

# Client Sign-offs

Get it done on time & budget.



When companies create their presence on the web, they want to sell products online or want a wider range of clients to contact them. A website is a great way for people to:

- know who you are
- discover what products or services you offer
- contact you with questions or comments

When you start a project it's important to find a web designer or design company who can help you accomplish these goals. In time, their work helps your company reap the rewards of profit and business expansion.

The questions are:

- How can you find a web designer you can trust?
- Does the web designer share the same idea for your vision?

Client/Designer trust becomes difficult

when ideas are misinterpreted and the end result is not what you expected. When the project doesn't go according to plan, you might feel the need to seek legal advice and decline to pay for the work. This option can waste everyone's time, money and you're still in the same place with an unfinished website.



How do you avoid misunderstandings? The answer is a contract and regular client/designer sign-offs. It may seem like a lot of work initially, but it's always good to keep a paper trail. Then each party can see the project's progression and know what's been agreed to.

## The Contract

It's impossible to know how each contract should be written, because each web design project is unique. However, here are a few basic points you should be aware of and include in your contract.

## What is the progression of client sign-off in a contract?

Client sign-off should happen at each milestone of the project. Whenever an important step or goal has been reached that the client and designer agree it's completed. The first step might be the review of the contract. Ask yourself when reviewing the contract:

- Do I agree with what the web designer is asking me to do?
- Do I understand what he is saying?
- I've reviewed his portfolio. Is he qualified for this job?

- Does he understand my vision?
- Will my goals and needs be met on time and on budget from the quote?

If you can agree on these questions and others you've discussed, then the first sign off can occur.

The second sign-off might be an actual drawing or mock-up of the site. The designer may present 2 or 3 mock-ups that he feels represent the vision of your site. You might review these ideas on a computer screen or on a sheet of paper. Ask yourself:

- Is this my vision of a website?
- Is this the type of navigation or user journey I want for my clients?
- Does this idea flow well?
- Do the colours match my corporate colours?

Often this part of the review may go through three or more revisions between you and the client. It's important to get this step right and approved before you build a website with 50 or more pages. If you approve the design then you sign-off.

There may be several more sign-offs that occur at this stage, such as:

- Supplying the designer with all the materials required.
- The designer must take photos or create a video by a certain date.
- Review of a certain page or section that you have a concern about because it has to have a different look than other areas of the site. This could be a separate banking area or a page that only company employees should view.

## Arrange time for a sign-off

As each sign-off occurs in the project, make sure that you and the designer are kept on track. Try to supply material to him in a timely manner. If you or the



designer is not on track, contact him to see if you need to readjust the timeline. A signature sign-off does not always have to be in person. Though this is usually the best way, a sit down meeting on simple changes can waste time. Sign-offs can be through a scanned email, fax, a courier sent form or over the phone agreement. However, remember with over the phone agreements, there is no paper trail so it's always best to follow up with an email confirmation if possible.

## A sudden change in the contract.

Most projects have to come to an end at some point. Throughout the project you've hopefully expressed your concerns to the web designer and he has answered your questions. However, what if a certain area of your website suddenly needs to be changed or redesigned, and this was not part of your original contract?

## Contract revisions

A revision of the original contract or an entirely new contract may have to be written. Remember this will not be the same price you were quoted earlier in the first contract and now the price has increased. Determine the extent of what your revision will be. Is it a minor change such as a few logos, photos and a colour? Or a major change with a new database, client login and a whole e-commerce section? Like a new website, major changes need new contracts. They require a face to face meeting to work out the details.

## The final sign-off, closing the project.

Closing off the project will be the final step in the job. How do you know when you are done? When all the steps have been fulfilled in your contract. As mentioned, you should not expect that you can keep adding items to your job and expect the price to be the same your original quote. Addition of items to the job or creating a stall will not get the job done on time. This is known as job creep and should be avoided. When a job is complete compare the price to what you were quoted, hopefully the price is the same, but if it is higher consult with your web designer if you do not understand why. Sign-off when you are done and pay your designer on time.

## Future Maintenance



As technology improves, ideas about how we express ourselves on the internet change. What looked like a dynamic website 5 years ago is now old technology and client's activity on the site has declined. You may need to contact your designer every few weeks, months or year, to update information. However, is designer maintenance a good idea? Or would it be better to do some of this yourself? The answer comes down to three points:

- time
- computer skill level
- money

If you are a busy person who is not financially able hire an in-house web designer you might choose to set up a contract with the original web designer. You could arrange to submit information to them and they will update certain pages every other week for you.

Another option is, if you have more personal time, you may want to talk with your designer and ask if your website could be set-up in such a way so that you could update it yourself. This may save you time and money in the future.



However, remember if you plan to be the one to update the website always make sure you have the computer skill level to match. If you don't, this process may end in frustration or the entire site could become corrupted. Be aware that updating a web page is not as easy as an update in a Microsoft Word document.

If you want to update your website ask your designer first if he can sit down with you and show you how to update the site or information properly. He may recommend that you read books on the topic or take a continuing studies course at a local college. Whatever he shows you or recommends, all training time needs to be accounted as part of your budget as an additional cost for the project. Always consider if this needs to be part of the contract.

## Final Thoughts

Throughout this process you might wonder...

When it comes to a sign-off and deadlines, why should I respect the time of my web designer?

As mentioned, when a job is delayed it does not get completed on time and on budget, this is known as job creep. Respect of the web designer's time is important because he may be working on multiple projects at the same time as your own. If you cannot make a meeting, let him know. Remember other clients want to complete their jobs at the same time and if you delay your sign-off on the job, you delay the work of others as well.

If you respect their time: you respect your time, your budget and complete your goals on time.

Hopefully this information is helpful and you will be able to work together with your web designer on many future projects.



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The Contract  
What is a Client Sign-off?  
How should I arrange it?  
&  
Why should I be on time?

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