



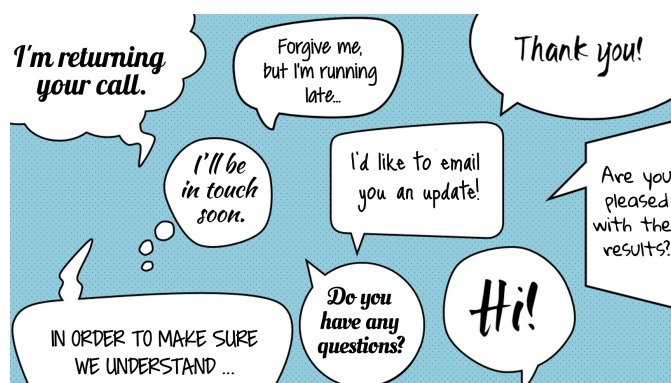
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## Building a Business Reputation Starts With Basics

*By Sandy Nelson for Finance New Mexico*

A common complaint of people who hire specialists or tradespeople to provide a service is that the person didn't show up as promised or didn't even return a phone call. Sometimes all it takes to build a client base is to treat prospective customers with the basic decency you would use in personal relationships that matter to you.



When your company is one of many a client is considering, a few basic habits might help you land the job.

**Respond immediately to a client contact:** Duh, right? But it's surprising how many businesses don't return phone calls or emails right away and thus risk losing work to a competitor who responds quickly to inquiries and solicitations. An immediate reply makes a good impression on a prospective client, because it suggests an eagerness to please and a solid work ethic.

**Show up when you say you will — or a few minutes early:** Being on time for an appointment or job shows respect for the client's time. It builds trust and reassures the client that the work will be done on time. If you're running late, let the client know when to expect you.

**Communicate even when there's not much to say:** Especially with a big project, clients like progress reports even when things are going smoothly, and they don't like to have to hunt down the contractor or service provider to get that information. Take the initiative to keep the client in the loop and anticipate her concerns at any given stage of a project. Being a regular communicator alleviates a client's anxiety and uncertainty, and even high-maintenance clients are calmer when they know that work is going as planned. If someone becomes so demanding that it starts to interfere with work, set up a regular time to talk and stick to it.

**Be available:** Give prospective and active clients more than one way to reach you, depending on the urgency of the communication. For example, you might allow texts and phone calls for emergencies and emails for more involved conversations.

**Assumptions are dangerous:** Some business owners are so averse to one-on-one communication that they don't talk to clients even when it's obvious that a consultation is needed. One Four Corners contractor kept building instead of calling the client when construction dramatically departed from the building plans. The result was a beam that protruded several feet into the master bedroom instead of being part of the master bathroom ceiling. These types of miscommunications can cost a company money if the client refuses to pay for a job improperly done, sues the business or brings the dispute public in online platforms that smear a business's reputation.

**Be the business you would want to hire:** Successful businesses build their reputations on superior workmanship and thorough follow-up. Even when they have a full project schedule, they still make time to bid on future jobs. They're the kinds of businesses anyone would want to patronize and the kind smart entrepreneurs aspire to be.

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