

LEADERSHIP

Managing the Design Process

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Every remodeler takes a different approach to managing the design process. So, is it really all that surprising when two similar jobs located in two similar markets handled by two different remodelers end up with drastically different profits?

Catering to the same type of customer doesn't guarantee ending up with the same type of business success. But the problem isn't how these jobs ended. Rather, it's how they began. Because I believe that profitability in any good remodeling project begins with managing the design process. And nobody – client or remodeler – is going to reach the best happy ending without a happy beginning.

Welcome to the “organization”

In truth, maximizing profitability and owning the design process begins when the customer walks in the door.

First impressions should leave lasting impressions. Your organization (or lack, thereof) at your place of business translates into the organization someone can expect if he lets you into his home. The cleanliness of your showroom (if you have one), the dress code of your team, and the time you take to meet with that potential client set the stage to set the budget.

This first meeting can weed out those customers who aren't serious about paying for good design the way you are serious about running a smart business. And if you design your operation to look professional, the design process should be priced accordingly. It's a low-pressure or no pressure approach that positions the remodeler as the expert in this relationship. And experts get to lead the process.

Time is Money

When it comes to remodeling, you do this for a living but your client has to live through it. Education is key. Explaining how your business handles a remodeling project start to finish helps set expectations and eliminate unnecessary surprises. How you present each step also helps your business get top dollar and your client get top design out of the process.

Once you've established those parameters, you've developed a rapport with the client. Together, you will get a feel for whether or not you have similar objectives for the job and the budget it will take to reach them.

Then it's time to get every bit of what you're worth. And that means charging a design retainer up front. This fee communicates that you are 100 percent committed to your client and your client is 100 percent committed to your process.

It automatically positions your business above competitors that waste countless hours giving out free estimates and crossing their fingers. You don't want to be the firm that throws out the lowest number. You want to be the firm that commands a certain price. And with a design retainer you can do real work for a real client instead of guess work for somebody on the fence.

Fulfilling Dreams

Money in hand, you now can justify the time and the team it takes to create the vision for this project. You find the best materials to meet the budget. You create the drawings and visuals for the space. You define a realistic timeline for the makeover. And you put your masterpiece before your client to reach agreements on all of these important ingredients in an overall big puzzle.

Your design process is the window through which you and your client begin to discover the possibilities of the end product. It also serves as insurance that each party is getting exactly what they want out of the process – strong profits for your business and reputable work for your client. This collaboration answers questions up front, rather than costly change orders down the line. Then from demolition day to final reveal, the picture comes to life.

How your firm manages this process also shapes the ultimate vehicle for referrals. Because rather than people talking about how they got your services for a steal, you want customers to drive more business your way for the same quality work at a very deserving price.

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