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Articles

Long Term Relationships Work Better For Everyone

How sticking with the same O&M Manual provider works both professionally and financially for both parties

O&M I.T. was conceived nearly a decade ago during a country walk and pub visit with a friend who works for a top London refurb / fitout company. See http://www.oandmit.co.uk/News5.htm for that story.

That relationship and other similar ones have stood the test of time and now benefit both parties in the following ways:

Financially
We are so used to working with our long term client's and vice versa that the amount of time consuming information chasing and communication problems is minimised. So our job is easier which means that we are able to charge these companies less than we do for some other similar sized jobs and clients where things do not run as smoothly.

On the flip side of that, our long term clients all tend to be prompt payers. They have worked out that fees are pretty minimal in the bigger scheme of things so they pay quickly. This certainly helps develop a feeling of mutual goodwill and if it comes to two clients both requiring work done at the same time we will generally favour the one that has a better payment history.

Professionally
Because these jobs tend to run more smoothly, long term clients get a more complete draft manual requiring less checking and commenting. Then, the final issues are delivered quicker. All this adds up to the building owner or CA being happier with the whole O&M / H&S handover documentation process. It reflects well on the main contractor and hence on ourselves. Everyone's happy!

How this relationship has developed to work so well.
Long term clients who know what is involved in using us to compile their O&M Manuals will promptly supply their own information and assist us in obtaining information from any of their subcontractors who are slow in responding to our RFIs (Requests for information). This simply equates to the documentation being prepared quickly and accurately first time which in turn leads to the other benefits just falling into place.

Problems that can hinder this kind of relationship developing.
Failure to supply information promptly or to support us in obtaining information from subcontractors
Any O&M Manual compiler is only as good as the information that they are able to get hold of.
If RFI after RFI are ignored by a client and / or their subcontractors then clearly the documentation is not going to be compiled on time.

There is a tendency for anything relating to the O&M Manuals to drop down everyone's priority list.
If this happens then we have to chase everyone more often and the time wasted in doing this will reflect in prices for subsequent quotes.

Taking the attitude of 'we are paying you to do it so that we don't need to get involved'
Although it would be great to think that this is the case, it simply isn't.
We require some basic initial information to start the ball rolling but it doesn't stop there. If our RFIs for updated info throughout the project life are ignored then the problems start to back up.

Switching O&M Compilers to save money
Competitors will sometimes undercut our quotes in order to gain business and view the initial jobs as loss leaders. This is fine. It's business after all. But, it's always sad when old clients come back after trying other options and having experienced raised prices, hidden extras or a lesser service. There are always going to be glitches when building a business relationship but if everyone is understanding and prepared to work through any problems these things can be easily sorted out and lessons learnt.

Economy of truth in supplying initial pricing information
We've been in this game for a while now and it destroys trust when a client attempts to portray a job as being much smaller and simpler than it actually is.

Typically, we will be asked to quote for a certain number of works packages and then discover that there are substantially more. This is no different from a building owner asking a main contractor for a quote to refurbish 2 floors then expecting to sneak a third floor into the job without paying for it.

Summary
It all comes down to helping each other out.

The amount of input required by our clients to enable us to do a good job in compiling their manuals / files for them is minimal. But, only too often it is ignored or postponed. It's like any other unpleasant job; it tends to get ignored in favour of other stuff.

The clients who benefit most are the ones who take the attitude of 'it has to be done, so I might as well do it now and get it over with'.