



Hiring Freelance Writers: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly From an Agency Perspective

Mary E. Dominiecki, PhD
Medical Director

AMWA Freelance Workshop
April 25, 2009

AOICOMMUNICATIONS, L.P. 
Consider it done



Overview of the Talk

- Finding medical writers
- Screening applicants
- Assessment of writers
- Keys to good working relationships





Background

- How I got here
- AOI Communications, L.P.
- Past experiences influence present and future decisions.





AOI Communications, L.P.

- Small, oncology-focused medical marketing and communications company
- Clients
 - Pharmaceutical companies
 - Biotech companies
 - Nonprofit patient advocacy groups
- Departments
 - Account management
 - Client services
 - Editorial (medical)
 - Graphics
 - IT



AOI Communications, L.P. (cont)

- Projects
 - Advisory board meetings
 - Slides
 - Executive summaries
 - Webcasts
 - Live meetings
 - Slide decks
 - Publication plans
 - Congress abstracts
 - Congress posters
 - Oral presentations
 - Manuscripts – primary, secondary, review
 - Promotional materials





Medical Director Role at AOIC

- Managing editorial department
- Integral part of management team
- Hiring freelance writers
- Supervising and reviewing work of freelancers



Finding Medical Writers

- AMWA
 - Freelance directory
 - Events
- Word of mouth
 - Through colleagues
- Unsolicited
- Applicants for other positions
- NETWORKING, NETWORKING, NETWORKING!





Screening Applicants

- Resume
 - Experience
 - Types of projects
 - Therapeutic areas
 - Formatting
 - Typos
- Writing samples
- Writing tests
- Phone conversation
- Estimate of fees
- Trial project





Assessment of Writers

- Communication
 - Deadlines
 - Questions about source materials
 - Questions about formatting
- Ability to meet deadlines
- Quality of questions



Assessment of Writers

- Quality of work
 - CONTENT
 - Example - 'Joe' – incorrect citations – plagiarism
 - Example - 'Brigit' – writer who sued
 - FLOW
 - Typos
 - Spell check
 - Inconsistencies
 - Formatting
 - Client style guide
 - Journal guidelines
- Pride in work
 - Follow-up
 - Open to criticism



Keys to Good Working Relationships

- Communication, communication, communication
 - Stay in contact with your clients.
 - Follow up on your projects.
 - Examples
 - 'Kim' – writer who flaked last minute
 - 'Rafael' – sent assignment and disappeared
- Consistent work that meets assignments
 - Saves client time
 - Dependable
 - Examples
 - 'Jim' – internal consistency
 - 'Anna' – work from project to project



Keys to Good Working Relationships (cont)

- Play to your strengths.
 - Therapeutic areas
 - What are your strongest therapeutic areas?
 - How easily do you pick up new therapeutic areas?
 - Types of projects
 - Can you write manuscripts with little guidance or do you need to have a brief outline?
 - Have you ever written a congress abstract?
 - Have you ever worked on an interactive project?
 - Examples
 - Not every writer is a pro at PowerPoint or a whiz at creating tables and/or graphs.
 - Example – ‘Bob’ – technically challenged
 - Not every writer can quickly pick up the topic of portal hypertension or bipolar disorder.



Keys to Good Working Relationships (cont)

- Options to expand capabilities
 - Learn the software you are using.
 - Focus on projects using the software you know.
 - Offer to provide the client the content but let them know your limitations in formatting.
 - Expand your repertoire by offering to do a new type of project for a reduced fee.
- Make your client's life easier!
- NETWORK! Meet people.



Summary

- Network to meet people in a position to hire you or to meet people who know someone who may want to hire you.
- Accept writing assignments within your comfort zone.
- Complete assignments according to directions and within deadlines.
- Follow-up on assignments.
- Be open to criticism.



Oncology is what we do.

Consider it done!

