



# The importance of project management in digital projects

As a lifelong project manager and digital delivery specialist, I've seen many digital projects of various shapes and sizes. Some small, some large and everything in between. Not all digital projects are created equal, nor is there a central definition of what a digital project actually is - even the definition of digital alone is itself broad, however I digress. I wanted to highlight the importance of often overlooked value of project management when it comes to delivery of your digital projects.

## Why project management?

So first off, why project management? Isn't everything web based or cloud based and just automates itself? Well, yes but no. You can have all the fancy tools and algorithms in the world, but at the core of every project is both people and business requirements. I view project management with a number of lenses.

- Aggressive, in that you are actively driving the delivery of business outcomes and business value. After all, if the initiative itself is not ROI positive or delivering some net benefit, what's the point?
- Defensive, in that you want to mitigate against risks, delays and cost overruns. Good project management has these three things baked in at the core.

Without these two facets being present, time drags on, deliverables slip and ultimately the costs, both seen and unseen begin to compound.

Projects in our space are particularly compounded when you consider that there are also different ways to manage a project. We could have project management internally, which means we deliver our work and it's managed according to the project scope, budget and resourcing needs. The client also needs to have a project manager at their side to be certain they can meet timelines, deliverables and feedback. Best practice project management as with that which we deliver, actively seeks to straddle both sides of this fence and keep both client and internal team deadlines in check.

## What is there to actually be managed?

When it comes to digital projects, there are actually quite a number of moving pieces to be managed, even in the smallest of projects. Lets take a basic business website for instance, in this example, we have:

- Scope -- what is it the business needs and what is to be delivered
- Cost -- what is the final cost and how is it to be measured when it comes to ROI
- Timeframe -- when are we going to get it?

- Quality -- Sure we might get the scope, but what compromises are going to be made on quality in order for us to get it?
- Risk -- risk exists in every project. Risk of budget overrun, risk of resource availability, risk of quality issues. The more you look for risk, the more there seems to be!

Lets say we are managing a new business system, which has front facing endpoints that the customer accesses, as well as backend endpoints which need to send, receive and process data to keep the wheels turning in one such business. Some additional elements exists here in:

- The same scope, cost, time, risk and quality items as mentioned previously, although with deepened complexity
- Complexities relating to how these core projects areas intersect (this is somewhat covered by 'scope', but does deserve its own layer
- Change management, especially across multiple systems, vendors or companies
- Stakeholder management, whose priorities are more important than the other?

Success in each of these areas, means a quality solution, delivered on time, to scope and to budget. Failure in each of these areas... well, I'm sure everyone has seen a project fail to succeed in their time (and if they tell you they've never had a project fail, I'd tell you that the odds suggest otherwise..). A good project manager will be ahead of the curve when it comes to any of the issues above and the benefit to both client and agency is such that they avoid pitfalls, they work collaboratively and communicate to get the right outcome, sooner.

## What does it mean to me?

As I like to say, no one wakes up in the morning with an intention to derail, complicate or not deliver something that they set out to achieve. But they do have competing interests, priorities and in some cases a different understanding of what it is that needs to be delivered.

When dealing with vendors, creation of new software solutions, APIs, connectivity and automation, there will always be conflicting priorities and these conflicting priorities come at a cost.

If a new solution that was to be developed for use in your next project was not to be available as anticipated, there is both an opportunity cost, in the fact that the benefit the system derives is not available for use as expected, as well as an internal cost for you and the development partner. Team members who were resourced to work on that project, then have to find other perhaps non-productive tasks to work on to fill the gap during the delay. Expectations get missed. What was to be delivered for Q2, may slide to Q4 and no longer be as 'shiny' or provide any competitive advantage when it does finally come to market.

Whatever it may be, we all want to move quickly. Project management is the glue that keeps the business objective in sight, keeps the wheels turning on the bus and gets the delivered solution in place in your business as soon as possible.



Project management locks in the value of your project and provides certainty. At Assure Digital, it's baked into everything we do so that both our business and our clients derive this benefit from the very outset.

## But what about agile?

So if you have been on this project management rodeo before, you'll notice that a lot of the things I'm talking about don't sound particularly agile, and you would partially be correct. Truth be told, as an Agile Practitioner, Certified Scrum Master and long term devotee to continuous development practices, I can count the number of true agile organisations I've seen on one hand.

For the unaware, traditional project management aims to fix Scope, Cost and Time. No surprises with what you'll get, what it'll cost or how long it will take. Agile project management instead fixes only Quality and instead leaves Cost and Time as variables. Whilst there are some, I'm yet to see a gleeful line of stakeholders in most mid level organisations comfortable to leave cost and time undefined.

In our projects, we aim to embrace change, however the traditional approach of fixing price, scope and time provides a simple and sharp method to ensuring successful digital project delivery.

## Case Study

A small case study to illustrate what happens without project management. The particular item is still in the works and whilst we are not working together with this organisation, I've been following along from the outset.

John (name changed) runs a large specialist healthcare division. They produce a unique set of products for high skilled doctors and are known for their quality of product/service. The corporate website needed updating. Listening intently to understand where things were at - I asked a few key questions to learn more about the project.

- What's the status of the project - Unsure, was the reply. They hadn't seen the solution yet, but were told it was going to be launched next week.
- Great, so what about the scope? What is it that is being delivered? - We're not really sure what we are getting" he said... "and I think there is something that couldn't be done but that's getting put off until the new year
- But your customer", I asked, "They have high expectations about technical data and quality of information they can view about your product, do they not?" - Absolutely. We need to get this right and I'm concerned that these web people just don't know what they are doing.

I checked back in just prior to writing this article. Solution hasn't launched. Quality is appalling. Wholesale changes re going to be required to make this right.

Not only has this taken 4-5 months of time for the business to get to this point, but its going to take even longer again to remedy the situation and get an appropriate solution in place.



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What's that costing the business in this instance? Subpar customer experience. Opportunity cost of new sales/customer enquiries. Sunk cost of both the project and resource time internally doubling back to get the right solution in place. Project Management in this instance would of been immensely valuable and would have seen the right solution delivered the first time around. When you consider that their average order value would likely be in the 5 figures and that there are probably at least 2 or 3 of their target clients within most main suburbs around the country, the opportunity cost is certainly adding up!

If you have a current project that just keeps going and seems to have stalled, or you have an upcoming web project and you want to know how to maximise the value your business receives, as well as ensure it is delivered on time, to budget and without surprises, [reach out](#) and we can show you the best way to get things underway.



**Speak with Kurt 1300 427 127.** Kurt is the Head of Strategy of Assure Digital and leads a team of specialists focused on creating high performance website solutions.