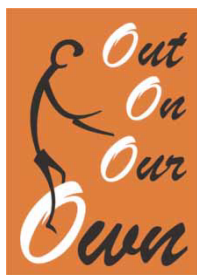


Out On Our Own

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Editorial

We hope that you enjoyed the summer months and found time to step away from your desks and relax. This time last year, Kath organised her first 'Medical Writers' Retreat', the aim of which was to provide an opportunity for fellow free-

lancers to spend a day away from the office to 'work on their business', network, and attend a group coaching session with international life and business coach Elaine Bailey. In this issue of Out On Our Own, Kath describes her motives for organising the event and her experiences as organiser, while fellow freelancer Alysia Battersby gives an attendee's account.

How did we all keep in touch before Facebook and Twitter? Social media is taking up space in our personal lives, and is becoming an increasingly important tool in business for networking, marketing, and keeping in touch with clients. In the first of a new series on different aspects of social media for freelancers, Jane Tricker explores how social media can be used for networking.

Our Freelance Foraging feature will help keep those holiday spirits alive and make you smile,

with a couple of amusing snapshots courtesy of Sam. You'll never look at an aircraft safety card in quite the same way again! Please send us your humorous photos for publishing in future editions of Out On Our Own.

The minutes for the Freelance Business Forum (FBF) at the May 2013 EMWA Spring Conference in Manchester are now on the EMWA website and we look forward to catching up with you in person once more at the EMWA conference in Barcelona on Friday, 8 November 2013 at 17.15. With so many new freelancers joining us at each FBF, we see a repeat of questions largely relating to acquiring clients and setting up and running a business. If you require such information, please go to the Freelance Resource Centre (FRC) on the EMWA website (www.emwa.org). Log in to the 'members-only' section, click 'Resources', then 'Freelance Resource Centre', and browse. The FRC contains a plethora of information about different aspects of business management as well as many other useful documents and guidelines relating to medical writing.

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A medical writers' retreat

From concept to reality

It was while riding my horse, Wilbur, through the autumnal woods close to home that the idea came to me. Why not organise a medical writers' retreat to provide a support network for freelancers based in the UK?

I am a member of a similar and regional network of freelance clinical researchers who meet once a year to discuss topics relevant to their role. I have found these meetings invaluable and a fantastic opportunity to meet like-minded people. I am also

actively involved in the EMWA Freelance Business Forum and have been involved in the Institute of Clinical Research Freelance Forum, so I have experienced, first-hand, how useful these meetings can be.

The task seemed daunting at first but I enlisted the help of business coach Elaine Bailey, who acted as a sounding board for my ideas, adding suggestions from her own experience of setting up workshops and training retreats. I knew the idea was good, but I was still uncertain of how to move forward. Why would anyone want to come along to something I had organised and was there a



Photo 1: Our group of solopreneurs.

need for such a forum in the UK? Elaine laid down the gauntlet – if I organised one for 2012 she would come along to provide group coaching to the attendees. It was a deal. This would provide the perfect launch and provide participants with an opportunity to receive sound business advice, while networking with their peers. My objective was to offer my fellow freelancers a day away from the office in comfortable, informal surroundings where everyone could concentrate, without the distractions of work or home life, on developing themselves and their businesses alongside others in a similar situation. I wanted to bring everyone together to swap ideas, thoughts, and concerns.

I am fortunate to have a fantastic network of freelancers and colleagues, many of whom have been mentors to me since beginning my freelance career, while others are considering a move into freelancing, and I have been happy to answer any queries they have about that. The first step was to contact everyone I knew within that network and ask them whether they would attend such a retreat. The response was overwhelmingly positive. It seemed my intuition was correct – freelancers do value support from their peers and an opportunity to network with like-minded people.

I kept the venue for the meeting local to my home to aid the organisational logistics. The Greyhound is a pub in the village where I live and the proprietors very kindly agreed to let me have the use of a room to conduct the retreat. A questionnaire was sent out to the participants beforehand to establish their needs so that, with Elaine's help, we could tailor the training to meet their requests. The day of the retreat dawned and all my concerns melted away. People travelled from all over the UK to be there. The energy and enthusiasm in the room was

palpable. We mixed group discussion with smaller break-out sessions and covered a wide range of topics in relation to managing a business, dealing with client demands, and understanding our own value as medical writers. Everyone went away feeling positive and enthused and this was evident from their feedback. On that note, I will hand over to Alysia who attended the medical writers' retreat to give you her perspective.

I have value, do you want some?

Throughout the day, the atmosphere in the room was buzzing. As soon as I sat down I was drawn into conversation with the other freelancers around me. The range of freelance experience in our group was varied and so were our client portfolios. The honest revelations and often humorous contributions from the floor, combined with Elaine's clever guidance using descriptive keywords and quotes, helped us to collate a fantastic bundle of ideas and tools with which to improve our careers as freelancers.

When asked what issues we wanted to tackle in our freelancing lives, most of our concerns fell into two categories: how to become better freelancers and how to optimise client relationships. Some of us wanted to improve our time management and be more effective at our jobs, others wanted to learn how to best deal with criticism without feeling devalued. Some of us felt that we had taken on too much work, while others wanted to attract more clients through better marketing. All of us felt uncomfortable in talking about money with our clients.

After putting our heads together, a number of valuable strategies emerged on how a freelancer can grow and improve, including how to master



Photo 2: Hard at work, brain storming.

self-leadership and how to believe in our own self-worth. Our discussions also covered the practical sides of running a freelance business, including the value of online visibility in the form of freelance registries, a business website, and social media sites.

With all that brain storming we were ready for a late lunch at the pub! After good food and drink we all returned home. Had it been worth the long drive over? Definitely and I am looking forward to the next one.

Acknowledgement

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SoMe and me: Networking

I was a reluctant convert to social media (SoMe). The Web, of course, is an invaluable resource for medical writing (in fact it's hard to remember how we used to cope without it), but what about the interactive aspects? Not for me, I thought. I didn't want to share my photographs and video clips with the world. I didn't want everyone to know who my friends are, and I preferred email or telephone for contacting them. More than that, I was absolutely convinced that joining the social web would end up in my being buried in spam or, worse still, hacked.

Well, I haven't changed my mind about sharing my personal life with the world, but I have changed my mind (or perhaps I should say that I have had my mind changed) about the value of social media in business. In this and forthcoming issues of *Out On Our Own*, I will be sharing my experiences of using social media in my freelance

business. I'm not an expert, although I have been lucky to receive some good advice and support along the way. This is a distillation of things that seem to work for me.

I could classify my use of social media under three main headings: networking; training and education; and marketing and business development. The nature of social media, however, means that these are false divisions. For example, if I contribute to a discussion in EMWA's LinkedIn group, then ostensibly I am networking, but the fact that I have commented will be shared with my contacts and everyone that has opted to receive updates from that group. This reminds my contacts that I am around and also means that my name and the fact that I'm a freelance writer is reaching some people who aren't connected with me – including some potential clients. More than that, by participating in the discussion I can garner opinions about an issue,

adding to my knowledge and understanding of the subject.

I do have a couple of rules that I try and stick to when using social media. I try not to talk about my home life and my family, and I don't say anything that could identify my clients or my clients' clients.

Networking

In the remainder of this article I will focus more closely on networking and building a network.

When I first started freelancing, I had a card index for collecting the names of contacts within publishing companies and medical communications agencies. These were mostly former colleagues that I would mail or email periodically with my latest curriculum vitae (CV) and/or to ask if they needed any freelance assistance. This index was gradually transferred to Outlook and was expanded over time with clients and the names of other freelancers that I could recommend if I was unable to take on a project myself.

Those lists of contacts are now almost entirely superseded by LinkedIn, which maintains my contact with those people in a much more dynamic way. LinkedIn tells me when my contacts have moved on to new jobs – something that I would only have discovered if the person had contacted me in the days of my old card index. It also tells my contacts when I have added skills, experience, qualifications, etc. to my profile without having to send an updated CV.

I have actually met and/or have worked with more than 90% of my contacts on LinkedIn. Once I've worked with someone a couple of times I ask them to connect with me, along with recruiters, agency staff, and other freelancers that I've met at conferences and networking meetings. I've also grown my network by noticing who my contacts are connecting with. I've found a number of former publishing colleagues and colleagues from my lab days, and others have found me. For me, LinkedIn is all about people.

By contrast, Twitter is about information. I joined Twitter to provide a strong back link to my website and, simultaneously, to make sure that my home page was updated every day by my Twitter feed, both of which help with the site's Google ranking. But membership came with an unexpected bonus – I discovered that I could use Twitter to follow announcements from the major science and medical journals; organisations such as the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), EMWA, and the International Society for Medical Publications Professionals (ISMPP); pharmaceutical companies; and medical charities and news feeds.

Twitter presents me with access to papers, articles, advice, and opinions that inform my work as a medical writer and editor. By following hashtags – like #EMWA, used at the May 2013 Spring Conference in Manchester – I can read about what people are saying at conferences (and even respond) in real time or in my own time after the event, and read collections of opinions on particular issues or events. You don't have to be part of Twitter to read those – try Googling #badpharma, #sunshineact, #arseniclife, or #OAintheUK to get a feel for what Twitter can do.

So what about the spam and the hacking worries? Well, of course I receive spam and malicious emails, some of which I can almost certainly attribute to having a social media presence – but there are software tools and site options for limiting my exposure to them. There are also best practice guidelines for protecting myself.

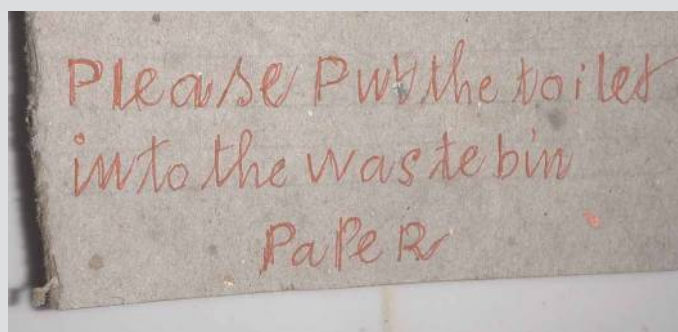
On balance, having a Web-based social network means that I am better informed. It has brought me more work and more ways of finding work. It has put me in touch with people outside my own areas of expertise and this, in turn, has opened doors that I didn't know existed. These are topics that I'll expand on in forthcoming articles.

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Freelance Foraging

It is all about the word order. This sign in a Vietnamese restaurant rest room says it all!



This aircraft instruction conjures images of balloon people!



Please keep us smiling and send us your photos. Thanks, Sam and Kathryn.