

Streamline Processes in Tough Times

By [jasonvistaprint](#) | September 22, 2010 | [Micro Business Issues](#) | [No comments](#)



Today's *Micro Business contributed post* comes from [Caprice de Lorm](#), owner of [de Lorm Designs](#).

The economy. The stock market. Spending. What a roller coaster ride it has been, and continues to be. How is it impacting my business and goals, at least in one way?

The impacts of the economy to my customers and also to my business, has shown that it is important that business fundamentals are strong and that there is space for the fluctuations that are occurring in the current environment. The downturn has created an opportunity to further streamline processes and increase offerings so that my business continues to be efficient, flexible, and responsive.

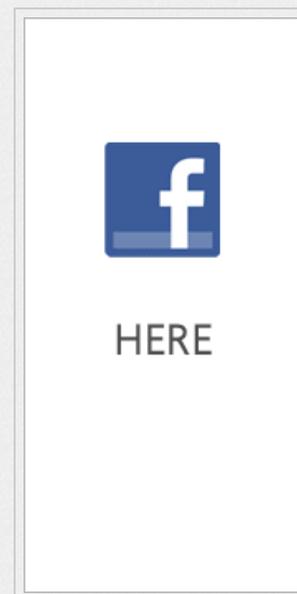
I have noticed that many clients appear distracted financially and mentally as a result of the economic instability. They are concerned about the downturn and unknowns and are doing what they can to operate as economically as possible. Many are not sure what the future holds and its impacts to their short or long term processes. As a result, many clients are focusing on being more careful with spending yet sometimes are behaving in a way that might instead cost more money or result in lower productivity.

Because of the volatility, some clients are not willing to invest in infrastructure at this time or may be doing so in a condensed fashion. What I have observed is that these clients are more hesitant to proceed with projects or project elements. This can result in delays in funding and approval, as well as delays in payment processing. This can also result in a reduced, or "bare bones", version of a project that would otherwise be more comprehensive in scope. For example, a client that would typically want a ten page website is launching with a three page version that can expand as the economy stabilizes. Another client has taken on the task of learning how to edit their site content to save on administrative fees.

The mental distraction and pressures have resulted in some clients going through several iterations of a design prior to proceeding with a project. During implementation, there can be longer delays in getting responses to issues at hand, which ultimately impacts the overall timeline of the effort. Clients seem to be focused on dealing with the impacts of the downturn on their operations and, as a result, are not as freely available to focus on infrastructure efforts. The outcome of this can be more time spent on the administrative portions of an effort, such as overall project management of implementation and changes, which can lead to less time available for working on the project within a specific budget.

To make sure that my business serves clients in the most efficient manner, I continue to be clear on options and implications when discussing projects with clients. To withstand the volatility of the economy and the impacts on my customers, I need to be able to sustain delays or smaller scopes of work. It is as important as ever to make sure that clients understand the impacts of delays in responding to the overall effort and that project elements are clearly scoped out in terms of estimated cost, time, and value. And, as always, it is vital to be flexible on the tactics to meet client needs and do

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so in a way that represents the strategic vision of the customer in a quality and professional manner.

In addition to maintaining clear and consistent communications with my customers, I have further streamlined processes for creating proposals, estimates, project management tracking, and billing. This allows me the time to further seek out and develop opportunities and increase my breadth of knowledge. For example, I continue to increase my experience creating websites using a content management system based approach. Doing so increases the marketability of my business and provides for different application options when creating sites. I am also pursuing more proactively including client training in my portfolio of offerings so that I can further meet the evolving needs of my customers.

While this is a strange and uncertain time for many, this is also a good time to essentialize one's practices and to expand one's scope of skills and networking. Continuing to implement sound business practices that focus on clear and upfront communications and serve the client's needs, while growing one's offerings and abilities, will keep businesses agile and highly competitive during these times and as the future unfolds.



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About the author

The lead contributor to the blog is Jason Keith, senior communications manager at Vistaprint. Jason and his team are deeply involved with Vistaprint's micro business customers on a daily basis and lead the efforts in mining micro business trends, behaviors, and attitudes. A former journalist with more than a decade of experience in the communications field, he and his team conduct surveys, analysis and create micro business case studies to get a better understanding of the issues facing this unique group of entrepreneurs. To reach him directly email microbusiness@vistaprint.com

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