

Social networking sites – a useful resource for editors

This is the first in a series of articles on electronic editing, so I'll start by introducing myself. After obtaining a BSc at Leeds University and a PhD at Sussex, I spent twenty years teaching and researching biochemistry and immunology in France, Scotland and Africa. I then returned to London, with my young daughter, to take a master's degree in science communication at Imperial College. As I finished this degree in 1999, a serendipitous meeting with Janet Salisbury of Biotext led me into a career as a science editor and relocation to Australia.

Now, the flexibility of electronic editing has lured me into going freelance – next year, I hope to be writing this column from an exotic location (the south of France, perhaps ...).

Over the past few months, I've developed a strong interest in ways to speed up electronic editing. I arrived at this through my membership of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS). BELS has a discussion forum, and a few months ago I was intrigued by a post from an editor who said she'd found work through the microblogging site Twitter, the social networking site Facebook and the business networking site LinkedIn. I duly signed up to all three and will use this first article to discuss these sites from the perspective of a freelance editor.

Twitter

I haven't quite worked out the point of Twitter – I tried 'tweeting', but soon gave up. The interface seemed a bit overwhelming, possibly because I 'followed' too many organisations and people. I signed up for tweets from various friends and relations, plus those from the UK's *Guardian* newspaper (on science and environment) and the Council of Science Editors.

Basically, tweets are so short (<140 characters) that it's hard to get a good sense of whether they are of interest. Also, I haven't been able to find a way to tweet meaningfully about projects I am working on (which apparently is the way to get yourself noticed by potential clients).

The weekly blog that I write about my business (ozeditor.wordpress.com) is set up in such a way that the posts automatically appear as tweets, but I doubt that anyone is actually reading them.

Facebook

I've been signed up to Facebook for a while, but only took it seriously once I got the idea that it could lead to work. Recently, a colleague commented on my Facebook page that I had discovered 'Facebook, the freelancer's friend'. However, my initial experience of the site was that it was more of a foe than a friend, because most of my interactions on it were purely social – chatting to extended family and reconnecting with old friends – which was pleasant, but time consuming. That situation has changed in recent weeks, since both BELS and the Council of Science Editors now have a Facebook presence. I'm finding their posts interesting; recent topics include:

- an interactive digital textbook platform that allows lecturers to update their books and share them with students online
- whether print editions are 'greener' than electronic documents
- the need for scientific standards in publishing
- different manuscript tracking systems.

Facebook posts can be longer than those on Twitter, so it's easier to get a feel for whether you might want to click on a link and read more. As with Twitter, I've linked my blog posts to Facebook, and have actually had some responses from readers (which hasn't been the case with Twitter).

LinkedIn

Theoretically, LinkedIn should be good for finding work – you can post a profile that includes your work and education history, recommendations from clients, information about projects you are working on, and so on. So far I haven't found work through LinkedIn, but I can see that it might happen in the future, given that I've found a copyeditor and a designer (both in the US) through the site.

However, in terms of editing, LinkedIn has been a real goldmine. The trick is to find the right groups to join. I've joined 'LinkEds & writers' and its subgroup 'Copy editors and proofreaders'. Both have been invaluable.

Through the discussions on these groups I have:

- purchased several tools to speed up electronic editing, and books on how to use MS Word more effectively (I plan to write about these in future articles)
- signed up to a weekly newsletter with tips on using MS Word 2007 (wordribbon.tips.net) or earlier versions of MS Word (word.tips.net)
- signed up for the online version of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (www.chicagomanualofstyle.org), which is much cheaper than buying the book
- discovered some helpful settings for creating PDFs
- followed some interesting discussions on style guides, points of grammar and the difference between copyediting and rewriting.

Conclusion

Now that I'm linked to the right groups, I'm finding that social networking – particularly through LinkedIn and Facebook – has many advantages. It's great to be connected to an online 'family' of editors, sharing resources, ideas, frustrations and successes.

Nevertheless, social networking will never quite take the place of a chat with a colleague over a cappuccino.

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