

“If you are working for yourself, you can take credit for yourself. If you are an employee in a firm, the boss can take credit,” he said.

Will Pollock (MSJ01) has been freelancing since 2002. He writes for magazines and corporate clients, freelance photography assignments and designs and writes Web sites from his home in Atlanta.

“If you can pay your bills, live comfortably and work for yourself, there is nothing like it,” he said, adding that there was a certain joy that came with being the sole creator and proprietor of one’s business. “It is nice to be the captain of your own ship,” Pollock said.

“I feel much more in control of what happens to me professionally and personally,” said Margaret Littman (MSJ93), who has been freelancing for 10 years writing articles for newspapers and magazines as well as two non-fiction books from her office in Chicago.

Sharon Cohany, an economist with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, said there were 194,000 people who defined themselves as either a writer or an author in 2004—a category that includes print, broadcast and advertising writing.

While BLS did not break out the number of self-employed writers in 2004, it did track them in 2001. At that time, roughly half the people in that category were listed either as freelance writers or independent consultants.

Brett Harvey, executive director of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, said, “It is virtually impossible to track everyone who hangs up a sign and freelances.”

Women—often the primary caregivers in a family—tend to be drawn to freelancing because of the freedom it provides, Harvey said. “A lot of people face the work/family bind,” he said. “If you are an independent entrepreneur and your kids are sick, you control your own time.”

Kellee (Van Keuren) Katagi (BSJ94, MSJ95) started freelancing full time in 2004 so she could spend more time with her daughter. She writes and edits for magazines and book publishers on topics ranging from weddings to skiing.

“I had already been doing some freelance editing and thought it would be a better service to my family and baby to stay home,” she said from her home office in Denver.

“Writing and editing is the perfect profession for that because you can do it out of your home so easily,” Katagi said.

Although Mast was a full-time freelancer years before she became pregnant with her son, Eli, she decided to continue freelancing so she could spend more time with him. “Working for myself made it so much easier to go



Carlotta Mast and son



Kellee Katagi and daughter

Photo by Owen Silver

back to work after Eli was born in 2003,” she said. “I didn’t feel like I had to choose between my work or my baby.”

Freedom and Flexibility

Michele Weldon, an assistant professor at Medill and a freelance writer, said she started specializing in essay and opinion writing as her family grew. Weldon writes for newspapers and magazines, conducts writing workshops and has written several non-fiction books.

“Freelancing was something I could do at 2 in the morning,” she said. “I could do background research and make calls here and there, but I could do the writing whenever I had a spare moment.”

Stay-at-home moms and dads can freelance as a way to keep their careers flourishing while spending more time at home, Weldon said.

Although more women than men have been attracted to freelancing in the past, Weldon said that more men are joining the freelance ranks. “I also know a lot of men who do it because it provides a lot of flexibility.” Weldon said freelancing provides the time for them to pursue speaking engagements or book projects.

Bryan Gilmer (BSJ94), who writes and edits for corporate clients and magazines, said he spends 40 percent of his time on corporate clients and 20 percent on magazine work. Freelancing allowed him 40 percent leftover in his work week to write his first mystery novel, which he recently completed and is trying to sell. He divides his time between his fiction writing and writing for Web sites and magazines from his home office in Durham, N.C.

Weldon, Littman and Mast said working for themselves has also given them time to pursue book projects.

In addition to the flexibility freelancing provides, Weldon said location can guide the freelancer. “Sometimes people choose freelancing if they are not in a city where there are the opportunities that they need,” Weldon said. “Now you can work from anywhere.”

Ingrid Travis James (IMC98) began freelancing as a corporate marketing consultant and a public relations provider for small businesses when she decided to move





Bryan Gilmer



Ingrid Travis James



Nicole Tricoukes

closer to her family in Detroit. James provides marketing consulting and wanted to take on varied projects instead of focusing on one or two accounts. She said freelancing provided that freedom. “I wanted to have the flexibility to customize the projects I wanted to work on versus having someone dictate what I had to work on,” she said.

Nicole Tricoukes (IMC02) works full-time for Tiffany and Co. in New York, but freelances in marketing and project management for small business, focusing on consumer products and international markets.

She relied on freelance income when she was interviewing for her current position. Freelancing gave her the flexibility to travel to interviews during her job hunt. She said it provides experience in industries outside of her own.

However, Tricoukes said it was difficult to earn enough money while freelancing, so she did not plan to pursue it full-time.

“To be a really successful freelance writer you need to have a base of weekly or monthly publications that are reliable,” Weldon said.

Freelancers should have a list of publications they would like to write for. “You try and get your base to be diverse and reliable because you don’t want to have one publication to be the bulk of your business,” Weldon said.

Mast said having the right personality was important to her success. “I think you must have stronger people skills because you don’t have as much job security,” she said. “You have to make every client feel like they are the center of your universe.”

Characteristics of freelancers vary from person to person, Carruthers said. It isn’t true that all entrepreneurs are risk takers. “The evidence is clear that risk aversion or risk seeking is not a stable personality trait.” He said someone could be a risk taker in his or her personal life, but risk averse professionally.

While freelancing does give people more control over their careers, it also has its own challenges.

“It is trading in one set of constraints for another set of constraints,” Carruthers said. “You’re free and don’t have a

boss looking over your shoulder, but now you have to answer to the marketplace.”

Harvey said freelancers are usually working constantly. “When you’re not researching or writing, you’re working at getting your next project,” he said. Most people leave the freelancing business because they cannot make enough money at it, he added.

Work Ethics and Networking

Pollock said running his freelance business takes continual management. “You have to stay on top of it 100 percent at all times,” he said. Pollock has relied on the skills he learned at Medill when freelancing.

“No matter what sequence you are in, you get a very strong work ethic [at Medill],” Pollack said. In addition to the education he received, Pollock said the network Medill provided after graduation was vital to his success. He said he has gotten most of his jobs through the Medill network.

Gilmer says his Medill degree and his work experience benefits his freelance career. He was a newspaper reporter for nine years before venturing out on his own. “It gave me a certain amount of credibility,” he said.

James said Medill’s IMC program prepared her well for a freelancing career. She said it broadened her marketing knowledge and helped her understand her customers’ needs.

“It also helped me figure out what clients were right for me,” James said. She partners with clients in industries that interest her.

Weldon said: “What we do really well here at Medill is to prepare students to be very flexible and capable in any and every situation. We turn up students who can produce the best work on deadline.”

She said Medill encourages diligence, accuracy and enterprise, which are key in a freelance career. “Our graduates are capable of presenting a good product, whether that student is sitting in a cubicle at a magazine or at home in his pajamas.” **M**

Mindy Jensen Long (MSJ01) is a reporter at Transport Topics, a trade newspaper in Alexandria, Va.

