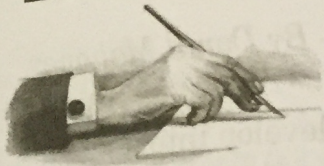


# How to Deal with the Holiday Haze as a Freelancer



— By Ruksana Hussain

So you are a freelancer and the very thought of a vacation, short or long, expected or not, has you in jitters. Well, I just got back from a two month stint visiting family in Asia. That apart, my whole year in 2014 was splattered with little trips to different places across the US since I started doing a travel column for a local magazine. This year looks no different, if not busier. I have decided on at least one conference a quarter apart from other travel trips that are being planned as I type this article. And my freelance business stays healthy irrespective.

The whole idea behind most of us opting to go the freelance route is so we can do what we want when we want. Vacations figure on that list. Taking some time off or even traveling for work need not be as tortuous an experience as most people feel. A little bit of planning and forethought is all it requires and you can enjoy your holiday sans heart attacks or panic fits.

First and foremost, let your clients and contacts know. A little note intimating a change in your schedule or holiday dates/hours is all it takes. Most folks are happy to see you taking time off, and will even respect the dates of no contact you have mentioned. Of course, lengthy vacations may pose an issue but if there is a chance you can still take on work during certain dates and times then let your clients know that as well. Don't forget to set that vacation response on your email. In the event that you did forget to inform somebody, they are aware you are on holiday and won't mind a delayed response to their query.

Try as you might, being completely off the grid is not a gift everyone can boast of. If you can then hat tip to you buddy! But if you cant, then consider a few minutes of alone time a day or every other day, as time permits during your

vacation, when you can keep abreast of happenings and news in your area of interest. Check mails but don't consider it necessary to reply asap. A handy tool like Streak will allow you to snooze mails for a later date and those mails will disappear from your inbox so you do not have to worry about seeing the same unattended emails every morning.

Keep a working note of story ideas if you can/want to. Nothing impresses an editor or client more if you come back rejuvenated from a holiday and have a few pitches to boot. A quick 'hello I am back' email and a note on some ideas that would work well for the magazine's readership or client's blog is sure to get the emails rolling and work coming in. Even if you don't have any pitches, still reach out to your editors informing them of your availability and preferred departments so they can have you top of mind for the next set of assignments.

Start putting out feelers of your work on social media. Two months, in my case, was a long time to be out of the work circle but I still added links to my work on my website and shared that on social media every here and now. If I read something interesting I made sure to either note it on a to-do list or schedule it right away on Hootsuite. A few days before I made my return trip to the US, I mailed some of my editors letting them know when I would be back and how soon I would be available for stories. Some did not respond, some said they took note and others readily sent across some story ideas they wanted pursued! You never know which tactic works with which editor, but try you must.

If clients are specific about start dates, look at your schedule to see if there is some leeway. If this is a client that has worked with you be-

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# HOLIDAY HAZE...

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fore or has come in through a referral, they will probably wait to have you on a project if they really think you bring quality expertise to the table. Asking never hurt anyone so ask for an extension or a delayed start, as the case may be, and you might just win another project. Remember though to show up as you say you will. This is where your task notifications and reminders on your calendar come into play. Mail or call or connect with said contact on the date and time you have specified.

Connect with folks whose projects you might have previously declined. Check in to see how the project fared and if they are still looking, or have something new they can use your skills on. Write to professional contacts you have already worked with to see if they have something brewing that you can contribute to, or better still, ask for a referral or recommendation to another project they might be aware of – word of mouth rocks in the freelance world, you now that.

Last but not least, especially if you have exhausted all efforts, check back on that ongoing to-do list you maintain. As freelancers, we all having a running document or sheet of people we want to contact, places we want to pitch, story ideas for a rainy day, etc. Review your notes – maybe a blast from the past is the solution to your dilemma.

Bon voyage!

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Through Twitter and Facebook, I learn about different websites of interest to writers. I send my own e newsletter out about once a month to update my friends, family and colleagues on new developments in my career. I always include a section about 'friends' and also a section on 'opportunities.' That way it isn't all about 'me' but more of a community experience.

Carol Smallwood, *Women on Poetry: Writing, Revising, Publishing and Teaching* (McFarland, 2012) on the list of Best Books for Writers by *Poets & Writers Magazine*

## Dylan Thomas Writers Shed at the Boat House

— By Martin Willis Jr.

To reach this shed, small enough to pace in a circle tracing Dante's Circle, he had to wind around the hill, upwards, like a spiral staircase, staring at the well-worn ground, knowing the ruin of shoes, the sure-footed user, the way of wind.

If he kept cycling towards heaven, would he have been happy? What would he find? The end of his wit? Would he have used the oil lamp? That one had two switches: the illumination brought insight, and the off switch, the one of darkness, troubled everything with reality of death, the lamp oil taken from a whale.

Was this shed a getaway from himself; or was it to escape who he had become, although he had whittled his own image out of straw?