

New Media Opportunities for Consultants

Many of us are attracted to multimedia, to the vision of seeing our ideas played out in a skillful composition of images, actions, and sounds--not just prosaic old prose. I know I always wanted to be a movie director. Are there opportunities for tech comm consultants to work on multimedia projects in Atlanta? If so, how can we break in? These were the topics of a panel discussion at the April 1 meeting of the Atlanta Chapter Consulting SIG. Representatives from three local multimedia companies described their businesses and their use of contract and freelance talent. Following are some pertinent details.

All of the panelists use freelance and contract help--from 40 to 60% of their project teams, on average. Most new media companies are small and need to outsource much of the work. The speakers were all interested in building relationships with consultants, whom they could rely on over multiple projects. Some projects are very brief, with discreet bursts of work for the freelancers, while others can be long-term and involve lots of team interaction.

In terms of writing talent, new media companies most often seek freelancers with copy-writing or "creative writing" expertise. On some projects, instructional design experience might also get you in the door.

At the moment, there are also great opportunities for communicators with advanced web skills. Just as the tech writing business was revolutionized in the early 90s by online help and hypertext, the multimedia business is undergoing a similar transformation as developers move from CD-ROM delivery to accommodating the narrower bandwidth and display restrictions of intranets and the Web.

In any case, if you want to write for multimedia, you must write concisely, and it's important that you think in pictures, not just words. In a multimedia presentation, all the of the media are coordinated together, no one piece stands on its own. And the whole is interactive. There are books available on writing for interactive media; check them out.

So how can you break in? The panel suggested that we explore innovative ways to market ourselves to new media firms. For example, you might contact a principal or manager of a company and offer a "trial size" of yourself--a free consultation. Suggest that you analyze their current proposals and point out ways you can improve them. Or look at some of their past projects and explain how you could have made them better. In other words, think like a consultant: investigate ways that your skills can make these companies more profitable, then pitch your services on that basis. Oh yes, and don't call yourself a "technical writer." Say you're an "information designer" instead.

My sincere thanks to the panelists who made the April Meeting happen: Mardi Forman of AppleTree Multimedia, Ron Wincek of Interactive Media Consulting, and Mike Wittenstein of Galileo, Inc. See you at the movies.

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