HOW CAN freelances market their work abroad most effectively? Peter Veenhoven and Ole Pijnacker Hordijk, owners of the Amsterdam-based International Features Agency (IFA, www.ifa-amsterdam.com) advised July’s London Freelance Branch meeting on “what works and what doesn’t” in syndicating abroad.

Peter says that these days “there’s less commissioning going on”, so editors buy more via syndication. IFA has about 400 freelances, and resells to Europe, South America, Japan, and Australasia. About 90 per cent of sales are written interviews that feature somebody famous in a way relevant to at least three countries.

Most publications in the UK are buying First British Serial rights, so most freelances have the right to sell their work abroad without restrictions. If you offer your work abroad after it’s been in, say, Mojo, it “destroys about 80 per cent of its retail value abroad.” If you don’t want your story going abroad before its UK publication, you can let agencies know about its availability in advance — rather useful for the many publications that have three-month lead times.

For editors in much of the world outside the UK and the US, an interview has to be in Q & A format or “it’s not regarded as an authentic story.” You can write up different versions of an interview “for here and abroad,” which also avoids possible copyright issues. And “it’s very important that you can trust the information given,” says Peter, so editors also need “all relevant details of the interview… when it was done, where it was done, whether any agreements were signed with PR people,” and so on.

Rates are “not much higher abroad than in UK”. The USA and Japan, the bigger markets, are “more interesting.” After recent “rough” years, “things are really looking up” in the syndication market, according to Peter, especially in “emerging markets like Brazil, also in Germany, Belgium, Holland,” all of which have seen some recent new launches. “If you think there’s a weekly magazine in Belgium that would benefit from your work, contact them,” he advises.

LFB photojournalist Julio Etchart, who sells his own visual reportage overseas, also reports that in recent years he’s been syndicating a lot more to emerging markets — “Indian, Chinese and Brazilian publishers.” Julio says it’s “challenging” working with editors in “the South” but “more rewarding.”

Peter says UK-based freelances have an advantage in that “everyone thinks highly of you (or did) and they can understand what you’re saying.” (In Japan, editorial teams have translators who pitch English-language stories to editors.)

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• LFB’s Phil Sutcliffe, who’s on IFA’s books, has more detail on working with this syndication agency at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/108ifa.html and the NUJ members’ Freelance Fact Pack has a “freelancing abroad” section: see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/0810fact.html

New front in intern battle

A NEW front has been opened in the struggle to get fair pay for interns, with NUJ sister union BECTU supporting an intern through the process of getting the tax person to intervene — leading a film production company to compensate Onur Özkol for over £1000 in back pay.

Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is formally responsible for enforcing minimum wage legislation. Early victories in claiming minimum wage for interns — first by the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) with Nicola Vetta’s case in 2009 and then by the London Freelance-Branch-initiated Cashback for Interns win for Keri Hudson in May — have resulted, however, from the unions representing claimants at Employment Tribunal.

As BECTU Supervisory Official Tom Bell puts it, “Onur Özkol’s case represents a new landmark in the fight against unpaid labour in broadcasting because it was successfully concluded by HMRC. This now means that we have proven that unpaid labour is an unlawful practice through two different routes — the Employment Tribunal and now the HMRC.”

As a BECTU official he supported Onur in approaching HMRC; when it took up the case it approached the company Bonn Productions, which settled out of court. “We’re delighted,” Bell says, “and Onur certainly is.” Whereas Tribunal cases must generally be brought within three months of the end of the engagement, HMRC has the power to prosecute — or simply threaten prosecution — much longer after the event.