# Briefing document: How to manage a simple project

Nearly every IT project has to be managed to make sure the finished product fits with a client's requirements, and is delivered on time with everything working properly. Managing a project is a skill – something that nearly everyone in the IT industry has to learn. This briefing document will introduce you to managing a simple project, by showing the steps along the way. You can create your own project plan for the website you are building to begin to develop this important skill. Follow the steps in red italicised writing at the end of each section to develop your own project plan.

## Step 1: The client brief

Understanding exactly what the client wants is essential for a successful project. This will inform every decision that is made throughout the project. At the first meeting with the client, lots of questions should be asked, and lots of notes taken, to make sure the project manager and team members present fully understand what the client wants. It may be that further communication happens at the beginning of the project so everyone is sure that the concept of what the product is and what it is meant to do is shared by everyone. A requirements document can be generated at this point which clearly defines everything the product should have. With a website, this might include the definition of the audience, the inclusion of audio and video, use of images, design ideas and, most importantly, when the client wants the product to be delivered.

*[Look again at the client brief for your project and make sure you know exactly what is needed for the final product. Make a check list of everything that will be in the website – this will include text, images, audio, video, design and structure]*

## Step 2: A priority list

The project manager will have to create a priority list of everything that needs to be done to deliver the final product. If the client is working to a tight budget, there is a need to define the 'must haves' and the 'would likes'. These are essential features of the product (must haves) and desirable features which might be omitted if they are likely to cost too much (would likes). More discussion with the client might be needed here. When the priority list is produced, the 'must haves' will be first priority – the first tasks that need to be looked at. So with a website, some of the priority tasks might be research into the audience and a review of the competitors, research into design, storyboarding the website structure, and organising the audio and video content. There will also be images to be found, content to be written – it's a very big job! And the project manager needs to make this list and work out what happens first.

*[Take the checklist from step 1 and try to prioritise it. Which things are most important and need doing first? Put a 1 next to these. Work out what comes next, and put a 2 next to these. Are there any things that can be left right to the end? These could have a 3 next to them]*

**Step 3: Identifying resources and allocating tasks**

When the priority list is ready, the project manager will have to work out which members of the team will be working on which parts of the project. Sometimes this is very easy – the agency might only have one or two specialist people. However, they might be busy on other projects! So extra resources might be needed. Sometimes that might mean bringing in consultants from outside the agency. Some people are multi-skilled and can work on different aspects of the project. The project manager will know the team really well and will be able to identify who is the best person for each task. When the task is allocated, the person doing it will need to know exactly what is needed and by when. This is particularly important when there are lots of different strands of work all coming together at the end. For example, with a website, a website designer will be waiting for research on audience and design to be completed before starting that part of the project. Audio and video content can probably be created alongside other tasks, so the designer can be creating the look and feel while the audio and video are being created and edited.

*[This will depend on whether you are working on your own or in a team. If you are working on your own, then everything will be down to you! However, you can't do everything at once, so you need to work out what you do first. Your priority list should help here. If you're working in a team, you will need to decide who is doing which task. You might have already thought about this. But the thing to do now is put a name against each part of the project and make sure that person is clear about what they have to do and when they have to do it by]*

**Step 4: Developing a project plan**

The project plan is a very important document. This shows each task, who is responsible for its delivery, the amount of time the task is expected to take and when it should be complete. It might also show dependency relationships between tasks – this is where one task might be dependent on something else being completed. An example would be the website designer waiting for some research to be carried out by the researcher before starting the design task. Or it might be that the audio editor is waiting for the audio tracks to be selected before editing them ready for the website.

*[You can use a spreadsheet program to make a simple chart to show how your project will work. Use the* ***Briefing Document: How to create a GANTT chart using a spreadsheet*** *to help with this. You will need to list all the tasks, estimate the time each one will take, show any places where they overlap and make sure any dependency relationships are shown]*

**Step 5: Reviewing the tasks**

During the project, it is always necessary to check that everything is going according to the project plan schedule. This might involve a meeting with the whole team, or individual members. The project manager would check that each part of the project was on schedule for delivery according to the plan. If anything was holding up the schedule, such as content delays or problems with the design, the project manager would need to review the schedule and perhaps negotiate with the client for a revised delivery date. There is often some slippage on delivery dates, particularly for large projects. However, good planning often reduces any delays!

*[As you get into your project, keep checking either your own progress, or that of your team, against your GANTT chart schedule. If you think you are not going to complete any task on time, you might need to talk to your teacher! It could be that you have to review the delivery date of your finished product]*

**Step 6: Delivering the project**

When all the tasks are complete, and the different parts of the website are all integrated together, it is time to deliver the project to the client. This might involve making the website available in its first release form on a development server so the client can test it to make sure everything is as s/he wants it to be. The client might want you to carry out user testing. This means finding a group of people who are willing to carry out lots of tests on the site, following a brief that you have given them. They will feedback to you their findings and this might mean making some changes to the site before it is released to the client. If there are a number of changes, you might need to develop an action plan to correct the problems. It is very important that the whole site, and everything integrated into it, is working properly for the client.

*[At the end of your project, you will need to find some friends to check out your website and make sure everything is working. You will probably be able to publish your site on the school or college intranet – check with your teacher about this – so that anyone you ask to view and test it can access it easily. You might want to guide them through the site and ask specific questions about it. For example, asking them about the navigation, the design, use of images, audio and video. You can get some help for this from the* ***Briefing Document: How to collect and analyse feedback on a project****]*

**Step 7: Post-implementation phase**

After delivery of the final product to the client, there may still be work to do. The client may come back with some changes and you need to assess whether these were covered by the original brief, or whether they are additional (so they might need to be paid for). If the client is pleased with the final product, s/he might want you to carry out more work or extend the product with extra functionality or refinements. A good job well done will almost certainly lead to more work for the agency!

*[This phase is when your teacher or lecturer looks at your product and gives you feedback based on assessment. It may be that some changes are necessary to ensure you achieve a high mark for your product]*