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# Out on Our Own

## Editorial

### Welcome readers,

Advertising is key for any freelancer. In order to get clients, you need to get yourself known and ideally have a platform to display your services, previous work, and clients; the more platforms you have, the better. Of course, there are many routes you can go: LinkedIn, Twitter, a personal website, printing business cards, but EMWA offers another platform, the Freelance Directory. We would like to think all our readers are aware of this platform, but we feel that it may not be the case. The platform is open, so anyone, from the pharmaceutical industry, an academic, to a medcomms agency, can browse

through the listed freelancers to try to find the one that matches their project needs. It's available on the freelance tab on the EMWA website. Upon arriving there, it is possible to search freelancers by country, skills and services, subjects, languages, etc. The advantage is that in your profile you can use specific keywords that summarise you and your work. The more you refine your profile, the better. We suggest giving as much specific detail as possible to make yourself unique. There are currently 71 members registered on the Freelance Directory. The Freelance Business Group subcommittee is in the midst of updating the page and making it more accessible. In this issue of *Out on Our Own*, three

experienced freelancers who are listed in the directory give an account of what their experiences have been, address whether it is worth the registration fee, and detail how many potential clients have contacted them through the directory.

We believe the EMWA Freelance Directory gives you another means to advertise yourself. Some housekeeping, you must be an EMWA member to be listed, and it is not a free service. Read on to hear these freelancers' views and experiences, and if you have ideas or want more information then, get in contact. Happy advertising!

Laura A. Kehoe

## Benefits and experience of using the EMWA Freelance Directory

### “Put an emphasis on what makes you unique.”

Surprisingly, many professionals still don't fully appreciate how professional associations can help them in their career path. They may view associations as training grounds in a given field and forget or disregard all the other opportunities these can offer.

Among the many tools EMWA is currently offering to be used as marketing opportunities, we have the Freelance Directory. In this listing, clients may find freelance medical writers, medical editors, and translators who are members of EMWA and have decided to advertise themselves using this marketing toolkit. Clients may use filters such as skill, therapeutic area, name, or country to find the most appropriate professional for their needs.

EMWA is a high-profile association, which means that EMWA members may also be considered as high-profile professionals. Being an EMWA member shows an understanding of the importance of professional continuing education, of being up to date with what is happening within the field, and of many other pro-

fessional issues. This means that when a client is looking for someone in the EMWA Freelance Directory, he or

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she is looking for a qualified professional and perfectly knows that such know-how needs to be appropriately compensated.

When I first decided I wanted to be listed in the Freelance Directory, I had two goals in mind. First, I felt very committed to the association and all the hard work it was doing at the time (and still does) to promote and advance our profiles, and thus, I thought that being present in that listing gave me a sort of “label” of which I was very proud. Second, I was in a situation in which I was not enjoying some of my clients anymore and wanted to be able to say goodbye to them. So, I needed to expand and improve my portfolio of clients.

I first subscribed to the listing in September 2014, and 3 months later I received a phone call from a client needing to find a medical writer to cover four scientific board meetings abroad during the next 2 years. The phone call started like this: “Hello, I'm Mr. X, I've found your details in the EMWA website and would like to talk to you about ...”. This turned out to be a very interesting and nice project and, eventually, I have worked on several other projects for this

same client. The total annual Freelance Directory fee – which is €90 – paid for itself very easily, then! Over the

years, I have received an average of three new contacts annually thanks to the directory. Not all of them have turned into actual clients, but some of them have. For example, in 2017, I was contacted three times, which led to one very interesting 6-month project. Likewise, in 2018, three contacts turned into two actual projects.

Currently, I think I have reached my two objectives. You may ask, why do I renew my presence in the listing year after year? Well, I do think that my presence in the listing is an extremely useful online business card and even if very often I get new contacts thanks to word-of-mouth, I know that clients check both LinkedIn profiles and EMWA's website as well.

If you are wondering whether you should subscribe to the listing or not, my advice would be to give it a try and see what happens. Target your profile according to the number of freelancers listed in the directory in your own country and put an emphasis on what makes you unique. Hopefully, your experience will be similar to mine!

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## “The Freelance Directory did indeed work in my favour”

In August 2016, I set out on a new career path as a freelance science and medical writer. My client base consisted of one regular source of work, and through actively sending emails to prospective clients, this number gradually increased over time. However, my methods of self-promotion were very time-consuming, and even though I found clients using the targeted email method, I began to wonder if there was a better way to get my name out there.

On joining EMWA as a member, I noted that this did not automatically allow me access to the EMWA Freelance Directory which was a source of advertising I considered might be useful. Setting up a profile required a fee of €90 in addition to the EMWA membership fee, and while I understood that my membership was essential to develop a network of contacts, I wondered whether there was any evidence of the Freelance Directory being worth the additional fee.

In November 2016, I set out to attend my first EMWA conference in Belgium and went there with the aim of speaking to other freelancers who might be able to advise on whether the Freelance Directory fee was a good investment or not. When you are starting, and don't have many clients, €90 can be hard to part with unless there's some form of guaranteed benefit and I was hesitant at spending money I didn't have. At the conference, I sought the advice of a few people, but unfortunately, most of the delegates I spoke with were either employed, or were not in the Freelance Directory, and I left the conference without the information I hoped to gain.

Fast forward to May 2018 and my new position on the Freelance Business Group subcommittee – this time I was sure I could find out what the benefits were. Alas, no, there was still nobody in my immediate network who could tell me if it was worth spending the additional €90 or not, and nobody who could advise me whether it was a good source for potential clients to find my services. It was then I decided to conduct a small experiment. My EMWA membership was due in 3 months, in July 2018, so I registered for the Freelance Directory for the remaining 3 months membership to test it out. If it didn't work out, I'd only paid for 3 months and not a full year. I parted with my pro-rata ~€30 and set up my profile. By the time July came around for my membership renewal, I was a bit disappointed not to have received any enquiries via the Freelance Directory. However, I decided to give it another chance – business was good, and I could now afford to lose the fee if it didn't



work out. So, in July 2018 I renewed my EMWA membership and registered for the Freelance Directory for a full year.

This time things started to happen. In September I received a phone call from a client who had found my profile while searching through the Freelance Directory. He advised me that this was the first place medical communication companies are likely to use to source freelance medical writers and offered me a project, which I accepted. This project was exactly the type of work I was looking for, and since then we have developed a good working relationship, which has led to regular projects and a new established client. A month later, I received another call, this time from a different medical communications company, which resulted in another great project, an excellent experience, and another new client. A third phone call that same month led me to turn down work as I now had two new clients who could provide as much work as I could take on. In addition to my existing long-term clients, I am now extremely busy. I received all three phone calls after the clients sourced my details from the EMWA Freelance Directory, and none of these enquiries came through my website, LinkedIn profile, or any other form of self-promotion I used. I have had many emails and messages via LinkedIn, but these are mainly from recruitment agencies.

After 5 months of having my profile in the directory, finally, I had my answer – yes, the

Freelance Directory did indeed work in my favour and is a valuable source of freelance writers for clients. Now that I think about it, even in those early days when I had limited earning potential, even one new project would have covered the €90 fee for the Freelance Directory. Not only that, it would have likely led to more projects and more clients. I can see this now, but when I was starting on my freelance career, I wasn't able to appreciate the bigger picture.

For anyone beginning a freelance career, who may also be hesitant about paying the Freelance Directory fee, let me assure you that I have had only a positive experience. My next task in 2019 is to improve my profile to include all the new work experiences I have had over the last 3 months and to fine-tune my details to make sure that I am found quickly when potential clients perform a search of the directory entries. In 2019, I am looking forward to developing long-term working relationships with my new clients, and I am hopeful that the Freelance Directory will help direct more new clients to my services. I've even joined the Australasian Medical Writers Association Freelance Directory to see if that bears any fruits, too. Let's see.

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## “We should all be aware that as freelancers we can use each other to bring in work.”

Having worked first in scientific research and then in education, about 10 years ago, I decided to set up as a freelance Dutch-to-English medical translator. My business soon expanded to include editing, writing, and training in scientific writing. While building up my business, I've always found my network – both local and online – to be a good source of work\*, and when I joined EMWA in 2011 it was partly for access to the journal and partly to connect with like-minded professionals. Having not yet attended an EMWA conference, I do realise that I am missing out on meeting others face to face, but luckily the directory has indirectly put me in touch with other medical writers in my region. More on this below.

I've had my services listed in the Freelance Directory since 2017. In the 18 months since then, I've noticed that potential clients have only started to find me there in the last 6 months, which could be simply a coincidence or perhaps an indication of an increasing need for freelance medical writers. I have been pleasantly surprised by the diversity of emails I've received – both in terms of the type of client and the type of assignment – and I'm pleased not to have received too many messages from low-paying agencies or people looking for services that do not match the information provided in my listing.

Of the five clients that have contacted me through the directory, so far only one has resulted in a paid offer that I accepted – editing a grant proposal for a Danish university. However, this project easily covered my annual listing fee of €90, and the client has also passed on my details

to other departments at the university – networking at work! The four other clients that have contacted me were as follows:

- A Swiss health communications company needed someone to write short congress reports. I couldn't take on the assignment as they caught me at a busy time, but they've kept my details on file for future reference.
- A Spanish editing company was looking to recruit more freelancers to edit scientific manuscripts written by non-native speakers of English. Since the hourly rate on offer was below what I normally charge I offered to share their request with other freelance medical writers and editors in my network.
- A Dutch clinical services company needed someone to write and revise clinical evaluation reports. As this is not something I have experience with, I again shared the information with others in my network.
- A UK-based non-native English-speaking researcher was looking for help writing up articles for publication based on chapters of his PhD thesis. We're still negotiating timeline and budget.

You may think it unnecessary to try and find another freelancer for new clients who contact me about assignments I cannot take on myself, but I think we should all be aware that as freelancers we can use each other to bring in work. My business would not be where it is today without referrals from within my network, and this is why I am keen to pass on potential work

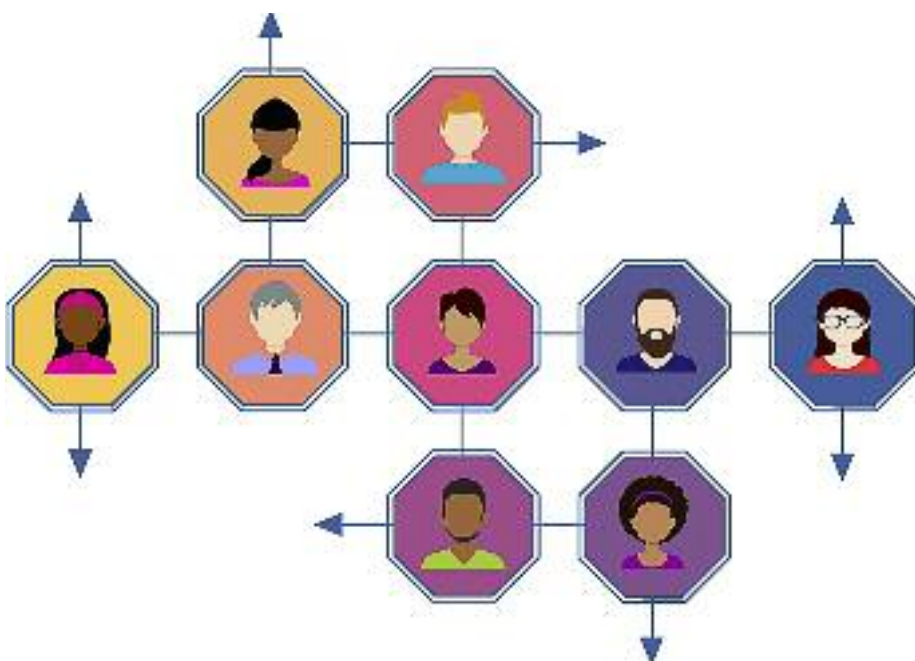
opportunities to others whenever I can. I've also found LinkedIn quite useful in this respect.

Given that EMWA has no members-only online forum or membership directory, the only way of finding other freelancers in EMWA is through the directory, so it's a shame that we're not all listed there. I think many of us do not realise that such a directory is just as important for being found by other freelancers as it is for being found by potential clients. Of course, when you're first starting out as a freelancer and still building your business, you have to decide which investments are going to bring in work, and I would imagine that joining professional associations such as EMWA, and attending conferences, workshops and other opportunities for networking and professional development take priority over paying for listing in the directory.

Having said that, some medical writers – both freelance and those working for companies – are managing to form their own networks. I recently joined a regional network of medical writers based in the Netherlands that is currently a Facebook group with more than 50 members. After a first informal meeting in June 2018, we held our first workshop in October and are getting together again in January 2019. For me, the connection came through my listing in the EMWA Freelance Directory, I connected on LinkedIn with Amsterdam-based freelancer Jackie Johnson who was also in the directory, and we met for coffee. Jackie is an active networker and is keen to help those new to EMWA or medical writing. In fact, many members of this local network are currently in academia and hoping to transition into medical writing, so it's an excellent opportunity for them to learn from others already working in the field. We share resources and job opportunities, and the discussions – both online and in person – have proved very supportive and inspiring.

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\*See <https://www.sense-online.nl/about/sense-publications/esense/728-esense-40-2016/file> for an article on networking that I wrote in 2016 for SENSE, the Society of English-language professionals in the Netherlands (found on pages 5-8 of the PDF).



# Upcoming issues of **Medical Writing**



**June 2019:**

## **Generics and biosimilars**

This issue will introduce readers to generics and biosimilars; provide and discuss their key legal and regulatory aspects in the US and Europe; and discuss their economics and how they affect pharmaceutical companies.

Guest Editor: Diana Radovan

**The deadline for feature articles is March 10, 2019.**



**September 2019:**

## **Trends in medical writing**

The medical writing industry is growing and evolving at a fast pace, and we need to keep up with the trends. From public disclosure to global medical writing, find everything you need to know in this issue.

Guest Editor: Somsuvru Basu

**The deadline for feature articles is June 10, 2019.**



**December 2019:**

## **Artificial intelligence & digital health**

Technological innovation is overtaking all industries, and medicine is no exception. Artificial intelligence, digital health, biohacking, and health optimisation are growing trends, and as medical writers, we must understand and communicate these advances.

Guest Editor: Evguenia Alechine

**The deadline for feature articles is September 9, 2019.**

### **CONTACT US**



If you have ideas for themes or would like to discuss any other issues, please write to [mew@emwa.org](mailto:mew@emwa.org).



<http://journal.emwa.org/>