

Getting Noticed in a Crowded Online World

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Back in 1999, when I first hung out my shingle as a freelance medical writer, the online world was just getting started. At the time, I remember debating whether or not I should sign up for an email address offered to me by my University. “What was the point of having one of those?” I thought to myself.

Fast forward nearly 20 years and the world looks a little different, at least when it comes to the online space. It’s crowded. You have millions of people doing a “side hustle” in a desperate attempt to quit a day job they hate. So, if you are starting your freelance medical writing business today, it’s not enough to put up a website and hope that prospective clients will find you. It’s also not enough to send out a few random emails to people you don’t know and hope that they will respond. It used to be a numbers game: send out enough emails, and *someone* will respond back. Not these days.

So what’s a budding freelance medical writer to do? It’s still possible to make an excellent income working from home as a medical writer BUT you have to be savvy about navigating the online space. In addition to working on writing skills and scientific knowledge, medical writers, at least the ones who want to freelance from home, should consider some of the following ideas:

1. Learn About Online Marketing and Entrepreneurship

Here is a list of gurus that I think are worth following (by no means an exhaustive list):

- o Amy Porterfield – www.amyporterfield.com: Great courses: Courses That Convert, Webinars That Convert, List Builder’s Lab. Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast.
- o Pat Flynn – Powerup Podcasting and <https://www.smartpassiveincome.com/>
- o Rick Mulready – Facebook advertising (you can target people who might hire a medical writer) <http://rickmulready.com/>
- o James Wedmore – Mind Your Business Podcast, all about the mindset of entrepreneurship <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-mind-your-business-podcast/id1074394632?mt=2>
- o Josh Turner – [Advanced Linked in Masterclass](#)

2. Create Something of Value to Attract Clients

I will use as an example the HittList, which is a weekly email we send out that contains medical writing jobs. I started sending this out in 2001 as a way of providing free job postings (because the economy was bad and I thought it was wrong that a certain medical writing organization was charging to post them). You can sign up [here](#) (it’s still free). In any case, it costs a few hundred dollars each year to send it out but the goodwill, name recognition, and return it has generated over the years has offset the time and expense many, many fold. What information can you provide to your clients that will be helpful to them? Can you send it out in a weekly or even monthly newsletter? If you do regulatory writing or CME, perhaps you can create a newsletter about happenings in those fields, for example.

3. Look for Opportunities to Guest Post

It is challenging to gain traction with blog posts these days, but if you write one that is related to medical writing, you can send it to me at info@nascentmc.com and we will post it on the HittList and it will reach thousands of readers, while linking directly to your website (Interestingly not many people have sent in a guest blog post for the HittList, and I find this perplexing!). If you have a topic relevant to ACEHP,

RAPS, AHJA, the Chicago Graham Medical writing program, etc., they would probably be willing to post a blog post if it were helpful to their readers. And in most cases you can put a short bio and a link at the end. This is a great way to get in front of people who could use your services.

4. Start a Podcast

There's a bit of a learning curve on this, but it's not too hard to learn how to do it. I recommend Pat Flynn's Powerup Podcast course. As an example, I have a new podcast called "[New FDA Approvals](#)". It takes me about one hour in the morning to create each episode, and I send it out 5 days a week. I get the latest news from a Google alert that comes in at about 5 a.m., and I simply report on that in a 10-minute episode. It's personally helpful because it keeps me up to date about what's going on in the pharma world. But also, I mention my medical writing business, [Nascent Medical](#), at the end of the podcast. Most podcasts are once weekly and are prerecorded, so it doesn't have to be a daily newscast (I like to make things challenging for myself obviously!), but it's another way to attract clients to your business. Other ideas for podcasts are ones like [Grammar Girl](#) but that specializes in AMA style or one that discusses NIH or CDC happenings. Or one that talks about upcoming or past medical conferences, or one that takes a medical word and discusses its use and etiology in each episode, to name just a few examples. Podcasts now are what the online space itself used to be: an unchartered territory. Now is the time to get in there and start building a following.

5. Focus in on a Genre of Writing

Medical writing is pretty niche to start with, but if you take one genre within medical writing, for example, needs assessments, and become the absolute expert in that area, by posting information consistently on your website (ie, video, recording or written), then you will ultimately get visitors, work, and referrals from that. It will take time, at least a year or two (so make sure you are passionate about the topic!), but it will be worth it. Tip: read [Medical Marketing & Media](#) for ideas of problems/topics clients are dealing with.

6. Online Courses

You can become the world's leading expert in some niche of interest to potential clients, such as needs assessments, and then build an online course on a platform such as Teachable or Kajabi (which are really not hard to learn). Then 1) you quit only earning dollars for hours worked, which gets to be a bit draining when you do medical writing for years and years, and 2) you can actually make quite a hefty income, far surpassing what you'd make as a medical writer--if you do it right. I recommend buying a book called "[Launch](#)" by Jeff Walker to understand how to sell online courses effectively (it's not enough just to post something online and hope that someone buys it—they won't). Interesting course topics could be on BELS certification training, medical terminology, or medical editing. For ideas, you can check out the AMWA annual meeting program and develop courses based on those topics. I offer a course in the business aspects of medical writing called "[Everything you need to know to start your freelance medical writing business](#)." Even though I am teaching future medical writers, not my clients, some course graduates, years later have become my clients when they decided to get a staff job or have experienced overflow as a freelancer.

7. Other Random Ideas

Here are some other random ideas: you can give webinars (paid or free); write an ebook or two (not a lot of money, but great for getting your name out there); or simply specialize in a really hot area (health economics for example). I have one writer on my team on whom I pile all the health economics pieces because she knows a lot about this topic. She's very busy! Get yourself on video (eg, on Facebook, YouTube, and/or LinkedIn). Know that very few people feel comfortable on video, especially when they

first start, but it's a great opportunity to increase the "know, like, and trust" factor with your clients. Try starting a meetup group for science, medical, and technical writing in your area.

It's important to remember that one constant between today and twenty years ago is that people still don't like to be sold, and it's more important than ever to add value and to be consistent in what you put out. You want to attract rather than promote. If you give enough value, rest assured that it will come back to you--somehow, some way and your competition will fall by the wayside. That has not changed.

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