



Editorial

In my first editorial as section editor for *Freelancing*, I'm delighted to have Laura Kehoe share her achievements as the previous section editor and chair of the Freelance Business Group (FBG).

During her tenure, Laura and the FBG team have made incredible strides in representing the

freelance community at EMWA, providing us all with the tools to grow, learn, and network. From the Freelance Business Forum to the Business Survey, passing along the Freelance Directory, all major activities are highlighted in this article that spans 6 years (!) of considerable challenges, such as going virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking over Laura's functions in 2024, I hope I do a good job in my own way. I'm comforted to know the FBG team and other EMWA members will help me along the way and I wish Laura all the best in her future endeavours. Happy reading!

Adriana Rocha

Navigating my freelance journey while driving EMWA freelance activities

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I didn't plan to become a medical writer, but then again who does? It wasn't, at the time, a career on the list of things to do after a PhD. Shortly after completing my PhD, I got a job as an editorial coordinator for a high-impact journal in hepatology, learning all the intricacies of the publication world. It was in this role that I found EMWA and went to my first conference in Brussels (2016). I must admit, I felt a bit of imposter syndrome going to a medical writing conference when I was "just" editing. Oh, how I was wrong. I was amazed at the diversity of medical communicators at the conference and all the interactions I had gave me the realisation that there were multiple opportunities to be had.

A year later, I left my job and set myself up as a freelancer, not knowing what to expect and where this path would lead, but I was excited. I signed up to the next EMWA Conference (Cascais 2017) and the Freelance Business Forum (FBF). Shortly after registering, I received a message from Satyen Shenoy asking if I'd be interested in being a table leader for the forum. My initial thought was dread. How could I help others in freelancing; I've only just stepped into this field? Satyen reassured me that the event is very relaxed, and people want to simply share

ideas, ask questions, offer solutions, and help guide other freelancers. I decided to do it. And so, my freelance journey with EMWA had begun.

From table leader to FBG chair

Satyen quickly saw my enthusiasm and positive attitude towards freelancing and invited me to become a committee member of the Freelance Business Group (FBG) in 2018 at the Barcelona meeting. There, I met the other committee members; Allison Kirsop, Carola Krause, and George Xinarianos. Because of my background working in publications, I quickly took on the Out On Our Own (OOOO) section for the *Medical Writing (MEW)* journal, which led me to work with some amazing authors who were freelancers or business owners working with freelancers. Every story I have received over the years has been inspirational or educational and I hope this provoked a similar feeling in our readers.

I stepped into the FBG chair role when Satyen had a bigger item on his agenda – becoming EMWA vice president and then president. In the five years I've been the chair, I've had the pleasure to work and welcome several wonderful people to the FBG committee, such as Mariana Rickmann, Irene Farré, Diana Ribeiro, Sónia Costa, Beate Walter, Johanna Chester, and Adriana Rocha. Clearly, I'm a feminist!

Freelance achievements for EMWA

Over the years, we have launched several objectives and initiatives to improve freelance

activities, communications, and events for EMWA. Of course, since 2019 to today, we had a little hurdle to jump over in the form of COVID-19, which left all us volunteers stretched thin. Life as a mum, teacher, business owner, and volunteer became particularly challenging. During this turbulent time, our volunteer activities for the FBG waned slightly but we picked it up when things returned to "normal". Some of the things we've worked on are summarised below.

Freelance directory

When I first registered myself in the freelance directory, the information we could provide was very limited, making it difficult to be found by potential clients. The FBG committee, specifically Allison Kirsop, designed a more detailed profile option for the freelancers to fill in, giving them more opportunities to explain their expertise, academic and professional backgrounds, languages, etc. With the rise and success of professional platforms like LinkedIn, the freelance directory needs a revamp once again, specifically how it can be used by EMWA freelancers and clients searching for their ideal freelancer. Watch this space!

Virtual and face-to-face FBF

The FBG committee organises the FBF at every EMWA conference: an informal event where people can freely engage with one another, ask questions about freelance life, and network. The face-to-face FBFs are always a lively affair, with



many groups gathering around roundtables to discuss current freelance topics. The conversations often flow freely with the help of wine and beer served to the attendees! Table leaders are key for these roundtables to keep the topic on point and to give a summary of the discussions at the end of the forum.

With COVID-19 preventing us from meeting in person during 2020–22, we had to decide how to run the FBF online. This was going to be hard to achieve in a virtual setting, but we managed it. After initial presentations by myself and a guest speaker, we went into breakout rooms each with a different freelance topic or theme. We encouraged people to come off mute and interact. People were allowed to freely move from one breakout room to the next. It was so successful that we continue with this setup today in the virtual November conferences, giving freelancers that much-needed opportunity to talk and network with other freelancers.

The FBF is my personal highlight of the conferences due to the friendly and stimulating conversations I have every time. So, if you are a freelancer or interested in becoming one, then register for the next FBF, it's free for registered members. Equally, if you want to be a table leader and discuss a specific topic, then get in touch with the team at freelance@emwa.org.

Out On Our Own (now known as "Freelancing")
Since 2018, I have thoroughly enjoyed being the section editor of OOOO. As well as publishing personal journeys of other freelancers, I also aimed to find authors who could provide readers with practical and easy to access tips on being a freelancer. I hope I achieved that. In fact, over the last six years, we've had a total of 28 authors publish their experiences and guidance to inspire

and encourage other freelancers. I have been amazed at the generosity and enthusiasm of each author. Whether I reached out personally to them, or they approached me, every time the collaboration was fluid and productive. I thank each and every one.

Freelance Business Survey

Back in 2018, when I embarked on the FBF committee path, Satyen had just launched the Freelance Business Survey. Due to multiple reasons, we never got the results published. However, when Johanna Chester joined the committee at the end of 2022, she was as enthusiastic as me to run a new survey. We worked to create a more up-to-date survey addressing relevant issues on work-life balance and COVID-related questions and launched the survey in January 2023. With a quick turnaround, Johanna analysed the results and compared them to the 2018 data; we then wrote an article and published it in the Freelance issue of MEW in June 2023 as "The Seventh Freelance Business Survey: The freelance landscape 2018-2023". This survey offers insights into how freelancers are advertising their services, finding clients, pursuing their continued professional studies, hourly rates, their strategies to de-stress and handle the work-life conundrum, and so much more. Of course, data should be taken lightly, as demographics and individual responses create some diverse results. So, if you haven't already seen it, you can find it on the journal website in the June 2023 issue at <https://journal.emwa.org/freelancing/>.

Special Freelancing issue in MEW

With the editor-in-chief of MEW, Raquel Billones, and myself recognising that a special issue on freelancing was sorely needed, I teamed

up with Satyen again to guest edit one. Together, we approached various freelance medical communicators from around the world and invited them to share their expertise in feature articles. Again, I was amazed at the enthusiasm of each author we contacted. In total, we compiled an issue of nine feature articles plus the survey results. These ranged from soft skills needed as a freelancer, hybrid freelancing, mentoring and coaching, to book reviews that support people in their freelance journey. We hope that this issue offers some useful and essential tips for new and experienced freelancers. If you haven't read it, search the June 2023 issue of MEW.

LinkedIn Freelancing Group

For many years, EMWA members have been asking the FBG to create a special group where EMWA freelancers can ask each other questions or share information, and not just wait for the FBF each year. In May 2023, we decided to create a LinkedIn private group for any EMWA members interested in freelancing – known as the EMWA Freelance Business Forum online which can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12769131/>. People are just discovering the group, but we already have 159 members. Our plan is to make this an active group, with regular posts and events if possible. So, if you haven't already joined, send a request to join and ideally include a little message with your EMWA member number to prove you're an EMWA member. And, if you're already a member, start sharing and chatting!

Future endeavours

The reason, which I've yet to explain, as to why I'm writing this summary article on the FBG achievements over the years is because I have handed the FBG chair baton over to another enthusiastic freelancer, Adriana Rocha, and I will gently step away from the committee in the coming months. It's time for a refresh, Adriana has her own ideas and initiatives she'd like to work on with the committee, and she will bring an exciting and fresh approach to EMWA and freelancing.

For me, my journey continues with new opportunities. I will continue to be involved with EMWA activities for years to come, but for now, I would like to thank everyone I worked with over these six years, thank EMWA and the EC for enduring me for so long, and to all the wonderful authors, committee members and table leaders who made my job a pleasure.

Happy freelancing!