wp freelancer forms

"I used your agreement form to contract a $3,500 web site job. I had already proved that I was the right person for the job, but it was nice to not look like an amateur business person when it came to reducing the promise to writing." - *Matt Biskup*

| Home | The Forms | Frequently Asked Questions | The Blog | About Us |

Contact Us

Managing Client Relationships

BY PATTY J. AYERS

"My client is driving me crazy," writes yet another distraught web designer. "He's changed this design ten times. He emails me constantly asking me to move something over one pixel or make that color just a little lighter. This site is going to take three times as long as I planned! Help!"

This is only one of the many varieties of torture small startup web developers have to cope with. Then there's Ms. Takes-Forever-to-Send-Content, and Mr. Just-Do-It-My-Way-Despite-the-Fact-that-I'm-Clueless, and Mrs. I've-Sent-You-96-Attachments-Hope-You-Know-What-They're-For. Web design clients come in

Managing a WordPress-Based Web Design Business

Finding the Right Clients

What Should I Charge? Finding Your Own Right Answer

Estimating a Website Project

From Contact to Contract

Show Me the Money: Getting Paid

Backing Up Your WordPress Site

Choosing a 3rd-party WordPress Theme

every personality type imaginable, and it's almost guaranteed that some of them will drive you nuts. This issue is more of a problem for most web developers than any technical challenges that arise – code is much more predictable than human beings.

To be fair, it's not entirely your clients' fault. In fact, it's mostly your fault! That's not what you wanted to hear, is it? But the truth of the matter is, you are the one who has the responsibility and the power to improve the situation. You are the one who runs a web design business; you're the expert on managing a website project. The client has probably never participated in a web design effort before, and has no idea what it takes to organize and execute the necessary work. But you do, or at least you must make it your business to learn, and the sooner the better.

There isn't any one right way to manage clients. We're talking about chemistry between people, and naturally there are countless different situations. I'm going to offer some advice, but each of us has to find his own groove in this area. There will likely be trial and error, with more errors than you care to think about. But one fact remains: the managing is up to you, not to the client.

Naturally, basic good "people skills" are the essence of working well with anyone in any situation. If you think it's a weak point for you, you'd best address it sooner, rather than later, because running a small web design business is all about dealing with people.

On the other hand, there are a number of practical ways to lessen the amount of uncertainty and friction that arise between you and your clients. I'd like to offer the following suggestions.

1. Be prepared. Like a good Boy Scout, you must decide upon and make your standard business

policies and procedures clear ahead of time, before trouble hits. These policies should be stated in the contract you sign with your client. (And please, never do any client work without a signed contract.) You should verbally go over – or at least mention – the most important points of your standard contract. In my business, for instance, I routinely emphasize this particular point: that, although it's very common and normal for site specifications to change during the course of the project, the estimate covers only the work specified in the contract, and that any additional features will incur additional fees. A policy like this might seem basic to you, and it might be stated in your contract, but it still helps to be sure your client is aware of it.

2. Be consistent. I believe that a business of this type should deal with clients in as "standard" ways as possible; in other words, the rules should not be invented anew for each client. The reason for this is simple: it's fair, and so it lends you more authority. It's a lot easier to say, "I require a deposit of 1/3 of the estimate in advance" if you actually require that of everybody. Plus, your clients may talk to each other, and it is much more professional to have standard policies.

Does this mean that you can never negotiate custom-tailored arrangements with individual clients? Of course not. It's your business, and the essence of good business is flexibility and compromise. But this shouldn't be your starting point; these should be exceptions, and should be stated as such. "Our policy is to allow only three rounds of revisions, but we'll make an exception in this case."

3. Communicate often and well. Go out of your way to communicate well with your clients. Make this a priority. Reply to every phone call and email quickly, cheerfully and professionally, answering their

questions and clarifying the status of the project. The client may fall severely short in this area; all the more reason for you to be a clear-as-a-bell communicator.

A word about email: be aware of its shortcomings and pitfalls. Most of us prefer email over the inconvenience of that ringing telephone on the desk, but I believe independent web developers need to use email wisely. Don't rely only on email; be sure you pick up the phone occasionally and let the client hear your friendly voice. Go out of your way to make your emails sound cheery, because emails without social niceties ("Hello, hope this finds you well", "I think the project is going great – talk to you soon") can sound very cold and disturbing on the other end. Again, the fact that *they* send *you* poorly-spelled unsigned one-liners without so much as a kind word included is no excuse for you to do the same. Common courtesy is like the oil in your car's engine, making otherwise grating work much smoother.

And one cardinal rule: **if things have gotten sticky, use the phone!** When a situation gets tense with a client, email can mask the problem, obscure the issue, and sometimes make it much worse. ASCII text is not good for communicating something emotional, regardless of your proficiency in typing little faces. A conversation by phone (or in-person) can usually fix a sticky problem a lot more quickly than email.

4. The customer is not always right. We've all heard the old motto which claims otherwise, but I believe that the point it was intended to convey has become muddy and misunderstood. Whatever manager coined that phrase to try and whip his surly clerks and salespeople into shape wanted to convey to them that *they need to do everything reasonably possible to make the customer happy*. Of course the customer (or client) is not always right; he can't be made into some

kind of dictator. I believe what is meant is really more that *the customer is solid gold*.

Of course, this is excellent advice which web developers need to heed. However, it does not mean that the client should dictate the course of a web design project. This is a crucial distinction. Again, you are the one managing the project, and you are the expert at web design. If the client asks for something which is clearly not a good idea, it is not only your right, but your responsibility, to at least inform him that you strongly advise against it. You may have to give in if he is particularly stubborn, but you must at least make every effort to produce a high-quality website, and not to just give him whatever he demands.

This suggestion will not always make things easier for you initially, especially if you have to oppose a client on something. However, in the long run, you are much better off maintaining your status as the authority on the subject and the manager of the project. If you give in and let them have something you don't recommend, at least you're allowing it and not just being ordered around.

5. Be creative and flexible. If and when trouble comes, try to step outside of the dispute or irritation and see it as a challenge: how can I turn this into something positive? If need be, get away from the situation for long enough to re-gain your composure, and then return to it with a good attitude, determined to work through the problem. The vast majority of clients can be worked with. Apologize if there's something you can apologize for ("I'm sorry that the contract wasn't clearer"), and suggest practical solutions. Look for a way to get through the issues and reach the common goal of a finished, high-quality website.

Many of us, upon launching our small web design business, thought that we would be able to immerse

ourselves in geekiness all day and half the night.
Instead, we find, we're dealing constantly with people.
We thought we were going to be our own boss, but
instead we now feel as if we're surrounded by bosses.
This is one of the tougher realities of working for
ourselves at web design. Since there's no point at all
in fighting it, we might as well work on getting really
good at it. Your business will reflect your extra effort,
and you might just build a little character in the
process.