an important impact on website traffic and a business's visibility online. This in turn may influence the number of enquiries, leads generated, sales conversions, and so on.

Top tips for SEO

To implement a successful SEO strategy and improve the visibility of your business, we've put together our top tips on how any business – large or small – should be considering SEO in everything they do online.

Key phrases

Begin from the customer's perspective: why is a potential customer visiting your website, what are they trying to find, and what search terms would they use to find it? By looking through the customer's eyes, you will discover the key phrases that generate traffic to your website. These key phrases can then

be applied to page titles, descriptions, URLs, and page content to improve your website's visibility. However, be careful not to over insert the same key phrases, known as keyword stuffing, as this can go against your ranking.

Create valuable content

Pay attention to writing high quality, original content around the search terms you want to be found for. Search engines will only list your site for information which closely matches your searcher's query. This means that if your website content is irrelevant and doesn't add value for your audience, you are far less likely to occupy a high position in search engine results.

Keep it fresh

Stay on top of news and take this as an opportunity to publish up-to-date, relevant information for your customers. The more regularly you update your content, the more frequently it will be crawled and indexed by search engines and, therefore, ranked more highly. Blogs are an excellent way of keeping your website content fresh and, in addition to improving your ranking, they help to build relationships and encourage social sharing. Go one step further and set up Google authorship, allowing you to link your blog content to your Google+ profile and stand out more in search engine results.

Don't forget to optimise images

Images are often overlooked in SEO, yet they are increasingly important to the customer experience and provide another opportunity for your business to be found. Choose a relevant image file name and caption as well as using ALT and Title tags. The ALT tag (ALternate text) is a text description that can be added to the HTML tag that displays an image. When the cursor is moved over the browser, the ALT text appears. A title tag is an HTML tag used to define the title of the web page.

Don't forget the social network site, Pinterest. Make your images pin-able by adding Pinterest's 'Pin-It' button. With 70+ million users, Pinterest is one of the fastest growing social networks and one of the top social media traffic referrals to websites (source: Shareaholic Jan 2014 stats).

Build links

Link building is the process of generating quality inbound links to your website from other websites and remains one of the most important indicators to determine site relevancy and importance. Plan

your link building strategy carefully and select a handful of relevant trusted sites rather than lots of links on poor quality sites as this will work against you. Marketing applications such as Group High can help you identify influential bloggers to generate more word of mouth buzz, increase trust, and empower your biggest advocates. Furthermore, creating unique and compelling content will encourage others to link to your website naturally.

Social media sharing

When website content is shared on social media, this sends a strong message to both visitors and Google that your content is valuable, especially when it is shared a lot. Make sure that all of your website pages, news, and blog articles are easily sharable by implementing a sharing plugin. Most of these are free (e.g. ShareThis) and easy to set up.

Local SEO

Create a Google Business listing and greatly improve your visibility in searches. To set up, visit <http://www.google.com/business/> and connect with customers when they're looking for you on Google Maps, search, or Google+.

Local SEO is becoming increasingly important because more and more people are using their phones to search locally, for example, for places to eat, drink, and shop. Ensure your business is set up locally on Google my Business and don't forget to include your phone number so that users can click to call you. Three out of four mobile searches trigger follow-up actions, whether that be further research, a store visit, a phone call, a purchase, or

word-of-mouth sharing (source: Econsultancy) so it's vital that your business is featured.

Install Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free tool and provides valuable insight into the search queries that generate traffic to your website, top referral websites, and what your visitors do once they arrive. By monitoring and understanding website traffic on a regular basis, you can identify the ways in which you can optimise your content for search.

Keep it clean

Keep the HTML code of your website clean by making sure it is formatted correctly, is readable, and as simplified as possible. Avoid anything that requires a lot of code as this will make it harder for search engine spiders to find your valuable content and ensure you get your keyword-rich copy as high up the page as possible.

To get started on your SEO strategy, Google has published a useful 'Search Engine Optimisation Guide' which will take you through everything from SEO basics, improving site structure and optimising content. Alternatively, if you would like to save yourself the headache and let a team of SEO experts help, get in touch or refer to the Recommended Agencies Register (RAR) for a list of reputable agencies.

Fiona Higgins
fiona@hma.co.uk

Freelance foraging

Horses at this event cannot only read, but know their left and right!

