

# Freelancers Roundtable

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The Freelancers Roundtable was one of the opening sessions for the 2021 CSE Annual Meeting. As a follow-up to the Virtual Happy Hour discussion on freelancing that took place in January 2021, in this roundtable, the speaker Judith Orvos of Orvos Communications talked about the turns a freelancer's life takes; while it seems glamorous that one can be their own boss, several challenges also exist. Peter Olson, the moderator, facilitated this discussion and began with a brief introduction. Olson represented a wide variety of careers in the science editing field and had years of experience from which he was able to draw answers to the participants' questions. He focused on the various career options for scholarly editors and gave advice regarding new opportunities in scholarly publishing.

In the Freelancers Roundtable, Olson and the participants discussed their freelancing goals within the science editing community and also addressed the overall freelancing workflow and management. Participants in the roundtable discussion included early career and professional freelancers looking for more information about freelancing opportunities or how to make the most of their current gigs. Additionally, there were participants who were contemplating switching to freelancing and were interested in learning more about the scope and opportunities. This diversity prompted discussions about the flexibility available in freelancing and the idea that most people can find their own niche.

The main grounds of discussion being determining fair and competitive rates, marketing oneself, and balancing one's client base, Orvos shared several tips and tricks that could help a freelancer with the issues and challenges they may face each day. The first part of the discussion was focused on how freelancers can balance their client load. The participants were encouraged to not invest too much time and effort into one organization as this may have its own limitations—limited jobs, risk of the company shutting down, etc. Clients come and go, and no matter what level of services one provides, there is always a chance of receiving negative feedback and/or the contract being terminated.

How one can up-sell and cross-sell existing clients and ask for recommendations/referrals was also discussed.

The second part of the discussion was focused on how one can determine fair and competitive rates for their business. Resources on survey-based salary data of freelancers and cover topics, including median gross income (by type and area of work), highest level of education and years of experience, and benefits, remote work, and more, by the American Medical Writers Association<sup>1</sup> and the Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA)<sup>2</sup> were recommended. The participants were advised to examine all aspects of an assignment and inventory the editing files before quoting rates or accepting jobs. Orvos and the participants also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of billing methods—hourly rates, flat project rates, payment on retainer—with emphasis on the assessment of the client's typical payment terms.

The final part of the discussion was focused on how one can market and really put themselves out there. A good, engaging LinkedIn profile can do wonders; this platform can be used creatively to engage in conversations with experts and institutions and share ideas with the community. If you run out of ideas, fret not! Feedspot<sup>3</sup> and EurekAlert<sup>4</sup> are nonprofit news-release distribution platforms that serve as resources for journalists and the public. They help readers keep up with multiple websites simultaneously without having to visit multiple sites. Twitter is another helpful option for freelancers to engage with science people, understand the market, and identify potential connections while showcasing their work. Old-school techniques such as business cards and attractive, meaningful website logos and email signatures may do the trick as well. Finally, no matter how many times you've worked with a particular client, always make it a point to stay in touch with them. This facilitates good business relations and ensures client delight while reminding them of your business. If feasible to your business, sending a small gift or a token of thanks to VIP clients is a pleasant thing to do. Orvos could not emphasize enough how one is allowed to ask for referrals and return the favor, both from clients and friends/colleagues—it's an absolutely normal thing to do! Finally, never stop learning; take courses that will help you get better at marketing yourself and actively participate in organizations (CSE, Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, EFA, etc.) that disseminate STEM knowledge.

## References and Links

1. [https://www.amwa.org/page/Salary\\_Survey](https://www.amwa.org/page/Salary_Survey)
2. <https://www.the-efa.org/rates/>
3. <https://www.feedspot.com/>
4. <https://www.eurekalert.org/>