

Consulting/Freelancing Panel

Panel Speakers

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By Melissa Growney, PharmD Candidate

On September 18th, 2025, a panel of professionals participated in a Q&A session to discuss the role of freelancers and consultants in regulatory affairs and medical writing. The panel discussed the transition to freelancing, qualities for success, how to build client relationships, and how to run a freelance business. The American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) Carolinas Chapter in collaboration with the North Carolina Regulatory Affairs Forum (NCRAF) extend thanks to the panel for their insight, and to Batu Sharma, PhD and Laura Sommerville, PhD (Precision Medical Writing, LLC) for moderating the session.

Transitioning into Freelance/Consulting.

Success in the freelancing space revolves around building your network, while 10 years of experience or using a PhD as a “foot in the door” also helps. Learning how to effectively network and build relationships with people is a highly valuable skill.

When beginning a career in freelance writing or consulting, don't shy away from temporary agency or contract work. These experiences can provide valuable

exposure to diverse projects and clients. Unlike full-time roles, the scope of freelancing work is broad and requires the juggling of additional responsibilities like business, finance, IT, and marketing.

Panelists stressed the importance of setting firm boundaries to avoid burnout but highlighted the variety, structure, and the ability to manage your own schedule as just some of the benefits of working in this area.

Business Setup & Logistics.

- **Setting up your domain:** Establish your business as LLC or an S corp; this is an important step in formalizing your business structure but one panelist pointed out that this is not strictly necessary for success as a freelance writer.
- **Separate communications:** Keep a separate email, phone-line, listserv, etc for communications and a separate LinkedIn account for marketing your business.
- **Protect your business:** Build trust with your client base by securing your data and purchasing liability insurance.
- **Track your hours for billable services:** Keep a running log of working hours and update it daily. Remember; you're working to live, not living to work!

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- Maintain a regular schedule: Keep reasonable hours for task management. Whether you're invoicing clients or performing administrative upkeep, maintaining a schedule is necessary. Try to make these tasks as predictable as possible.
- Be ready to negotiate your contracts depending on client needs: Have reimbursement for travel fees/per diem travel time/conference fees/project fees written into your contract with the client and establish timeline expectations. For example, set the expectation that you should be reimbursed for any travel expenses within 1 week and have your receipts ready for submission. Consider charging for non-productive travel time at half your standard hourly rate.

Compensation & Value

You're not going to be making the money of a 40-hour work week unless you're working 60+ hours per week, because you're not getting paid for administrative or management tasks, which are necessary but not billable to the client. Utilize the AMWA Freelance Rates Sheet as a resource for deciding your rate for fair compensation. The bottom line here is this: you don't need to undersell your skills, talent in this industry shows its own value.

Networking & Client Relationships

Networking remains the cornerstone of building a client base. As a freelance writer you are the master of your craft. Word of mouth is a powerful business development tool and maintaining relationships with previous clients can help you build a base upon which to grow. Speaking at conferences, volunteering with professional organizations, and networking with other freelance writers are all great ways to meet potential clients.

Project & Time Management

Whether you are using checklists, desk calendars, or sticky notes, project management is a learned skill that everyone develops in different ways. It's all about finding which hat you like to wear versus the hat you are required to wear for your role. Individuals must find what works for them to successfully run an independent business. The key here is balancing client-facing tasks (meeting deadlines, delivering a high-quality product) with business-facing tasks (contracts, billing, marketing). Neglecting the more "menial" administrative tasks and responsibilities can undermine long-term success.

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Legal & Contractual Considerations.

First-time freelancers are encouraged to seek mentorship when drafting a contract for the first time. While legal review is not necessary, it can help you identify any gaps in coverage that could leave you open to liability. Review all contracts with your client to align expectations and ensure the language therein is fully understood by both parties.

Include language for special situations in your base contract that would ensure you are fully protected in the worst-case scenario. For example, if the client wants to move the project deadline, you can include a “prorated fee” to ensure you are being adequately compensated for the additional time and effort put into the project.

Professional Development & Closing Advice

To stay current with industry trends and expectations, you can subscribe to newsletters from various professional societies like RAPS, MAPS, and AMWA weekly digest. Newsletters are published at regular intervals and can give some insight into industry trends. As client needs evolve, the ability to adjust while maintaining professionalism and quality will set writers apart.

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