

What every medical writer needs to know

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Abstract

A medical writer is never done with learning. In the fast-paced world of online communications, learning means getting involved in the digital environment and using tools like social media, websites, and blogs to enhance your online presence and develop your career. Health Writer Hub, a new global community for health and medical writers offering tips and advice focused on digital communications, getting started, freelancing, finding employment, and more, can be useful to achieve these goals.

Keywords: Career development, Digital communications, Online networking, Websites, Blogging, Social media

Health and medical writing is a prosperous career choice, with more and more people toying with the idea of either living the dream and becoming a freelance writer, or taking their valuable medical qualifications and becoming a medical writer with an employer. If there was one piece of advice I could give to anyone who wants to be or is already in the business of creating medical content, it would be this: your learning is never done. Whether you are a relatively new medical writer or have 20 years of experience under your belt, constant learning is the only way you can stay up-to-date with your profession.

Learning is also what drives you to be competitive. If you are dedicated to learning, developing, and growing your career, you can easily stand out in an increasingly popular market.

What does learning mean for medical writers?

Joining professional associations gives you the chance to network and to obtain formal training through courses/workshops they offer. This step is key for anyone who cares about his/her career. But what is just as important is knowing that the learning landscape is changing. This means

understanding where the future of health and medical writing is headed and therefore we need to get familiar with the online world.

Writing as a profession is evolving because reader behaviour has been changing. Consider these: everyday, 294 billion email messages are sent, 4.7 billion minutes are spent on Facebook, and 864 000 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube.¹ People spend a lot of time online. Reports say that national newspaper circulation in the UK fell by 22.5% from 2007 to 2012 and that if this rate stayed constant, there will be a loss of 45% of newspaper sales in 10 years.² No wonder newspapers and magazines are closing down. In fact, some medical journals are only available in digital format. Over 92 000 pieces of digital content are published every day.³

It is not just the future of content that medical writers need to be mindful of. We also need to embrace digital communications wholeheartedly. Medical writers who are serious about their careers should have a strong online presence such as:

1. Websites with a portfolio of work. Speaking from experience as someone who has hired medical writers in the past, I can say that if a writer does not have a website with writing samples, I lose interest in pursuing them. The best writing websites appear simple, clean, and professional, with links to writing samples as well as a biography and contact details. These days, it is so easy to set up a website for free that there is almost no excuse for not doing so. If you are not sure where to start, try with Google: there are probably more than 1 million pieces of content alone on this very topic! If you are a freelancer, you may have a business website already and this is one of the best ways to generate new leads – providing you rank well in the search engines.
2. LinkedIn. A professional profile on LinkedIn with a brief overview of your work history can do wonders for your online reputation.

Keep your profile up-to-date by ensuring all your jobs are listed and encourage your colleagues and peers to recommend you. Add examples of published work to your profile and join relevant medical writing groups. There are some very active health and medical writing groups with thousands of members. You should also choose a professional profile image and change it regularly.

3. Twitter. This microblogging platform is essential for journalists and writers. You can follow your peers, find out about trending topics, discover new leads, and network with other writers online. Twitter requires effort and persistence – a little bit of ‘Tweeting’ each day will pay off in the long run.
4. Facebook. The importance of Facebook for business is increasing and if you have a freelance writing or communications business, Facebook can be an exceptionally valuable tool in terms of networking and sharing content. Find other business you work with (e.g. graphic designers or website designers) and connect with them when you are getting started. Like Twitter, Facebook requires effort and the more you can hone in on your target audience, the better engaged your followers will be. A business Facebook page is probably going to be more useful for you if you are a freelancer as opposed to an employee.
5. Google+. While Google+ has not been as popular as Facebook, it is still an important social media presence for writers to make use of. Ever wondered how you can get your image to appear in the SERPs (search engine results pages). This is achieved by Google Authorship – a crucial feature to utilise if you are setting up your blog or website and want to rank well in search engines.

How can medical writers learn about changing trends?

Following industry-leading writers and bloggers online is vital. But while generic advice usually

Author information

Michelle Guillemard is the founder of Health Writer Hub. She is also in the Executive Committee of the Australasian Medical Writers Association. Michelle specialises in digital health and medical communications

and translates well to the health and medical writing profession, we all prefer to read about specific information related to our medical writing niche. Health Writer Hub (<http://www.healthwriterhub.com>) is a newly created global community for health and medical writers that provides weekly tips for novice and experienced medical writers. Advice focuses on new technologies to help writers get better at what they do and ultimately develop their careers: for example, blogging and strategies for getting started, what Instagram is and how to use it for business, and tips on SEO (search engine optimisation) copywriting, online medical news and feature writing, and online marketing.

Medical writers should not be afraid to get involved in the online space – even if they are only writing for print publications, because eventually all printed materials will become digital. The earlier you start moving in this space, the better for you.

Joining Health Writer Hub

Health Writer Hub can help to keep you up-to-date with how you can benefit from the changing digital environment. You can also join Health Writer Hub’s Writer Directory, register for job alerts, get regular health and medical writing advice, and stay connected to a growing, professionally relevant community.

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