



By Molly E. Holzschlag
(10/19/99)

Tired of trying to make a dime with your coding skills while dealing with overbearing clients? In this client "tour de farce," you'll meet eight fictitious clients who have committed Web design crimes and misdemeanors. While we examine the problems inherent to each of them and provide solutions, you'll also meet some real-world site builders who've suffered through their own nightmare jobs.

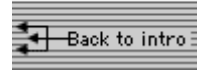
- [Mr. Micromanager](#)
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Note: All real names have been changed to protect the guilty. For those clients who make our lives happy and bountiful, we are truly grateful. No good clients were harmed during the production of this event.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Mr. Micromanager



This is the fellow who calls you one busy morning and asks for a meeting posthaste. You arrange to see him at your office. You're impressed: he has company brochures and logos in electronic format, and he says he believes a Web site is important to his business.

As the meeting continues, he makes at least three weird comments about your office: he doesn't like the view, your favorite Chinese vase clashes with your office color scheme, and goodness, how *do* you work with all this clutter on your desk?

But he likes you. And overall, you're pretty satisfied this is going to be a good project--organized client, good pay. He signs on the dotted line with a gold Mont Blanc.

At 5 p.m. the phone rings. You recognize your new client's crisp hello. The next thing you know, he's bombarding you with instructions, directions, and demands. You handle it calmly and shrug it off new client jitters. But you start to get worried when he tries to tell you all the photographs on the site should be GIFs instead of JPEGs. He doesn't know anything about Web graphics, but he once heard that GIF files were big on the Web.

As the days pass, you see that this man is an absolute control freak. He wants his princely fingers in everything. He calls five times a day--a missing comma here, a sentence splice there--by the time you're deep into this project, you're ready to hurl your beloved vase into his controlling face.



[Web graphic designer Amy Burnham tells her story.](#)

Dealing With Mr. Micromanager

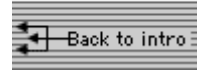
Prepare a document in advance that discusses what your production method is and include some information about Web advantages and limitations. This helps the client stay informed. If your attempts at education go ignored, gently but firmly explain the issues one additional time. Most importantly, give the client specific days and hours that are appropriate to contact you.

Also, it's helpful to plan the design down to the last detail before starting your coding. Start with sketches and move on to mockups. Have the client sign off on each stage of planning. Then, when you're building the site, there shouldn't be any surprises.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Ms. Penny-Pincher



Ms. Penny-Pincher knows she needs a Web site. She's heard you're great to work with, so she emails you one day asking about your services. You discuss the project and fax her a detailed, fair proposal.

Five minutes after sending the fax, an email appears in your in-box. Ms. Penny-Pincher has gone over every single item and has questions regarding each. Do you really *need* to optimize images? And just why are you charging so much for HTML and scripting? Can't you just use FrontPage? Better yet, her eight-year-old nephew Horace can do the HTML for free.

You patiently explain your approach. Eventually, she agrees to your terms. You begin the job. The first payment arrives, with a note bickering about how the site costs too much. Despite the fact that she pays on time, she moans and whines about money every step of the way.



[Builder Buzz member Suriel tells her story.](#)

Dealing With Ms. Penny-Pincher

Your best bet with her is to provide a detailed expense sheet and explain each item and have her sign the sheet after she clearly understands. Most importantly, tell her firmly that you are doing the best job for an agreed-upon price, and you'd like her to stop discussing monetary concerns.



Web Building Clients From Hell

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Mr. Content Interruptus

Most designers know this guy *really* well. He's the one who is hot to get his Web site up yesterday. You start the process, but he fails to get you any content. A week goes by, and you call him and leave a message. Another week goes by, so you page him. He returns your page the following day, but when you return his, all you get is voicemail.

The launch date is getting closer and still no connection--and no content!



Launch date arrives. The phone rings. You answer.

[Web designer Justin Crawford tells his story.](#)

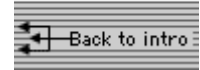
"So, where's my Web site?" You can see the smirk through the telephone line.

Dealing With Mr. Content Interruptus

Explain the need for timely content up front, and set milestone responsibilities for both you *and* the client. Write those milestones into your contract, giving the client a legal responsibility to deliver content to you in order for a milestone to be met.



Web Building Clients From Hell Ms. No Pay



You've got a terrific site up and running for your client. The check, she says, is "in the mail." You wait the requisite 15 days promised on your invoice. No money arrives. You stretch it to 30 days. Still no check. You ring her up.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Ms. No Pay says, ever so sincerely. "I was sure I wrote that check. I promise you I'll send another today." You're such a good-hearted soul that you believe her. Weeks pass, and there's still no green to be seen.



[Usability guru Seth Gordon tells his story.](#)

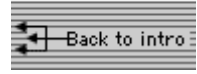
Dealing With Ms. No Pay

You can avoid problems with Ms. No Pay by ensuring that half of the project is paid for up front, with a contract clause explaining this fee is nonrefundable. You can then have the remainder of the money due upon the completion date. When you're paid, the site goes up. And if a check bounces or is delayed, take the site down.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Mr. On the Fence



The contract is signed, the client gave you plenty of graphics and corporate identity information. You've designed three comps based on the results of your client meeting. You're really happy with them, and you invite the client to take a look.

He hems, he haws. He likes the graphics on A, the type on B, the layout of C. The colors of C could go with B, but maybe use a deep red instead of the blue? No, no, A is really best. Well, maybe not. Could you try a new mockup after all?

You recomposite. He haws, he hems. He likes the new comp, he really does. But maybe it would look better with the type from layout C?



Even though you've just created four brilliant designs, you're wondering how much revision and recompositing you'll be able to take before you smack him with a two by four.

[Web builder Wayne Benner tells his story.](#)

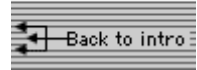
Dealing With Mr. On the Fence

If you are certain you are dealing with a personality type like this, don't give this client decision-making power. Tell him, instead of asking him, what it is he needs and provide a site most appropriate to his needs. Rejoice if you find he is grateful you took control and delivered the goods without too much of his involvement.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Ms. It's Never Right



Some people are just impossible to please, and nothing you do--despite how good it really is--will be acknowledged. You do have to have thick skin to be a Web developer. Designs get criticized, no matter how wonderful they are.

But there's criticism, and then there's Ms. It's Never Right. She's the client who--regardless of your excellent performance, regardless of the design depth and coding creativity you deliver--will never be happy.



[Graphics guru Matt Straznitskas tells his story.](#)

Ms. It's Never Right could use something to satisfy her, but you're simply too polite to tell her just what it is she *really* needs.

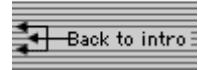
Dealing With Ms. It's Never Right

Ms. It's Never Right is a rather intransigent problem. You can recommend that she seek out another designer, since she's apparently not happy with you. Or you might suggest some book titles and developer Web sites for Ms. It's Never Right so that she can design the site herself.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Mr. Bad Vibe



There's something just plain weird about this client. First, he calls from a phone booth. Then, he calls from a cell phone, but he has apparently forgotten the number, so you can't call him back.

You want to set up a client meeting. He says he doesn't have an office--can he meet you at yours? He shows up, and he's very nervous. He's looking over his shoulder and sweating rather profusely. He describes his site needs and agrees on the terms.

You arrange to pick up his company logo and content. This time, he says he has an office, and can you come to him? No problem, you say. He gives you an address in a rather seedy neighborhood. You drive up, and he's standing outside a dilapidated office building.



[The author tells her story.](#)

He greets you with his now-familiar over-the-shoulder twitch and hands you floppy disks wrapped in tin foil.

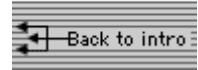
Dealing With Mr. Bad Vibe

Just say no. If you do get bad vibes from a client, simply don't take on that client. If you're in deep already, look for ways to pass the client onto another firm that has more buffers (such as client reps) to keep you safe.



Web Building Clients From Hell

Ms. Cybernot



One of the most popular types of clients from hell is the person who knows a Web site is important but is a little confused about the site-building process. Instead of listening and learning from you, this client's ignorance makes your job miserable.

She's the type of client who, when you try to explain why a script won't work on all the major browsers, responds by asking, "What's a script?"



But that's not even the half of it. She doesn't have enough knowledge of the Web to tell you what she wants for the site. That's OK with you at first, though: you can provide the vision, right? But as you try to show her mockups of your previous work, she sucks up your time trying to figure out how to turn on her computer.

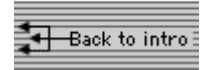
[Web builder Debbie Mitchell tells her story.](#)

Dealing With Ms. Cybernot

Clients don't have to be ASP experts or HTML wizards: that's why they hire you, right? But they should know some basic concepts about the Web. The best way to work efficiently with Ms. Cybernot is to explain the process from the beginning in very general terms. Try discussing what end result she wants and then determine what content or interaction you'll need from her. Sometimes keeping the client in the loop about every little detail, from page load time to browser incompatibilities, isn't such a good idea.



Web Building Clients From Hell Quick Tips for Client Management



Ms. Penny-Pincher still nickel-and-diming? Mr. On the Fence still sitting? No matter who the clients are, Web builders can do plenty of things to protect themselves, their clients, and their precious sanity:

- **Never work without a contract.** Whether your client is a close friend, a relative, or someone completely unknown to you, a contract is your first opportunity to protect both parties in clearly defined terms.
- **Provide clients with a what-to-expect information sheet.** This simple courtesy might save hours of frustration and help provide your client with a sense of comfort.
- **Delineate milestones and adhere to them as best as possible.** Within your contract, specify dates defining the responsibilities of both parties. Include information about what happens if either of you fail to meet the milestones.
- **Encourage positive communication.** Agree with your client that you will be available for appropriate and positive discussion of how to ameliorate delays or concerns.
- **Keep a referral list.** Compile a list of developers. What may be a troublesome client to you might be the perfect fit for someone else.
- **Don't be afraid to turn a client down.** Even if your rent is due and the car is about to be hacked by the repo man, don't take on a problematic client. There is no dollar amount in the world that can make up for abuse and unhappiness.
- **Develop a relationship with a qualified attorney.** Spend a couple of hundred dollars now to consult with an attorney. Get a general contract written, discuss concerns, and keep the attorney's number handy. Call only when you've exhausted your options.

Your ability to improve client-designer relationships lies in the ability to choose clients carefully, set clear goals for both client and designer, and operate as professionally as possible. You must also know when to walk away, say no, or recommend a colleague who might be a better fit for your bad seed. If all techniques fail, it may be time to turn to your legal advisor for direction.

No Web designer will be safe from run-ins with these and other clients from hell. But being prepared is your best defense! Learn these characters, heed these tips, and set your boundaries. You may not have heavenly relationships with everyone, but if you can fend off hell and fury, you might prevent committing a crime or misdemeanor of your own.