

9 Steps for Working with a Freelancer

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One of my clients used to send me what I thought of as “Russian doll” emails: One inside another, inside another, inside another. The record was seven. Inside the smallest one was the background for a new project. If you work with outside writers, here are nine steps to help the process go a little more smoothly.

1) Define your objectives. This one’s obvious, but it’s not always easy – especially if the project has been dumped on you fast or without much explanation. An experienced freelancer will ask questions that will help define what needs to be done. Who’s your audience? What should the tone be? What does the company want to achieve with this project?

2) Define the scope and budget for the job. Is it one draft with two revisions by a fixed deadline? Or as many revisions as your boss wants, for as long as it takes?

3) Develop a schedule. If it’s a major project like an annual report or a new website, create a series of interim deadlines. An experienced freelancer will outline, probably in a contract or Email, what he or she has agreed to do, by when, and for what fee. This is also the time to take care of legalities your company requires such as non-disclosure agreements.

4) If you’ll need additional talent -- PowerPoint pros, photographers, designers or producers – ask the freelancer for recommendations. Most independents belong to informal networks and know who’s good in related fields. Many frequently work with the same partners again and again, which works to your advantage because they know how to work together.

5) Provide plenty of information. An experienced freelancer will already have taken a thorough look at your company’s Website. You can provide additional background, such as executives’ speeches, brochures, recent interviews and articles, ads and videotapes of executives. Provide a list of people to contact for the project, with phone numbers and Email addresses. It’s a good idea to contact these people yourself first to pave the way.

If your company has a style guide, provide that. If not, make the freelancer aware of things such as terms the company avoids and words or phrases the CEO hates.

6) Be available to answer questions, or tell the freelancer who else to call. Include the freelancer on conference calls. If the job involves internal reviews, try to give reviewers' comments to the freelancer all at once rather than piecemeal. If the comments conflict, tell the freelancer whose comments take precedence.

7) Once the project is done, hold a post mortem, especially if it's the freelancer's first job for you. Give them copies of the project if it's a print piece. If the freelancer's work was terrific, say so, and make plans to use the freelancer again. If something is off the mark or you're not pleased, say that and figure out what went wrong.

8) Make sure payment is on time, even if it means riding herd on your accounts payable department. You wouldn't like waiting 90 days for your paycheck and freelancers don't either. Remember that while experienced freelancers may charge more, they typically work faster and produce better results -- which means less work for you.

9) Finally, recommend good freelancers to others. And if you're pleased, call them again. Chances are good the second and third projects will go even more smoothly. And you'll have a great resource.

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