

Out on Our Own

SECTION EDITORS



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Editorial

Hope you all had a good start to 2017. There have been a few changes in the FBF since the last issue. After 12 months as Freelance Business Advocate, Julie Charlesworth decided to step down from the post and we would like to thank her for all her hard work during this time. Two new members – Paul Wafula and George Xinarianos – will be joining the team. Welcome, Paul and George, and thank you for volunteering.

This edition of the *Oooo* brings to you three diverse and informative articles –

As a part of its outreach for freelance members, EMWA looks to build associations with other organisations that promote the freelance cause. Last November, EMWA reached an agreement with the VGSD (*Verband der Gründer und Selbständigen Deutschland e.V.*), a Germany-based advocacy group for freelancers and entrepreneurs. In an interview with *Oooo*, Dr. Andreas Lutz, the CEO of VGSD, gives pointers on things to consider while freelancing in Germany and the various benefits that are

afforded to freelancers and small-business owners through VGSD membership.

Effective brand-building and marketing for freelancers was one of the well-debated topics in the table discussions at the recent FBF in Brussels. In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift from traditional methods and currently online professional networking plays a large role in how businesses are managed and advertised. As daunting as it sounds to a time-constrained freelancer, the availability of numerous avenues and platforms such as LinkedIn has made the task of creating and maintaining an online presence relatively simple and easy. In her story, Jackie Johnson tells us how she successfully utilised LinkedIn en route to building her freelance medical writing business – JLJ Consultancy – while transitioning out of academia.

Stress is an undesired by-product of our busy lives and can have a huge and negative impact on our productivity and success. As freelancers, we perhaps feel the pressure somewhat more than our colleagues with stable jobs, in terms of generating a steady income, managing multiple

clients, and developing and running our businesses. And while there is plenty of advice – medical, psychological, and holistic – on handling stress, there is no one sure-fire remedy; the best technique for stress management is the one that works for the individual. In his article, Tim Bradburn of IPSE discusses a strategy for handling pressure that is based on introspection. He suggests that employing a weekly self-administered Q&A exercise to identify and dissect stress-causing situations could help us optimise our resources and remain firmly focussed on the outcome.

I hope you find these articles instructive and an enjoyable read. I also request all to continue providing feedback and sending in your articles so that you can share your insights with your fellow freelancers. Last, but not least, my personal thanks to the contributors for their informative articles, and especially for working on these during the holiday season.

I hope to see you at the spring conference in Birmingham.

Satyen Shenoy

Freelancing in Germany: An interview with Dr. Andreas Lutz of the Verband der Gründer und Selbständigen Deutschland e.V. (VGSD)

As a part of its initiative in forging alliances with associations that promote freelancing at a national level in Europe, EMWA has recently tied up with the *Verband der Gründer und Selbständigen Deutschland e.V.* (VGSD) which is based in Germany. The main goal behind this is to offer the various benefits that come with a VGSD membership to EMWA members who are already in Germany or plan to do so in the future. Interested members can find further details on EMWA's website.

The VGSD (www.vgsd.de) is an advocacy group based in Germany with over 10,000 members and represents the business interests of entrepreneurs, self-employed, and small businesses (with less than 10 employees) at a national level. Besides political lobbying in Germany, and the EU (as a member of the EFIP – European Forum of Independent Professionals), VGSD also offers a host of benefits to its

members such as weekly webinars with business experts, networking events in 10 cities in Germany, discounts and rebates on insurance and phone contracts, etc.

In this interview with Dr. Andreas Lutz (AL), the CEO of the VGSD, he offers pointers and advice on freelancing as a profession in Germany. Questions were formulated by – Carola Krause, Satyen Shenoy, and Paul Wafula – EMWA members and freelance medical writers based in Germany.

Oooo: At the recent EMWA conference, Marco Torregrossa of EFIP talked about the exponential growth of freelancing as a career in Europe. Is this trend replicated in Germany?

AL: There is a strong demand for freelancers and especially knowledge workers in Germany. At the same time the number of founders has sharply

decreased in 2012 and has been at such a low level since then, that the total number of self-employed has been decreasing during the last five years (cp. <http://www.vgsd.de/?p=12032>). There is a growing gap between the demand for external experts and the ability to recruit them.

Oooo: Are there any government incentives offered in Germany to promote freelancing? For example, tax waivers, seed capital, etc.?

AL: The access to the most important programme “Gründungszuschuss” has been dramatically curtailed at the end of 2011. The number of founders supported fell from 134,000 in 2011 to 20,000 in 2012 (-85%). Consultation incentive programmes, support for seminars and the microcredit programme have been stopped or reduced as well. While founders have been very much encouraged and supported in



**Dr.
Andreas
Lutz,
CEO,
VGSD**

Germany during the first decade of this century, politicians have changed their focus completely and focus very much on regular employment. Legislative changes like these have been the reason for us to start the VGSD in 2012 and for its strong growth to now more than 2,000 paid members. We are in Berlin all the time to influence politicians to return to a more freelancer-friendly policy.

0000: Broadly, what must a person consider in terms of insurance, social contributions, etc., when deciding to become a self-employed/freelancer in Germany?

AL: I recommend using the help of an experienced set-up advisor (for a list of our members in this field: http://www.vgsd.de/branchenliste/?tl_q=&tl_pc=&tl_c=4&tl_s=p#list). The earlier, the better: With good advice at an early stage, there are good chances of getting the “Gründungszuschuss” (up to 19,000 Euros) and depending on which federal state you live in, you can be reimbursed 50 to 70 percent of consulting costs. Particularly if you come from another country and German isn't your mother

tongue, it is essential to have somebody at your side who knows the pitfalls.

0000: Despite a large pool of medical writers being based in Germany, medical writing as a profession is not recognised as a distinct profession by organisations such as the Industrie- und Handelskammer (IHK; Chamber of Industry and Commerce) or insurance agencies and is usually bunched with artistic writing or journalism. How can medical writers gain recognition as a profession in Germany? Is this possible through VGSD membership?

AL: Being bunched up with artistic writing and journalism has a big advantage for medical writers: they have access to *Künstlersozialkasse* (KSK; artists' social fund), which pays for half their social security expenses and gives them access to much lower rates compared to other self-employed.

If enough medical writers join VGSD we could work along with EMWA to strengthen recognition as a distinct profession without losing the advantages of the current status.

0000: Liability insurance, though desired by most freelance medical writers, isn't as readily available in Germany, especially since it is hard to describe medical writing as a profession to insurance companies. Does VGSD have tie-ups with insurance agents who can offer discounted liability insurance to freelance medical writers?

AL: As far as liability insurance is concerned, VGSD partners with exali.de, the leading online provider for liability insurance. They offer rebates for VGSD members as well as for founders.

0000: Along these lines, what about the statutory pension insurance scheme?

AL: As a member of the KSK, medical writers are obliged to pay into the statutory pension insurance scheme with half their contributions coming from the state and social security contributions of clients. This enables them to provide privately for old-age as well, which we recommend strongly. At VGSD we offer regular “expert telcos” on how to do that. Members can download and listen to the recordings of these along with more than 100 recordings on other topics relevant to freelancers.

0000: Does VGSD have annual meetings or encourage and offer support to local networking events for freelancers?

AL: VGSD has regional groups in Dortmund (“Ruhrgebiet”), Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hannover, Leipzig, Mannheim (“Rhein-Neckar”), Köln, München, Nürnberg and Stuttgart. Depending on the city we offer various networking and educational events. Most groups meet in the evening to discuss a topic, exchange best practice, listen to a lecture or often just for a glass of beer. But there are also very popular breakfast and lunch meetings.

0000: What would you say to our readers who might be interested in working as freelance medical writers in Germany?

AL: Germany has a thriving economy and welcomes workers from abroad. There is no lack of work and it is usually well paid, especially in the health industry. The founder support, tax and social security systems are complicated, but with good advice they offer advantages that might surprise you.

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Is LinkedIn the gatekeeper to a successful freelance medical writing career? Why PhDs should use social networking to leave the ivory tower

LinkedIn is the only major social media platform for which usage rates are higher among adults age 30–49 (30%) than among millennials (age 18–29, 22%).¹ Ironically, millennials are the driving force behind some of the most innovative companies, including LinkedIn.² Although millennials are often described as entitled and self-absorbed, they are also independent and entrepreneurial, holding fresh, innovative ideas for projects, companies, and life in general. Millennials have grown up around the technology boom, and it is no surprise that they can enthusiastically adapt to the changing world – and increasingly competitive job market. Many PhDs and postdocs – who are also aspiring medical writers – are millennials.³ So why don't more of them use LinkedIn as a networking tool?⁴ I can't speak for everyone, but here's my story.

Is LinkedIn an online resume?

Growing up among the “me-me-me” generation, I remember creating my LinkedIn profile in 2009. Being relatively late to the party compared to some of my friends (the company launched in 2003), I simply copied and pasted my lengthy, jargon-laden, academic information into the profile fields. Once I had filled out a few sections and uploaded a smiley photo of myself – with college friends and wine bottles strategically

cropped out – I sat back and thought to myself, “Well done, Jackie! None of your academic colleagues use LinkedIn, so you are one step ahead of the game!”

At the time, I was about half way into my graduate studies, and I already knew that the academic world was not where I wanted to stay for my entire career. By simply signing up for LinkedIn, I naively thought that a big opportunity would arise, that recruiters would find me, and that companies would want me to come work for them (for no other reason than my academic credentials). I knew that LinkedIn was important, I just didn't know why.

Who should I add to my LinkedIn network?

Of course, nothing happened after I signed up. I added a few connections that I knew from my academic labs, some people from high school, and some family members. Seriously ... I added my mom and dad. They were proud of my accomplishments, so I figured, “Hey, who not?” Basically, LinkedIn was nothing more than another way to waste time on the internet (when I should have been working on my thesis). I treated my new online profile like I treated my Facebook account: only accepting connections from people I knew, and then moving forward with a sense of privacy hysteria. *Why would someone I have never met want to connect with me?*

Were they trying to steal my data? I was left bewildered. Do I use LinkedIn like Facebook? Or do I treat my profile like a business card, accepting invitations from anyone I would like to meet in the future?

It wasn't until several years later, with a PhD degree (and zero job prospects) in hand, that I logged back into LinkedIn with fresh eyes. This time, I was still in academia, as a postdoc, and I was still waiting for my big break: the opportunity that would rescue me from academic purgatory, changing my life forever. As I hadn't had any luck so far, and no recruiters were contacting me, I decided to take matters into my own hands – to create my own luck.

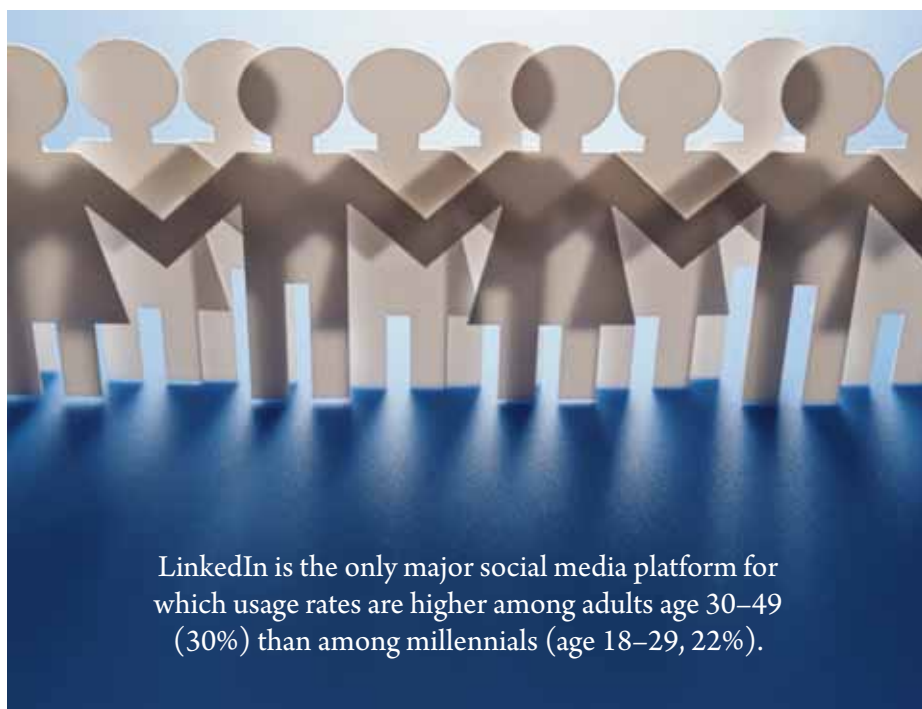
Reach out to career mentors

In the midst of cyber-stalking companies that I admired, I managed to connect with a CEO of a local biotech company. A CEO! To my complete surprise, he messaged me back, and agreed to meet me for a coffee that week to discuss his company. I immediately Googled him, of course. I found that, as an MBA, he had helped many companies grow and remain profitable in the Netherlands biotech space, and he was a specialist in mergers and acquisitions. There was a lot of information about him online – I felt like I knew him before we met.

Have you Googled your name lately?

Later that day, I received a message in my inbox that this CEO was looking at my LinkedIn profile. I was flattered! But then I realised I shouldn't be; why wouldn't he do the exact same thing that I was doing? It is normal to look for additional information about someone you just met (on the internet!) before meeting up with them in person. With my academic blinders on, I thought that he would be impressed with my scientific background and publication record. Or at least I hoped. Then it hit me. He didn't have a science background at all...he held an MBA. *Would an MBA find my profile relevant?* Out of curiosity (and fear), I Googled my name. The first thing to come up was the LinkedIn profile, and so I tried to view it from the perspective of the CEO.

The most obvious difference between his profile and mine was that my profile was only partially filled out. *Would he think that I am too busy to get around to the social networking – and was that a good thing or a bad thing?* My profile listed every single thing from my academic CV.



Would he think that I am accomplished, or that I lack business sense, creativity, and energy? I didn't have a single recommendation. Would he think that no one enjoyed working with me? I was only a member of cancer biology and PhD student groups. Would he think that I was too entry level and therefore not an expert in the field? My honours and award section was blank. Would he think that I had accomplished nothing in my entire career, or would he think that my publications spoke for themselves?

The importance of personal branding

I realised I knew absolutely nothing about marketing, branding, or networking. I had no idea how to be a professional outside of academia. I felt like a total imposter, and who was I trying to fool? My profile did not portray me as a professional. It did not sell my skills or differentiate me between the millions of other LinkedIn users or the thousands of other scientists trying to break out of the academic world. It certainly did not invite recruiters or other professionals to reach out to me with opportunities.

Needless to say, my coffee appointment with the CEO did not go as well as I had hoped. I was very much underprepared. I did not manage to gain a new client or a referral that day ... but I did learn a valuable lesson about making a first impression.

Over the next few months, I made self-study a top priority. I read everything I could about building a personal brand and the secrets to networking. Given the conflicting information available on the web, I tried and tested several different strategies until I found what worked for me. I reached out to professionals with interesting career paths, and I invited them to share their stories with me. I wrote and then rewrote my LinkedIn profile until I believed what I had written about myself (this isn't easy for anyone!) Truth be told, the process of documenting my accomplishments and goals was a great exercise in soul searching. You need to think before you can write. It helped me figure out who I was professionally, and what unique value I offer clients and connections.

From postdoc to freelance medical writer

After several months, I realised that my LinkedIn profile was not my resume. *My resume represented my past accomplishments, but my LinkedIn profile represented my goals.* This was my virtual handshake for prospective clients. As soon as I optimised my profile, I started getting noticed in a big way. Companies starting reaching out to me with freelance writing jobs. I couldn't believe it: prospective clients had offered to pay me to

write! *They trusted me before we even met.* These early opportunities were a great way to cut my teeth in a new career and a new industry. I learned the basics of quoting projects, negotiating rates, managing client relationships, resolving conflicts, and developing detailed briefs *before* starting projects. All of this was done virtually.

Before I took LinkedIn seriously, I was a lonely academic who could not figure out how to make it in industry. As an introvert, I struggled to muster energy for live networking events, and I certainly couldn't build confidence and trust with people I had just met. After my LinkedIn makeover (and loads of practice), I had a better idea of what experiences from my past would interest prospective clients and contacts. As my online network grew, so did my confidence.

Over that year, I focused on growing my network in a big way, with relevant, high-quality contacts. The more I used the platform, the more I realised that I didn't have to keep sending resumes down online application black holes, I could send InMails to key opinion leaders and executives directly. Although not everyone responded, many did, and they remain valuable connections. Once I learned how to network effectively online, in-person networking events became easier to manage, too. I still collect business cards at networking events, but now I organize all my new contacts on LinkedIn, and even set reminders to follow-up every few weeks.

Take a leap of faith

By the end of 2015, I decided to walk away from all I ever knew professionally and leave the ivory tower of academia behind – for good. I founded my company, JLJ Consultancy, and formed close collaborations and partnerships with many clients in the pharmaceutical, biotech, and publishing industries for various medical writing projects. I also started coaching other PhDs on how to better manage their online presence and job search strategies – I love teaching other medical writers how to use LinkedIn to their advantage! As the demand increased, I started to subcontract projects, and manage a growing network of talented freelancers all over the globe.

In a little over one year, JLJ has grown to a group of 10 freelance writers specialising in virtually every disease state and a variety of med comms projects, scientific events, medical blogs, website copy, and more.

During my career transition journey, I learned a lot. When it comes to networking, it is a skill that anyone can learn; there is nothing to be afraid of, and there are tons of enthusiastic mentors who will help you get your footing in a new industry (and many are on LinkedIn). Most importantly: smart companies – the ones you want to work for – know their brand depends on valuable, unique, professional stories. And they do want to hire enthusiastic millennials to tell them. We've just got to get on their radar first – and LinkedIn is one very effective way to make that happen!

Acknowledgements

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Three questions to help you handle pressure

"I imagine it's very hard being a freelancer," says Pierre, a salaried employee. "I have some room to hide if I'm having a bad day, but a freelancer has nowhere to hide. You have to be on top of your game all the time."

Working for yourself can be incredibly rewarding, but it also comes with a certain amount of pressure.

Learning how to manage that pressure is an essential part of the freelance skillset. The more adept you become at it, the more passion and energy you feel for the work that you do.

Here is an exercise that can help you to do that:

"Here is an exercise that can help you to do that – every Monday morning, jot down some quick answers to the following three questions."

1. How much pressure am I under?

The strange thing is that when you're under a lot of pressure you don't always realise, because you're too busy reacting to whatever crisis comes your way.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman emphasises how important it is to be aware of how you are feeling.¹ This awareness alerts you to deal with the emotional build-up before it becomes a problem.

So, even though it sounds like an obvious question, it is worth asking yourself how much pressure you're under.

One way of doing this is to assign a score from 1-10, with 10 being the maximum. This helps you to take a step back and look at your current situation from a more objective viewpoint.

If your score is high, it acts as a reminder that you may need to be more proactive than usual in choosing techniques to release the pressure.

So what are some of the best techniques?

Antony Cockle (antonycockle.com) is an Executive Coach who helps high-performing professionals to manage stressful situations. He offers the following advice:

"If you're suffering from tiredness, procrastination, outbursts or sleep problems, they're a possible sign you may need to install a release valve. Not all release valves have the appropriate long-term effect. Many people use drugs, alcohol or tobacco as their release valve, which in the long term severely reduce their ability to deal with pressure.

"Instead we need to focus on tried and tested release valves, such as doing exercise, taking time out to watch a film or read a book, expressing concerns rather than bottling them up, taking short breaks or even a catnap in the day, and

taking longer breaks such as a weekend away or a proper holiday.

"If the daily routine is too full of negative habits, or if there are no positive, nourishing habits, our batteries will eventually run low. A positive routine helps optimise performance."

There is a growing body of evidence showing that incorporating mindfulness and meditation into the daily routine can improve our ability to cope with pressure. There are many books and YouTube videos providing guidance on how to use this technique.

Vivian, who works in healthcare, says her work is so varied that no two days are the same, which makes it hard to plan. However, she tries to create a routine that provides a stable framework to deal with whatever life throws at her.

"I make time for 20 minutes of meditation and I always have breakfast; oats with raisins and pumpkin seeds and stewed apple with rice milk, every day! I'm aware of foods that build me up and those that deplete my energy. Usually I have something I can snack on mid-morning.

"This all provides me with a cornerstone, something to hang the day on. In a way it's good to surrender and react to what comes, as long as you get what matters done. It's kind of proactive and reactive. My framework is food, tea and chocolate! I have to have little treats – then I think I can do anything.

"I used to be too caught up in work and wasn't getting my personal needs met. It's important to have your personal needs met – the connections, the emotional relationships – you have to have those outside of work."

2. What is within my control?

What are the issues concerning you this week? How many of them can you directly change or influence?

Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher born a slave in AD55, believed in focusing energy and attention on the things that fall within our immediate control.

"I can't think of a single reason why this isn't as relevant now as it was in the first century," says Antony Cockle. He adds:

"Any effort devoted to matters that are outside of our control is unproductive. For example, one of the clients I coach is passionate about her work and has a reputation for excellence, but she's often filled with dread and anxiety about failing. She begins to doubt her capabilities. Whether at home or work, everything she does has to be perfect. There is little time to relax and unwind, let go, or to just let things work themselves out. Of course, there's a personal cost – her happiness!

"She needs to give herself permission to fail. Permission to fail is not about



believing in failure. It's about detaching from the result instead of worrying about how well it will go or what could go wrong. It's best to focus on the things you need to do to complete the task to the best of your abilities – those are the things that are within your control.

"There is a specific point at which you need to let go. It isn't about discarding the necessary preparation. It's about scheduling a time to prepare, and a time to act. During the preparation time, you focus on the risks, so that you can plan for them. During the action time, you just act!"

This philosophy can also be seen in professional tennis. Players are coached to banish any thoughts of "I'm two points away from winning a grand-slam tournament" and replacing those thoughts with "bounce, hit". This doesn't mean that they haven't prepared meticulously for the championship. But once they're in it, they have to let go and just hit the ball.

Blaming others is another classic form of focusing on areas outside our control. When we blame someone or something for our situation, we are reducing our level of influence and therefore feeling under greater pressure. By taking responsibility and focusing on the things that we can influence, our enthusiasm and passion are more easily managed.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow also warned of the dangers of seeking control over

others. It's impossible to control how other people think, and trying to do so creates resistance, friction and consequently more pressure. We can strive to inspire others with our ideas, but what they think of our ideas, or our work, is beyond our control. Maslow recommends being "independent of the good opinion of others." We should know when we have done a good job and not need to be told.

3. Why am I doing it?

Elon Musk is a man who understands pressure. He simultaneously runs three firms with a combined revenue of over 10 billion dollars: the electric car firm Tesla, the rocket company SpaceX and the energy company SolarCity.

Given the unpredictable nature of space flight, his rockets sometimes explode, incinerating over 100 million dollars, years of research and recently even a satellite that his rocket was launching for his client, Facebook.

He has been on the verge of bankruptcy several times and faces crisis after crisis. Yet he always seems to pull his firms back from the brink of disaster.

The intolerable levels of stress that Elon Musk endures would break most normal people.

So how is he still standing?

The answer may lie in his unshakeable sense of purpose. Musk has been quoted as saying that his overriding goal is to colonise Mars. This is what gets him out of bed every morning, come what may.

Someone who is aware of their purpose in life knows that difficult moments are part of the bigger picture. Purpose breeds tenacity and perseverance.

However, over time, our sense of purpose can become clouded by the day-to-day distractions of life. For that reason, it's important to take time out on a regular basis to revisit what we're about and where we're heading.

According to Shannon Kaiser,² best-selling author of *Adventures for your Soul*, the way to find a sense of purpose is to let go of the idea that there is only one purpose. Instead, remind yourself of the things that you love doing and make sure you are either doing those things, or taking action to move towards them.

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Save the Date

The 44th EMWA Conference in Birmingham, England will be held on 2 - 6 May 2017 at the ICC.

For further information:
http://www.emwa.org/EMWA/Conferences/Conference/Birmingham_2017.aspx