

Software Support for the Non-Technical

Communication between software developers and the average software user can often be a challenge. The secret to success generally boils down to the user being specific about what they need and the supplier providing options and answers expressed in understandable terms.

For example, an art gallery manager has decided that she needs to come up with a more efficient way to manage the inventory and artist information for her art gallery. She is computer literate and is currently using an Excel spreadsheet to record her inventory, a contact management system to record her artist details, an accounting program to prepare invoices and pencil and paper to calculate commissions. She is looking for a solution that can do all these tasks but requires a fraction of the time.

This art gallery manager investigates two possible options: Option A is to purchase software that she can download to her computer and with 2 hours of training she'll be up and running. Option B is to purchase a monthly support package that includes the software she needs (accessed via the Internet), 2 hours of training, and ongoing support. Both options handle the back-end functions such as managing clients, inventory, artist details, invoicing, images, shows, mailings, accounting and commission statements.

How does our art gallery manager determine which is right for her? She chooses the software she can download to her computer because she prefers to keep full control of her data. All goes well with her training and she is up and running in no time. When she experiences some difficulty, she doesn't get an answer on the phone, but is forced to go online and open a support ticket for which she will get a response within 24 hours. She needs an answer now!

Had she chosen option B, the situation would be different. The art gallery manager logs on to the Internet with her personalized password and accesses the system where all her data has been uploaded. Daily admin functions are straight forward and she manages with no problem. Eventually, she wants to try creating a direct mail piece and calls up her supplier to learn how. During a short phone call she is walked through how to implement her plan and is pleased to have this new option available to her as she grows her business. Had she discussed the details of her growing business in more depth with her supplier at time of purchase, she may have learned that her added needs over time would result in ongoing support requirements.

Regardless of what industry you are in, the need to communicate in common terms is critical to success and the need for support and customer service will always be high on the list.