



"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*

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Show Me the Money: Getting Paid

BY PATTY J. AYERS

When is a client a client?

When I have a signed contract and a payment.

Until that

point, I don't allow myself the luxury of assuming that I have a new client, because we're not yet actually doing business together until they "show me the money". This is one of those possibly harsh-sounding but very real aspects of the business world. I strongly recommend that you draw a clear line there as well, because there are lots of people who will benefit from your time and attention for days or weeks and then decide not to hire you. Observe that line, and limit how



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much energy you put into someone who has not committed to working with you yet.

I now require that clients have a detailed site specification before I can figure an accurate estimate. Since almost no small business website client has this, I offer to write one for him, for a fee, for which I require payment in advance. After I've done this, if the client wants to engage my services, I apply that fee to the total estimated cost of the website.

Then I break the total estimated fee for a website project into 3 parts:

The first payment is “due before work begins”, and I take that seriously. If you don't take it seriously, and start work before getting paid anything, you will soon regret it. I guarantee you that you will run into clients who take advantage of you. I have heard this sad story from dozens and dozens of freelancers. This is business, and we simply have to be firm about it.

The second payment is “due at about the halfway point of the project” – this is how I describe it in my contract. Obviously this is a very loose criterion, but these are small projects, and the truth is, I have never once in fourteen years had a client object when I said that the project was about halfway complete and billed them. I do sometimes wait to receive this payment until doing any further work on the website; this is a judgment call. I've never had to tell the client I was doing that, but I think they figured it out.

The third payment is “due at the time that the website goes live”. My contracts state that, but I will sometimes bend it slightly. The truth is, if for some reason a client delayed or refused paying that final payment, I would just take the website down.

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I have had close to zero problems with getting paid over the years, in contrast to what I hear from many of my colleagues in this business. I think it is because I am clear and firm about it. I make it clear that I'm not going to tolerate anything else. This is necessary for any business, but I think especially for the business of website development, because its reputation as "new" and "creative" tends to make some clients think they can get away with not paying fairly. Make it clear to your clients that you will accept no nonsense in the matter of getting paid.

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