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UX projects are complex and often involve many different contributors and stakeholders. Project managers ensure projects are delivered on time and that objectives are completed in an effective and affordable way. Good project managers facilitate communication between the project team and the client to set goals and expectations. This allows UX researchers, designers, and strategists to focus on the right problem at the right time, without losing sight of the bigger picture.

Project managers are essential for a successful UX design process because they:

Guide the design process from strategy to development

You know that moment when you reach for your flashlight, flick the "on" button and feel relieved when you realize you remembered to include the batteries? Having a project manager (PM) on your project is like having a fully charged set of batteries in your flashlight. A flashlight highlights doors, walls, and corners to guide you through a room, like a PM highlights opportunities and challenges to guide you through a project.

Anticipate roadblocks

Project managers keep you and your team members organized throughout the project process by flagging potential risks and removing roadblocks. As a result, your team can focus on what they do best. Identifying problems before they happen or getting ahead of any "bad news"

means having time to make adjustments to avoid getting stuck later on in the project. This high-level problem solving will allow your team to move through projects with efficiency and confidence. Oftentimes, this also contributes to earning repeat clients.

Keep lines of communication open

Project managers handle the logistics and communications to keep the rest of the delivery team laser focused on doing what they do best, whether that is strategy, envisioning, design, research, brand expression, engineering, or all of the above. While it is important to have a team that is collaborative and supportive, forming teams where each member can focus on their strengths is part of the secret sauce that allows project teams to deliver consistent, high-quality work.

Additionally, project managers can shepherd the design process to make sure the client understands where your team is in the project timeline and the “why” behind your decisions. For example, if our Blink team is creating mood boards, our PM communicates with clients to make sure the design team has the feedback and direction they need to meet the project expectations.

Project managers also shine during the research process by making sure researchers are talking to the right people. At the heart of every successful evidence-driven project lies useful customer feedback. A project manager is the link between the client, the project team, and the recruiting partners that ensures your team has the best participants for obtaining client feedback.

Are knowledgeable about a variety of clients and projects

UX project managers often have a depth and breadth of knowledge that is different from other contributors at the organization. Depending on the company, many PMs work with a wide range of clients and a variety of projects and collaboration tools. This gives them a familiarity with industry trends and a deep understanding of company best practices.

A good PM understands the problem they are trying to solve for the client and uses a programmatic, strategic approach to solve it. At Blink, we balance our project teams by assigning PMs to the clients and the types of work they know well, while still giving them a variety of new experiences to keep their skills sharp.

Can adopt collaboration tools

Project managers are skilled at setting up and maintaining tools for collaboration between the UX team and the client. If needed, most PMs welcome learning new, unfamiliar tools that the client has already adopted. For your internal teams, this alleviates the burden of having to be experts in these new tools. For clients, being able to communicate within their own messaging systems, video conferencing apps, or organizational tools keeps everyone in lockstep, which saves time and mental bandwidth for the important stuff — the work!

For example, our clients at Blink use tools such as Slack, Teams, Confluence, Zoom, Trello, Chime, and Bluejeans, and as a result, we use them too. Although we have our own standardized tools and workflows, we often default to the client’s communication systems and policies to make it easier to collaborate.

Think about business and champion good

culture

Project managers are the resident business thinkers in the company. They juggle both the big picture of the final deliverables as well as the day-to-day logistics. Project managers know how and when to bring the right people together. This allows your team to make collaborative decisions that are successful for your clients and meet the company's business objectives.

Lastly, project managers reinforce company culture and team morale. By keeping a pulse on the internal team and the client, PMs can identify pain points and gauge if the client is engaged and happy. At Blink, project managers do this by ensuring teams meet a high standard of excellence while maintaining empathy and genuine expression in our work. After all, when your team is having fun, it's easy for your clients to enjoy the work too.

UX teams thrive with good project managers

UX teams tackle a variety of challenges. Designers, researchers, and strategists can do their best work with the support of a project manager. PMs offer guidance, structure, and a wealth of experience to every project they support. Before you start your next project, remember to add a project manager to your team and put those batteries in your flashlight!