



CASE STUDY

Growing a New Freelance Business Despite the Recession

Margaret Johnson, PhD

Freelance medical and science writer since 2019

When Margaret Johnson, PhD, moved from academia to freelancing, she had strong experience in medical writing and strong therapeutic expertise. The former professor and researcher in biochemistry and structural biology got a few clients. But Margaret wasn't fully booked and she wasn't making a living as a freelancer. Like many new freelancers, Margaret lacked direction.

Near the end of her first year of freelancing, Margaret heard about [Finding the Freelance Clients You Deserve](#), an online course that helps freelancers learn the most effective ways to target and reach the right clients. "The course was highly recommended by successful freelance colleagues who are leaders in their fields," she says.

Margaret took the course during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic and the recession that followed, she was able to start growing her freelance business, [Mackenzie MedWrite](#).

Focusing on What Works Best

As a researcher who had applied for and received research grants, Margaret was comfortable with the idea of marketing. But she didn't know what to do. "I had visions of placing ads on Facebook or mass email campaigns, and wasn't thrilled about those ideas," she says.

During [Finding the Freelance Clients You Deserve](#), Margaret learned how to do what works best in marketing a freelance business. The first step was defining her specialty within medical writing: medical education and research communications. "Defining my specialty also helped build my confidence. I'm now able to focus on the areas where I have relevant experience and knowledge, rather than trying to contribute to all the areas of medical writing at once."

A narrower specialty is crucial because medical writing is a vast field. Different types of clients (target markets) have different needs. And effective freelance marketing focuses on the needs of each target market and how the freelancer can meet those needs.

Finding and Attracting the Right Clients

After defining her specialty, Margaret needed to learn how to find—and then attract—clients in her target markets: medical communications agencies, medical education agencies, and research organizations. The course showed her where these clients are and how to develop a prospect list to reach out to them.

By developing a prospect list, Margaret began to learn about the needs of clients in her three target markets. Next, Margaret learned how to write direct emails customized to the business and needs of each client.

In overhauling her [LinkedIn profile](#) and her [website](#), Margaret focused on the needs of her target markets and how she meets those needs. For LinkedIn, she developed a complete, client-focused profile with the right keywords so that clients searching for freelancers will find her.

Margaret had designed her first website on her own and learned in the course that she had made some common mistakes. “I’m not trained in web design. It’s not useful or effective to try to figure out web design on my own,” she says. “I need to spend the majority of my time on writing.”

So she hired a professional designer, who used Margaret’s marketing messages (e.g., accurate and timely services to support innovation in drugs and medical devices), to create a clear, compelling website.

“Several potential clients have asked for my website URL,” says Margaret. “A website displays your bona fides: your specialty, work you’ve done in the past, and your background. Clients like to see a website to confirm that the freelancer is qualified and organized, and get an idea of the kind of work they do.”

The designer also created Margaret’s logo, which she uses on her website and in other marketing materials. “I wanted my logo to express innovation and a progressive mentality, which are both central to communicating groundbreaking research,” she says.

Having a logo (a key part of a freelance brand) helps Margaret stand out in a sea of freelancers. Here is Margaret’s logo on her website.



Coaching Makes Freelance Success Much Easier

Margaret took the version of the course with personalized coaching, which included review of key exercises and coaching sessions to talk about marketing challenges and solutions.

“Lori’s coaching helped me learn the basics of marketing and networking, and the norms of the medical writing business,” says Margaret. She found being able to ask question about things she was stuck on, like how best to reach out to potential clients, especially helpful.

Despite the COVID-19 recession, Margaret was able to get four new clients within a few months of completing the course. Three of the clients have become steady clients.

Referrals from other freelancers were the source of three clients. Margaret met the freelancers by networking in professional associations. Professional associations are the easiest way to meet the right people—especially other freelancers—and build the trusting relationships that lead to referrals.

Margaret found the fourth client herself on LinkedIn. While working on a list of prospective clients for a direct email campaign, Margaret found a post by a medical communications company that was looking for medical writers. “I contacted them expressing interest, and sent them links to my LinkedIn profile and website,” she says. After a Zoom meeting, the client hired Margaret. Since then, she has worked on other projects for this client.

Most of Margaret’s new work is in medical education and research communications. “This type of work really interests me and is higher paying. I love helping clients advance their research or communicate their message effectively,” she says.

“The course was fantastic. It not only met but exceeded everything I’d heard,” says Margaret. “My confidence increased greatly, like from 10% to 100%! Lori is a true expert who shares her knowledge generously.”

About Margaret’s Freelance Business

Mackenzie MedWrite helps medical communications agencies, medical education agencies, research organizations, and other clients communicate with healthcare professionals and other professional audiences, so they can innovate or help their clients innovate. Margaret specializes in medical/scientific writing and editing, and medical education materials for healthcare professionals.

Learn More About Margaret

[Mackenzie MedWrite](#)

[LinkedIn profile](#)
