



What to do if a Product Development Relationship is failing, and how to avoid such in the first place

A product development company claiming never to have had a failed relationship is either inexperienced or lying.



What is a Good Relationship?

A good product development relationship is built on performance underpinned and fostered by trust. The performance can wobble, and the relationship survive (in fact it is inevitable that it will wobble at times), but trust can suffer not even the faintest tremor.

If trust is lost all is lost.

A good product developer will put transparency and honesty above all else, and a good client should recognise this as the most important attribute in his/her choice of supplier.

The ability to filter a nanovolt signal from a megavolt of noise counts for little when the parties of the relationship don't trust each other.

Product developers usually sell their performance well, but few take steps to show how much investment they put into ensuring the relationship is transparent, honest and upright. Performance is of course important, but it isn't an absolute. A wrong turn will detract from performance, but it can be redeemed. A perceived deception will kill a project, stone dead: there is no redemption.

The answer to the question posed by this section is:

Performance is important but probity is essential to a good development relationship

How a Relationship can go Wrong

It may be tempting to dismiss the argument made in this article as a trifle neurotic. After all, it is adults that enter such relationships, which should therefore have all the attributes of mature, sensible and well-educated human beings. Fiddlesticks!

An unnurtured development project will descend into something akin to a divorce squabble in the blink of an eye, and it isn't really that difficult to understand why. The following serves to illustrate this.

Projects usually start with a wealth of bonhomie and optimism, the client feeling the development that will make money is underway, and the developer pleased to have won an order and initiated a new revenue stream. This is the honeymoon of a project during which everyone trusts everyone, and all is well, but untested.



With a straightforward project not requiring any feasibility studies, it is normal to go through a phase of writing specifications. This is usually a harmonious process, but the seeds of future discontent are be planted here. The developer's notion of a specification is likely to be that it is carved in stone. The developer will usually demand approval of said specification, quite rightly, but implicit is the agreement that deviation always will involve extra cost. The client is likely to just want to get something physical and will trust that the developer has led them through the specification process in such a manner that the project's requirements will be fulfilled. This is not a satisfactory situation for the following reasons:

- Markets and knowledge of them inevitably change during a development cycle, and an effective niche is only ever captured by a development process that can change direction, if necessary.
- A first attempt at a design, i.e., the first prototype, inevitably involves technical discoveries that require specification changes.
- Logistics, e.g., component availability, may require changes in parts or specifications that couldn't have been predicted at the outset of a project.
- A process that is fine for prototypes may not translate well to production
- A discipline other than one in which the developer is an expert suddenly puts an unexpected constraint on the proposed design.
- Unforeseen environmental conditions mean that the development doesn't work as expected.

The full list would take many pages, but this hopefully gives the reader an idea of the numerous difficulties that can trip up a smooth development process.

There is no need to go through the other phases of a development because it is self-evident that if one or more of the above occurs, a dispute can result. Trust is immediately tested because the client wants whatever the issue is to be resolved, and the developer needs to protect its budget.

It is a short road from a difference of opinion over performance versus an approved specification to a Mexican stand off and eroded trust.

So, this obviously requires an alternative approach. It is all about recognising that the most important thing is the relationship, not the specification. There are three golden rules:

- **Developers must acknowledge that specifications can not be wooden. The maximum flexibility must be built into them when first written and great efforts taken to achieve change without extra funds**
- **Client's must acknowledge that projects can run into difficulties that demand a revisited budget.**
- **Both parties must build a robust and honest relationship that balances the requirements above. This takes time, and certainly isn't something that a pedantic set of rules in a specification will achieve.**

JJ has a 3 min read that takes these ideas a little further:

www.jonjutech.com/Cass/DevRoadblock.pdf



What to do if it has or is going wrong

The first and most important thing to do, if trust is lost, is plan an EXIT. These situations very rarely improve, and it is only damaging all the parties involved to prolong the arrangement.

If TRUST is lost, plan an end to the relationship

Below are some points to consider if this unfortunate outcome is pertinent.

- Work out exactly what needs to be done in order that both parties leave the relationship in an amicable frame of mind
- Both parties must be prepared to compromise to achieve the item above.
- It is cathartic to go through this process because it relieves all parties of stresses that have dogged them, probably over some time.
- Never back the other party into a corner from which there is no escape, or route out. We all stand and fight in this circumstance.
- Don't base the negotiation on blame. Both parties need an exit, and this is a point at which it really doesn't matter where fault lies. Focus on the needs of the project, not the pride of its owners.

Feel free to contact JonJu Tech for some free guidance: sales@jonjutech.com

How to keep things on the right track

Go back to the 3 major bullet points in 'How a relationship can go wrong'. It isn't easy because it is about human psychology, but it is the only way to build lasting development relationships.

Why not take advantage of some free electronics product development consultancy and contact: sales@jonjutech.com.

About JonJutech Ltd:

JonJu Tech Ltd. is a leading-edge supplier of electronics product development services. It has completed numerous product developments in all major market sectors over the last decade, taking its clients from the earliest conceptual stages right through to manufacture in volume, with revenue. As well as providing this fundamental service, JJ is a formidable problem solver – not all requirements are for the full journey; some just need re-railing.