

◆ *Freelancing Roundup*

Moderator:

Gabe Waggoner
Freelance Writer and Editor
College Station, Texas

Speakers:

Seth Beckerman
Business & Technical
Communications
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Janis Ramey
Ramey Technical Writing
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Reporter:

Susan M Shirley
Freelance Editor
Corpus Christi, Texas

Seth Beckerman and Janis Ramey are long-time freelance writers and editors in science and technology. In this session, they shared their experiences and provided advice to anyone considering or working in a freelance career. Beckerman and Ramey used a tag-team approach as they offered guidance on what to consider before starting a freelance business: setting up an office, networking, professionalism, credibility, financial matters, and resources.

Freelancers enjoy flexible work hours and locations, working one on one with interesting people, working in neutral locations devoid of office politics, possessing the ability to say no to undesirable projects or disagreeable clients, and not having to commute or adhere to an office dress code. But someone thinking of leaving a job for freelance work should compare the financial, social, and support aspects of the

current job with those of self-employment. A freelance's income may not be steady throughout the year, and company-sponsored benefits, such as health-care insurance and retirement plans, are nonexistent for the self-employed. Have enough money set aside to last a few months before your freelance income starts coming in. Identify potential clients and markets for your services and talk to self-employed colleagues about their transition to freelancing. Social isolation and lack of participation in team projects can be difficult adjustments for freelancers. They can no longer speed dial the office IT technician when their computers seize up or the documents they've been working on for months disappear into the ether. Beckerman suggested trying some freelance work while still employed to see if it's right for you.

Ramey identified ways to find clients and market yourself. New clients are often your current or past employers, co-workers, vendors, members of your professional societies, friends, casual acquaintances, and family. Even if they don't hire you directly, they may refer someone else to you if they understand what services you offer. She emphasized that networking is essential. Attend society meetings and social gatherings of people who have similar interests. The people you meet there are potential clients. Those gatherings also help to keep you current in news and events that could generate work for you.

Success as a freelance writer or editor depends on your credibility and reputation. Ramey suggested that freelancers become known as experts: take training, obtain certifications in your field of expertise, publish your own work, teach, present at

professional meetings, become an officer in a professional society, judge competitions, and work on important committees or advisory groups. Market your business with a logo that is representative of your services, a professional Web site, and ads placed with societies that are likely to produce clients. Write newsletters, e-mails, and even brochures offering your services.

Finances are important in any business, but a self-employed person is directly involved. Know exactly how much you need to cover expenses and make a profit. Know the going rate in your area for the services you provide—refer to online rate surveys and talk with other freelancers to find out what they charge. Keep meticulous records of expenses and know which are tax-deductible. Keep business and personal finances separate. Ramey suggested doing your own taxes for a few years; this allows you to be in the best position to make decisions about your business.

Both presenters emphasized the importance of professionalism and networking in the life of a freelance. You are your business, and your business will be judged by not only your professional work but how you conduct yourself daily. Your clients might Google you, so be careful about posting blogs and photos on the Web. Always maintain a professional demeanor in your business communications. Answer your telephone away from family noise, and forward your calls to an answering machine or to your cellular telephone to keep children from intercepting your business calls. The advice presented by Ramey and Beckerman in this session will form the foundation of a successful freelance career. 