

# Helping People Sell Can Be Good Business

## FROM THE 2009 FREELANCE WORKSHOPS

*By Joseph Breck*

Medical writers enjoy covering all ends of the communications field, from cutting-edge science articles to tedious regulatory affairs documents. A large part of the mix is also writing pharmaceutical sales training materials – the things that help the sellers sell.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> annual AMWA-DVC Freelance Workshop on April 25<sup>th</sup> in Bluebell, Pa., freelance medical writer Lynne Lederman, PhD, presented opportunities in pharmaceutical sales training for medical writers.

The first thing Lynne stressed is that sales training is education. It is not sales. From the writer's perspective, it can cover anything from medicine and science to pharmacology, treatment guidelines, competitive therapies or managed care. The challenging part comes in effectively communicating a message to the various audiences which may be targeted – some with little or no science background.

While the pharmaceutical companies are the ultimate customer, most writers work for or through a medical/education or medical/communications agency. The agency is tasked with building a program to educate audiences ranging from district or regional sales and business managers to medical science liaisons, clinical nurse consultants, and medical directors. The titles vary from company to company, but the aim is the same – to help people persuade clients to use their company's therapies on an ongoing basis.

This goal often requires a team approach to reach the desired outcome. Writers can expect to work with editors, illustrators, project managers, subject matter experts, workshop leaders, and desktop publishing experts. What's important is an understanding of the contribution each makes, and how the various inputs gel into a compelling training program. The individual pieces of any program can include self-study modules, on-line learning, audio and video scripts, workshops, games, role-playing, etc.

What the “learners” expect out of all this is product knowledge, working information on disease states, current therapy information, competitive therapy data – information on any or all of the factors that go into an effective sales process and a solid working relationship with a client.

The learning modules that are produced for the client are subject to regulatory, legal, and medical review, meaning that writers should have a good grasp of the product fundamentals. Writers also need to know the learning objectives of the program, and structure their writing to help the audience gain knowledge and skills that continuously move in the direction of the objectives.

In order to do all of this, you, as a medical writer, must be able to draw on any number of background resources, including medical texts, nursing texts, patient advocate websites, peer-reviewed literature, product information, client company websites, competitors' websites, and others. As in all assignments, what goes without saying is that you need to write well, have product knowledge or be a quick study, understand the industry and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and be up-to-date with communications technology.

To a certain extent, you also have to be able to sell yourself and your skills. So, as you create those little gems of sales training copy for your clients, don't forget to practice some or all of what you preach.

For more information on opportunities in the medical sales training field, you can visit the Society of Pharmaceutical and Biotech Trainers's website at [www.spbt.org/en/home](http://www.spbt.org/en/home). You can also contact Lederman at [LynneLederman@aol.com](mailto:LynneLederman@aol.com).

*Joseph Breck is a member of AMWA and a principal of Breck & Company, a medical communications organization based in St. Davids, Pa. He can be reached at [joe@breckandcompany.com](mailto:joe@breckandcompany.com).*