

Pricing Strategies for Success

FROM THE 2009 FREELANCE WORKSHOPS

By Julie Munden

An always-energized Brian Bass, president of Bass Advertising, Inc., and author of *The Accidental Medical Writer*, began his presentation on pricing strategies for success at the AMWA-DVC Seventh Annual Freelance Workshop with this question, "How many people want to be successful?" Nearly everyone raised his/her hand. The workshop was held on April 25, 2009, at Normandy Farms in Blue Bell, Pa.

But being successful is more than just good business acumen, discipline, and hard work. Bass revealed that pricing your services right is really the way to achieve success.

However, setting fees may be daunting and stressful for some, if not all of us. Bass made it sound as simple as 1-2-3. Here's his *Pricing Strategies for Success* plan:

1. Decide HOW to Charge

Do you charge by the hour, job, unit of work, or retainer? To get the most financially out of a project, Bass not only recommends—he insists—that you charge by the project. "Charging by the hour punishes the proficient and rewards the inefficient," says Bass.

He uses a simple example to illustrate his point. As a new freelance charging \$85 per hour you would earn \$4,250 for a project that you finished in 50 hours. When your client approaches you again to work on a similar project, your skills are better honed and you can now finish that same project in about 30 hours, earning \$2,550. Once you are skilled in a project's subject area, you can complete it in 20 hours and earn \$1,700. What's wrong with this example? You're being punished for your proficiency. Here's the breakdown:

- Project X @ \$4,250
- @ 50 hours = \$85/hour
- @ 30 hours = \$141.67/hour
- @ 20 hours = \$212.50/hour

Charging by the project is a win-win situation according to Bass.

2. Decide WHAT to Charge

To get a picture of what to charge, use your resources. One popular resource is the AMWA 2007 Salary Survey available on AMWA's Web site. Bass does point out that according to the 2007 survey, two-thirds of AMWA's freelancers still charge hourly. In deciding what to charge, he encourages you to tap into your AMWA colleagues through the AMWA Freelance Listserve, look at your past projects, and go with your gut.

"I work out 3 to 4 estimates and then make my decision based on past experience, the experience of others, and by computing the value of what the project is really worth. Looking at all of these different ways and what your gut tells you will help with your decision," says Bass. However, he warned attendees to be prepared for the most challenging part of setting fees--No 2 projects are EVER alike! It is important to remember that nuances and subtleties of projects like the number of drafts and revisions and annotating and highlighting references, to name a few, must be considered when deciding what to charge.

3. How to Respond WHEN Your Estimate Is Rejected

Yes, you read that correctly, "when your estimate is rejected." Bass not only expects this; he honestly invites it. "Rejection is a good sign that your client wants to work with you and that they just need an explanation," says Bass. To estimate a project fee you need to ask as many questions as you can, make assumptions and plan on them, and put everything in writing so there are no surprises.

Bass concluded his presentation with this statement: "Never negotiate your fee, always negotiate the deliverable." Bass explains that if you choose to stand your ground, you may lose the project, but if you give in, you will lose yourself. You need to negotiate to win. "Negotiating your fee builds your confidence and confidence ultimately leads you to success," says Bass. "It's what makes you a successful business person and a successful medical writer."

Julie Munden has been a freelance medical editor and writer for over 6 years. Her company, Blue Ink Editor, provides editorial and writing services to various medical communications agencies.

#