Freelancing part-time while working in a full-time job is a great way to begin to build a freelance medical writing business. This article describes the experiences of two freelancers who built successful businesses by moving from part-time to full-time freelancing.

MARKETING YOURSELF FROM PART-TIME TO FULL-TIME FREELANCING
By Genevieve J. Long, PhD

“How do you get started?” is a common question from would-be freelances. I combined my backgrounds in writing and medicine. While earning my degrees in English and teaching and planning to enter academia, I worked part-time in several health care positions. Then I realized medical communication would allow me to combine my love of writing with the chance to help people in practical ways. I started working at a medical school part-time as a medical communicator and began freelancing during my off hours.

Starting out part-time allowed me to learn about freelance writing and business without the pressure of needing to earn a living. I learned by
• Reading general business books
• Reading about starting a writing business
• Asking all freelance vendors I hired about their businesses
• Accepting projects that helped me build a client base

I could have done all of the above if I had started as a full-time freelance, but starting part-time allowed me to prepare myself for success.

Benefits of Working for a Company While Launching a Business
Working for a health care employer while I started my freelance medical communication career had many benefits. I learned the scope of medical communication and about what clients need. I also had time to choose my freelance emphasis; I started out as a manuscript and grant editor but discovered that I most enjoy writing for patients.

Freelancing part-time provides the flexibility to develop ideas and a client list without the pressure of earning a full-time income. Time to set aside startup funds is another benefit. Some experts recommend having 1 year’s worth of salary, plus money for office furniture, computer equipment, and the monthly expenses of running a business, such as Internet, telephone, and general office supplies. Expenses vary based on many factors, including lifestyle and geographic area, so I recommend doing research to determine your needs.

Is Part-time Freelancing the Right Choice Now?
Part-time freelancing is a great way to try freelancing or to build a business before going full-time. If you have young children or older parents who need your attention, part-time might be best. You don’t have to tell clients you are part-time–only the Internal Revenue Service needs to know how many hours you work.

Differences Between Full-time and Part-time Freelancing
A full-time freelance does everything an employer would do: administration, marketing, operations, and IT. Some books, such as *The Wealthy Freelancer* and *The Four-Hour Work Week*, offer tips on delegating activities so you can devote more time to freelancing. A self-employed friend advised me to hire helpers, eg, house cleaners, yard workers, or bookkeepers, if they charge much less than I charge clients. For example, a house cleaner who charges $20 per hour and spends 4 hours cleaning helps you make money if you do more than $80 worth of work in that time. As your business grows, consider hiring subcontractors to help with big writing jobs.

As a full-timer, you will work harder than a part-time freelance and harder than you ever did as an employee. Bottom line: don’t become a full-time freelance writer if you want more free time. Do consider freelancing if you want control over the work you do and the convenience of working at home, with somewhat flexible (though long) work hours.

Before You Market Your Services
You must know two things before you market your freelance services: What do I offer? and Who are my buyers?

Will you do the same work as you did in your corporate job? For example, if you wrote manuscripts and grants, will...
those be among your freelance services? If you have been out of the work force, you might need to ask yourself what you did best and would like to do again.

Consider who needs your services and why. After reading The New Rules of Marketing & PR by David Meerman Scott,¹ I wrote detailed profiles of the editors, marketing managers, and others who hired me when I freelanced part-time. Reflecting on their needs helped me hone marketing messages for my full-time business, emphasizing how hiring me would benefit them.

Switching from Part-time to Full-time
My part-time freelancing lasted 7 years. I devoted 1 to 3 days to freelance work each week, billing as few as 4 or as many as 15 hours per week and spending any non-billed freelance hours on professional development and marketing. Before I went full-time, I updated my Web site, told clients about my increased availability, and changed my e-mail signature, listing services in areas where I wanted more work. Other suggestions:
• Fine-tune your online portfolio to reflect the types of work you want most.
• Practice telling people what you do in a sentence or two, until it sounds natural.
• Hand out business cards freely.

Several marketing tactics have proved successful for freelances (see list at top right).

Whether you are part-time or full-time, be professional. I recommend the following.
• A professionally designed Web site
• Professionally written marketing copy
• Professionally designed and printed business cards
• Electronic letterhead
• Accounting system
• Time-management software
• Business savings and checking accounts and business credit card

WordPress and other programs make creating a Web site easier than ever, but a professional impression requires some design skill. In addition, time spent designing and building a site could be spent writing or networking. If you lack experience writing Web content, find someone who knows how. Visitors won’t read every word but scan for information about your services, qualifications, and clients. Unless you want to learn about Web sites from the ground up, you might be better off with a marketing writer, Web designer, or both.

I recommend purchasing printed marketing materials from a reputable designer and printer. Homemade business cards don’t look or feel professional. Your card might be the only marketing piece you hand to a contact; it represents the quality of your work, so it’s worth investing in the heavyweight paper and quality design that are standard for most businesses. The language, colors, and typeface on your cards and other materials should match your Web site.

Proven Marketing Tactics for Freelances

- Web site: A well-written, professionally designed Web site with writing samples that you update regularly. Some things you can’t show—proprietary information, for example—but you can list client names or journal titles.
- Business card: Professionally designed and printed
- Targeted direct mail: Develop mailing lists of potential clients and high-quality direct-mail pieces (flyers, postcards, a letter, etc.).
- LinkedIn: Write a good profile, build your contacts, and stay in touch with them.
- Partnering with other freelances: Freelances often need to refer clients to other freelancers for work they do not or cannot do, or when they need help with their projects.
- For clients: Holiday gifts—give something neutral, like food—and birthday greetings.

Market to Current Clients
It costs less to keep a client than to find a new one, and keeping clients starts with doing great work. Take courses and read literature in the field to improve your work.

Be responsive. The more you value clients, the faster you should call them back. Be collegial: find out something about them, and share something about yourself. Keep it light: you both have Springer spaniels or love shoe shopping. Start slowly, but start building a bond. Business is built on relationships.

When you finish a job and your client is happy, tell her that your business grows by referrals and ask whether she knows two or three people who might use your services. Caveat: ask only if your client is happy with your work.

A note on keeping clients happy: you can be organized, personable, and do terrific work and still occasionally have a client who isn’t thrilled, usually for reasons beyond your control. Don’t take it personally; do your best and move on.

Finding New Clients
Focus on the best sources of full-time freelance business, and don’t bother with the worst sources (see below).

Best and Worst Sources of Full-time Freelance Business

**Best Sources**
- A former employer (one more reason to start in the corporate world)
- Firms that know the former employer
- Contacts made while working for a former employer
- Clients from part-time freelancing
- The AMWA Freelance Directory and AMWA colleagues
- Referrals (once you are established)

**Worst Sources**
- Local business groups (for example, city business associations)
- Social and personal connections
- Small-business owners, including solo or small-practice physicians
LEARNING HOW TO FREELANCE BEFORE TAKING THE FULL PLUNGE
By Lori De Milto, MJ

I started freelancing part-time while I was doing marketing communications full-time for a business school. My initial goal was to learn about future career opportunities and make some extra money. But as I started freelancing, I found that I really liked it and wanted to do it full-time. At that point, I had 2.5 years before I would be vested in my university’s retirement plan. Because I wouldn’t have a retirement plan once I started a business, I decided to start freelancing full-time the month after I was vested (March 1997).

During those 2.5 years, I marketed my business and took on more freelance work so I would have a steadier income when I finally took the plunge. I developed a business name, tagline, and logo and used them in professional marketing materials (business cards, brochures, envelopes, and direct mail pieces). As a journalism major and a marketing communications writer, I had the expertise to write my own copy. But I hired a professional to design and produce my marketing materials. I also joined AMWA, attended the annual conference, got actively involved with my chapter, and signed up for AMWA’s Freelance Directory.

Investing in a Freelance Business Pays Off
From the start, I treated freelancing as a business. I invested time and money, developing high-quality marketing materials and a direct-mail campaign. I developed my own mailing lists, starting with a search of the AMWA membership directory for companies I might want to work for and contacts in those companies. The Web was in its infancy at the time, so to develop the rest of my mailing list, I went to the library to search directories of hospitals, health care associations, and other health care organizations for other potential clients. All of this took many hours.

In my first year as a full-time freelance, I sent three flyers, each to about 250 people, spending about $10,000. It was worth every penny. Within 1.5 years, I had as much business as I wanted. Some clients contacted me within days of receiving the first flyer. Others hired me after receiving the second or third flyer, and I realized that it was important to continually market my business so that potential clients would remember me when they needed help.

Finding Freelance Opportunities Through AMWA
Getting actively involved with AMWA helped me build my business. Along with using the membership directory in my direct-mail campaign, I found work through the jobs list and the Freelance Directory. As I built my experience and became more involved with AMWA, I began to get referrals for work.

AMWA also helped me learn the business end of freelancing. I talked to freelance colleagues and attended AMWA events geared toward freelancers. I also read a lot of books on running a business, including Secrets of a Freelance Writer, Third Edition: How to Make $100,000 a Year or More and Guerrilla Marketing, 4th edition: Easy and Inexpensive Strategies for Making Big Profits from Your Small Business.

Building the Confidence to Take the Plunge
Freelancing part-time while learning how to market and run a business was a successful strategy for me. By the time I officially launched my business full-time, I had a few steady clients and, thus, some income, a marketing strategy, and the confidence to take the plunge.

Starting a Freelance Business Today: The Importance of the Internet
The Internet has created a very different environment from the one I faced in 1997. When I created my first Web site in 2002, few other writers had one. Today, a good Web site is essential to marketing a freelance business. Clients want to learn about your background and experience and see work samples, often before they even contact you. My first Web site was pretty basic in its design and content. In 2008, I revised my Web site, adding more content and hiring a professional Web designer. Getting the content just right took many hours of research and writing. My new design cost nearly $3,000. Based on positive feedback from clients and colleagues, the time and expense were well worth it.

LinkedIn, a social network for business, is another important marketing tactic for freelances today. I have gotten business through LinkedIn and know other freelances who have also. By building connections with clients and contacts on LinkedIn, you can easily update them on your activities, keep track of them as they move around, and gain access to the people your connections know. LinkedIn has two useful features for freelances:

• “What are you doing?” a Twitter-like feature that keeps your connections thinking about you through periodic network updates LinkedIn sends out. I’ve used this to highlight my interesting projects and other professional activities (eg, moderating a session at the AMWA annual conference).
• Groups, including AMWA, Medical Marketing & Communications Group, and the Freelance Writers Connection, which let you keep in touch with people with similar interests and share your expertise through discussions.

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References
In just 15 years, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has grown from “a self-help group” for about a dozen journal editors to an international organization of more than 7,000 members that offers seminars at spots around the globe and educational materials in a variety of languages, according to Liz Wager, chairwoman of the COPE Council.

“It started really as a group, a sort of self-help group, for journal editors who were faced by tricky problems, perhaps allegations of misconduct, perhaps, you know, quite serious concerns about a paper, and they really didn't know who to turn to,” Wager says.

The members began meeting to discuss situations that had proved vexing and to offer possible solutions. COPE’s Web site (www.publicationethics.org) offers a searchable database of the cases that members have ruminated on through the years. Many of the broad topics are predictable — plagiarism, authorship disputes, informed consent, and conflicts of interest, for example—but the individual (and anonymous) details of the cases help to convey the complexities of translating overarching principles to the day-to-day management of a journal.

What should a journal editor do if an author of a manuscript under review sends a gift?

What actions should an editor take if an author submits patient consent forms signed after an experimental treatment has already been administered?

How should an editor proceed if one author of an article suddenly wants his name removed, apparently because his romantic advances had been spurned by another author?

The database includes summaries of advice offered by other COPE members, and for some, an epilogue that describes how the case ultimately was resolved. Some case discussions also are available as podcasts.

“I find the cases fascinating,” Wager said. “You always think, ‘Surely, there can't be anything new. We've surely heard all the cases before.’ And yet every time you have the cases, there is some interesting twist to it, or something that makes it really difficult to deal with.”

In addition to the case discussions, other resources provided by COPE include guidelines for new editors and flowcharts for handling certain types of ethical quandaries, such as what steps to take if plagiarism or fabrication of data is suspected. Many of the flowcharts have been translated into multiple languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, and Croatian. COPE recently launched Web-based learning modules that are available only to members.

Journal editors and publishers who are COPE members are expected to follow the organization’s codes of conduct. Complaints can be lodged with COPE if there are suspicions of code violations. If the complaint is found to have merit, the COPE Council may recommend a course of action, such as asking the editor to apologize to the complainant, publish a statement from COPE in the editor’s journal, or take steps to improve procedures.

Complaints against members are rare, generally just a few per year, Wager says. COPE is planning to publish a summary of the complaint cases on the organization’s Web site.

Wager, whose 3-year term as COPE chairwoman concludes in the spring of 2012, says it is difficult to measure the direct impact of COPE on publishing ethics, but notes that awareness of its activities is growing, particularly among publishers that pay for journals to be members.

“They see it not just as something nice to have, you know, some sort of little decoration. They actually think that it is really relevant to their work.”