

# Common project management failures and ways to avoid them

By [Jonathan Hawkes](#), issued by [Red & Yellow](#)

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Project failure is never what project managers aim for, but it is unfortunately common, and, with improper planning, almost certainly inevitable.

Jake is in his office, daydreaming about how pleased his client is going to be with the new commercial. It's going to be epic, and will cover Nkandla, Oscar Pistorious, Crimea, Game of Thrones, the missing Malaysian aircraft, and dancing cats (the internet's full of them; they're a must!) It's going to be the best darn toilet paper advert ever. Just then, an intern rushes into his office, and proceeds to cower and mumble unintelligibly in front of him. Something about actors' dogs, spilt sugar-free caramel lattes, ruined filming equipment, and terrorised cats. The intern wants to know what to do (well, the team does). Jake, though, hasn't a clue. This wasn't supposed to happen; it was supposed to be epic ...

This article will look at some of the most common pitfalls that marketing agencies can avoid with effective project management.

The goal, or scope, of every project should be clearly defined from the very beginning, and repeatedly referred to throughout the project. It is essential to know what the client wants, and what the agency aims to deliver. Any changes to the scope should be discussed, documented, and signed off. Not doing so could result in **scope creep**, where the agency tries to deliver more, for less money, in less time. Scope creep is responsible for the majority of project failures. Jake's commercial, for instance, was trying to do too much.

Who needs to talk to whom, when, and about what is essential for the smooth running of any project. The **communication plan** is an often overlooked document that defines when, how, and why communication must take place with various stakeholders. Unless everyone is aware of the correct channels, communication can easily start to break down. Jake's team did not know whom to talk to in a crisis, and this knowledge could have averted some of the disasters.

The **risk plan** is another crucial document that lays out all the possible risks that the project could encounter, and rates them according to their likelihood of occurrence and impact on the project. Once potential risks are known, plans can be put in place to avoid, minimise, or deal with risks that do occur. Risk plans should also be checked and updated regularly throughout the project. Taking out insurance on filming equipment could have allowed Jake's team to buy new equipment quickly.

It is always important to try to meet the client's expectations, within reason. It's tempting to say 'Yes' just to please a client, when you mean 'No' because you do not have the resources to deliver what they want. **Saying no** when the client wanted expensive and demanding celebrities, and saying no when those celebrities want their pampered pooches on set, could have prevented some of the disasters experienced by Jake's team.

All of the previously mentioned pitfalls have one thing in common: Jake. **Inadequately trained and/or inexperienced project managers** can result in major project problems or catastrophic project failure. Taking a [recognised project management course](#) for marketing agencies is the first step to good project management, because unless you have the right skills and experience, running a project is just like trying to herd cats.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Jonathan Hawkes: Knowledge Officer at Red & Yellow** Jonathan joined Red & Yellow mainly due to his fascination in behavioural economics and learning in general. How people apply what they've learnt, and how educators can plug the gap between knowledge and action, is something he's particularly interested in. He thoroughly enjoys researching (read: is obsessed with looking things up on the internet), and making information accessible and practical. Some say he's quarrelsome, but he just enjoys good discussions (particularly philosophical ones).

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