SO, YOU THINK YOU WANT TO BECOME A DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER?

A Guide to Getting Started on the Wild West of Digital Project Management

By Ben Aston

dpm

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Hello. Thanks for buying this book.

So You Think You Want To Become a Digital Project Manager? is for anyone considering a career as a digital project manager (DPM). This is a guide to getting started in the wild west of digital project management.

I was inspired to write it after receiving emails from readers of The Digital Project Manager who were interested in starting a career in digital project management.

I was asked the same questions time and again: “What’s it like being a DPM?,” “what do I need to know?,” and “how can I become one?”

People ask because there aren’t that many people who know, and there are even fewer who are talking about it. The digital frontier is the wild west. This is relatively uncharted territory with lots of people not entirely sure what they’re doing and are often playing things fast and loose.

As a relatively new career choice, there isn’t much information available on starting out in the field, because nearly all of the more experienced DPMs around today didn’t start their careers ever planning to end up as a DPM.

So this book is written to address exactly that. I'm not intending to teach anything about project management—although I'm sure you'll pick up some titbits along the way—but I hope to give you an insight into what you can expect if you decide to pursue a career in digital project management.

As you read this book, take the advice for what it's worth. Remember: it's not like becoming an accountant or a lawyer—there is no ultimate qualification that provides the golden ticket or magic formulae to make a career as a DPM. That said, I hope that you find some useful insights within the pages of this small book.

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We'll explore three things

FIRST

what being a DPM is all about and what digital project management is, why I love it, and what DPMs actually do all day.

SECOND

we'll take a look at what makes a great DPM, explore character, competence, and chemistry, and use that knowledge to help you assess the areas in which you need to develop and discern whether you could make it as a DPM.

We'll explore three things

THIRD

assuming that you're still thinking this sounds fun (I hope you do) and it's a career you might want to pursue, we'll look at where you can begin and what steps you can take to start your career as a DPM. In short, I hope you find this a useful guide in becoming a DPM.

Part 1

What’s being a digital project manager all about?

"Be thankful for problems. If they were less difficult, someone with less ability might have your job."

Jim Lovell

To kick things off, I'll set the scene with my story of becoming a digital project manager (DPM).

Next I'll explore what digital project management is all about and dissect the role of a DPM within it. I'll then investigate what the process is all about and give the lowdown on a day in the life of a DPM and the tools that we use. I'll finish off with an honest rundown on why I love being a DPM, and why you might hate it.

The tale of a failed fighter pilot

GROWING UP, I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I liked planes and I liked Top Gun, so it was a natural choice. After a few years, a challenging IQ test, and some troubling career counseling, those dreams came crashing down. I have a very vivid memory of visiting my school career counselor and being presented with the altogether damning results of my career prospect assessment.

The one career for which I seemed to score a very high match in terms of skills, interests, and abilities was a refuse collector. Great for some maybe, but driving a garbage truck didn't have quite the same allure to me as flying a plane.

Then again, neither did being a DPM. I don't think I even knew what a DPM was, let alone wanting to become one. So how did I end up not only being one but also blogging and writing a book about it? Since we got our first x386 PC, I found myself with a mild addiction to the internet. Loading up on free minutes from Compuserve CDs, I started building my first websites and I was hooked.

Early website successes for me included Seuch Times—a satirical online newspaper (since cloned by The Onion) and The World of Ben—a message board and friend profile site (since cloned by Facebook). My real miss was not inventing Google before its time.

Ok, if I'm honest, the websites weren't great, but I loved the global connectivity of the web. I discovered that I found Computer Science itself pretty boring, though, so I completed a BA in International Relations and Politics instead. That led me to working in advertising, but after a few placements at traditional advertising agencies, it became clear that I had my fingers in too many pies—mainly digital ones. I was a bit too maverick for the 'above the line' world of TV spots, print, and radio ads.

So I began my career as an account executive at Wunderman Interactive—an agency where I was able to put some of my digital know-how to good use. After progressing to account manager, I realized that because of my digital knowledge, I would probably make a good DPM, so I made the switch into a hybrid producer role at Dare.

Fast forward another five years to 2011, when I founded The Digital Project Manager to provide a place where people in a similar position can find answers about this emerging and ever-changing field.

In the time in between and since, I've spent more than 10 years working at some of London's and Vancouver's top digital agencies including FCV, Dare, Wunderman, DLKW Lowe, and DDB, before committing to The Digital Project Manager full time in 2018.

I've delivered websites and intranets with everything from videos to CMS, flash games to banner ads, and eCRM to ecommerce sites. I've been fortunate enough to work across a wide range of great clients: automotive brands including Land Rover, Volkswagen and Honda; utility brands including BT, British Gas, and Exxon; FMCG brands such as Unilever; consumer electronics brands including Sony; and a healthy smattering of public sector accounts.

So when it comes to the world of digital project management, I've been there, and done (a bit of) that.

What is digital project management?

DPMs are known by a few different names: web PMs, web producers, digital producers, and DPMs—but for the most part, they're all pretty much the same thing. To understand the role that all of these job titles represent and understand what digital project management is, it's probably best to first unpack the term—digital project management.

FIRST UP, WHAT'S PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

In our digital context, you can think of project management as the planning, organizing, and motivating of resources and processes to deliver a project. A project is a temporary venture where a team comes together to produce something or make something happen. A project is usually time and cost constrained, has a definite beginning and end, and is developed specifically to meet some strategic objectives—there's a business case for the project.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IS TO DELIVER ON A PROJECT'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES WITHIN ITS CONSTRAINTS

The challenge of project management is to deliver on a project's strategic objectives within its constraints. The constraints you're normally going to encounter are budget, scope, and time. Project management takes those constraints and uses a process to deliver a project within them.

It's all about process, process, process. Process deals with the question "how are you going to make this happen?" Faced with a set of requirements and a set of constraints—a budget, a deadline, and a team of people—what are you going to do to deliver something that delivers results?

To address this challenge, there are two key activities involved in project management: creating and managing:

Creating involves developing the framework to run the project within, and developing documentation to facilitate and enable the process to happen and the project to initiate.

Managing a project is the next step and involves leading a team and using processes to manage resources and constraints through to successful delivery or completion.

In a nutshell, that's the project management aspect. Making stuff happen.

SECONDLY, WHAT'S DIGITAL?

This one's a bit more nebulous but you can think of it quite broadly—if it involves pixels, megabytes, and the internet, it's probably digital. It's anything you can see, use, or interact with on a screen, be that a desktop, tablet, mobile, or digital outdoor. Digital projects are any projects that use the internet and web technologies to deliver anything from websites to mobile apps, videos to games, and ecommerce to emails.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IS THE PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND MOTIVATING OR RESOURCES AND PROCESSES TO DELIVER A PROJECT

So bringing those two elements together—digital + project management—is simply the leading, planning, organizing, motivating, and delivery of internet related projects that are delivered on screens or some kind of electronic device. Digital project management is making stuff happen in a digital world.

What is a digital project manager?

Let's start by taking a look at a definition of the role of a DPM. What is it that a DPM actually does?

It depends. Defining the role of a DPM is not straightforward—there's really no standard as to what the role entails. Depending on the agency, the role that a DPM can play can vary massively. There's often overlap between DPMs and account managers—and particularly at smaller agencies, there can often be overlap between QA, user experience, and business analysis too.

Bring teams together to make things happen—it's all about leading, empowering, facilitating, and communicating.

If digital project management is all about making things happen, and using processes to make things happen, then the role of a DPM is to bring teams together to make things happen—it's all about leading, empowering, facilitating, and communicating.

It's a complex role which requires a unique skillset. The job requires an understanding from a strategic perspective of why you should do a project, what technology could be used to achieve it, what it could look like, how it could work, and importantly, how much it will cost and when it could be delivered.

A DPM IS PROBABLY THE KIND OF PERSON WHO NOT ONLY MATCHES THEIR SOCKS AFTER DOING THE LAUNDRY, BUT ORGANIZES THEIR SOCK DRAWER TOO.

DPMs have to be great communicators. As digital project management touches all departments of an agency, we need to be able to speak and understand the languages of the different departments of an agency and be comfortable navigating through ambiguity of all kinds to create clarity.

Communication is key to internal communication and navigating the swamps of inter-departmental politics, but it's also critical externally too, with third party suppliers. Most importantly, communication skills are critical to successfully working with clients who themselves aren't entirely sure what they want, need, and more often than not, have no idea how much things should cost or how long it should take.

At the most basic level, a DPM nudges a project along and keeps things on track. They're organized and love tracking details; probably the kind of person who not only matches their socks after doing the laundry, but organizes their sock drawer too!

A great DPM casts vision and leads their team by serving.

Anyone can be organized and track details, but the difference between a good and great DPM is in providing real leadership to a project; being the hub of knowledge and source of truth for a project; and influencing people, anticipating and resolving issues, and seeing the big picture. A great DPM casts vision and leads their team by serving—greasing the wheels so that the project team can follow in their wake and be empowered to successfully deliver their best possible work.

Understanding process: how to manage a project

Now that we've explored the role, let's dive a bit deeper into what a DPM does to make projects happen. To make projects happen in a digital world, DPMs manage processes which describe the inputs, activities, and outputs to make projects happen.

DPMs love talking about processes nearly as much as designers like talking about how great their MacBooks are. Process might not sound that interesting, but it is important.

To properly understand what digital project management is about, a good place to start is understanding what process is all about. Process is what DPMs facilitate—it's how projects happen and how they are taken from brief through to delivery. Try to imagine how you might build a house—you'd need to consider the architect's plans, the materials, and the sequence for construction to make it turn out as it should. Process defines how all of these things tie together to ensure that a project is a success.

Process is all about the steps you take in order to deliver a project. Process defines how different project phases are strung together to maintain quality, who gets involved at what state, and who needs to sign off on what, when.

Like the way an architect draws up the plans for a house, there are endless options for the type of house you're building. The plans dictate how the house is then built—depending on the requirements, the house can be built in many different ways.

A WATERFALL APPROACH IS THE PROCESS THAT EVERYONE REVERTS TO, EVEN IF THEY CALL IT AGILE ANYWAY.

Similarly, there's typically a variance between the type of process used on a conceptual project, where the output is an idea which is then brought to life in something like a banner ad—and a production based project where the output is not just an idea but a product, like a website.

There's a lot of excitement about agile processes—people love the idea that they can get something out the door more quickly, cheaply, and efficiently. In theory it's great and sometimes, for some projects, with some clients, it works just as it should.

But largely due to some of the challenges of supporting agile (fixed budgets, fixed requirements, fixed timelines, and a lack of approval authority), a waterfall approach with some kind of iterative development is more often the process that everyone reverts to, even if they call it agile anyway.

This gated approach, where project phases are done in sequence, allows for requirements to be fully defined up front, with budgets and timelines to match so that the client knows exactly what they're getting. Often though, in the build phase of a project, a more agile approach is used to run development in sprints to capitalize on an iterative and incremental approach which allows clients to see progress earlier in a project and compress the overall timeline.

Process is all about the steps you take in order to deliver a project.

Broadly speaking, although agencies market their process in different ways, fundamentally they're all pretty much the same. Process always begins with some kind of definition of the problem, followed by the design of a solution, and then finished off with the build or development of the solution which is then deployed and evaluated so that the process can begin again.

It's difficult to totally standardize processes because of varying client and project requirements but in short you can think of the process as following these five steps. If you're interested in finding out more about each of the steps (and if you're new to digital project management and going for an interview, you should be) you'll find a detailed explanation of the process in the appendix.

A day in the life of a digital project manager

"So, this is my life. And I want you to know that I am both happy and sad and I'm still trying to figure out how that could be."

Stephen Chbosky,
The Perks of Being a Wallflower

It's all very well explaining the process and the role but when it comes to the nuts and bolts of how DPMs do their role and deliver projects, what are we actually doing?

The beauty of the role of a DPM is that every day is different. There really is never an average day; you're guaranteed that no two days are going to be the same. Every day you'll face fresh challenges on different projects. The client, the type of project, your project team, and the stage of the project will all have a massive impact on how you end up spending your day. As a rough guide, here's an overview of how a typical day might pan out.

A Day In The Life Of A DPM

any given day

Internal meetings

You might start the day by briefing your team or attending a daily standup on a project. You could also have a new project in the initiation phase, so you spend time in internal meetings with different teams across the agency to develop an approach.

11.00

Desk working

When you've gathered those insights from your team, you'll then find you need to create cost estimates, timeline project Gantt charts, and statement of work (SoW) documents.

12.00

Checking in

No matter how well you brief your team or how straightforward you think the task they are working on should be, people have a tendency to lose their way and go rogue. "Doing the rounds" and checking in with your team to look over their shoulder (which they generally hate) is often time well spent, as you can gently refocus their effort and direction.

A Day In The Life Of A DPM

any given day

Travel

You'll often find yourself traveling for a client meetings. If you're lucky, you can tether your laptop to your phone and work on the move or use the time to make some client calls.

15.00

16.00

Client meetings

As we're the hub of information on a project, clients love talking to PMs, as they can give them the information and assurance they need that their project is on track. You'll find yourself in client meetings for status updates, briefings, or perhaps a UX or creative work in progress presentation.

18.00

So the only thing that is typical in any given day is constantly re-prioritizing and evaluating your tasks to ensure that you keep momentum across your different projects.

DPMs are plate spinners. Each project is a plate you just have to keep spinning by giving it just the right amount of push and momentum at the critical points of a project.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IS THE PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND MOTIVATING OF RESOURCES AND PROCESSES TO DELIVER A PROJECT

Tools in a digital project manager's toolkit

"To the man who only has a hammer, everything he encounters begins to look like a nail."

Abraham Maslow

We've covered off the types of things a DPM will do in a typical day, but what tools are used? You'll find that the tools vary across agencies and between DPMs as everyone has their own preference, but each will have tools to help them across project planning and project control.

Here's a rough guide (based on real data from a random working day) of my DPM toolbox that I use as I'm leading and managing projects.

Phone

Yes, even a DPM has to use the phone. Talking is always better than sending an email.

Outlook

A significant proportion of time is spent reading and responding to emails to clients and people working on your projects.

Slack

Increasingly we use Slack throughout the day to message team members who we're not sat with and to connect with colleagues or suppliers offsite.

Excel

Another significant proportion of time is spent in Excel usually for creating cost estimates, change requests, status reports, and risk assessments.

Project

It's probably no surprise that Project is used to create timing and project Gantt charts and also used in conjunction with Excel to create estimates and forecast resource requirements on projects.

Chrome

We use a lot of online project management tools such as Basecamp, Jira, Google Docs, EasyBacklog, and Trello. You'll also find yourself doing a fair bit of browsing as you research unknown elements for projects to find solutions fast. And you'll end up using Chrome to debug and QA projects.

Evernote

When you're in meetings, it's important to take notes. Assuming you've got a laptop, capturing them in the meeting, in real time using something like Evernote means you can very quickly send out a contact report after a meeting by giving it just the right amount of push and momentum at the critical points of a project.

Word

There's always documentation that needs to be produced: scope of work documents, change requests, technical specifications, and requirements documents are often developed in Word.

PowerPoint

Whenever work needs to be presented to the client it needs to be presented in the best possible way so PowerPoint is often used to compile work.

WHY I LOVE BEING A DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER

I'VE GOT A TERRIBLE ATTENTION SPAN.

THANKFULLY DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROVIDES THE PERFECT OUTLET FOR THAT SHORTCOMING. HERE'S WHY I LOVE MY JOB.

I Love Solving Problems

My immediate reaction to a problem is to be searching for a solution. There's something incredibly satisfying about fixing something; whether it's a client's or consumer's problem, creating something that fixes things is very rewarding. And it's exciting to build and create solutions for things in a digital world where technology is always evolving so that even when you're faced with the same challenges time and time again, there is always something new which can provide a fresh solution to challenges.

I Love Making Things Happen

It's pretty simple. I love to lead. I'm motivated by progression, by seeing things advance and progress and being the catalyst to make things happen. I love the point where you stop just talking about something and start to action a plan to do something about it. I love leading teams that create things together that no one ever thought was possible.

I Love Seeing Ideas Brought To Life

I love seeing an idea, which starts off as just a vague idea in someone's head, move onto paper and transition through an agency to become something that you can interact with—and because it's digital, I love that the process of making it happen can take just a few days.

I Love Bringing Teams Together

Being a DPM means you get to work with a range of people from different disciplines, and you're the lynchpin that holds it all together. I love the challenge of bringing people with different experience together to build things; some strategic, some creative, others analytical, and some technical. The fun is in the power plays—each discipline wants to make their mark on a project, and the fun is in holding the tension between everyone's needs and wants in balance.

I Love The Fusion Of Business, Creative, Technology, And User Experience

If I'm honest, I'm a bit of a Jack of all trades (and yes, a master of none). But being that Jack of all trades is perfect as a DPM—a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. As DPMs there's no part of a project that you're not privy to. You get to cover it all—from the business aspect through to the technology implementation—you get to play with it all!

WHY YOU MIGHT HATE BEING A DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER

"If at first you don't succeed then skydiving definitely isn't for you."

Steven Wright

So here's the thing—while I love being a DPM, I would be remiss if I didn't mention it can also be a really, really tough gig. You'll need a suite of superhero skills in order to survive and thrive. Here's why you might actually hate it.

It's Complicated

Technology isn't always straightforward. It's constantly changing, so you can find yourself out of date very quickly. One thing is consistent with digital projects—they're complex beasts with a lot of moving and seemingly conflicting parts.

In that environment, it can be difficult to manage a team when you're unsure exactly what they're doing, or how they should go about doing it. All the while, the client keeps changing their mind about what they want and your team tries to convince you to change the way you're running the project.

In this context it requires some serious leg work to properly plan and manage a project. And you're doing it in an industry that is constantly evolving, so you need to keep your skills sharp so you can be confident that you do actually know what you're doing.

You're An Easy Target

Whose fault is it when a project fails—it's obvious isn't it? Everyone looks around and sees the only person trying to sort out the mess and willing to take any responsibility—it's the DPM.

If a project's going badly, regardless of the actual reason, it's always easy to point the finger at the DPM and put project failure down to poor project management. After all, if only the project was managed properly, it would be a success, right? And there's usually very little you can do to prove otherwise. The truth is, the buck stops with you.

It's Stressful

So, because you're an easy target, having an off day isn't really an option. You have to deliver on budget, on time, and on scope. Every time. That's a bit tricky when you've got conflicting client priorities, not enough resources, and internal battles between different departments. But everyone wants to be reassured that the project is running just fine. Often, you're really not sure it is. There's rarely enough time to do things as they should be done, but you have to figure out how to make it work anyway. Every day.

It's Dependent On Others

Deep down you might know you could have been an awesome UX designer or coder, but in your role as DPM, you really shouldn't be doing it.

So no matter how good a DPM you are, or how hard you work to document and control your project, your projects can still fail because people are unpredictable creatures. Your team might suck or just be ill and your client will probably be expecting the moon on a stick.

You're at the mercy of your project team who doesn't directly report to you and has differentpriorities—they just want to look good. And you're at the mercy of your client who can probably get away with murder before anyone starts asking whether or not you should really be working with them.

No One Will Ever Thank You

If you thrive on words of affirmation, this isn't the job for you. The role rarely holds any value to the client—to the extent that clients will often question why they need project management at all!

It's thankless—the industry and clients are happy to celebrate beautiful UX, great design, and awesome technical wizardry. They have awards, dinners, and everyone feels awesome. None of it could have happened without a DPM, but no one is ever going to specifically call you out for the amazing project management you did on an award winning project. What you do is table stakes.

YOU'VE GOT TO BE SELF-CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT YOU ROCK ANYWAY! SO IN SHORT, BEING A DPM IS A TALL ORDER. IT REQUIRES A CORNUCOPIA OF SKILLS AND A HEALTHY SIDE HELPING OF TENACITY.

Part 2

What makes a great digital project manager?

"Wisdom isn't the acquisition of Knowledge. It's knowing which Knowledge is worth acquiring."

Frank Tyger

In this section, we'll take a look at what makes a great digital project manager and explore three aspects: character, competence, and chemistry.

But hold on a second—aren't we jumping the gun here? We're not even DPMs yet, so why do we need to know what makes a great DPM? Here's why: considering what makes a great DPM is worth exploring as it'll serve as a checklist of what to develop in yourself as you grow in your career.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER?

1. You're One Of A Kind

As with any discipline within an agency, or any comparison of people, you'll rarely find two with the same background, training, and skill-set. Perhaps more than other disciplines within digital agencies, you'll find that DPMs rarely set out on their career path with the intention of becoming one. That said, popular routes into digital project management most commonly seem to be through a background in either account management, IT, or software development.

2. You're A Piece Of History

Depending on a DPM's professional provenance, their skills and way of working are likely to shape their approach to digital project management. DPMs from an account management background will be great at understanding the strategic and financial workings of a project, whereas a DPM from a development background is likely to be much stronger technically, and accurate in their understanding of exactly what's got to be done to deliver a project.

3. Be Yourself, Only Better

But there's got to be some commonality, so these are the things I'm looking to develop in myself and that I look for when I'm interviewing someone or considering whether or not someone is ready for a promotion! I've found Bill Hybels' approach to Courageous Leadership, using the 3 C's (character, competence, and chemistry) useful, so we'll begin there. Whilst this is by no means an exhaustive explanation of being a great DPM, it's a good lens to look through to identify your own and other people's paths to develop into a great DPM.

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

John Wooden

Of the three areas we're looking at which make a great DPM—character, competence, and chemistry—character is probably the most important. Where competence and skills can be learned over time and good chemistry is helpful but not essential, changing and adapting your character is going to take considerably more effort!

But while it's difficult, it can also be important in defining the kind of DPM you are and the extent to which you will be liked and admired by your team and clients. Someone with good character will be someone that other people want to work with. And it can also mean that they're more likely to forgive your competence issues, and through it, enable you to develop better chemistry. So take a look at three key areas for character development below and ask yourself—are you hitting the mark?

4. Leadership

For me the most important characteristic of a DPM is leadership. If you can't lead other people, you can't manage a project. As a DPM, you need to lead, to be proactive, and to pull people along with you. You need to be the lynchpin, the person that everyone in the team looks at to find out what's going on and where a project is at. The only way of the project team knowing this is if you, the DPM, are actually managing the project and leading from the front.

This doesn't mean issuing orders as much as checking in with people and making sure you know:

1. **What everyone in your team is working on**
2. **Where they're at with it**
3. **When they'll be finished**
4. **What the next steps are**
5. **What could throw the project off course?**

It's important that as a DPM you ensure everyone's pulling in the same direction. You can often find, especially at the beginning of a project, that people in different departments have got different ideas at even a very basic level about what is being produced and what needs to be done to produce it. So when people have different ideas, a DPM's ability to lead is very important to gently guide them back on track. It also means taking action before a risk escalates and becomes an issue, and being on the front foot all the time, being proactive, and anticipating what's coming next.

5. Maintaining Personal Integrity

Before you can lead others, you need to be leading yourself. As much as anything else, this is an exercise in self control, motivation, and discipline. This means not being lazy with anything. Everything you do at work is a reflection of your integrity—check and double check everything to make sure it's correct.

If you always make silly mistakes, you're going to find it difficult for anyone to take you seriously. Throughout a project, this also means treating people not just as a 'resource' to milk for all its worth, but as people that need care and respect, no matter what's going on.

6. Being Calm Under Pressure

Because of the demands of the above, it should be clear by now that the DPM role is demanding and stressful at times. High blood pressure is inevitable. You're trying to bring together different people—clients, suppliers, and colleagues, each with their own agenda for a project, and more often than not, they're not totally compatible. Not only that, but ultimately as a DPM you're responsible for delivering a project on time and on budget, and making sure it works as you said it would—that in itself can be stressful.

BEFORE YOU CAN LEAD OTHERS, YOU NEED TO BE LEADING YOURSELF.

The important thing in all this is being able to tolerate the pressure and not become overwhelmed by it. Your goal is to try to bring peace and to deliver in a world of total chaos. It can be incredibly stressful, but the key is to keep calm, and stay focused on delivery rather than get your knickers in a twist.

YOUR GOAL IS TO TRY TO BRING PEACE AND DELIVER IN A WORLD OF TOTAL CHAOS.

7. Competence

Whereas experience comes from years of running projects and can be applied to specific projects, competence is something far more fundamental and important—the way you approach a project, the skills you use, and the rigor you apply.

Even if you have done a certain type of project before, by the time you come around to do it again, the technology will have invariably developed, the standards changed and the best practice that you thought you knew isn't best any more. It's not that experience doesn't matter, but you can find vastly experienced DPMs that aren't very good, and inexperienced but competent DPMs whose approach makes them far better at managing projects.

BEING ABLE TO WRITE QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY CAN OFTEN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING DINNER AT YOUR DESK AND GOING HOME!

This is what makes digital so exciting; there's always something new to learn and to become competent in. So apart from the real need to be keeping yourself up to speed with the latest digital technologies and developments, what are the core competencies that DPMs need to function well? The following are 5 key areas for competence development.

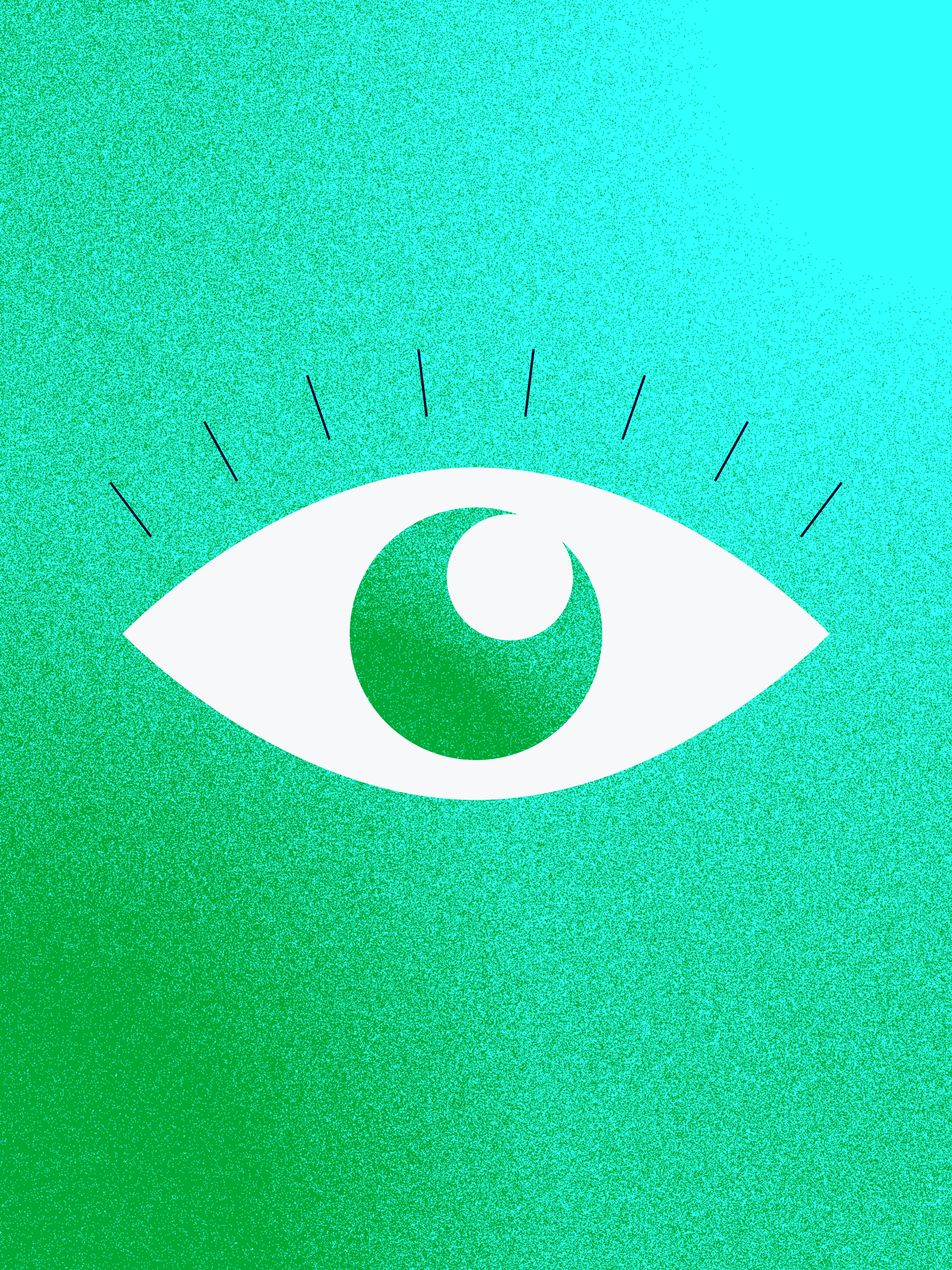
The 3Rs: reading, writing, and (mental) arithmetic. This includes excellent oral and written communication skills. Often the cause of project failure is simply down to poor communication, so being able to communicate clearly and succinctly is pivotal to project management success.

Good mental arithmetic is important too; you'd be surprised the difference knowing your times tables makes. It means you can quickly give ballpark estimates without having to get a calculator out or telling them you'll get back to them half a day later. Learn your tables!

Being able to quickly read through documentation and write it quickly and accurately is essential to being efficient. Creating documentation can often be the thing that you end up doing at the end of the day when you're not having to manage a project, so being able to write quickly and accurately can often be the difference between having dinner at your desk and going home.

8. Functional Skills

Besides being smart, a base level of project management knowledge and an understanding of different life cycles and which one is most appropriate to a project is vital. These include project scheduling, task estimation, statement of work writing, risk management, and an ability to spot trends and update project documentation.



9. A Good Eye

Some people have this naturally—it's knowing what works from a visual or design perspective; what looks good and why. This is something that you can develop both by listening to creative directors when they're critiquing work and by reading up on design blogs (take a look at my DPM reading list, below, for starters). Once you've honed this skill it means you can add a lot of value making sure that the creative work is right before you start sharing it with other people and getting them to sign off. The fun bit is that you also get to make your mark on the project (don't tell the creative directors that though!).

10. Technical Nous

Knowing what's possible technically and what's not, and even more importantly, how much work might be involved in a type of project, is invaluable. DPMs don't need to know all the details, but we do need to know enough to make good project decisions and to be able to ask the right questions.

As with mental arithmetic, it means you can very quickly give estimates for the length of time and cost of a project. It's also very helpful when you're managing developers—coming up with workarounds to issues or being able to ascertain whether or not enough progress is being made as it should. It is also very useful in client facing situations as it gives you the confidence to explain where a project is really at, rather than having to give vague answers about the project being 'in development'.

11. Commercial Awareness

Before a project starts, and while it's being scoped and costed, you need to be aware of the potential value of the project to the client but also know if they can really afford what they're asking for. Is the brief right for the budget they've got? When a project is underway, is it on budget and are you going to be able to continue delivering it on budget? At all times you should have an idea of the status of the budget of your projects; financial tracking should be updated weekly and any variations from budget accounted for and where possible mitigated before they happen.

11. Liking People Like Us

When recruiting or forming a team, you'll naturally gravitate towards people who are like you, and those who you have instant chemistry with. That's why character and competency are the things you should be looking for first—it forces you to prioritize what's most important. But that's not to say that chemistry is unimportant; good chemistry within a team makes everyone's lives happier. So what skills can you develop to improve your chemistry within project teams and what should you look out for when recruiting DPMs?

Attention to detail is one of those things that people don't notice unless you haven't got it! Nothing dents other people's confidence in your ability quite like attention to detail. Double, then triple check everything you do, from writing emails, to creating timing plans and probably most importantly, cost estimates. And if you're too busy to check, ask for more time, or at least tell people that it's a draft and you'll need to check it later.

"THE MEETING OF TWO PERSONALITIES IS LIKE THE CONTACT OF TWO CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES: IF THERE IS ANY REACTION, BOTH ARE TRANSFORMED." C.G. JUNG

Getting on with people; when there's conflict, when you don't like them very much, or when you would rather not have to work with them, is the crux of what chemistry is all about. It's something that we as DPM's need to continually develop.

12. Diplomacy

Digital project management can be a bit of a classic power struggle; it can be a fight for control over limited resources. There are always jobs to be done, and rarely enough resources to do them. Learning to navigate your way through horse-trading and bartering, knowing when to put your foot down, and knowing when you can afford to let up is a very useful skill. The challenge of course is to do this without alienating yourself, being too annoying, and upsetting other DPMs in the process (who need the same resources that you do to get their projects delivered on time). To do that, diplomacy is essential—learn to win people over, and you'll go far.

13. Persuasiveness

Similar to diplomacy, being persuasive and confident in selling in your scope, costs, or timings to an account management team, for them to in turn sell to the client, is a hugely valuable skill. If you can get your message across and persuade senior stakeholders, even in front of a large group, that you're right, you've got a much better chance of delivering a project the way it should be delivered. Conversely, if you get this wrong, you'll find your costs and timings get eroded, your scope creeps, all while your timelines shrink! You've got to be confident, know your stuff, and be persuasive.

14. People Skills

It'll come as no great surprise that you get much better results from a project team if they like you. Demonstrating and showing concern for the project team is a good place to start—you'll get better work as a result. At the very least, you need to get along with others and make them believe that you're on their side. The project team needs to believe that you're rooting for them and that you're not just someone who's in the driver's seat. This can be especially important in getting your team excited about a project; focus on motivating them rather than intimidating them!

15. Communication, Communication, Communication

So much of what it takes to be a great DPM lies in excellent, clear, and concise communication—it's what ties an entire project together. It's the DPM's role to be the hub of communication for a project. Projects often fail simply because important information wasn't communicated clearly to the right people at the right time. DPMs need to be able to build rapport with a range of different personalities to effectively communicate with their clients, their peers, and their teams.

By working on your character: leadership, maintaining personal integrity, and being calm under pressure; developing your competence: reading, writing, arithmetic, a good eye, technical nous, and commercial awareness; and refining your chemistry: diplomacy, persuasiveness and people skills, you'll ensure you're on the right path to becoming a great DPM.

Part 3

Where to start your digital project manager journey

“The Scariest Moment Is Always Just Before You Start.”

Stephen King, On Writing: A Memoir Of The Craft

By now I hope you've got a good idea as to what being a DPM is all about, and what it takes to become a good one. But where do you go from here? What are the best steps to take on the path to become a DPM? In this final section we'll explore what to read, learn, and build, and make suggestions for furthering your experience and networking so that you can land your first DPM gig.

Start Reading

"THE MAN WHO DOES NOT READ HAS NO ADVANTAGE OVER THE MAN WHO CANNOT READ."

MARK TWAIN

EXPLORE SOME BLOGS

A good way to get into the headspace of what it's like to be a DPM is to start reading some industry blogs. You're not going to find all of it relevant, and you're going to read some seemingly conflicting things but it's an important step to begin to understand the world of digital project management.

Whether or not you find the content in these blogs interesting is actually a great test for whether or not you'll enjoy life as a DPM. If you're going to make it as a DPM you're probably reading some of these blogs already, or you at least have a genuine interest in most of them.

Project Management

- All Top Project Management
- Sam Barnes
- Adventures in Project Management
- ProjectManagement.com
- A Girl's Guide to Project Management
- Project Smart
- The Papercut Project Manager
- Project Management Hut
- PM Student
- Every Day DPM

IA/UX

- UXmatters
- A List Apart
- Interaction Design Association | IxDA
- UX Magazine
- UX Booth
- Boxes and Arrows
- Axure

Design

- Co.Design
- Smashing Magazine
- net magazine

Technology

- Techmeme
- TechCrunch
- ReadWriteWeb
- Geeky Gadgets
- GeekWire
- Wired.co.uk
- Engadget
- ZDNet

Social Media

- Social Media Today
- SocialTimes
- Mashable

SEO

- Search Engine Marketing
- Search Engine Watch
- Search Engine Land

Ad Industry

- Campaign
- Adweek
- Digiday

Inspiration

- Fast Company
- Co.Exist: World changing ideas and innovation
- TED: Ideas worth spreading
- Kickstarter
- PSFK
- Seth's Blog
- Behance

READ SOME BOOKS

There aren't many good books specifically on digital project management but below is a handful that might be worth taking a look at:

- Interactive Project Management: Pixels, People, and Process (Voices That Matter)
- Herding Chickens: Innovative Techniques for Project Management
- A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK(R) Guide
- Web ReDesign 2.0: Workflow that Works (2nd Edition)
- Web Project Management: Delivering Successful Commercial Web Sites
- Website Owner's Manual
- Real Web Project Management: Case Studies and Best Practices from the Trenches
- Managing Humans: Biting and Humorous Tales of a Software Engineering Manager
- Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams (3rd Edition)

Start Learning

LEARN THE BASIC SOFTWARE

If you're serious about becoming a DPM, there's a handful of programs that you need to be confident in using.

MICROSOFT OFFICE

First of all, get yourself familiar with MS Office—if you can't use this, you're going to find it difficult to do anything! Going into your first role, you'll be using MS Office every day so make sure you're up to speed with the following:

- MICROSOFT OUTLOOK
- MICROSOFT WORD
- MICROSOFT EXCEL
- MICROSOFT POWERPOINT

If you haven't already got a copy of this software, head to http://office.microsoft.com/ to download a trial version.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

It's worth familiarizing yourself with some project management specific tools as well, so that you can get a grip on the tools that DPMs use.

PROJECT PLANS	PM TOOLS
• MS Project • Smartsheet • Gantt charts	• Asana • Trello • Basecamp

You don't need to be an expert, but at the beginning of your career you need to have a decent working knowledge. Have a play around, create some projects and watch a few tutorials on YouTube to get familiar with what the different products do, and think about how you might use them on a project. If you haven't got a real-life project you can practice with, make something up—a party, a holiday, it really doesn't matter. What's important is that you learn the process of pulling something together.

Start Building

There really is no substitute for experience. So to be honest, rather than spending any more time reading this book or anything else, you should actually start doing something about it. If you're serious about becoming a DPM, then the best way to learn is to get some experience by doing it yourself. Once you make a start, you'll discover things along the way which will help you to become a much better DPM. You'll look at problems through a different lens and as you do, you'll be gaining valuable experience. But where do you start? Below are five things which you can do to start getting some experience so you'll actually have something worth talking about in an interview.

#1

RUN A PROJECT

This is the easiest and simplest way to start. It doesn't matter what the project is, what matters is the disciplines that you're exposing yourself to and the way you run it. For the activities below, run them all as though they were real-life projects for a client. Write a brief, create a project plan or a timeline, create an estimate, define a statement of work, and then keep track of your progress along the way. It'll be great conversation material for an interview later.

#2

WIREFRAME AN APP

Most projects that you'll manage as a DPM will involve a user experience (UX) phase. Come up with an idea for a mobile app and download a tool like **Balsamiq** or use **Moqups** to create some wireframes.

Start thinking about usability, making something that's easy to use, that's rooted in user insights, and that's business driven. It shouldn't be complex, but should focus on doing something really well.

Bonus points for originality, but if you're struggling to think of an app idea, think about what makes your favorite app suck, and create an improved version.

#3

DESIGN SOMETHING

Get yourself a copy of Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator and head over to LinkedIn Learning to take a few quick lessons. Start by designing a mood board to create a look and feel before trying your hand at designing a logo or even that app you just wireframed. If you don't feel like there's a creative bone in your body, too bad—do it anyway. It's important that you understand how difficult it is to be creative on demand and the effort involved in designing and iterating on a design.

BUILD A SITE

So much of what we do as DPMs is focused around building websites. So go and build one! Buy a domain name from **GoDaddy**, buy some hosting from **Media Temple**, install **WordPress**, add some plugins, and configure a theme. The website doesn't have to be fancy but why not use it to create a portfolio of the work you've done, or at the very least, start writing a blog? It really isn't that difficult at all. And you'll learn a lot along the way.

MANAGE SOMEONE

OK, so you might not have an army of volunteers lining up for this one, but you need some experience leading people and managing a team to work together to create something. Any project where there are conflicting ideas around what, how, when, and how much should the project achieve is perfect!

The key isn't in learning to manage subordinates, but in managing your contemporaries. That's because in a typical DPM role, the teams you work with won't report directly to you—you're not their line manager but you are responsible for bringing together a team to work together to make something amazing happen. There might be opportunities outside of the work to manage teams—why not organize an event for a charity?

Get Some Experience

Decide if it's really for you by doing it.

GO AND GET A JOB

It doesn't really matter where you start, as long as you stop thinking about it and start somewhere. It's ideal if the job you find enables you to work on fun projects, but at the start, keep your head down and learn fast.

If you're starting out as a project coordinator, you'll probably find yourself working on pretty boring and simple projects and tasks to start with. Don't lose hope, but focus on getting the basics right, applying excellence to everything you do. Remember that everyone has to start somewhere and eventually, if you keep doing it right, people are going to start to take notice.

KEEP READING, LEARNING, AND BUILDING ON THE SIDE

It's important to stay fresh and excited about digital. When you're working on boring projects this can be pretty tough. So to stay excited about digital, make sure you keep doing the reading, learning, and building that you did to get you to this point. You'll find that by keeping up to date with the latest trends, you'll also be able to bring a fresh perspective to your projects.

START NETWORKING

No matter how good you are, unless you're meeting the right people, you're unlikely to land yourself a job. So in tandem with reading, learning, building, and getting some experience, you need to start playing the networking game hard.

What's hardest of all is that it's totally reliant on other people who are busy and usually have better things to do than help out someone who's pretty green. So stick at it, even when you don't get any response, and eventually you'll start making connections with people. Be prepared for the long haul though.

LINKEDIN

If you haven't already, get yourself on LinkedIn and start creating a profile. Rather than potential employers wading through CVs, it's much more likely that they'll just look you up on LinkedIn. Leave out your bartending experience and summer jobs unless you can somehow relate it back to project management. You'll find potential employers are much more likely to respond to you if they think you're a serious DPM candidate.

GET TO THE CITY

If you live in a small town and you're serious about a career as a DPM, you probably need to move to a big city, ideally the capital (or a city of at least 1 million people). Of course, there are great companies outside big cities, but you're much more likely to bump into fellow DPMs and find events, meetups, and opportunities as well as quickly further your career in larger cities. You can always move back later!

MEETUPS AND DPM EVENTS

Check out DPM events on Meetup.com. They're a great free way to begin to meet people in the industry. Don't restrict yourself to just attending digital project management meetups—check out those for UX, design, and development to get exposure on other parts of the industry and provide some interesting fodder for interviews. See if there are any DPM events in your city.

GET TALKING

Google some local web development agencies and look them up on LinkedIn to find out who the DPMs are. Get in touch and offer to take them out for coffee to pick their brain. Ask them their story and find out how they got into digital project management. Find out what they'd recommend to someone starting out in the business. Discover what they've learnt along the way and ask them if they know anyone looking for keen beans like yourself. Try not to talk too much about yourself but let them know you're serious about becoming a DPM.

Prepare For Interviews

Hopefully after a while you'll land yourself an interview with an agency. It's important to prepare properly for it because at the start of your career, these opportunities don't come around too often.

If you're sitting at the table trying to convince someone you're right for a role, it's worth preparing for it. As with any interview, there are a few things the interviewer needs to establish:

- Have they got the right experience?
- Have they got a good work ethic?
- Are they good at what they do?
- Are they going to fit into the agency/ team?
- What are their motivations for moving?

Think about how you might talk to the questions below.

- How did you get into project management? Why digital?
- Talk me through your experience and the types of projects you've managed.
- Tell me what you enjoy about PMing.
- What don't you enjoy?
- Give me an example of a project that went well. Why was it a success?
- Give me an example of a project that didn't go well. Why didn't it go well?
- What did you do to get it back on track?

As an interviewee, be very careful with what you put on your CV in terms of experience! It's important to be able to talk in depth about projects you claim to have delivered, and be totally comfortable with the details: knowing what language it was written in, the history of a project, the challenges you came up against, and how you overcame them. Make sure you've got good examples of projects that were successes and those that were failures. The valuable thing is the awareness of why they went wrong and what you'd do differently next time. When talking through your experience, if it is broad, make sure you let the interviewer know that, and also be clear about what you enjoy doing; you don't want to be offered a job for the type of work you don't really enjoy.

EXPLORE CHARACTER

Leadership: How would you describe your approach to managing projects? How do you manage people and projects?

People Management: How do you deal with people who aren't working fast enough, or the quality of their work isn't good enough?

Personal Integrity: How do you manage keeping your documentation up to date throughout a project?

Calmness: What gets you stressed out on a project?

As an interviewee, make sure the interviewer is going to have every confidence in your care, thoroughness, level-headedness, and attention to detail. Offer to show examples of your work and documentation, or better still, bring it with you so you inspire confidence that you know the detail of what you're presenting. When asked questions about working with tricky people or stressful situations, focus on the solution that you came to, anticipating issues, being proactive, and escalating early, rather than just berating people or blaming it on others.

EXPLORE COMPETENCE

3 Rs: What makes a good PM?

Good eye: What good digital work have you seen recently?

Technical: What new digital technologies got you excited recently?

Commercial: How do you manage your budgets to ensure they stay on track?

Good attention to detail: Talk me through the documentation you use in a project.

As an interviewee, think about why you're good at your job, and if there's anything that might differentiate you from other candidates: Have you got a design or development background that helps you in those areas? Do you have a commercial edge having worked as an account manager? Have you got your own website you develop on the side? Present those experiences as what makes you a unique proposition. And make sure you can back yourself up if you're asked to share documentation!

EXPLORE CHEMISTRY

Diplomacy: How would you deal with a situation where your project is running behind because the resource you've booked is being used by another urgent project?

People skills: How do you like to manage a team? How do you motivate them?

Persuasiveness: What would you do in a scenario where you've estimated for a project, and you're told you need to cut the costs?

As an interviewee, don’t be afraid to pause for a moment to think about a good response. When you’re given scenario questions, try and provide a range of solutions to overcome a problem, and if you need clarification, ask for it! When you’re given an impossible scenario, don’t be afraid to be confident in knowing that you can’t have it all; costs, timings, or scope have to change sometimes!

EXPLORE MOTIVATIONS

Why are you leaving your current role?

What are you looking to achieve in your next role?

As an interviewee, even if money is the primary motivator for moving on, think about some more valid reasons: that you're looking to take on more responsibility, looking for specific experience or a different type of work, or a new challenge.

Get Certified

If you're just starting out, I'd really only recommend this as a last resort if you've got nothing better to do. Most certifications are regarded almost universally as being a bit of a waste of time by hiring managers within digital. Certification is nice to have, but in the wild west of digital project management it doesn't really count for that much other than putting a tick in the box.

Obviously, any form of official certification is always going to benefit your career. But first consider the cost, the effort, and the time involved in taking project management certification courses. It is important that it is actually relevant to you, right now. For instance, if you simply want to learn more about managing projects, you may be able to get everything you need from some simple day courses or online resources.

All project management certifications, from PRINCE2 to PMP, are designed to give you a great grounding in the strategies and skills needed for project management success. The differences between courses are more to do with methodology than basic skills, so whatever you choose it is unlikely you will be restricting your choice of employment in the future, as long as you stick with the bigger names and most widely recognized certifications.

GET IN TOUCH

Still want to be a DPM? I sincerely hope that this book proves useful to you in your own digital project management career.

If it does—I'd love to hear from you!

Similarly, if you found nothing useful in this book at all and you've got a hankering to give me a piece of your mind, I'd also love to hear from you! So for any comments, questions, feedback, suggestions, or complaints and to let me know how you are getting on in your DPM career please email me:

ben@thedigitalprojectmanager.com

Thanks for reading. Good luck!

FAQS

IS THIS A 9-5 JOB?

No. It's quite a lot of work. It's also quite stressful at times. If you're looking for an easy job, this is not it. Yes, it's well paid and rewarding, but it's not easy.

Being a DPM is about leading a team—and the best way to lead is by example and by serving your team so that they succeed. You can't expect your team to put in the extra effort unless you are too. So expect some late nights and weekend working when projects don't quite go to plan and just before projects go live.

WHAT COURSE SHOULD I TAKE AT UNIVERSITY?

It doesn't really matter. However, if you've got nerdy tendencies, it wouldn't hurt to do a computer science related course—a solid grounding in development will help a lot. Or marketing, or business. Or, like me, take politics and international relations.

WHAT PROJECT MANAGEMENT COURSES SHOULD I TAKE?

PRINCE2 and PMP are both great project management qualifications to do but neither are really necessary. They will definitely broaden your skills, open up possible opportunities in the future (as any formal qualification does), and strengthen skills you already have, but they don't translate particularly well to the world of digital. If you're really keen to take a course, start with a course on user experience, design, or development to get a better idea about the kind of projects you will be managing. And if you're a bit of a nerd, take a course to become a Certified Scrum Master (CSM)—it'll definitely help with managing the development phase of a project.

WHERE SHOULD I WORK?

Go big or go home. Head for the biggest city you can find and find an agency that's doing work that you think looks interesting.

WHAT'S A TYPICAL CAREER PATH?

There really is no typical career path. How you actually get to the point of starting out as a DPM is always a bit of a mystery. Once you've started though, you can expect progression to go something like the job titles listed below.

HOW MUCH WILL I EARN?

That depends on where you live, how much experience you have, and how good you are, but probably most importantly, how much people like you. Here's a rough indication of US salary ranges based on the job titles we outlined earlier (as of 2023):

- **Junior DPM / Project Coordinator**
  $35-60k (0-2 years experience)
- **Digital Project Manager**
  $60-90k (2-5 years experience)
- **Senior Digital Project Manager**
  $90-105k (5-10+ years experience)
- **Project Director**
  $105-250k (10+ years experience)
- **Head of Project Management**
  $105-250k (10+ years experience)

It’s worth noting that the biggest supply of jobs are for senior project managers—employers are looking for those with demonstrable experience with lots of years under their belt. Many senior digital project managers don’t progress into higher management roles of project director and head of project management as these roles are less focussed on managing projects and more focused on managing teams of project managers.

WHY WON’T ANYONE GIVE ME ANY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Probably because you haven’t demonstrated that you’re genuinely interested in digital and/or project management. People aren’t going to hire someone who’s wooly about what they want to do with their career, so at least try to come across as being single minded and focused on becoming a DPM. Check out the section again on where to start your digital project management journey and make sure you’ve done all you can to read, learn, build, get experience, network, and prepare for interviews.

APPENDIX 1

Process

The process described in the next few pages describes the process and activities that you might expect to take place in a typical website development project.

Discover

Projects will nearly always begin with some kind of discovery to refine and clarify the brief—understanding what the project is and why it is needed from a business perspective. You need to look at defining the customer behavior that needs to change in order to make the project a success. Armed with that understanding, the problem, or brief, is defined and sets the parameters of the project.

A project begins with an internal huddle followed by a kickoff meeting with the client. In these meetings the brief, requirements, process, and next steps are discussed with representatives from agency departments and client stakeholders. Discovery is important to deliver the best project possible. With everyone on the same page as to what the project is actually about, the objectives set, and everyone clear about costs, timelines, scope, governance, and the approval process, you're ensuring the project kicks off. The discovery phase can include:

- Internal agency briefing or huddle
- Client kick off meeting
- Competitive analysis
- Trends analysis
- Creative brand exploration
- Technical assessments
- Site and content audits
- Client stakeholder interviews
- Brief definition—defining business needs

Plan

After understanding and framing the problem to be solved, the planning phase begins. In this phase, you'll make a plan that uses strategic insights from customers to identify and solve customer needs. Planning looks through the lens of the customer to find insights which will make a compelling proposition—what are the things that will most positively impact customers to make them think, act, or feel differently?

During the planning phase, business and customer requirements are documented to ensure there's clarity on all required features for the project. The output of the planning phase is a clear plan on what the project is, how it meets business and customer needs, and how it's going to be delivered.

The planning phase can include:

- Persona development—to identify they key target audiences
- Customer research and focus groups
- Customer pathways or user journeys
- Brief refinement—defining customer needs, and identifying the business solution
- Business requirements definition
- Feature set definition
- Performance measurement framework / return on investment (ROI) modeling

Design

Design takes the requirements defined in the planning phase and translates them into a customer-centric solution. Design defines how a customer interacts with a client's business. Design begins with user experience (UX) where sitemaps, wireframes, and annotations are created in low fidelity to provide a high level Information Architecture (IA) solution. The UX will define the interactions and will focus on usability and ensuring that the design facilitates the most efficient and effective user journey.

In tandem with UX development, design develops a look and feel to align with a client's brand and, when wireframes are approved, brings them to life with page design rollout.

The design phase considers not just the usability and aesthetics of a project but also considers the content strategy—how the content is going to deliver on a customer's needs. Content creation, including the development of copy and image and video assets, also forms part of the design phase.

The design phase can include:

- Sitemap development
- Wireframe development
- Clickable prototype
- User testing
- Look & feel development
- Interface design
- Content creation
- Copywriting

Build

The build phase takes the assets produced in design—annotated wireframes and page designs—and builds them into the final deliverable. During the build phase, the back-end system and CMS are built out to create any functionality required and to accommodate the required templates. The front-end build then begins, creating page templates and integrating with the back-end. The output of the build phase is a functioning site, built to the specifications refined in the design phase, which can then be populated with all data and content and sent to the quality assurance department for testing, integration, and deployment.

The build phase can include:

- Back-end technical development
- Front-end interface development
- Data migration
- Content entry

Deploy

The deployment phase begins with quality assurance, the finalizing of test cases, and running the plan against the project. Issues are identified, tracked, fixed, and then tested again to ensure all issues are resolved. Furthermore, once all the fixes have been verified, a full regression test is conducted to ensure the fixes did not break anything else.

Once all defects have been closed or deferred and QA has signed off, the build is deployed to UAT (user acceptance testing) or a staging server for client review and approval. After the client approval, the build is then transferred to production. Once in production, QA will perform a smoke test to ensure the deployment went as planned and the build works correctly.

The deploy phase can include:

- Development of test cases
- Unit testing
- Non-functional testing (standards for security, performance, accessibility, redundancy)
- End-to-end quality assurance testing
- User acceptance testing
- Deployment / launch

Evaluate & Support

Beyond release or go live, activities shift to evaluating and supporting the client. Evaluation is conducted to first baseline and then get measurable results on the performance. Those performance results can then be used to refine and optimise the output to ensure the build delivers the ROI defined in the planning phase.

Support is often needed by the client to train internal teams and to make updates and enhancements to the build. Additionally, in combination with data analytics and user testing, a build will usually be constantly updated and upgraded to make use of lessons learned as well as emerging technologies.

The evaluate & support phase can include:

- Managed monitoring and support services
- Updates and enhancements
- Training & organizational support
- Data analytics analysis
- Usability testing

APPENDIX 2

A DPM's Job Description

Below is a sample job description for a DPM which outlines the role more formally.

THE DPM HAS DAY-TO -DAY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SMOOTH AND EFFECTIVE RUNNING OF THEIR PROJECTS WITH THE FOCUS ON GREAT DELIVERY. TO DO THIS THEY SHOULD HAVE GREAT SKILLS IN EFFECTIVE PROJECT SET UP, BUDGET CONTROL, PROJECT TRACKING AND REPORTING, RISK AND ISSUE ANALYSIS, AND QUALITY ASSURANCE. WITH THIS IN MIND, AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRINCIPLES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT, APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGIES, AND PROCESSES IS VITAL .

THESE ARE THE MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS FOR A DPM:

- Manage and deliver multiple work streams for various types of digital communications projects within an account (ex. web-site development, banner advertising, email marketing campaigns, etc.) to agreed scope, timings, budget, and quality.
- Work with internal teams to help define project scope, resource requirements, and cost estimates for projects.
- Be the hub of communication for the project—maintain regular contact with internal and external partners engaged in delivering the product.
- Encourage and facilitate collaboration. Set up projects in the appropriate tools to give you full visibility but allow the team to collaborate independently.

- Create robust and realistic cost documents in MS Excel and Replicon.
- Produce realistic timings in MS Project with clearly flagged milestones.
- Work with client's third party agencies and agency suppliers to jointly scope, manage, and deliver campaigns when appropriate.
- At the start of a project, analyze the areas that could potentially throw the delivery off track, log these risks, and list what you plan to do to mitigate against them.
- Be on top of your projects and know timings, key milestones, budgets, resourcing, etc.

- Assess the time and financial impact of changes and communicate to clients as appropriate.
- Be firm but fair in judgment: push back when scope creeps or suggested budgets are not realistic whilst understanding the constraints of the client. Be prepared and able to defend the agency's position and profit margin internally and externally.
- Understand the workings and needs of the account you are partnered with. Have a good understanding of the brands you work on—their definitions, their core characteristics, and how they should and shouldn't behave.

- Understand the key technical aspects of the development process for website delivery, email delivery, online advertising, digital outdoor, etc. as appropriate to your client.

- Be commercially aware: at all times you should have an idea of the status of the budget of your projects. WIPS should be updated weekly and any variations from budget accounted for and where possible mitigated before they happen.

Being Professional

- Ensure that all documentation, costings, briefs, scopes, and presentations are of the highest possible standard.
- Be positive and a force for good in the team, even when faced with difficult problems. Be solutions focused.
- Remain calm and stable under pressure.
- Know when to delegate upwards and raise the alarm at the right time to the right people when issues occur.
- Be prepared to share duties outside of your immediate team. This means sharing resources, helping on other accounts, taking part in pitches, or managing internal initiatives.

Building And Safeguarding Relationships

- Build a partnership relationship with your clients.

  Good rapport here is key to success of both the delivery process and account development.
- Have great relationships with the internal project teams, so that people want to work with and for you.
- Be responsible for ensuring that relevant clients and account team members are kept up to date on project developments: changes in timings, costs, and any issues arising. Communicate regularly and don’t avoid difficult conversations.
- Never make promises you can’t keep, and always set expectations realistically.

Being Passionate About Advertising And Marketing, Specifically Digital

- Make it your business to learn as much as possible: reading relevant blogs and articles, attending training sessions, talking to experts, and taking an interest generally in what is going on around you.
- Be plugged in to new trends and developments across the industry and particularly within the client's sector.
- Understand the different types of available and emerging media, particularly online, including constraints and opportunities presented by each.
- Understand what makes a good piece of marketing.

Striving For Great Work

- Learn to develop creative and technical judgement and strive for the best work every time. If you don't think it's good enough, say why and work with the team to improve on it before it moves on.
- Ensure you are driving quality at every stage of the project.

- Ensure that internal and client sign-offs are obtained on all key project deliverables, and that you have an audit trail to protect yourself if things go wrong.
- Where possible don't back your client into a corner—clients make mistakes too and are sometimes over-ruled by their bosses. Be sensitive to the pressures they face and work with them, not against them.
- Manage conflicts and issues effectively, and seek guidance from your project director or your manager on any potentially sensitive or difficult situations.

dpm

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