

Freelance & Drupal in NYC

Pains, Headaches, Satisfaction, Euphoria and Complete Misanthropic Metamorphosis (Head-in-wall syndrome).

The Pitch

- People need websites. We build websites. People have budgets, and hopefully they fit our rates. In NYC, 9/10 times the client has more cash than they will let on. 1/10 times the person will make it clear that they have more than enough cash and want something done right. Hallelujah.
- Be yourself, and don't be a pussy. These people need to know that you know what you're talking about.
- The way you pitch the site will determine how easy your life will be. Take the following into account before anything else:
 - ◆ Client Type
 - ◆ Site/Industry Type
 - ◆ Compatibility

Client Types

There are four main types of clients in NYC:

- The Eggplant: Technophobe/Computer Illiterate/Grandma with Porcelain painting website. Easy pitch, so long as you don't get too technical, but also technical enough that they understand you know what you're talking about.
- The MacFan: Uses Social Media, knows what a good website looks like, has no idea what the cogs and gears of things really are and loves his/her Applegear without question. Has never logged into a terminal or had to write more than 2 tags of HTML outside of Myspace. A nightmare to deal with from a design sense, but a complete shanking in the gut to deal with on a development level. Your site makes coffee, now you want it to make your toast too, great.
- The Dude: Knows a lot about computers, has coding skills, is aware of the market and what SEO means. Is humble enough to admit what he does not know, hence is in need of your services. Great to work with, if you know your shit.
- The Entity: More often than not a company looking for contracting work, though you may find yourself at the mangling hands of a senior developer that has an understaffed department. Either really good and pays fairly for your time, or a complete nightmare, and now you know why they are understaffed.

What to expect

- The Eggplant and the Dude are pretty straightforward with the proposal and contract: lay out a workflow, draw up a couple mockups and just gung-ho the project.
- With the MacFan, the proposal will be pretty easy to get down, but there is a 99% chance the project will have to go out of scope after the initial design specs are finished and completed. This is why the contract is the single most important thing here. DEFINE the AGREEMENT, PHASES, ESTIMATES, REVISIONS and OVERTIME very, very clearly. Be anal. Use run-on sentences. Re-iterate the same points twice with different rhetorical devices. Impress upon the client that these things are set in stone and let the text impress upon them that this is the kind of paperwork Apple takes to work every day.
- The Entity on the other hand, may offer YOU a contract. Just keep your eyes open for independent contracting details. They may try to pay your taxes for you and/or bind you to a long term contract. Don't ever sign a VH1 contract. You will wake up in a bathtub full of ice and missing a kidney.

The Contract

- Covers your ass and the client's; nobody will sign anything unless it is fair to both parties.
- You have to be crystal on billing: phases, estimates, revisions and overtime. All four cover the same thing, but need to be established separately.

The Fun Stuff

- The difference between Drupal and other content management platforms is your best pitching tool, unless you are talking with Rupert Murdoch. **"It's open source & community driven. If I get hung from hooks by some maniac I will call you and get you in touch with another Themer/Developer that lives within a 5 mile radius and you can probably track him on Google Latitude."**
- If you are talking with Rupert, then don't go into the open source thing, but do mention the community bit. Then proceed to point out that whitehouse.gov and the Economist are Drupal powered corporate beasts.
- If you're dealing with the Eggplant, express that Drupalers are pro environment, community driven, like good, organic beers, and have lives outside of computers like photography, stamp collecting and bloody flesh suspension based performances. Or just picking flowers on weekends, whatever.
- If you're dealing with the MacFan, you will want to go easy on how much you relay about the nature of Drupal and the community. Mention the basics. When he says "oh, like WordPress," don't compare, just say "Exactly." **IF** he asks why not WordPress, **THEN** proceed to explain (minimally) that Drupal is scalable, you have multiple content types, there are 234235 modules to do 235234112 things, etc. You can sell anything to a Hipster.

- If you're dealing with the Dude, speak openly, build what you think is cool. There is a good chance with somebody like this that they are open to new ideas, and these are the best projects to really get something cool on your portfolio. The Dude will appreciate the creation of custom modules, new themes and the idea of trying something new.
- If you are working with the Entity, then you will most probably already have a full plate of stuff to work with from the get go.

The Proposal

Once the client and yourself have reached a mutual understanding and are aware of where the project is about to go, send them a proposal. Send this BEFORE the contract, and make it personal.

I find that laying out the project into **4 basic stages/phases** is immensely helpful and avoids any misunderstandings.

1. Proposal and Concept review
2. Upon receiving initial deposit, draw up mockups, review mockups, approve mockups, and move on to next stage.
3. Design & Development implementation. Unless you are working with the Entity, it is usually up to you how you do this. Naturally, it's a good idea to get a design down first.
4. Final review, Final payment, site gets moved to their domain/hosting plan, site goes live.

Once the proposal is approved, send off the contract. This is the part most people want to avoid even talking about. Anything related to legal paperwork in NYC makes people very bored, uncomfortable and avoidant. It's like people enter a state of denial in the face of impending doom. You have a meteor coming straight at the earth, people are in a state of panic, running around like headless chickens. How do you impose some semblance of order? Tell everybody you are going to take their asses to court for stomping on your lawn and the meteor will immediately become a secondary concern.

If your contract is well written, then you shouldn't even have to breath twice at this point.

Misanthropy

All web work has one thing in common: time spent and what that translates to for you. Money, barter, a dope portfolio, etc, it's all up to what you are looking for. We all have to pay rent and support ourselves, and if web design is the main chunk of your income, then you know how difficult it is to stay within bounds of a pre-determined schedule.

Drupal has one huge advantage that makes it worth everybody's time. It is not only a open source, community driven content management system with SEO-friendly tools pretty much built in that has a plethora of modules that address use-cases that fit pretty much 80% of what people look for in a website, but it also just happens to be a brand name. The fact that it actually HAS competition makes it that much more realistic for people to get on the bandwagon.

Open-source has been around forever, and one of the things that everybody involved in it has benefited from in the capitalist realm is the act of getting paid for implementation. It's almost like we, in the open-source world, are providing a service as compared to selling a product. Not that other CMSs are products, web design is still technically a service, but the way people perceive this kind of stuff in the real world is still very black and white; you're either paying for a package, or paying somebody to build a package.

Taking away the headache with Drupal

The deeper you get into Drupal, the more you start noticing a few trends. It starts to seem like you are removing or disabling stuff more than you are creating or implementing something new.

Depending on the kind of client you are working with, and the kind of site you are building, you start finding out that there are modules out there that fit in with a certain kind of budget. The best way to make your life easier is to address this for yourself in the proposal phase of a project. Draw up a couple of templates for what is available.

I have a few different ones for nightlife venues, bands, corporate venture sites (insurance, private equity, etc), photographers and artists. I used to just pitch Drupal sites as being an awesome thing that can do anything and everything, which I still believe it can. But life is much easier if you let your client know from the get-go what they can afford.

As you start building higher-end sites and start building themes that are much more involved, developing modules and code that makes the site do fantastic things like summon dragons, you might find that the templates are the one thing that don't change.

NYC Compatibility Failure

Most people will probably not need a full blown CMS, and most people will probably not even know what to do with it if they have it. But as we all know, the internet is changing every day and it's become clear that content management and a strong SEO base is becoming more and more relevant every passing minute.

The idea is to sell the CMS regardless of the necessity for it, IF you can see that down the road this site will need changes, or the business has potential to grow and hence, need a much more involved website. We are ultimately, Drupal sales-people at this point.

On an idealistic note, that is skirting monopolistic thinking, it WOULD be nice to be dealing with platforms on the web that are all similarly usable, and preferably with the same API as well as UI. This isn't realistic, but whether we like it or not, we are carving out a place in history for Drupal right now.

So, before you go ahead and sell somebody on Drupal, make sure that you get along with them well too. If you foresee personality conflicts, don't take the gig. Because when the project fails due to somebody's inability to communicate with you like a normal, calm human being, then Drupal starts looking shoddy too; people have a natural tendency to associate a brand with a name that they know.