

Out On Our Own

SECTION EDITORS



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Editorial

Welcome to the OOOO section of Medical Writing.

Whilst members who attended the freelancers' networking meetings in The Hague (November 2015) or Munich (May 2016) may have noticed the recent changing of the guard at the Freelance Business Forum, for those who did not, please allow us to introduce ourselves as Julie and Satyen, the new Freelance Advocates.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Alistair Reeves, Kathryn White, and Sam Hamilton for their past service at the helm and generously giving their time and effort for the

freelancers' cause within EMWA. It is our intention to continue in a similar vein and keep adding to the solid work that has been carried out in the past. On this note, we sincerely request your input, advice, and yes, any articles that you have penned and wish to share for the benefit of fellow members.

In this (our first) issue, we have included an editorial extra to provide you with a glimpse of the future with your new team J and S.

We are particularly delighted to include some insightful contributions from our EMWA freelancing community.

Joselita Salita, an experienced freelancer based in Bremen, Germany, writes about an integral skill for any business professional –

networking. More specifically, she gives a few pointers on certain issues that should not be ignored (but sometimes tend to be) when it comes to developing business relationships.

In addition, we present the second part of Marion Alzer's article on medical translation as a profession. Here, Marion talks about the most significant decision that we as freelancers have made at some point or other – the decision to go freelance! An important message in Marion's article is the need to carefully consider personal factors when it comes to choosing between the security of life as an employee or the unknowns of running one's own show.

Best wishes and happy reading.

A glimpse of the future with your new team – An editorial extra

Given our different backgrounds and experiences, Satyen and I bring diverse and new perspectives as Freelance Advocates. However, you will also find that we are both passionate and enthusiastic about serving you as best we can for the "freelance cause", and we hope this will be to your advantage.

I have been here before. I see freelancing as an option that allows personal choice at different stages of life and career. You don't have to put up with an employment situation in a company that really isn't working for you – I'm not saying don't try to make it work and I'm certainly not encouraging everyone to suddenly resign and throw caution to the wind, as personal responsibilities, financial commitments etc. need to be carefully considered before such a big decision is made. However, I would like to strengthen the support made available by the freelancing community. If you know freelancing is a feasible option, even if it doesn't necessarily suit you at a particular time, it puts you in a position of strength to make informed decisions about what you actually want at different stages of life and career. Maybe this could even encourage companies to be more flexible in their treatment of employees as power shifts more towards the individual.



If and when the time is right you can take the leap, or decide not to – but the choice is ultimately yours. That is how I see the future.

So, what have we got lined up for you in future editions of OOOO?

We can tell you that we are continuing to develop our relationships with other associations (IPSE and others beyond the UK) and we are already lining up a wide range of serious (and entertaining) articles about business and the practical aspects of freelance working.

We are also receiving ideas directly from you

and we want to encourage this flow, whether this is in the form of letters to the editor, recommended reading for freelancers, interview style pieces, or anything else that you feel would be of benefit to our wider community.

We want to hear your stories, your experiences of freelancing and tips you can share with us all. We like serious, and also lighter topics – keep your eyes out for freelance foraging photos.

Ultimately this is your section, and together we can work to both inform and entertain to the benefit of all. Until next time....

Julie Charlesworth

Medical translation – A dead-end job or a gateway to opportunity? Part 2

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?

Flexibility in the job search

It was while working in the Frankfurt area that I met my future husband, a native speaker of English and a medical writer. He took a position in Munich and although I also tried to secure a position as a medical translator in the area, there were no openings. However, a small clinical research organisation (CRO) that worked in German and English offered me a position. They were looking for an assistant who was familiar with clinical trial documentation, paid attention to detail and was fluent in English. In contrast to the classic employee in a large, well-established pharmaceutical company, employees of smaller companies typically perform a whole range of responsibilities. This was a dynamic and highly demanding working environment. I had to learn the ins and outs of clinical research and many new tasks quickly. During the next ten years the company grew rapidly and I did my best to balance bringing up a young family with the day-to-day demands of my career. The employment was based on both full- and part-time roles which varied: clinical research associate (CRA), phase 1 manager and quality assurance associate. Box 1 below details the variety of my responsibilities.

My responsibilities

- Co-ordinating and monitoring phase 1-3 trials
- Conducting monitor and investigator meetings
- Preparing training materials and presentations for monitors and investigators
- Providing input into study protocols, informed consent documents and case report forms
- Performing quality control of study protocols and clinical study reports
- Preparing and maintaining trial master files
- Writing, reviewing and updating standard operating procedures
- Co-authoring publications

Flexibility at work

Working for a CRO meant providing services to international clients as well as fulfilling their expectations and individual needs under

considerable time and cost constraints. Being faced with these challenges daily helped me understand both the service provider's and client's perspective. It enabled me to develop a customer-oriented approach and become fast and flexible at re-focussing on ever-changing projects and priorities.

New skills in a new business

In 2005, the experience I gained at the CRO proved to be invaluable when I took the plunge to become self-employed. At home, the head-count had increased by two and we needed more space. We had no choice but to move out of the city. The distance from home to work was too far for me to commute. As I was unable to work from home on a part-time basis I decided it was time to become my own boss. Given my previous experience, medical translation seemed the obvious career path. Translation work can be carried out remotely and projects usually have a clearly defined beginning and end. So I went back to my roots.

New challenges

The skills I had gained and the contacts I had made in previous years were all favourable for starting my own business. My former employers were also my first clients. Little investment was required because I already had a desk, a PC, software programmes and dictionaries. What I totally underestimated, however, was how much time and effort I had to invest in business aspects such as accounting, tax issues, marketing, business development and pricing. I can recommend the following resources to those in a similar scenario: "The Entrepreneurial Linguist: The Business-School Approach to Freelance Translation" by Judy and Dagmar Jenner, and "Freelancing – Are you ready to go solo?" by our EMWA colleague Kathryn White.^{1,2}

Today, the world of translation uses sophisticated computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and translation memories (TM). CAT tools are programmes that facilitate the translation process by splitting text into smaller segments and showing source

text and translated segments side by side. Both are then stored in a translation database called translation memory, and can be retrieved for future translations. For further information, see Emma Goldsmith's free e-book "An Introduction to Translation Memory."³ When I first worked as a translator in the early 1990s, CAT tools and TMs were in their infancy. By the time I went freelance in 2005 these tools were indispensable for anyone wanting to succeed in the translation business, and I needed to catch up.

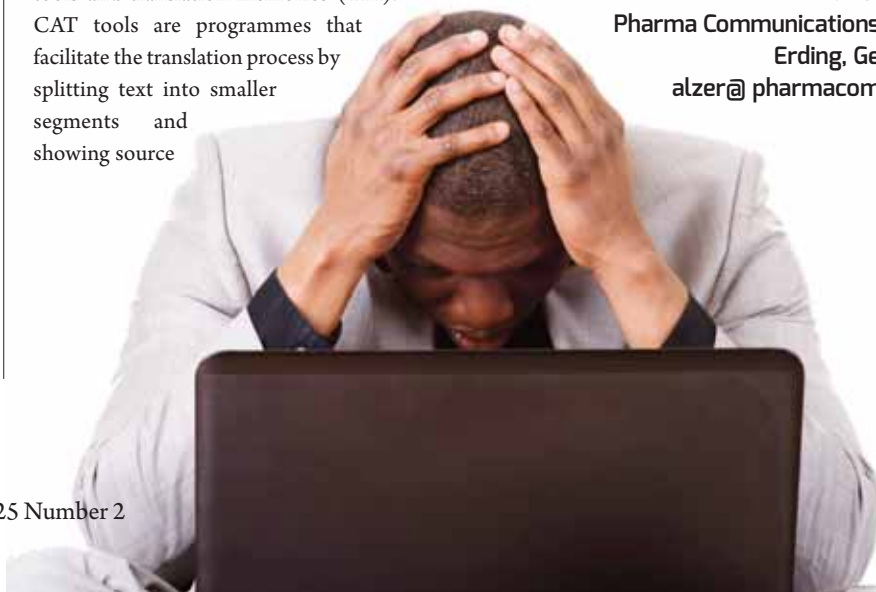
Alysia Battersby describes the importance for freelancers of getting out of the office, networking with peers, and enjoying the team spirit and exchange of information.⁴ Similarly, I joined the Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ) which is Germany's largest association of language professionals.⁵ The BDÜ offers professional development and networking opportunities to more than 7,500 members, the majority of whom are freelancers like me. I have personally benefited from many seminars and workshops they have offered and in the process met peers with whom I have since collaborated.

(To be continued in the next issue. Editor)

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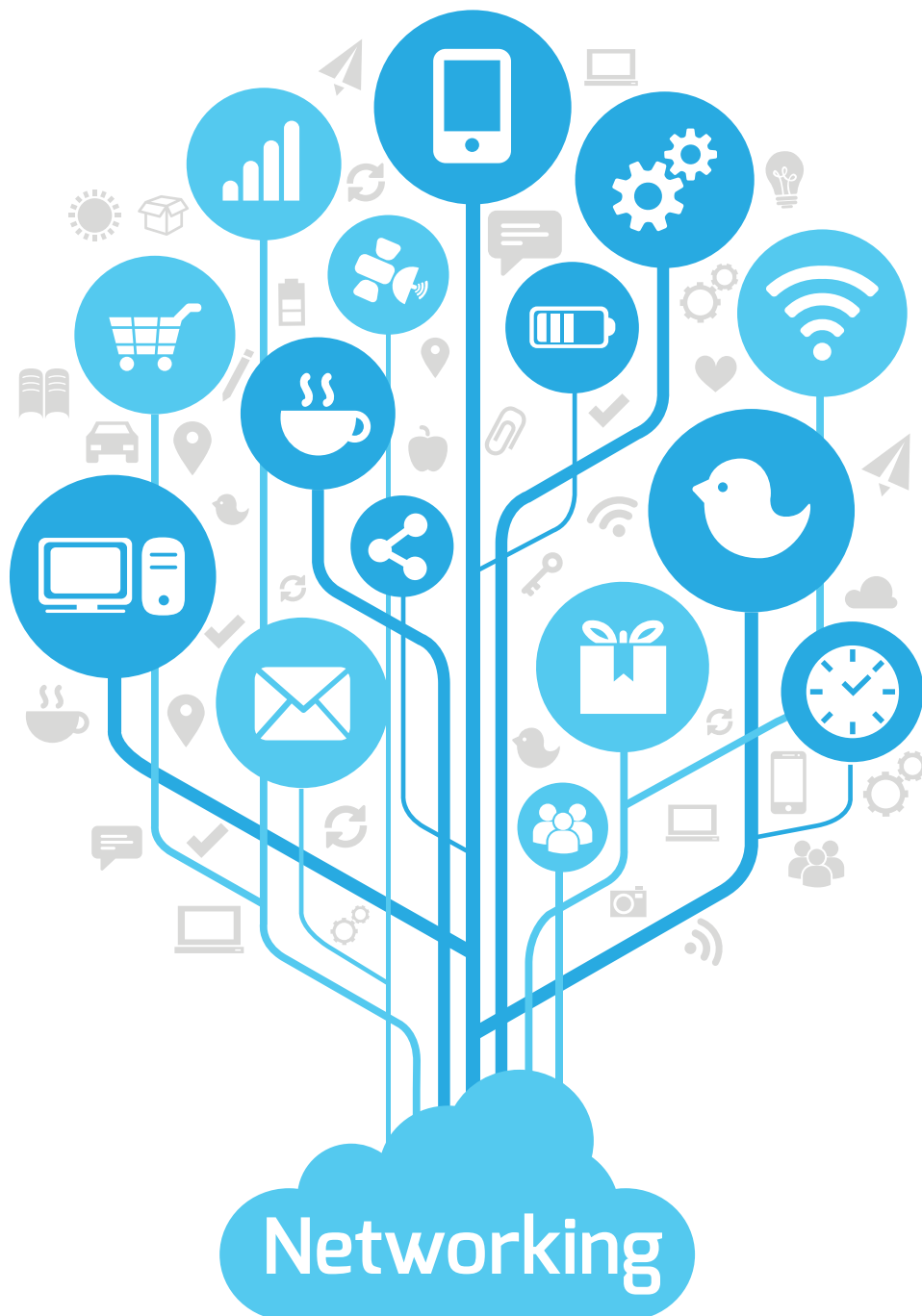
Conferences and related events are usually the best options for networking.¹ Social media may provide such an opportunity as well, but meeting someone face-to-face, listening to him/her speak, and seeing his/her facial expression and body language is an incomparable experience. Many articles (printed or online) talk about the value of networking for getting a job, expanding a business, client retention, evaluation of opportunities, or learning from others.^{1,2} In fact, people mostly get their business from referrals and word-of-mouth marketing powered by their networks.^{3,4} There are also numerous references that give tips on how to successfully network e.g. exchanging business cards and taking down notes, targeting who to talk to, what to say and what not to say, how to start and end a conversation. In addition, there are even courses and advisors specialising in networking skills.^{5,6} It's true that networking is an investment and putting in effort by being prepared and following these tips could pay off substantially. However, I think there are three things that are often ignored or neglected in networking.

First, let us consider several types of networkers according to Angel Ramos:⁷ the direct networker (straight down to business), the analytical networker (task-oriented, focused, hates networking events), the promoter (chatty/seller), the expressive networker (lively and outgoing, values making connections), and the supportive networker (values relationships and sincerity, helper and giver).

You should know which one you are or want to be. And if you are the direct or the analytical networker, the secrets I'm sharing may not work for you.

1. Networking takes time

Networking doesn't take place one evening and simply end there. Instead, networking is a continuous process. Since we all network mostly to promote our business, irrespective of what type of networkers we are, we should check our ROI (returns on investment) i.e., we should set our own time frame when we expect to be a part of a network. However, this is by far the most difficult to set. Networking is about building relationships; sometimes they turn out to be long-lasting friendships, and might just take time. Moreover, a basic component of networking relationships is *trust*. In the medical writing business, trust means not only the client's trust that you can do what you claim you are able to



do, but also their trust that you are reliable: that is, you will deliver on time and maintain data confidentiality (although normally you have to sign a binding contract, agreeing to such terms, before receiving the project). Some people are gifted in that they know at once if someone is trustworthy. However, most people take time to find it out.

People say you learn more when you listen. This may be true and even the promoter networker (see above) has to learn this. Networking is not about you. Questions such as “do you have a job for me?” are a turn-off. It is better to ask about what they’re doing and show sincere interest. Take down notes, when possible. Talk less about yourself but be prepared to give concise and positive information about yourself, in case you

get asked. If you listen carefully, you can tailor this information more effectively.

Many people go to a network event with an aim to have “something in the basket” after the event. While some get what they wanted, most end up frustrated, saying “it didn’t turn out as expected”. In fact, people often return empty handed from the next or another similar event. This is probably because they are not aware that in order to be remembered, you should give something first. I don’t mean simply your business card; I also mean your time, your potential and your support. Emma Hitt-Nichols, a well-known freelance medical writer and owner of Nascent Medical (formerly Hitt List Medical Writing), gave a webinar on how to make someone

important give you an appointment or answer your email. She said you shouldn't say who you are and what you can do, but instead say how you can help or support his/her business. In this webinar, her advice for crafting an effective email was to imply that you are offering assistance and not directly applying for a job.²

In networking events, you should also be prepared to offer help and not just expect to be helped. And this time, I mean, seriously offering your talent, whatever you can do. In a network, you help others who will help others, who in turn will perhaps help you. You don't even have to be selective (with target individuals) as you can't predict who will someday provide you with connections. Kathryn White's article on freelancing argues that marketing does not necessarily have to be hard selling;⁸ you can sell yourself just by being genuinely you.

Networking strategies via social media are also similar. In Stelzner's webinar on the use of social media to increase one's business, he gave examples of successful business people and social media personalities.⁹ One of them, Ana White, is a carpenter and successful blogger. The reason for her success is because she shares her knowledge on creating furniture through a lot of do-it-yourself instructions. Many businesses, big and small, also offer free webinars or free-for-download information in order to create a following and benefit from it.

In the medical writing business, you network to connect with medical writers and you can offer your help directly to your target, such as an established medical writer, or to an organisation like EMWA. You can consider this as a form of internship. However, you should also be cautious of being exploited. One good alternative is assisting in clubs or organisations. In this way, your activity and assistance are transparent and there will be fellow members ready to support you. For example, you could take advantage of the many volunteering opportunities in EMWA. It is the best way to hone your writing and editing skills (e.g. for the EMWA website or *Medical Writing*, EMWA's official journal), or liaising and organisational skills (helping out in organising conferences.). These skills are transferrable and much sought after in the medical writing business. Plus, you get updated and stay current on developments in regulatory writing, pharmacovigilance, etc. Also, organisations are, in general, very generous in giving recommendations which you may someday need. After all, John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural words "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" also holds true in this business.¹⁰

Closing remarks

Networking is an opportunity to get to know people in the business. As in life generally, it takes time to get to know another person. Getting to know someone means listening to them, finding out their interests and needs, and being prepared to fulfil these needs.

Happy networking!

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So, English speakers should do their washing only when no-one else is present (one wonders why)?

Hey ho –
it all comes
out in the wash!

Oops not quite the intended translation! 'yourself' not 'alone' – a bit like Freelancers – independent and just getting on with things – Out On Our Own but not alone! By the way where do all those lost socks go...

