

# Making Mountains Out of Molehills

## The Fine Points

- **Learn about scope creep**
- **Learn some of the factors that make small project grow out of control**
- **Learn how to keep contractors working toward your goals**
- **Learn ways to keep your molehills from becoming mountains**

Knowing when to end your Web project may be even more important than knowing when to start. The flexibility of the Web coupled with designers/developers anxious to push the limits of technology and management that often doesn't really understand how the Web works can lead to projects that start small and end big, often with poor results.

Scope creep is actually a very simple concept. You start out with a project -- something that typically has a starting point and an ending point (a scope), but over time, without warning, this simple project takes on a life of its own and become the mythical nine-headed hydra (the creep). In a way, it is like spring-cleaning. One day, you start working on cleaning the garage, and you come to your senses five or six days later repainting the white walls on your tires. This phenomenon occurs with such frequency on the Web that it really should be considered the norm rather than the exception to the rule.

Projects grow out of control due to a huge variety of factors. Everything from new technology, new ideas, the availability of additional personnel, and management factors can cause scope creep. For example, let's imagine that you have been tasked with building a Web site to sell your product "Widget2000." You build the site, describing every facet of Widget2000 with painstaking detail. You have product photos, diagrams of how to use the product, and even customer testimonials, but when you take it to the boss, they respond, "Hey this is great! Do you think we can have people buy this right off the site?" Of course you can! But, now scope creep has started. Next time you come back (with the online sales functionality), the boss says, "Wouldn't it be great if we could offer real-time customer service?" ... And so on. You get the picture.

Unfortunately, another factor often found at the heart of making a project bigger than it needs to be or was planned to be is your Web contractors (and even in-house developers). Let's face it, a short, simple project simply doesn't bring in tons of revenue, and often developers are dealing with people that don't have any measure of comparable skills. Too often, one can find sites that should have been very simple, but they have been made very complex for no apparent reason. In reality, keeping contractors working for your best interests is challenging if you lack the skill to understand what they are doing, but this can be minimized by clearly defining what you want, establishing a routine of status reporting, and learning what technology levels are appropriate for what types of applications. Additionally, you will want to keep track of how much code and how many pages are generated in the time billed by your contractor. It may not help you on your first project, but it will give you a benchmark for future projects.

Overcoming the challenges of scope creep will be a skill that you will continue to develop as long as you work on/with the Web. To help minimize these challenges remember to do your research up front (what are competitors doing, what are similar businesses doing, what can we build, what can we support, what meets our business needs...). Once you have done your research, you need to do requirements modeling (putting everything you want on paper). Finally, once the development has begun, file your ideas for **new/additional** functionality/technology in a "Golden Ideas" folder. Sites grow from the day they are created, so adding new items to a future version of the site isn't typically a problem, and will help keep your current project manageable.