

# How to Hire Outside Development Help

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# INTRODUCTION

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Hiring is tough, especially when you're hiring an outside company for your development. There are a lot of things that can go wrong, and without an established relationship, there can be a lot of risk involved.

That being said, there are many reasons why it makes sense to hire outside development help:

- > when you aren't able to find the talent you need
- > when you don't want to commit to a long-term employee relationship
- > when the quantity of work you need is more than you can hire in the short-term
- > when your company has strict hiring rules
- > when you need someone outside of your company culture to affect change

# INTRODUCTION

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Whatever your reason, this guide will outline a process you can use to reduce the risk when hiring outside development help.

# UPFRONT PLANNING

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Before you can really start evaluating companies, you need to be clear about what you're hiring a developer for and why.

## What do you need?

The first thing you need to be clear with is the “what”. What are you doing that needs outside help?

It is very simple: you wouldn't hire a plumber to fix your car, would you? Knowing the “what” is important to help focus only on who can help you.

This can be easy or difficult to answer, but take the difficulty as a sign of how thought out the project is. If this question is easy and clear to answer, then explaining that to an outside developer shouldn't be difficult. If it's difficult to describe to yourself, it will be twice as hard to an outside developer.

# UPFRONT PLANNING

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What would you like?

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## What would you like?

One thing to be clear about is the difference between what you **need** and what you **want**. What you need is the minimum project you need from the company, while what you want might be a lot more. Keeping them separate and clear will make it easier to prioritize with your outside developer.

Great developers who understand the business side of this can also help you discover your answers to these questions. Their expertise might even help you find a different path that is better than your first one.

## What is your budget?

The next step of planning you'll want to think about is your budget.

# UPFRONT PLANNING

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## What is your budget?

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Every developer will ask about the budget. It helps give them an idea about the size of the project and also about how serious you are.

You'll laugh, but there was a project request where a client wanted a clone of Windows that was 100% compatible with all Windows programs for \$5,000. If it only cost Microsoft that much to create Windows, that explains why they were so profitable. But that's not the case.

Along with the total budget, try to think about the schedule of payments for the budget. Some developers require 100% upfront, some 50% upfront, some charge week-by-week, and some bill Net 30. Try to find what different schedules you can accommodate and what your ideal one would be.

Forethought about the budget upfront will help you when you're talking to developers.

# UPFRONT PLANNING

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What's your timeline?

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## What's your timeline?

Similar to the budget, you'll also want to figure out what your project's timeline will be. If you have to hit specific launch dates, those will be important to write down, along with any major milestones that might occur. You also might not have a hard timeline in mind, but you want to make progress on this project. If so, write that down.

## What if you can't find someone?

This final part of planning is missed by a lot of people. Ideally you'd find someone perfect for you right away, but you need a contingency plan if that doesn't happen.

What will you do if you can't find someone? Can you just keep looking? Will you have to cancel the project? Will you use your own staff and just proceed slower?

# FINDING THE RIGHT OUTSIDE DEVELOPERS

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The biggest part of hiring an outside developer is finding the right one.

It will be time-consuming. It will include false starts and dead-ends. At times, you might feel like nothing is happening.

This is okay. Keep trying to find one, reach out to your network for referrals, look at advertising for them, and just keep going.

Far and away the best way to find a developer is through your network. A referral is gold on both sides, and starts a relationship on the right foot.

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Always remember to ask other developers you have in your network. Even if they can't help you, many of them keep lists of other developers handy and they might be able to pass your

# FINDING THE RIGHT OUTSIDE DEVELOPERS

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contact information on. Even employees might know someone or have a company in mind you can start with.

# THE FIRST PROJECT

# THE FIRST PROJECT

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So you've found an outside developer to help you.

Congratulations!

Now you'll need to start building your relationship with them. Even though you'll be doing business with another business or even an agency, it's still composed of people. The better your relationship with them, the better your experience will be

This goes doubly so for solo freelancers. They can be more personal with you, and with a stronger relationship, they'll want to help you more. They'll have the flexibility to go above and beyond if you need it, when you need it.

The first project you do with your outside developer will set the tone for the rest of your relationship. Just like a first impression, if the project goes bad then the relationship will sour even if either of you were at fault.

# THE FIRST PROJECT

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One trick I use with my own clients to speed up the relationship building process is to use what I call a trial project first.

# THE TRIAL PROJECT

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A trial project is simple and works exactly how it sounds.

Instead of giving the developer the main project you're hiring them for and hoping it goes well, you start with a trial project. This trial project is similar to your main project, but is different in several ways:

- > **It's smaller.** This lets the project start and end quicker, which gives you feedback much faster.
- > **It's focused.** Instead of building everything in your main project, the trial project focuses on one part from beginning to end.
- > **Limited financial risk.** With a smaller budget and scope, your financial risk is limited.
- > **Easy out.** If you aren't a good fit, then an easy exit clause can be used to end the trial project.

# THE TRIAL PROJECT

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For development projects, the trial project is commonly focused in one of two ways:

1. A vertical spike where one section of your project is implemented from end-to-end. e.g. User authentication from the login form to the database, and back.
2. A horizontal, broad sweeping change with one focus. e.g. Improvement of performance across all systems, or a security audit.

When done correctly, a trial project looks like a regular project but that's been compressed. You'd have the discovery process at the beginning, reviewing options, implementation of an option, review of the implementation, and finishing everything up for a release at the end.

# THE TRIAL PROJECT

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## Continuing the relationship

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Upon completing the trial project, you'll have actual experiences on working with them as well as the start of a relationship. You can use this to decide what to do next.

### **Continuing the relationship**

When the trial project is successful or if you feel like there is a good fit between you and the outside developer, then it makes sense to continue. You can do another trial project if you want to limit the risk, or you can invite them to help you with your main project.

Either way, you've found somebody who you can work with and delivers the results you need.

# THE TRIAL PROJECT

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## Ending the relationship

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### Ending the relationship

If the trial project didn't work out or you can't seem to get on the same wavelength as your developer, there are two things you can do:

1. Try a second trial project in the hopes that you both need more time to warm up to each other
2. End the project and part ways

HIRING CAN BE HARD, BUT YOU CAN  
MAKE IT EASIER

# HIRING CAN BE HARD, BUT YOU CAN MAKE ...

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I hope this guide helps you hire outside development help better. Through planning, searching and evaluating, you should be able to find the outside help you need for your project.

I'll admit, I'm a bit biased writing this guide. As a software consultant who works closely with clients, I see them go through their own process to hire me. But I know how painful it can be for them and I've watched the damage a bad hire can do. My goal is to help you improve your hiring, whether or not you end up hiring me.

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Eric Davis runs [Little Stream Software](#), a one-man Ruby on Rails and web development consultancy. Focusing on software and marketing companies, it has developed various software projects over the years. He has experienced a wide range of working environments from large governmental

# HIRING CAN BE HARD, BUT YOU CAN MAKE ...

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