



## Editorial

The EMWA autumn conference is always so well placed in November, giving us the chance to meet friends and colleagues before the onslaught of traditional end of year festivities. Barcelona's conference was no exception. We were pleased to welcome new and old friends alike to the Barcelona Freelance Business Forum (FBF). The FBF minutes are now on the EMWA website ([www.emwa.org](http://www.emwa.org)) in the Freelance Resource Centre (FRC), so do take a look if you missed the meeting. Remember that the FRC is your resource. Log in to the 'members only' section, click 'Resources' then 'Freelance Resource Centre' and browse – you may be surprised at the range of business- and medical writing-related content available. Do spread the word to your non-freelance colleagues; the content is open to all EMWA members.

In this year-end issue of Out On Our Own, Anne tells us about her first experience of taking a free (yes, free!) 'Massive Online Open Course' (MOOC). With content relevant to our profession, as well as plenty of alternative material to choose from, the sky (or probably more realistically, our available time) could be the limit to our learning. Perhaps MOOC will find its way onto a few New Year's resolution lists...

Jane's second article in her series on Social Media (SoME) develops the theme of using SoME as a business and marketing tool. Jane's practical use of SoME platforms to maintain continuity of workflow

illustrates the intelligent side of SoME use and balances out the side we are more used to reading about in the papers!

Hurray – Tool Box is back after Raquel took a well-earned rest in September 2013. This time, Raquel tells us about ORCID – an authorship attribution platform that gets around the problems of authors moving jobs or changing their names. From those of us who published material before marrying, chose to take our partner's name, and continued to publish afterwards, we salute you!

We close for 2013, but not before asking you to add another resolution to your list:

Contact us with any material or ideas you'd like to contribute to OOOO. More varied content and a wider pool of authors is good for us all. Remember that the exposure is particularly good for freelancers and your business.

We thank all our contributors for the wonderful material you have sent us in 2013. You know who you are, but we love you so much for getting involved, that we'd like to mention you again:

Ann Bless, Amy Whereat, Aylsia Battersby, Claudia Frumento, Jane Tricker, Anne McDonough, Paul Woolley, Anne Cunningham, and Raquel Billiones.

Hmmm – strange – not many men! Come on guys, get involved in 2014...

All the best to you all for the seasonal holidays, and we'll be back in March 2014.

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## Is a MOOC for you?

I am, by nature, a late adopter when it comes to technology, but as a freelancer I know I need to keep up with important innovations. Fortunately I have tech-savvy friends, and when one of them blogged last year about taking a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), I knew this must be the next big thing. She was ahead even of the *New York Times*, which

in November 2012 deemed that year 'The Year of the MOOC'.

## What's a MOOC?

A MOOC is a class (usually at the university or advanced degree level) that is available over the

internet and into which anyone can enrol. Over the last year or so, several providers of MOOCs have started up – both for-profit and not-for-profit. Coursera ([www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)) seems to be the most established and offers a wide variety of courses from prestigious American universities such as Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Stanford and from universities in many other countries such as Mexico, Israel, Australia, India, Taiwan, France, and Germany. Here are a few examples of courses that might appeal to medical writers:

- Clinical Terminology for International and U.S. Students
- Case-Based Introduction to Biostatistics
- Design and Interpretation of Clinical Trials
- Writing in the Sciences
- Drugs and the Brain.

The MOOC business model is not entirely clear to me, and I don't believe the rampant hype that MOOCs are a viable alternative to traditional university-based degree courses. They may, however, present an excellent opportunity for the freelance medical writer to advance his or her professional knowledge – particularly because they are free. Yes, you read that correctly – FREE.

### How was my experience with a MOOC?

Last spring I signed up for Drug Discovery, Development, and Commercialization offered through Coursera by the University of California – San Diego. Since I have worked in drug development for over 20 years, I did not expect to learn a great deal of new information from this course; my objectives were to consolidate the knowledge I had gained from experience, fill in some gaps, and gain a better understanding of the trendy new technologies being used in discovery.

I registered for the course online and received a welcome e-mail from the instructor with a link to the course materials. By the time the course started, over 14 000 people had registered. Apparently such a large enrolment is not uncommon, and MOOCs often have tens of thousands registered. Of course, fewer start the course, fewer still complete it, and only a small number of participants complete the assessed work.

The structure of the course was 2 hours of lectures (given via PowerPoint slides with voiceover) per week for 10 weeks. The lectures were released on Friday mornings and were available to view online or download; the instructor also provided PDFs of

the slides for download. Each topic was covered by a different presenter, and each presenter provided high quality, though slightly overlapping, content. The instructors also provided an online discussion forum and made themselves available in Google Hangouts. I initially found that as a busy freelancer it was quite difficult to find even 2 free hours a week, but I caught up after a few weeks. Once I was able to incorporate the time into my schedule every week, I really enjoyed the break from my work.

Quizzes after each lecture and a final project comprised the assessment component of the course. The final project could be completed individually or in a small group and was graded by peer assessment, a practice that seems to be the standard in the MOOC world. Participants who completed both of these activities received a Statement of Accomplishment. A Verified Certificate could be earned with the same work plus registration in the Signature Track (requiring payment of a US \$50 fee and provision of identity details). Sadly, I was not the recipient of either document because, although starting with the best of intentions, I gave up on the final project in the end. Because of my hectic schedule, I had planned to complete the project on my own, but found it was a bigger piece of work than I could manage in a reasonable amount of time.

### Would I recommend a MOOC to other freelancers?

Absolutely! My main piece of advice is to decide early on the level at which you want to participate. Will you just listen to the lectures, or will you complete the work to attain a Statement of Accomplishment or Verified Certificate, participate in the forums, and attend hangouts? Both approaches are valuable, I think, but, if you want to achieve the latter, some planning and commitment will be required to keep up and complete the work. If you are looking for more of a refresher or taster, a MOOC provides a great deal of flexibility in fulfilling those objectives. In fact, for at least some courses, an archive of course materials is available online, so you do not even need to wait for the course to begin to look at them. Overall, I think MOOCs provide a great resource that you can tailor to your needs, interests, and availability.

### Would I take another MOOC?

Again, absolutely! I was very satisfied with my experience and have just signed up for another

course related to my work. I'm also ready to try something new. As important and challenging as it can be for freelancers to keep their knowledge current, it can be equally important and challenging to switch off from work. Anyone want to join me in

Roman Architecture or Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas?

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## Using social media for self-promotion and business development

In the September 2013 issue of Out on Our Own I explained how I use social media for connecting and networking within the medical communications industry and wider afield. In this second article I will describe how I use social media to help ensure that I have a constant stream of work through self-promotion and business development. I am not a social media expert, but I have developed an interest in it in the last few years, and been fortunate to have access to experts who have been generous with their hints and tips.

### LinkedIn™

My first foray into social media was with LinkedIn. Although my first aim was to use it to network with other medical writers and editors, as time went on I began to appreciate that LinkedIn could expand my business horizons – both within medical communications (as people that I was connected with moved on to new jobs), or because people from outside our industry needed a medical writer for a one-off project. Deciding to use LinkedIn as a promotional tool, rather than as a networking opportunity, however, meant engaging with it on a different level.

I was advised to make my LinkedIn profile as complete as possible to improve my 'discoverability' and to encourage searchers to contact me. Over time I have continued to refine and add to my LinkedIn profile, usually at LinkedIn's prompting, to ensure that it stays 95–100% complete. My intention is that my LinkedIn profile should contain enough information to allow a potential client to make the decision to shortlist me for a project.

Another aspect of engaging with LinkedIn was to start to use it to give status updates – particularly when I'm attending meetings (in case some of my contacts also are attending) – and to follow status updates (to identify opportunities to renew a personal contact – for example, when a contact moves to a new job). I also started to join in with discussions in LinkedIn groups that I belong to: sometimes, if someone else has managed to crystallise my thoughts, and I can't add anything more of value, I'll just hit the 'Like' button, occasionally I contribute my own thoughts and experiences – however, I'm always

conscious that I could do myself more harm than good by saying something silly or by writing something that would identify a client. I have noted an upturn in the number of people viewing my profile, and have received invitations to connect with other group members, after taking part in a discussion.

I would say that in terms of social media, LinkedIn is my most important tool for self-promotion and business development.

### Twitter™

I joined Twitter just before my website went live in 2010. At that time, my only reasons for joining were the benefits that I was told it could bring to my website – and I will return to that later. As with LinkedIn, though, I soon started to see other possibilities. I followed the example of a fellow freelancer and started to post occasional Tweets (without mentioning clients or products) about the type of work that I was doing, and highlighting unusual projects or in-house interim contracts, for example, with the hope that the audience would see a versatile and flexible medical writer working in a range of therapeutic areas.

As with LinkedIn, Tweeting about (or sharing other people's Tweets about) new developments in medicine, news stories about the pharmaceutical industry, meetings that I am attending (in the real world or in cyberspace) etc., informs potential clients that I am here and taking an interest in issues relevant to the industry.

I believe that Twitter has its uses in direct self-promotion and business development, but its greater value is in networking, continuing education (a theme I will develop in my next Out On Our Own article), and indirectly supporting other business development efforts.

### Google+™

This is a 'work in progress' for me, as I have only recently set up my Google+ account. I have completed my profile and started to build some circles, but I'm still exploring what to do with it. As in my early days with Twitter, my primary aim for Google+ is to drive traffic to my website.

## All social media paths lead to [www.freelancemedicalwriting.co.uk](http://www.freelancemedicalwriting.co.uk)

My website is the most important part of my business development strategy. It presents a more detailed breakdown of services that I can offer potential clients than my freelancer listings allow; it contains testimonials from clients and – through a link to my blog site – potential clients can see examples of my writing style. However, the time and money invested in my website would be wasted if it was undiscoverable by people searching the internet.

Although some changes have occurred since my website was developed, search engine optimisation (SEO)<sup>1</sup> still relies on creating good backlinks (links from other websites) to improve search engine results page (SERP) rankings. As they carry a lot of SEO ‘weight’, I have linked my freelancer listings on EMWA.org and medcommsnetworking.co.uk, and my profiles on LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, and WordPress<sup>TM</sup> to my website. In addition, my

Twitter feed is plugged into my home page, so, as long as I Tweet regularly, that page is continuously updated, giving internet bots<sup>2</sup> more reason to re-index it and helping to improve its SERP ranking. Thus, the work done by my social media sites in pushing traffic to my website and improving its discoverability in internet searches, is at least as important as the direct opportunities that they present for self-promotion and business development.

<sup>1</sup>SEO is designed to improve the chances of your website appearing higher on the results page than those of your competitors – consult a specialist for more information and guidance.

<sup>2</sup>Internet bots are software applications that run high speed, simple and structurally repetitive tasks – in this context they fetch, analyse and file information about the pages held on the web server that they are assigned to.

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## Tool Box

### ORCID: The key to correct attribution

National censuses show that the likelihood of two unrelated people sharing the same family name is high.<sup>1</sup> Ask anybody with the last names Johnson, Patel, Lee, or Garcia and they will tell you how their frequently occurring surnames can often lead to mix-ups in their private as well as professional lives.

### Attribution and authorship

Attribution is defined as the act of attributing or ascribing, i.e. ascribing a piece of work to a particular person. Is this a Monet or a Manet? Was that Bach's or Beethoven's?

In academic institutions, accurate and reliable attribution of research outputs (e.g. publications) is of prime importance. And because in most cases multiple authors are involved, the order of attribution and the individual researcher's contribution in a publication also need to be clearly defined.<sup>2</sup> After all, attribution is not only about getting the credits and honours but also about responsibility and accountability. The example below illustrates how common surnames can complicate academic authorship:

Yu XM, Wang L, Li JF, Liu J, Li J, Wang W, Wang J, Wang C. Wnt5a inhibits hypoxia-induced pulmonary arterial smooth muscle cell proliferation

by downregulation of  $\beta$ -catenin. *Am J Physiol Lung Cell Mol Physiol.* 2013;304(2):L103–11.

### ORCID and publications

In 2012, ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) was launched to provide a unique identifier for researchers, thus addressing the problem of correct attribution of scientific publications. This ‘machine-readable, 16-digit unique digital identifier’<sup>3</sup> is similar to a barcode and aims to link researchers with their academic output, regardless of a change of affiliations or names.

The ORCID is far from the first of its kind in attempting authorship disambiguation. Over the years, many publishers have issued log-in names or unique IDs to submitting authors. There is also the ISO-certified International Standard Name Identifier (ISNI) which is the ‘global standard number for identifying the millions of contributors to creative works and those active in their distribution, including writers, artists, visual creators, performers, researchers, producers, publishers, aggregators, and more’.<sup>4</sup> ORCID is the academic or scholarly equivalent of ISNI and the two systems have issued a joint statement on interoperation.<sup>5</sup>

Claiming uniqueness ‘in its ability to reach across disciplines, research sectors, and national boundaries and its cooperation with other identifier



systems',<sup>6</sup> ORCID is supported by major players from different sectors including universities, research organisations, scientific societies, and publishers. Most publishers, including Wiley & Sons, Nature Publishing Group, Elsevier, and Thomson Reuters have integrated ORCID in their electronic submission process of peer-reviewed manuscripts.

## ORCID, research outputs and databases

However, ORCID is not just used for tracking peer-reviewed publications but also less prestigious, but nevertheless important, outputs such as conference abstracts and posters, researcher contributions that may not qualify for authorship status and even social media posts. ORCID can be linked to other pre-existing publications ID such as Scopus Author ID and ResearcherID, or to a LinkedIn account. Online bibliographic databases such as Ovid (ovid.com) and Europe PubMedCentral (europepmc.org) are also now linked to ORCID.

## ORCID and grant applications

Finally, ORCID is not just for researchers and publication tracking.

In January 2013, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) subscribed to ORCID and started testing the ID's use in their grant application workflows.<sup>7</sup>

Another funding agency, the Wellcome Trust, is actively involved in the ORCID board. According to Liz Allen, Head of Evaluation at the Wellcome Trust:

*ORCID promises to provide funders a means to better track research and understand the impact of our funding while reducing the burden for researchers of reporting the products of their research.*<sup>7</sup>

With this step, ORCID completes the circle of linking researchers with their grants and outputs.

In the future, we may expect ORCID to become a gold standard in research and lead to the development of new quantitative metrics for the evaluation of scholarship and scientific merit.<sup>2</sup>

You can get your unique ORCID for free at orcid.org (Figure 1). In the next issue, we will bring you some tips on how to use your ORCID to optimise your professional profile online.



Figure 1: Getting an ORCID is quick, easy and free of charge. Screenshot is used with permission from ORCID and the Creative Commons license.

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## Freelance Foraging

Kathryn White saw this unusual menu item in Mallorca over the summer. Served in a bun with chips is perhaps the best place for them!

