

## Eyes bigger than tummy

Author Linda Julian

You may remember that old warning from your childhood: "beware - your eyes are bigger than your tummy". This was occasionally uttered when someone wanted more on their plate than they could possibly finish, but more often when someone took on too large or challenging a task to maintain interest to completion.

And so it is with some clients: their "eye" for your expert work is bigger than their "tummy". These are the clients who like the look and sound of what you can do, and even become swept up in the excitement of having it all, but their real capacity to digest - and pay for - is much smaller than their appetite.

Beware clients whose "eyes are bigger than their tummies". Classically, they present as:

- less-astute clients who suddenly want the "best of the best" for their business
- clients who, usually acutely cost-conscious and looking for "no frills" solutions, suddenly "fall in love" with expansive plans
- giving rapid-fire agreement to every optional extra, including those of marginal benefit
- allowing substantial project scope creep, without taking stock how all the bells and whistles will add up.

Risks you face in allowing clients to be swept along by an appetite for your work which [no matter how fine] might ultimately prove indigestible to them include:

- embarrassment for them
- cooling in your relationship
- loss of trust and confidence
- angry outbursts
- time spent handling problems
- delinquent bills
- reputation damage.

Protect your clients from this syndrome and do yourself some big favours at the same time by:

- putting yourself into the client's shoes and working out those items from which they'll derive most benefit and focusing on those
- being wary of clients who take an uncharacteristically "no expense spared" approach
- resisting the temptation to sell clients of more than they can afford
- being clear about budget
- rather than selling a client of modest means the "whole box and dice" fully-featured service package up-front, breaking your service offering into a series of stages or "chunks" which deliver benefits and bills, one piece at a time
- for those who insist that they want to embark on a full-scale project right away, segmenting work to deliver interim benefits and bills and so maintain affordability
- encouraging clients to work through cost and timing of likely benefits before embarking on large-scale work

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- reconfirming along the way that the grand vision holds, together with budget capacity to achieve it.

Often, it's the very best professional experts - those with passion for excellent work and results - who are at most risk in this area. Their enthusiasm sweeps not-so-strong clients along.

But the very essence of professionalism is exercised in understanding what's good for a client, appropriate for them, financially prudent for them, organisationally "digestible" by them, and then doing the right thing by preventing all that attaches to the "eyes bigger than tummy" syndrome.

#### **About the author**

Linda Julian is acknowledged as a leading authority on strategic practice development and how to win business for law firms. Since 1979, she has consulted with lawyers and other professionals throughout Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and Asia on a wide range of business acquisition, client retention, and strategic management issues.

Her book *The Passionate Professional: creating value, success, and prosperity* has sold in 13 countries and has received wide acclaim. Linda lectures in strategic management and marketing professional services at post-graduate level. She leads the small and highly specialised Julian Midwinter & Associates consulting practice.