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Outsourcing medical writing - is it worth it?

By Kirsty Barnes, 23-Feb-2006

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If you're a big pharma company, outsourcing the writing of medical publications is not the way to go, according to a report by pharmaceutical business intelligence firm Cutting Edge Information.

The firm conducted a study weighing in-house vs outsourced productivity and found that on average, the in-house publication staff produced twice as many manuscripts as outsourced agency workers at 3.6 vs 1.8 per full-time equivalent (FTE).

Contract workers hired on a full or part time basis within a company were almost as productive as full-time staff members, producing 3.4 manuscripts.

The report notes a similar pattern in the development of abstracts, with in-house workers writing 6.9 abstracts, compared to 3.3 for contract workers and only 2.9 developed by agency staff.

In addition, manuscripts written by in-house staffers were also of a higher quality, as measured by the percentage of published manuscripts to those that were written, with a 58 per cent publication rate compared to only 50 per cent for outsourced manuscripts.

However, the contract writers were the most successful at having their manuscripts approved, performing at a 68 per cent publication rate.

"This report confirms from several vantage points that [outsourcing](#) is not necessarily the best option," says Jon Hess, senior analyst at Cutting Edge Information.

The study investigated scientific manuscripts, such as journal articles, monographs and abstracts, that were directed at clinicians to support Phase I-IV research, as opposed to marketing materials.

The main reason for the higher productivity and quality of in-house staff is that they have the advantage of being familiar with the inner workings of their employers, the therapeutic areas they serve, and the drugs they work with, Hess told **Outsourcing-Pharma.com**.

"Losses in productivity occur during transaction of this knowledge from the company to the agency worker," he said.

"Agency workers do not have the advantage of front-line access to internal company information and employees," said Hess.

While it may also appear that contract staff were more productive than in-house staff, interviews with publication managers reveal that in-house staffers often have to fulfill several additional responsibilities that consume about 25 per cent of their time - double that of contract staff.

In light of this report, whether or not it is best for a company to outsource or contract out [medical writing](#) depends largely on its situation in terms of size and budget.

"Certainly for large pharmaceutical companies with adequate resources, outsourcing is not the best way to go," Hess said.

"However, even though it may be more expensive and less productive, outsourcing is the natural choice for smaller companies who don't have the in-house capacity," he said.

For medium-sized companies, the case is not so cut and dried. If the company is on the upswing, Hess believes it is more beneficial to keep medical writing in-house.

For companies who don't wish to do this, bringing contract staff in-house is also a good alternative, however, it can be difficult to find and train suitable staff on a contract basis and outsourcing is often the easier alternative.

Hess believes that outsourcing is also a particularly good way for a medium-sized company that is experiencing a downturn to reduce its overheads.

If a company takes the decision to outsource, it will gain the most productivity if it is able to build a relationship with the medical writing agency, particularly if the same team of staff continually work on the brand.

However, many agencies suffer from high staff turnover and rarely have the benefits of staff working with the same brands over long periods of time and this is a particular problem highlighted by companies that were interviewed for the report.

A copy of the report can be requested from Cutting Edge information's [website](#).



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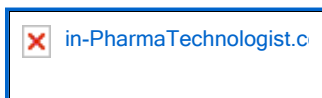
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