

FREELANCE FOCUS



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Q1: In the age of LinkedIn, how important is a website for a freelancer? What are the key elements that should be included in developing a website?

Initially, I thought my answer to this question would be quite brief: I don't think websites are important for freelancers, since I've never had one yet have had a successful freelancing career. Upon reflection and discussing this with other freelancers at a local AMWA chapter event, I realize this answer is very specific to the type of writing I do and at this particular time in my career. I almost exclusively write educational materials for pharma/biotech sales representatives and medical science liaisons, none of which ever enter the public domain. Although a website can include writing samples and links to published works that can be very helpful for many freelancers, I don't have any samples or links that can be publicly shared. After 20+ years as a freelance medical writer, I feel like LinkedIn is currently a better way for me to market than a website. However, I can't rule out that I missed out on great potential clients earlier in my career because I didn't have a website.

—Gail V. Flores

Although LinkedIn has become increasingly important for freelance medical writers and editors, you still need a website too. Clients use LinkedIn to search for freelancers and also to check us out to decide whether to contact us. But you have to follow LinkedIn's format for the content and design of your profile.

A professional, client-focused website helps you stand out from other freelancers and persuade clients that you're the right freelancer for them. Your website highlights your key marketing messages in a compelling and visually engaging way and shows clients that you're running a professional freelance business.

The two key elements of a freelancer's website are (1) content that's compelling, clear, and focused on client needs and (2) design that's visually engaging, clear, and easy to navigate. In your content, quickly tell clients

- what you do (your services),

- who you do it for (your target clients), and
- how what you do benefits clients.

If you already have a client-focused LinkedIn profile, then you should have much of the information you need for your web content. Write client-focused marketing messages and conversational, concise, and scannable content. Include the essential web pages for freelancers.

Use heads and subheads to highlight the benefits clients get when they work with you. Heads and subheads also make your content concise and scannable. Write your content like you're having a conversation with a client.

- The essential web pages for a freelance website are
- Home (the most important part of your website),
 - About,
 - Services,
 - Samples, Portfolio, or Work,
 - Testimonials, Clients, or Testimonials and Clients, and
 - Contact.

You can combine and organize Services; Portfolio, Samples, or Work; and Testimonials, Clients, or Testimonials and Clients in different ways. If you're a new freelancer, you can add testimonials and information about clients later.

Hiring a professional designer is one of the best investments in your freelance business you can make. If your design isn't visually engaging, clear, and easy to navigate, then clients will move on to the other freelancers on their list. Also, a good designer will guide you through the process of developing your website.

—Lori De Milto

Q2: What are your favorite web conferencing platforms and why?

My favorite web conferencing platforms are GoToMeeting and Zoom. I like GoToMeeting because it's extremely user-friendly. I can easily split the window so that the meeting

slides are on one of my monitors and the meeting participants are on a second monitor. I can also quickly use the camera icon to take a screenshot of the slides being presented instead of having to manually take screenshots. However, to my knowledge at this time, the accessibility features for GoToMeeting are behind those for Zoom; some of my colleagues have informed me that many screen readers are not compatible with GoToMeeting, and the closed captioning feature is not as robust as the one used in Zoom. For these reasons, I prefer Zoom.

I'm not a fan of either Microsoft Teams or Google Hangouts. Although I use Microsoft and Google apps and platforms all day every day in my work, I find their web conferencing platforms to not be as easy to use as those discussed above.

—Gail V. Flores

Other than Skype and FaceTime, the only two web conferencing platforms I have used (or attempted to use) are Zoom and MS Teams. The latter was not compatible with my iMac 27" desktop computer; the client's IT person tried three times to enable me to log on to MS Teams, over the phone and within my computer—this person was not successful. The person said it is "supposed to be" compatible with Mac but obviously wasn't able to make it so. Thus, I opted out of joining meetings via MS Teams (which, being a Microsoft product, is of course more compatible with MS Windows than with Mac). Zoom, on the other hand, is simple and works easily on the desktop, iPad, and iPhone. Since the pandemic shutdown, I have participated in somewhere between 5 and 8 Zoom meetings every week, except when out of town—with no complications.

—Cathryn D. Evans

Q3: What are the etiquette rules for web conferencing platforms that you follow? Camera on or off and when?

I'll start by saying that I believe that nobody should ever feel like they have to be on camera. In addition to not being comfortable with being on screen, many valid reasons exist for not being on camera. Personally, mine have included very early meetings, feeling unwell due to illness, and being upset after receiving bad news. It's OK for people to have offscreen days—after all, in each meeting, there always seems to be at least one other person who is offscreen because they are traveling, driving, or their webcam has stopped working. Furthermore, my projects went well for 20 years before the pandemic just through teleconference calls, so video isn't a must for project success.

However, there are also valid reasons for being on camera. I think it helps build a rapport with my clients, particularly during initial or project kickoff meetings. I also enjoy the social aspect; I often feel isolated working from home, and I enjoy interacting with others besides my family members, even if it's just onscreen.

With respect to etiquette, I believe that cameras should be off when people are eating or are using exercise equipment, such as a treadmill or stationary bike. Wardrobe is up to each person. For me, I might wear something nicer for a new client and something more casual for someone I've known for a while or for an internal team meeting. Finally, if you need to respond to an email from a client or a text from a family member, I recommend turning the camera off, since it's difficult to hide that you're not paying attention to the speaker.

—Gail V. Flores

For the most part, on-camera participation is something I do for only the first meeting with a particular group so that we all get to know one another and have a visual impression of one another; after that, I use an icon/photo when attending a Zoom meeting. Exceptions occur, but my general rule is to be off camera.

Obviously, the most important "etiquette" rule is to listen to others and pay attention just as dutifully as when you meet in person. Second (especially when meeting on camera) it is simple courtesy and common sense not to eat, read other materials, leave the room unless absolutely essential, answer the phone and carry on a sideline conversation, or do anything that might be considered rude or untoward. Drinking water, coffee, or tea seems to be acceptable. Third, "mute" yourself when you are not actually speaking. Finally, do not allow boisterous or barking dogs—or other potentially distracting background activities—to take place.

—Cathryn D. Evans

Virtual meetings have become especially popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because web conferencing takes the place of in-person meetings, I dress and behave as if I'm in the room with my work colleagues. Here are my best practices for virtual meetings:

- Wear business-casual attire, including shoes, in case you stand up and your legs or feet become visible.
- Ensure you have drinking water nearby so you don't have to leave the meeting to get it.
- Blur the background to draw attention to your face and away from your surroundings.
- Absolutely no other people (eg, household members) should be visible in your background if they are not a

conference participant. If you cannot conduct the web conference in a dedicated space to ensure privacy and confidentiality, blurring the background is especially important.

- Keep the camera on and look at the speaker so it's clear you're paying attention. If it's a small meeting and your clients have their camera off, you can turn your camera off to match them. I like to show my face at least initially so they know what I look like and that I am prepared to have our meeting.
- If you need to move away from the camera—either quickly to close a door or window shade or longer for

a bathroom break—turn the camera off temporarily so that walking away and coming back doesn't distract the other participants.

- In Zoom (and perhaps other platforms), add a business-casual photo of yourself to your profile so it appears when the camera is turned off. Using a photo is not essential, but this is a nice practice to keep some humanity in the virtual meeting.
- As a label for your face or photo, use your complete business name and perhaps add your pronouns in parentheses.
- Keep muted except to talk.

—Melissa L. Bogen



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