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Website designer goes AWOL

by Mary Ellen Collins

I NEED A WEBSITE, so I hire a friend's boyfriend. I don't know the guy well, but since he's freelancing in a tough economy, I give him the business.

Before we begin, I forewarn Sam that I get stressed by too much information, particularly too much geek speak. It doesn't occur to me to say excessive excuses also push my buttons.

He lives five blocks away and is late for our first meeting. He calls, apologizes and shows up 15 minutes later, over-explaining about how the dog got away from him and apologizing for the hole in his sock as he kicks off his shoes.

The first design discussion goes well because I'm clear on what I like. As Sam leaves, he says that getting copy from clients makes the process take much longer than it should. "I always have to drag copy out of people," he says.

"I'm a writer," I remind him. "This is not a problem." I send all of the copy within two days.

We fall into an exasperating pattern. He is barely on time for each meeting and keeps apologizing about holey socks. I send biweekly "So, where are we?" e-mails, and he responds with mea culpas, explanations and promises.

He eventually creates a great design, but continues to plague me with lengthy, technical explanations that start with, "You don't really need to know this, but ..."



Illustration by Heidi Birky Goldman

At the end of a looooong four months, he tries to help me master the site. His haphazard teaching style and constant sidetracking leaves me confused and frustrated. "I'm going to make you a how-to guide," he says. "A step-by-step video." I love the idea, so I pay him — before I get the guide.

And then the friend breaks up with him after five years and ushers him out of their house. He e-mails me and says he will complete the how-to guide as soon as he finishes one other project.

Six weeks pass during which I send increasingly agitated e-mails and get no response. "Did he really,

honestly bail out on me?!" I ask John repeatedly. It seems he did.

After locating a terrific site management instructor, I focus on doing a public service by preventing other trusting souls from following in my footsteps. Sam knows about Angie's List and my connection to it, but the part about rating service providers must have slipped his mind. Too bad. ☹

Mary Ellen Collins is a freelance writer who lives in St. Petersburg, Fla., with her husband, John. When she's not writing about things that make her crazy, she reads, draws and frets about coming up with her ideas for this column.