



## Editorial

The Freelance Business Forum is a staple of every EMWA conference, an informal networking event for freelancers or anyone interested in freelancing. This event is organised by the Freelance Business Group, whose members present its mission and activities. Afterwards, there is a presentation by a guest speaker or, as done at the May, 2024 conference in Valencia, Spain, a panel discussion with experts answering

audience questions. The session then moves towards roundtable discussions, where each table moderator guides the conversation on a specific topic. This setup works well whether in person or online, allowing attendees to easily switch between topics. At the end of the discussions, each moderator shares a quick summary so everyone can learn from their group conversations.

It is a highly interactive session and one of my personal favourites at EMWA conferences. Here, I provide a report of the Forum at the Virtual Conference held in November 2024.

Happy reading, and consider joining us at the next forum at the Riga, Latvia, conference in May 2025!

Adriana Rocha

## Report on the Freelance Business Forum at EMWA's 58th Conference (Virtual) in November 2024

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### Freelance Business Forum

The virtual Freelance Business Forum (FBF) had 40 attendees and was hosted by Adriana Rocha, Chair of the Freelance Business Group (FBG), who presented the group and its activities. The Group consists of five members: Adriana, Beate Walter, Johanna Chester, Heather Mason, and Jessica Norberg (who joined the group after the conference). The main goal of the FBG is to support EMWA's freelancers.

Previous FBG activities include the 2023 *Medical Writing* special journal issue on Freelancing, found at <https://journal.emwa.org/freelancing>. There is also the dedicated LinkedIn group where freelancers can connect, share experiences, and seek advice, the EMWA Freelance Business Forum – Online LinkedIn group, at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12769131/>.

Speaking of the *Medical Writing* journal, the *Freelancing* section has replaced the former *Out On Our Own* section, with Adriana as the new section editor. Freelancers are welcome to share their article ideas by reaching out to [freelance@emwa.org](mailto:freelance@emwa.org). The newly-renamed section was inaugurated in June 2024 with an article by Laura Kehoe, who shared her experiences during her 6-year tenure as the previous Chair of the FBG. It

is definitely worth a read: <https://journal.emwa.org/soft-skills-for-medical-writers/freelancing/>

Looking at future activities, the Freelance section of the EMWA website is being updated, alongside the larger EMWA website redesign, which may take some time to complete. One service hosted on the website is the Freelance Directory, a paid service for freelancers. An informal poll during the event revealed that only half of the attendees (57%) were signed up for the directory, but that the majority (85%) would join it if it were improved. The FBG is aware of this issue and is studying how best to improve it.

Additionally, following the 2023 Freelance Business Survey, there will be a 2025 survey, now led by the larger Remuneration and Salary Compensation Team (which includes FBG members). The survey will collect remuneration data from all medical writers: freelance, hybrid, and full-time employees. The survey is expected to launch in 2025 and the results will be published in *Medical Writing* in 2026.

The FBF continued with a presentation by the guest speaker, Eleanor Steele. Eleanor has worked in MedComms since 2004, first as a medical writer and then as team leader in several different agencies. She is currently a freelance consultant working as the MedComms Mentor and since April 2024 also manages the MedComms

Workbook, a subscription service for MedComms freelancers.

Eleanor spoke about taking control of your freelance career. While freelancing can be a fantastic way to build a career you love, there are many challenges. She emphasised the importance of understanding your individual career goals and setting boundaries to help you choose projects with intention and work in a sustainable way.

Eleanor noted that it can be hard to find professional development opportunities as a freelancer, but she recommends actively seeking feedback and reflecting on each project to gain insights that can develop your skills, along with investing in more traditional learning opportunities when possible.

Finally, she highlighted the value of finding your freelance tribe for community, accountability, and support – whether that's through local groups or professional organisations like EMWA.

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### Breakout rooms

After Eleanor's presentation came the most interactive part of the FBF, the table discussions. Since the forum occurred on Zoom, this meant online breakout rooms. Each room had a specific topic with moderators leading the conversation (Figure 1). Attendees switched freely between rooms, and after 45 minutes, the discussions ended and each moderator shared a summary of

their group conversation with all attendees. The summaries are listed below.

**Breakout room 1:**

**Hybrid work: juggling freelancing with part-time employment**

Kfir Lapid led the conversation on the hybrid work model in this breakout room. He had already been a part of a panel discussion on this topic in the FBF at the Spring EMWA Conference in Valencia, as it was such a popular subject. Hybrid work combines the security of a traditional job (part-time employment) with the flexibility of freelancing. Kfir shared his experience of freelancing as a temporary solution when transitioning from academia to industry. However, after landing a permanent job, he realised he could not give up his freelance business and became a hybrid worker. He explained that while freelancing is typically more flexible, the employee role is more predictable. One attendee likened it to employment being the cake and freelancing being the icing.

Kfir noted that it can be difficult to find a part-time position that allows for freelancing side activities, but he advised medical writers to be upfront about their freelancing plans in job interviews. He believes that prospective employers truly interested in hiring you will understand. In some part-time positions, such as teaching, employers would probably not care if the teacher has other side jobs. Being a hybrid worker also helps medical writers gain knowledge and transferable skills from both worlds, making them even more valuable for employers and freelance clients alike.

**Breakout room 2:**

**The relationship between CROs and freelancers – how do they work and how do you get started?**

Andrew Balkin guided a discussion on how

freelancers can work with contract research organisations (CROs). He shared proactive steps that freelancers can take before, during, and after initially reaching out to CROs, and exactly when, why, and what to say/write/include in that email. Some CROs source freelancers through recruitment agencies, while others have in-house recruitment departments. For the latter, a generic email could fall into an abyss, so Andrew shared tips and tricks on how to identify the right contact person and increase the chances of getting work. Being listed in the EMWA freelance directory is also useful as this is used/searched by many companies. Additionally, your CV must match your LinkedIn profile. While this may seem obvious, this is often overlooked.

The conversation also covered what types of freelance help CROs may need. Since the demand for freelancers can vary with workload highs and lows, there will be times when CROs particularly need extra help, especially under tight deadlines. Many freelancers have specialist experience that CROs may lack in-house, such as expertise in certain document types, conditions, etc., which can be important for securing work. Lastly, attendees discussed how often freelancers should reach out to the same CRO for work. While there’s no clear answer, maintaining contact rather than just reaching out once can lead to more opportunities in the future.

**Breakout room 3:**

**From freelancer to small business owner**

Katrin Zaragoza Dörr went from freelancer to small business owner herself and started a conversation about the different ways to create and run your own company, which can vary between countries. If based, for example, in Spain, you might choose to be a freelancer only or create an LLC (limited liability company) to protect your personal assets. In the UK, however, a freelancer must work under an LLC umbrella

company. Some people also consider forming an LLC for tax benefits, so it’s a good idea to consult an accountant and/or a tax advisor to understand the financial advantages.

Different options for operating as an LLC were also discussed, such as whether to employ yourself or invoice your LLC, and whether to hire medical writer employees or subcontract to freelancers. Katrin advised anyone with any further questions about setting up a business to explore the EMWA entrepreneurship-SIG, which offers the opportunity to learn from established business owners (see <https://emwa.org/sigs/entrepreneurship-sig/>).

**Breakout room 4:**

**Managing multiple projects and overlapping timelines as a freelancer**

Archana Nagarajan led the discussion about managing multiple projects and overlapping timelines – a challenge for every freelancer. Many in the conversation shared their favourite tools and strategies to keep track of multiple projects and meet deadlines. This included project management tools/software such as Monday, Freedcamp, Things (only for Mac), and ClickUp. More useful software included Calendly (for scheduling meetings), Google Calendar, Google Notes, Sorted (for invoices and taxes in Germany), and Toggle (timer).

To save time, it’s useful to create email templates for certain tasks, which can be made using artificial intelligence (AI). It is also helpful to provide a structured list of questions and checklists for any documents needed from the client. Finally, keeping track of how much time is spent on each project can help freelancers provide better quotes for future projects.

When it comes to working with clients, it is sometimes necessary to push project deadlines and it is crucial to be upfront and honest about this. If freelancers are working with the same client on various projects, they must always ask about the priority level and flexibility for each project to avoid any future complications. Ultimately, everyone agreed that maintaining good communication with the client is key to a successful project.

**Closing events**

At the end of the discussions, each moderator shared a summary of their group conversation with all attendees.

Adriana closed the event, thanking all the volunteers who kindly shared their time and expertise, as the FBF would not happen without them, and expressed her wishes to see everyone face-to-face in Riga at the May 2025 conference.

Breakout rooms	
1. Hybrid work: juggling freelancing with part-time employment	Kfir Lapid
2. The relationship between CROs and freelancers – how do they work, how do you get started	Andrew Balkin
3. From freelancer to small business owner	Katrin Zaragoza Dörr
4. Managing multiple projects and overlapping timelines as a freelancer	Archana Nagarajan

**Figure 1. Breakout rooms: topics and moderators**