

Out On Our Own

Editorial

This is the last OOOO edited by Kathryn White and Alistair Reeves, with Sam Hamilton in the background. After many years all three stepped down from their freelance advocate activities at the conference in The Hague, and have handed the torch over to Julie Charlesworth and Satyendra Shenoy, who will be running the Freelance Business Forum and will also be looking after this journal section in the future.

Of interest in how fellow freelancers set up business and acquire work is always high, and in this issue we include Lizzie Sharpe's story about her experiences in Germany.

We also include Part 1 of Marion Alzer's account of how she reluctantly became a medical translator but then found that it actually opened up many unexpected doors for her, including becoming a freelancer and also taking on medical writing jobs.

Are you having the impact you want to build the business you truly deserve? This is

SECTION EDITORS



Kathryn White

kathryn@cathean.co.uk



Alistair Reeves

a.reeves@ascribe.de



Sam Hamilton

sam@samhamiltonmwservices.co.uk

the question pursued by Dawn Bentley, an executive coach, who feels that creating the right impact on clients is something that freelancers often neglect. But since you alone are responsible for your impact, this is something to consider very carefully.

Please contact Julie (julie@atreeoflifesciences.com) or Satyen (sshenoy@describescientific.de) if you would like to contribute to OOOO

The start of a year in Germany as a freelance medical writer

"I'm moving to Germany."

"What?"

"Yes" I repeated, "Moving to Germany."

"And what are you going to do there?"

"I'm going freelance." I said – the thought of which was scarier to me than moving to a country where I didn't even speak the language.

So went the majority of conversations with friends, family, and colleagues as I broke the news that I would soon be moving to Munich.

In theory, all a writer needs is their laptop, a few industry contacts, and a reasonable WiFi connection. And that's it; you're free to work wherever you choose.

In reality, nothing prepared me for the barriers that would crop up on the other side of the UK border.

Challenge 1: Getting ready to go

Leaving a stable job at an agency I'd loved working at for the past 3 years was by far the most difficult decision. After that, I had to try to get to grips with what it meant to be a freelancer. Not just a freelancer, but a *freelancer in Germany*.

Being a complete newcomer to the game, I sought advice wherever I could. Calls with umbrella agencies, recruiters, tax advisors. Chats with freelance colleagues proved



invaluable, but no one could really tell me what steps I would need to take to work as a freelancer in Germany. I even rang the German consulate in one moment of desperation.

Before moving out here, I contacted various recruiters to see if they could help find me work and even got in touch with a few Munich-based agencies myself. A few got back to me and I secured a couple of interviews before boarding the plane.

Challenge 2: The interview stage

I come from healthcare advertising and – in Germany at least – it seems that scientific and creative writing are kept very separate. Luckily, I'd worked at an agency in the UK where I was given the chance to develop both skill-sets.

Being able to be both a medical writer and copywriter therefore seemed to be a rare and valuable quality to my German interviewers; and the fact that my portfolio spanned both creative and scientific work

really seemed to work in my favour.

Given my limited German capacities, I niched myself as a native English speaker, which I hoped might give me the edge over in-house German writers on global accounts. This, however, didn't always work to my advantage.

Challenge 3: Ich spreche kein Deutsch (I don't speak German)

When working in-house for German agencies, this was never really an issue. Germans are incredibly helpful people and I found that most were more than willing to go out of their way to accommodate my linguistic deficits.

For example, agencies would have freelance contracts translated into English for me before I looked over them. And I was grateful to find that my multi-lingual colleagues all switched to English for my benefit whenever I joined them on conference calls.

The language barrier only presented real problems when setting myself up as a freelancer.

Challenge 4: Making friends with the tax man

As I moved into freelancing, the hardest part for me to grasp was who was going to take care of my taxes. I would be working for both UK and German agencies, but carrying out the work entirely from Munich meant that all my taxes would have to be paid to the German government.

Most umbrella agencies are only able to support you for up to 3 months if you are living in another country. And if you are set up as a limited company then you're only able to invoice through this for up to 6 months while living abroad.

But I needed someone to process my UK and German invoices for a whole year. I had a few leads on some umbrella agencies who specialised in leasing out freelancers in European markets; but generally these were not willing to take me on unless I was contracted to work for at least a couple of months at a time.

The solution I found was to register as a 'Freiberufler' (self-employed person) – meaning I could invoice my clients directly using my tax and VAT numbers – and I hired a German tax advisor to take care of my German taxes.

To do this I first had to fill out a form from the Finanzamt (the 'Fragebogen zur steuerlichen Erfassung') – this is long, and

entirely in German. I had a German friend help me decipher the different sections and even she found it difficult to understand.

My biggest concern with becoming a Freiberufler was that this might close a lot of doors to me in England. It's not uncommon for many UK agencies to have a policy whereby they only work with freelancers who are registered as a limited company or otherwise working through an umbrella organisation.

After explaining that this was the most compliant way for me to operate as a freelancer in Germany, some of my UK clients were happy to work with me under my Freiberufler status, but others weren't.

Challenge 5: Getting down to business

After the first couple of interviews, which I'd set up before leaving the UK, I was optimistic that it wouldn't be long before I was hit by a tidal wave of work that would soon come flooding through my door.

At each interview I was greeted enthusiastically, complemented on my portfolio, and received great feedback. Then ... nothing.

I waited and waited for the call but it was almost 2 months after I moved before I got stuck into my first piece of work at a German agency.

Remote medical writing from old industry contacts in the UK tided me over while I waited to get started. I began to cast my net wider by applying for work in different sectors, and in doing so sought out jobs in places I'd never thought to look before. Even, at one point, branching out beyond pharmaceuticals into health and wellbeing for a Munich-based fitness brand.

Now, I'm mostly brought in to work for German companies on a project-by-project basis, which means my contracts are short term. The majority of my income still comes from remote work, and I'm not busy all of the time.

But I'm ok with that. This year is more about giving me a chance to explore life in another country; learn how to live as a freelancer; and hopefully pick up more than a bit of German along the way. Tschüß!

Correspondence to:

Elizabeth Sharpe

Munich, Germany

lizziejanesharpe@gmail.com

<https://elizabeth-sharpe-dglu.squarespace.com>

Medical translation – a dead-end job or a gateway to opportunity? Part 1

When I was a teenage student studying English as a foreign language, I used to think translating was boring; utterly boring to be precise. So, why did I follow a career as a professional translator and what made me change my mind?

Dreams and aspirations

It was during my first trip to England at the age of 13 that I fell in love with the English language. Three years later, in 1980, my German school offered a 3-month student exchange programme in Vancouver and I was selected as one of the fortunate candidates. I realised that the ability to communicate with people in other countries opened the door to the rest of the world for me.

By the time I returned from Canada, I was determined to teach foreign languages when I left school. Unfortunately, job prospects for teachers were far from brilliant in Germany at that time. I had to face the fact that the career I had dreamed of was not a realistic option if I wanted to avoid becoming an unemployed university graduate. Being a conference interpreter sprang to mind and it seemed like an exciting alternative. I

Are you having the impact you want with your clients?

As a freelancer, or 'entrepreneur' you are the leader in your business. You are the one who makes things happen, so whatever happens in your business is down to you. Good client relationships are the key to your success. *You* are responsible for setting the tone of each interaction and standards of behaviour for those around you. This may sound scary, however, as the leader in your business you are on show all of the time. People are always watching you and making assessments, so it's not good enough to just show up and hope for the best. Whether you like it or not, you and your business are judged by the impact you have on others.

So, the question is, are you having the

imagined myself travelling from one international conference to another, helping people communicate with one another. I applied to the “Department of Applied Linguistics” at the University of Mainz in Gernersheim to study English and Spanish and I was accepted.

Change and choice

What seemed fascinating in theory turned out to be disappointing in practice. I just couldn’t get the hang of sitting in a booth, listening to someone speak in one language and conveying what was being said in another language. After umpteen attempts to master the challenges of simultaneous interpreting, I eventually got to grips with the fact that all those international conferences would have to take place without me.

This experience did not discourage me from wanting to pursue a career in languages. Fortunately, my university offered translation studies as a suitable option and despite my earlier reservations I switched over to translation. The course was structured to include two foreign languages and an additional subject such as law, economics, engineering or medicine. I chose medicine and thoroughly enjoyed this subject. I attended medical lectures that focussed on the various body systems and

later completed medical translations specific to each body system to gain competence in medical terminology and how to convey the meaning of medical texts. The examining board consisted of professional translators, a physician and a pharmacist and ensured that after nine semesters I was proficient in “medicalese” and worthy of the degree “Diplom-Übersetzerin”.

Work experience

To gain work experience in the real world, I applied for internships in the Medical Department of a pharmaceutical company while I was still studying. I was introduced to drug research and development at a time when the company was granted marketing authorisation for a new drug which later became a blockbuster product. My responsibilities included translating regulatory documents and correspondence with authorities, medical and marketing materials as well as press releases.

Language proficiency

To improve my command of English, I decided to live in an English-speaking country and so I participated in exchange programmes with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) and Louisiana State University (LSU) at Baton Rouge. At LSU, I also completed a Master’s

programme in linguistics with a focus on second language teaching. To finance these studies, I taught German in the Department of Foreign Languages.

When I returned to Germany in 1991 I applied for a position in the pharmaceutical industry. Fortunately, the headquarters of a German pharmaceutical company with affiliates all over the world were looking for a medical translator. The company’s Foreign Language Services group formed part of the Scientific Documentation Department and consisted of six people who worked in four different languages. Our group was responsible for translating and coordinating translations mainly in the following areas: pre-clinical, clinical and regulatory; drug manufacturing; corporate affairs and international relations. Other tasks also included review and correction of translations done by external translators as well as terminology work.

In Part 2, I will describe how I became freelance.

Correspondence to:

Marion Alzer

Pharma Communications GmbH
Erding, Germany
info@marion-alzer.de
www.marion-alzer.de

impact you want to build the business you truly deserve? Have you even considered the impact you want to have?

In my experience most people haven’t!

How do I create impact with my clients?

There are two principles to have in mind when you are considering your personal impact with clients:

1. Your intention
2. Your attention

Principle 1: Intention

Let us start by looking at intention. There’s a phrase I often use which is ‘we judge ourselves by our intention and we judge others by their impact.’ Being really clear about your intention helps you focus your mind and your energy. To be effective your actions must match your intention. This

portrays a clear message, if you are thinking one thing but saying another, people will pick this up.

How often do you go into a meeting with a clear intention of what you want to achieve from it?

Leadership is about connection, so you need to make sure you connect in some way with everyone you meet – and yes I did say everyone. Of the people you come into contact with, you never know who could introduce you to a potential new client or perhaps they know one of your existing clients.

So, how do you create that connection? To connect you have to take the other person into account and should be part of your consideration when thinking about your intention. Before any meeting or interaction with a client, some good

questions to ask yourself are:

- What is your current relationship with them?
- What is the history between you both (or between you and their department)?
- How do you want this relationship to develop?

Once you have thought about these you can then think about what you want from a meeting with them – whether this is in person or remotely by telephone. What outcome do you want to achieve?

Case study

Here’s a case study from my coaching practice to give you an example of how considering your intention can make a difference:

Carol was a newly appointed Operations



Director and very experienced in her field. In a relatively short space of time she had mastered how to lead her team effectively so that they were aligned with her vision.

However, she realised she hadn't been giving her customers (i.e., her stakeholders) the attention they deserved in order to engage with them and 'get them on board'. This was particularly important if she wanted the changes she was implementing to work.

Together, we explored what her intentions were and what became clear was that she was 'just' going through the motions. She was using all the right words when she spoke with her customers, but she didn't sound as though she meant them. I sensed that her mind was on other things so she was working with her customers out of a sense of duty rather than to build relationships.

We went on to explore how she wanted the relationships to develop. By being focused on her intention, in just a few months, she'd built strong relationships and trusted allies.

So, before you have any contact with your clients, really think through what it is you want and how you want to be seen.

Here are a few examples of things you could consider as intentions to get you started before any client interaction:

- Do you simply want to connect and build rapport with the person? At the start of a relationship this is critical.
- Is there a particular result you want from this interaction?

- Is there something you want to learn?
- If there is a topic you're discussing with the client, do you simply want to understand it or learn more about it?
- If so, what is it about that topic that you want to learn/understand?
- Is there an idea you want to share with the client to get some feedback on it?

Principle 2: Attention

'Energy flows where attention goes'

Where do you put your attention? When you are in a meeting or with a client how often are you waiting to speak rather than actually listening with an intention to understand what the other person is saying?

If personal impact means aligning your intention to how you act, then you *have* to be attentive to those you are working with. That means that you are fully present in that moment. I am sure you have been with someone and thought that they were not really with you, their mind was somewhere else. When someone seems distracted like this, say in a meeting, you notice it. So, it will come as no surprise to you that people will notice it too when *you* are not paying attention!

Case study

This principle was a real light bulb moment for one of my clients as shown by the following case study.

When I'm coaching I encourage my clients to bring real situations they are facing into the session. On one coaching occasion I picked up that my client Paul, seemed to be rushing ahead and not necessarily

connecting with me as he described a situation he wanted help with. After some feedback from me, and some practise at improving his attention, we replayed the situation. There was a marked difference. He had slowed down, he was making eye contact, his breathing had slowed down and I felt he was really listening to me. Now, he was working with me at my pace and was fully present and engaged with me.

After the session he applied these principles at work and found his team became more engaged, he developed a deeper connection with his customers and as a consequence got better results.

What can I do to create impact with my clients?

To help you create more impact during your business interactions, I've listed a few things to consider before any client meeting:

- Set an intention for every interaction or meeting you go to.
- Consider how you want to be seen and adjust the tone of your voice and body posture to support this. The more relaxed you are, the deeper your vocal tone and this will be reflected in your body language too, thus giving you a greater air of confidence.
- If you are having a conversation with someone focus your full attention on that person and the conversation – really listen to what they are saying.
- If it's a meeting you are in, do the same and focus on every person as they speak.

Personal impact is what others feel when they are with you and this will be reflected in the quality of the relationships you build. If you want to take your business to a new level, practice these skills regularly and feel the difference it makes!

Dawn Bentley is an Executive Coach working with leaders to be authentic in their style and develop powerful teams. If you'd like to follow her posts please connect with her on LinkedIn Facebook, Twitter or sign up for her monthly newsletter here.

Correspondence to:

Dawn Bentley
Aurora Business Coaching and
Consulting UK
Dawn@aurora4success.co.uk
www.aurora4success.co.uk