

Profile

SECTION EDITOR



Beatrix Doerr

beatrix.doerr@gmail.com

An Interview with the organisers of the first Internship Forum

When I attended my first conference as Public Relations Officer in Dublin, I was approached by “newbies” looking for a job. I was quite impressed that people invested such a considerable amount of money to attend the conference in the hope of increasing their chances at finding a job. Anyone this motivated certainly deserves some assistance.

As I realised that many people are unaware of their strengths and how to “sell” them, my first idea was to develop a mentoring programme. It turns out that life had a different (and in hindsight better) plan. It was at the November 2015 Autumn conference that Danae Rokanas and Derek Ho independently approached the Executive Committee with the same idea – to develop an Internship Forum. At first I was not convinced at all as I didn’t see why people with a university degree should work for minimal pay.

But who am I to know the situations of the newcomers better than the newcomers themselves? Further, I saw this also as an opportunity for experienced medical writers to explore other fields of medical writing outside their own expertise, which is typically difficult for freelancers.

The “greenlight” of the Executive Committee was obtained at the same conference and we had the go for a pilot Internship Forum at the Munich Spring conference. Danae and Derek both agreed to work on the organisation of the Forum and soon Harald Meier joined.

It was a tough journey as time was very short and there were myriad things to do, but it was also

fun. I very much enjoyed working in a multi-cultural, “multi-lingual”, “multi-experienced”, and “multi-aged” team, as it brought different yet complementary skill sets to the table. It is now my pleasure to lead the interview with my fellow teammates: Danae, Derek and Harald.

MEW 1: Danae and Derek, how did your idea of an EMWA Internship Forum start?

Derek: I obtained my EMWA foundation certificate after the Fall 2014 conference in Florence. Despite having acquired a strong theoretical foundation from the workshops, I certainly didn’t feel ready to work as a professional medical writer without additional training and mentoring. This is why I didn’t want to begin my medical writing career as a freelancer as some colleagues suggested; I didn’t feel confident enough.

Furthermore, despite having an EMWA certificate on my resume, I wasn’t consistently getting responses when I submitted job applications. Many medical writer job announcements, even for junior level positions, require some degree of professional experience, which I didn’t have.

To make a long story short, after receiving my EMWA certificate I felt like I was in a “now what?” situation. It was at this time that I emailed all of my EMWA colleagues and asked them for their opinion on the following question: what if EMWA could develop some kind of an internship program where junior medical writers are connected with companies willing to provide them with training?

Danae: My idea to start an EMWA internship forum came around the same time that I joined EMWA: November 2015. The first conference I attended was EMWA’s 41st held at The Hague, Netherlands. At the time, I was one of the “newbies”. For two months I had been frantically looking for an entry-level job in medical communications and had been repeatedly turned down – either due to a lack of adequate higher-level qualifications (a PhD was preferred) or lack of relevant experience. I soon came to realize that there were no real ‘entry-level’ jobs. So, how could I get a job without experience and experience without a job? That was the question!

I joined EMWA for some guidance. I was surprised to meet so many young, like-minded individuals facing a similar predicament and decided to take matters into my own hands. Finally, I used the networking session as an opportunity to approach Ms Sam Hamilton, EMWA’s President at the time. I proposed my idea: *What if EMWA could create an internship programme whereby graduates (fresh out of university and with no prior experience) could be introduced to interested companies who could offer them a career in the field?* Ms Hamilton was enthusiastic about the idea and introduced me to Phil Leventhal who then introduced me to our team. The rest is history!

MEW 2: What was your motivation in participating in the Internship Forum team?

Derek: My motivation was pretty

Harald Meier



Derek Ho

simple. If I suggested the idea of an Internship Forum, and if I wanted it to happen, then I needed to play an active role in getting it off the ground. Being an active participant in the development and planning of the Internship Forum also gave me a chance to shape the program in a way that I felt would best suit everyone involved.

Danae: My motivation was fuelled by a realisation. After much research and many job applications, I finally came to the conclusion that there was a gap in the job market for young graduates aspiring to start a career in medical communications. My intention was to bridge this gap with EMWA's help; to leverage EMWA's prestige and high standing in Europe to help introduce young graduates to interested companies in the field. No such programme existed, so we created it. I am very proud of what our team has achieved in only a few months.

Harald: During my many attempts to find a job

in Munich, I was told the same thing by numerous CROs: "We acknowledge that you are well educated, and have valuable skills to offer, but you do not have any experience in the field of medical writing." So how could I get experience? My question remained unanswered.

Soon enough I attended my first EMWA conference at The Hague where I met young, smart and talented biologists who shared similar problems getting into the industry. They were either unemployed due to a lack of relevant (or prior) experience, or had obtained a job offer without promise of pay. I was very pleased when I heard from Beatrix about the idea of an Internship Forum with a view to support prospective talents in medical writing on their way into the industry. I immediately jumped on board!

MEW 3: What did you like best about the pilot Internship Forum in Munich?

Danae: Undoubtedly, for me, it was the atmosphere. The enthusiasm and positive energy in the room.

The wide spectrum of nationalities and ages present. The genuine interest in our event was truly overwhelming. It was very encouraging to see our project welcomed and positively received by so many. Overall, the fact that *all* participants were satisfied with their meetings with applicants or companies; that participants asked for follow-up events with a more extensive programme lasting half a day at the next Spring Conference; and that 82% rated our event 4/5 or 5/5; are all positive indicators of an all-around successful programme definitely worth developing further. Our hard work paid off!

Harald: The work over several months – from the first ideas to the promotion of the event, from the continuous attempts to attract companies and encourage internship applicants to participate, to the final decision on how to place the tables at the Forum's launch – it was all guided by one concern: "will it work?"

Minutes before the Internship Forum launch event, I was pretty nervous. We had attractive companies, many internship applicants, and the tables were perfectly arranged.

Then it started. All nervousness was suddenly gone. All the applicants found their way through the tables to their assigned company representatives. They spoke about their business and envisioned a possible future together. Our idea had worked. I definitely liked that best!

Danae Rokanas



The Internship Forum team can be contacted at:

Danae Rokanas
danae.rokanas@outlook.com
Derek Ho
derek.ho@helsinki.fi
Harald Meier
meierh@in.tum.de