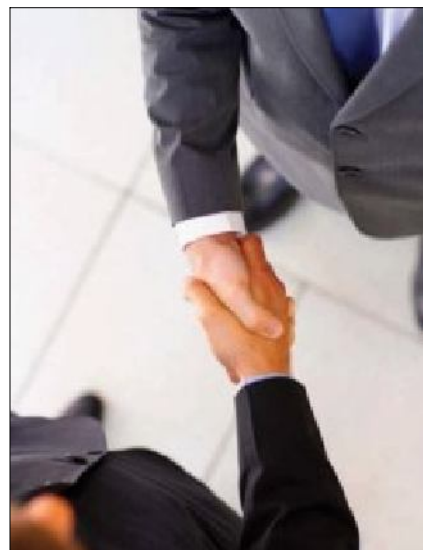


# Getting the Most from a Client/Consultant Relationship

By Chuck Lasker

I have the opportunity to observe the best and worst of client behavior from my experience as a self-employed consultant for more than five years, and helping hundreds of e-commerce site owners improve their websites. And believe it or not, a client's behavior and expectations can affect the work that is performed.



Many feel it's the consultant's responsibility to build a positive relationship with the client. But the real issue is about getting the best results. If you treat your consultant poorly, they could put you on low priority, overbill you out of resentment, fire you as a client, or a tarnish your reputation in the consultant community. A positive relationship with your consultant means getting significantly more than your money's worth.

Listed here are some guidelines your consultant wishes you knew, but won't say it out of fear of offending.

**Your consultant is not your employee.** He is independent for a reason. If you think your money buys the consultant or makes him subservient to you, you're at complete odds with his belief system.

**You're not his only client.** A consultant must balance time between you and other clients. There will be times when you want an immediate response, but he's working on another deadline or dealing with an emergency for another client. In addition, consultants will work when they're "on," and take time off when they feel overloaded. One day he might work 18 hours, then take the next day off to rest. Therefore, be sure to inform your consultant of important upcoming projects so he can prepare his schedule.

**Communicate the way the consultant prefers.** In my experience, most clients prefer to communicate through the telephone while most Web consultants prefer e-mail and instant messaging. There are many reasons consultants prefer e-mail — from having a written record that phone calls can't provide to being able to research answers before responding. If you want the fastest, most accurate responses, try e-mail and instant messaging.

**Ask for everything you want.** Maintain an ongoing conversation with your consultant about what you would like to see. Often what you think is difficult is actually simple.

**Be honest about deadlines.** Time estimates and deadlines are a strange dance between clients and consultants. Clients often cut their deadlines short, hoping to get priority. Consultants underestimate how long a project will take because they're in denial about interruptions, debugging, and scope creep. The solution is to be completely open and honest about this up front. Tell your consultant your true deadline and ask for a reasonable expectation to complete the project.

**Pay what was agreed upon.** A website owner often has a feeling of buyer's remorse when the work is complete. It's human nature. If your site goes down on Black Monday, you're probably ready to pay anything for someone to fix it. Once it's up and going again, you'll think it wasn't worth what you offered. Fight that impulse. If your consultant helps you, he deserves what you agreed to pay. Think about the long-term relationship (as your site will likely experience interruption again), instead of those few short-term dollars. Shortchanging your consultant will undoubtedly tarnish your reputation and result in difficulties finding a good consultant at a later time.

**Listen to your consultant.** Many clients paid for my advice, but I would estimate only 20 percent ever listened. Remember that you hired a consultant for their expertise in a particular subject in which you needed help. If you become tempted to dismiss your consultant's advice, ask yourself if you really know more than the individual who is immersed in their field, reads all the latest news and reports, gets training, experiments with solutions, and learns from the results of his work on other sites.

**Give feedback.** Don't tell your consultant you're happy if you're not, and then harbor bad feelings behind his back. Your consultant wants to know how you feel. On the positive side, if you are happy, compliment him. For consultants there's nothing worse than silence. Make the effort to compliment his work and you will be moved up on his favorite's list.

Our perspective is geared towards our needs and desires, not those of the people we hire. It's difficult to continually consider your actions and how they affect your consultant. But it's worth the effort both for your consultant's sanity and your profitability. Follow the advice above and you'll quickly see better and faster results, as well as enjoy a better relationship with your consultant. ■

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*This article contains content as an abridged version of "20 Ways to Get the Most from your Independent Consultant" e-Book, by Chuck Lasker. Chuck Lasker has been helping individuals and companies utilize the Internet since 1994. His focus is on training, writing and social networking. Lasker can be reached at [chucklasker.com](http://chucklasker.com) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/chucklasker](https://twitter.com/chucklasker).*