I am an in-house hiring manager, and I have only worked in-house. I do not know what it feels like to sit on the freelance side of the fence, but my guess is that there is a good bit of uncertainty involved. Some freelances may be trying to find new clients. Some may have gotten a first job from a client but never heard from that client again and have been left to wonder what went wrong. Well, here is your chance to get a glimpse into the mind of a hiring manager. Although some of what follows may seem like common sense, you might be amazed at how frequently the common-sense information gets left behind.

Getting Noticed

A number of venues exist for freelances to get noticed by hiring managers, and several of those opportunities are hosted by AMWA:

- **AMWA Listserves**—Well-written, professional posts to this venue are sure to get a freelance noticed. I have hired several writers who I first noticed on an AMWA listserve and who have subsequently received countless additional assignments from my company. Be careful: Just as a professional e-mail might be noticed by someone like me, an unprofessional one is even more apt to be noticed and could land the freelance on a hiring manager’s “do not call” list.

- **AMWA Freelance Directory**—When I am searching for a new writer, this is typically the first place I go. Nicely formatted entries with a clear focus are essential. I am more drawn to listings that show a clear specialization than those that cast a wide net. And please do not leave me wanting more! For example, entries that include Web site URLs give me an opportunity to learn more about a freelance before I contact him or her.

- **AMWA Annual Conference**—Network, network, network. I have hired medical writers whom I have met while attending the AMWA conference.

In addition to the AMWA venues, freelances can also get noticed by having a good Web site and a solid online professional/social networking presence (eg, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs). Freelances can also research target companies and send a CV with an engaging cover letter that expresses an interest in freelance work. I do not like to receive cold calls; the few I receive always seem to come when I am 10 minutes from a pressing deadline with 20 minutes of work left to complete.

Getting Hired

My beautiful truth about hiring a freelance is that once I have identified the person I want to try out, I rarely spot a red flag that makes me reconsider. I usually send an e-mail to the freelance to express my interest and ask for samples, and then I set up a phone call to find out more about the freelance and discuss the particulars of a project. By this point, the freelance has already made a positive professional impression on me, so the key during our conversation is that the freelance be confident and reinforce my existing impression.

What could mess up the freelance’s chance at this point? Here are a few things that have made me reconsider hiring a writer. It is probably not surprising that most have to do with money.

- **Quoted an hourly rate that is significantly below fair market value for his or her skills.** Some writers think a lower bid always wins new business—this is not true! A low hourly fee sends me the message that the freelance is inexperienced, which has scared me off in the past.

- **Asked for a percentage of the project fee up front.** I know some freelances have been burned by bad clients; I have been similarly burned by subpar writers who oversold their skills. As a practice, my company generally does not pay a percentage of the project fee up front and would not consider this arrangement with a new writer.

- **Sent signals that the proposed project fee is too low but still wanted to take the project.** This type of situation puts a cloud of negativity over the project and makes me worry about the quality of the draft we might get. I would rather work with someone who thinks our project fees are fair.

- **Been unable to provide samples.** I live in the world of continuing medical education, and samples are usually freely available, so if a freelance does not have recent samples to share, this raises concerns.
Getting Rehired

Although I have had to “fire” freelance writers (ie, invoke the dreaded “kill fee”), these cases are extraordinarily rare. What is more likely to happen is that a freelance submits the project and finishes the project amicably enough but is not called back for another assignment. I tend to rehire about 25% of the writers that I give a first assignment to, and about one-half of those writers become “regulars” for me. What goes wrong for the majority who do not become “regulars”? Here are some practices that have kept me from calling a writer about another project.

- Submitted a manuscript late. Life happens, and there are times where a freelance is going to be late with a manuscript, but if it happens on the first project, if the freelance calls the day before the project is due (rather than well in advance), or if it happens on successive projects, then I have no choice but to find another writer who can deliver projects on time.

- Failed to submit the draft to the agreed-upon specs. For example, if the contract states that the freelance will submit 6,000 words and the freelance submits 3,000, it is unlikely that the freelance will receive another assignment from me unless there was a miscommunication on my part.

- Addressed confusion negatively. Despite everyone’s best efforts to outline all the particulars of a project, confusion might arise, particularly as new clients and freelancers get to know each other. If this happens, a “combative” (defensive/offensive) response from the freelance makes me cringe, whereas a proactive, problem-solving approach will make a great impression.

- Communicated negatively (eg, “snarky” or passive-aggressive phone conversations or e-mails). It is rare, but I have been on the receiving end of this sort of negative communication during periods of confusion. This is the fastest way to wind up on my “never again” list, and there is no way to recover from it. If frustration levels are high, wait a few hours to call or send an e-mail to allow that frustration to dissipate as much as possible.

- “Pinged” me too much throughout a project. I am completely open to answering questions throughout the course of a project (particularly with a first-time freelance). However, freelances who call and/or send e-mails too frequently convey the message that they lack confidence in their own decisions. So how frequently is too frequently? It completely depends on the hiring manager! I have been spoiled by highly skilled writers, so I admit that my own threshold for questions is relatively low—more than one or two questions/requests a week is too much. Other hiring managers, however, may want you to ask away. So a good strategy would be to ask a new client how often their best writers contact them over the course of a project and what kind of questions usually come up—this will provide insight into a client’s preferred style.

Now that I have described some behaviors that could prevent you from being rehired, let me offer some information on traits and behaviors that will get you rehired. I work with some truly phenomenal writers who seem to do everything right and make the work seem effortless. These writers share a number of similar qualities:

- Put forth a professional, dependable, and collaborative persona
- Always submit drafts on time—sometimes early
- Submit well-written, polished, carefully referenced drafts (translation: they save me time during the editing and fact-checking phases of the project)
- Send all the ancillary materials with their drafts (learning objectives, post-test questions, source articles, etc)
- Limit and/or batch questions to avoid contacting me too often

For me, finding a freelance writer who is a great fit with my company is eerily similar to dating, and most dates fall into one of three categories.

- The scary date. It is “off” from the beginning, and you want to high-tail it out of the restaurant as fast as you can. Maybe you at least try to make it through dinner to be polite, but you know from the start you will not be calling again.

- The friend zone. These are perfectly nice people, but something is missing. Maybe the person is great except for one particular thing that drives you nuts, or maybe the person does not do anything wrong, but also does not wow you. It is just not quite what you are looking for.

- The match made in heaven. There is a mutual connection from the very start. You have the same interests, you are finishing each other’s sentences, you “get” them and they “get” you. These are the people you have amazing chemistry with, and you stay with them for a very long time.

My guess is that finding a great client is the same for those of you who freelance. My hope is that some of this information will help you turn more potential clients into “matches made in heaven.” Happy dating!