



Route One Print
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THE

DESIGN

COMEDY

HOW TO DEAL WITH 9 TYPES OF
HELLISH CLIENTS

“ MAKE IT POP ”

“ MAKE IT BIGGER ”

“ CAN ’ T YOU DO
THIS ONE FOR
FREE ? ”

Relaying Clients from Hell stories has become a favourite pastime for designers. But at the end of the day, clients are a designer’s source of income and maintaining productive working relationships is essential for a happy and fulfilling work life.

Nightmare clients can come in all forms and each one needs a different approach to smooth things over. For this eBook, we’ve split them into 9 separate categories. We bet you’ve waded through at least one, but probably more, of our 9 circles of client hell.

This eBook is here to show you that there are ways to work through each of these nightmare situations, and will provide practical ways you can tame even the most hellish client for smooth(er) and more productive relationships.



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01.

LIMBO

HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE IN LIMBO



he first circle of hell is limbo. This is the client who seems super enthusiastic at the start of your project and can't wait to get started, yet as the days roll on, becomes more and more distant. You may have bounced some exciting ideas around at the beginning, but then they won't provide any direction for your project, refuse to choose between the concepts you present and are generally, rubbish at giving feedback.

Vague insights such as , *“Think about ways to improve this”...“Think about that bit”...“Can we improve this”* are the common opinions they give to your work.

How To Get Out Of Limbo

As a designer, your time is your most valuable asset. Clients who leave you in limbo are wasting this precious time and limit the progress you can make with their brand and therefore your business.

1) Set Up Communication Points

Ask to hold regular meetings over the phone or face to face. These will help give deadlines for both of you to work towards; deadlines for deliverables from you and deadlines for feedback from your client.

2) Don't Do Any More Work Unless They Respond

Send a polite but firm email to address the situation and explain you cannot progress without their feedback. State you will not be able to do any more work unless you hear back from them. Until suitable feedback or opinion is given, you cannot deliver the results you want to.

Emphasise that not only is quality important to you, but knowing you are providing a finished product they are happy with is even more so. Once the client understands that it's in their best interest to respond adequately, you should see better feedback.



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02.

LUST

HOW TO KNOW A CLIENT WANTS TOO MUCH
(And no, We're not talking about romance)



And no, we're not talking about romance. The lustful client wants too much from you. They micro-manage every step of the creative process and expect you to work around the clock. The term "work/life balance" isn't in their vocabulary and every time you check your inbox, you can expect a dozen emails checking on your progress.

How To Get Them To Ease Off

It's easy to feel offended that this client doesn't trust you. After all, they came to you to provide a service which is frustrating when road blocks are put in the way.

Figuring out why this client is acting in this way is the first step to understanding their behaviour. Remove yourself from the situation and try to take an objective "balcony" look. There are many reasons this client is pushy:

- They are facing timeline pressures themselves from above
- They had to persuade their boss to hire you and it is on their head if the campaign fails
- A previous designer has let them down in the past
- They're used to dealing with staff who have to be pushed
- Or, they could just be unreasonable

It is your job to reassure the client that you can be trusted and although you appreciate their feedback and involvement, it's prohibiting you completing the task effectively. Explain you work with a structure and timelines and if they can't stick to them, you can't do the job.



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03.

GLUTTONY

WHEN YOU KNOW A CLIENT IS BITING OFF
MORE THAN THEY CAN CHEW

08



So you found a decent client who gives you a great piece of work to do and is happy with your rates. Amazing. You start the job and the client asks you to just provide a couple more assets that weren't on the brief. They're a new client and it's only a small task, so you agree. Then they ask you to quickly tweak the logo. Soon you're doing almost double the work you've agreed!

How to Reduce Your (Unbilled) Workload

A strict payment structure is the best way to combat gluttonous clients. If they make more than three major amends to a project, explain you'll have to charge them. Put a price against every stage of your project with firm ground rules from the start.

A Statement of Work (SOW) is ideal for keeping large projects focussed. They define the scope of the project and outlines every deliverable you agree to. Clarify deadlines, payment and what constitutes success. It's OK to be pedantic when it comes to your SOW - if it is vague, it leaves room for interpretation and that's where gluttony can step in.

“ C A N Y O U T U R N
A R O U N D A N 8 0 P A G E
P R E S E N T A T I O N I N A
D A Y ? ”

-

Polly Playford



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04.

GREED

WARNING SIGNS OF A GREEDY CLIENT



his client wants a bargain. They don't want to pay you for what you're worth and perhaps don't understand the time it takes to develop a brand or project. Designer Quentin James found exactly this:

I was once asked to quote for the design of a monthly local business advertising directory. The kind of A5 glossy publication that appears through your letterbox from time to time, advertising local businesses, tradesmen and services. It wasn't a project I was interested in and I soon found a good reason to decline their offer to quote for the job.

Me: *Thanks for the opportunity to quote for your project but I'll have to decline the invitation on this occasion.*

Client: *Why?*

Me: *Well I've looked at your rate card, then worked out how much the job will cost to print, and guesstimated your delivery costs.*

Client: *And?*

Me: *Well, even if you sell all the advertising space at full price, the print alone will cost way more than the revenue you generate.*

Client: *So?*

Me: *Well, if each edition runs at a loss, how are you going to be able to afford to pay me?.....*

How to Not Be Ripped Off

There are two ways to battle against a client who devalues your work:

1) Make a timeline that accurately presents the creative process. Many clients genuinely won't have worked with a designer before and just need educating on where their money is going and how it will benefit their business. Case studies of campaigns you've worked can help the client understand your worth.

2) When all else fails, leave them. Anyone can cook themselves a meal, but most are willing to shell out for a professional chef to cook it for them better. The same applies across all areas of service and you've got a business to run.



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05.

ANGER

IS EVERYTHING AN EMERGENCY?



he fifth circle of client hell could relate to the feelings felt by both you and them. To this individual, everything is an emergency and must be done immediately. They think they are your only client and once something pops up, any timelines that were put in place go straight out of the window.

How to Calm Down the Emergency

1) Before You Work Together: All clients, at some point, are guilty of forgetting that design takes time. The creative process is a sum of scoping, ideation, design and (of course) the inevitable amendments. Both you and your client must accept that changes might have to be made and assets revised, so make sure not to ignore these in the planning stages.

2) After You've Agreed to Work Together: If it's too late for this, you need to sit down with your client and explain something needs to change. Tell them although you value their business, you have other clients who you also respect and to be fair, everything needs to be planned out in advance. They may not like it at first, but long-term it's the only way for a productive relationship.



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06.

HERESY

WHEN A CLIENT DOESN'T "BELIEVE" IN DESIGN



Every designer's biggest bugbear. When a client is guilty of heresy, they either don't believe in the value of design or don't appreciate its complexity.

"Why can't you make it shine?"

"Make it less white" (It's a black and white image)

"Can you make that button look more 'buttony?"

How to Convert Them

You know what good design looks like. Although you want to yell and scream *"IT LOOKS LIKE CLIPART!"*, at the end of the day your job is to provide a service that makes your client happy. What looks rubbish to you could be that client's dream logo! If it's not your best work, just don't put it in your portfolio. Or, if you must, redesign it how you would have originally to show the difference.

"As a Designer, it is par for the course that your initial design for a client is never the final result. Getting a design to look how a client has envisioned in their mind can take time and patience. Sometimes, lots of patience. And often, what looks great to a designer, looks wrong to a client. "Jazzing something up" has become somewhat a classic phrase in the creative world, and what it means exactly is any designer's guess.

It means very different things to different people, but what you do need to remember is whilst a project might not make it into your portfolio in the end, the most important thing is you offered your knowledge and advice, and that ultimately your client is happy with the end result, even if you aren't necessarily.

One person's jazzing something up could be to change the font to Jokewood and stick it in magenta, whereas another person loves nothing more than to use "tasteful colour combos" like beige & mustard...hmm. Yes, this did happen, and yes, it did look like a hotdog. An old hotdog. The poster looked like a squashed, old hotdog.

Alan Pennington - bohemiart.co.uk



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07.

VIOLENCE

HOW TO SPOT A "VIOLENT" CLIENT



Obviously if a client throws a chair at you, walk away. But we are talking about more verbal abuse. Violent clients can be argumentative, contrary and disagree with everything you do. On one end of the scale you have the nit-pickers who might send passive aggressive or sarcastic feedback to your opinions. On the far other end of the scale, full creative clashes can happen.

How to Douse out the Flames

However good the project, however decent the pay, this isn't a working relationship. The only way to argue your case is to politely present the reasoning behind each decision as you see it and have an explanation for the choices you make. If the client can't see past this and demands it his own way, maybe it's time to move to a client who you can actually help.

I don't release editable artwork files to clients, unless agreed before a project commences, as I consider these files to be my intellectual property. So when a restaurateur client, whose menu was due to be updated asked for the InDesign files for their menu I politely refused. They got quite angry and demanded the files "that they'd paid for". I explained that they'd paid for their menu to be designed, printed and delivered and nothing more. I stood firm and replied by asking them for the exact recipe and cooking instructions for their house speciality. Their response: "No way!" I qualified my request: "But I paid for the meal in your restaurant a few weeks ago, why won't you give me the recipe so I can cook it at home?" Sadly, the comparison was lost on them. Needless to say, we no longer work for this client.

Quentin James - quentinjamesdesign.co.uk



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08.

FRAUD

HOW TO UNCOVER A FRAUD



rauds in the design world are clients who think they are designers, but aren't. Maybe they took an art course in college, maybe they played around with design in a different job, but everything you do, they can do it better.

Maybe they show you the design they made in Word for you to convert to a PDF? Or do they want you to create a project that's "exactly the same as what I made in PowerPoint". Often, clients just want a designer to get their artwork "print ready" or just have it confirmed its good by a professional designer.

How to Let Them Down Gently

Respect should come from both sides of a working relationship, and respecting your client's input is something that comes with the job. The trick is to listen to what your client has to say, then build upon or offer workable alternatives that keep both parties happy.

In this industry you'll almost certainly get enquiries from clients who come to you with super 'blue sky' projects - they won't see their concepts as 'blue sky' as they often don't know what's involved in such a complex build, whether that be a piece of print design or something web-based. I used to shrug off enquiries that were a little too 'ambitious' and say we didn't have the capacity; however I've recently imposed a 'don't hate, educate' rule in the office, we spend time explaining the complexities of concepts and often suggest alterations or simpler, cheaper solutions to what the client is looking to achieve. It's lead to a larger amount of work, which has resulted in some great growth. I think it's your responsibility as a designer to question and educate clients, they shouldn't be hiring you otherwise. If they just want someone to push a mouse around, tell them to get a cat.

Ryan Carter - ryancarter.co.uk

As a freelancer don't hesitate to provide your client with a different solution to what they're suggesting you to do. The client isn't always right, and your service to them shouldn't just fall to an execution of their ideas.

Tyson Beck - tysonbeck.com



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09.

TREACHERY

WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'VE BEEN RUMBLED



he final circle of hell designer's find themselves in can be the most dangerous. A treacherous client goes back on their word and rejects the terms you originally agreed on. This could be anything from pay, deliverables or measures of success. Prohibiting clients from becoming treacherous is one of the most important things for a designer to learn, as it can directly affect your business.

How to Get Back on the Same Page

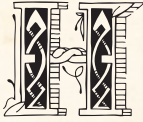
- Agree your Statement of Work and put your timelines and deliverables in the contract.
- Ensure not to make progress until contracts have been signed and just in case, keep track of all your emails.
- Create detailed, time-sensitive briefs. If you've messed up, you can see it's your fault and vice versa for your client.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.



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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

OF DEALING WITH HELLISH CLIENTS



How many of these clients have you had to deal with in your career? Unfortunately, there will always be people you don't like that you come across in work, but implementing these steps should help ease the process to help your design business succeed.

To summarise, we've brought together the key points to take away and always keep at the forefront when you feel like you're going to explode.

01.

Get Everything Down in Writing

Settling for verbal agreements is a recipe for disaster.



02.

Be Honest

If you won't have time to do something, be honest with your client. They will appreciate the heads up rather than a late submission.



03.

Be Firm

Stand your ground. Clients must recognise that you are running a business as well and have standards and deadlines to maintain.



04.

Set Up Regular Communication

Miscommunication is a root of (a lot) of evil, especially in a subjective area like design. Keep conversation open, flowing and honest to avoid disagreements.



05.

Make Detailed Timelines

Not only to keep your work on track, but to show the client how long everything will take so no unrealistic demands are made.

06.

Agree a Statement of Work

This will help put larger projects into perspective, give a clear understanding of deliverables and structure your work.

07.

Always be Polite

You always have more to lose by showing disdain towards your client. Even if you are angry, it won't ever do harm to remain professional.

08.

Explain Your Decisions

To those who aren't naturally creative, some decisions may need explanation. Always try to educate your client and keep alternatives open to discuss.

09.

Retain Your Pride

As your client deserves to be respected, so do you. When a client treats you poorly, recognise when it's time to walk away.

10.

Remember You Are The Professional Designer, Not the Client!

At the end of the day, it's your job to educate, inform and inspire your client to help them succeed. What seems ridiculous to you just comes from a lack of knowledge; fill in the gap and your client will thank you for it!



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