BUILD A BUSINESS · BUILDER · 12 MIN READ

Hire help without getting stuck: working with developers and agencies

Own your accounts and code, agree scope and milestones in writing, check work against acceptance criteria, and get a proper handover.

Pass the check (4 of 5) online to earn the “Smart Client” badge:
https://digitalbuilders757.com/university/study/hire-help-without-getting-stuck

When to get help

Vibe coding gets you far. Bring in a developer or studio when you're handling payments or sensitive data, when something must not break (bookings, orders), when you need it to scale, or when your time is worth more building the business. Good help leaves you more in control than before, not less.

Own the keys from day one

- Your domain, hosting, database, payment and email accounts are in your name (or your company's), with the developer invited as a team member.
- The code lives in a GitHub repository you own; if they start it, it's transferred to you.
- You can see the live and preview sites, and you know where the passwords and keys are stored (a password manager, never a chat).
- When the work ends, you remove access you no longer need.

Scope, milestones and money

Write down what's in and what's out (your mini PRD helps), split the work into milestones, and attach acceptance criteria to each one. Pay a deposit and then by milestone, not everything up front. Agree how changes are handled (a change request with time and cost) and who owns the work once it's paid for. For larger contracts, have a lawyer review the agreement.

Check the work and get a handover

Test every milestone yourself on a preview link against its acceptance criteria before you approve it. At the end, ask for a handover: a README with how to run and deploy it, where every account lives, what to update and when, and a short recorded walkthrough. Agree what support or maintenance looks like after launch, and how much it costs.

Key terms

Scope
The agreed list of what you'll deliver, and what's not included.

Milestone
A checkpoint in a project with something delivered, often tied to a payment.

Acceptance criteria
Testable conditions that say when a user story is done.

Change request
A written request for work outside the scope, with its own price and time.

Deposit
Part of the price paid up front before work starts.

Repository (repo)
A project folder plus its full change history.

Preview deployment
A private, shareable copy of a branch or pull request for testing.

README
The front page of a repository: what it is and how to run it.

Try it: Your hiring checklist

1. List every account your project needs (domain, hosting, database, GitHub, payments, email) and whose name each is in.
2. Turn your mini PRD into three milestones, each with acceptance criteria.
3. Write the handover you'll expect at the end: README, account list, walkthrough, support plan.
4. Ask an AI to review your checklist for anything that could leave you locked out later.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

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5 questions. Circle one answer for each; 4 or more correct passes. Answers are at the back.

1. Whose name should your domain and hosting accounts be in?

A. The developer's, since they need full control to fix problems quickly
B. Nobody's
C. A friend's
D. Yours (or your company's), with the developer invited

2. A sensible way to pay for a project?

A. A deposit, then pay per accepted milestone
B. 100% up front, so the developer stays motivated
C. Only after the whole project is finished and has run for a year
D. Cash in hand, with no written scope to slow things down

3. How do you approve a milestone?

A. When the developer says it's done
B. Test it yourself on a preview link against its acceptance criteria
C. Approve all of them at the end
D. When it looks nice in a screenshot

4. Midway, you want a new feature. What's the healthy way to add it?

A. Mention it casually in a message and expect it to be included for free
B. Stop paying until it's added
C. A written change request with the extra time and cost
D. Hire a second developer to add it secretly

5. What belongs in a good handover?

A. Just the final invoice
B. Only the developer's phone number, so you can call whenever something breaks
C. Nothing, since everything needed is already in the live website
D. A README, the list of accounts, a walkthrough and a support plan

Official sites

GitHub docs: Transferring a repository: https://docs.github.com/en/repositories/creating-and-managing-repositories/transferring-a-repository
SBA: Find your local assistance: https://www.sba.gov/local-assistance
Digital Builders services: https://digitalbuilders757.com/services

Last reviewed 2026-11-25. AI tools change fast; check each tool's own site for current features, plans and prices.

ANSWER KEY

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1. D: Yours (or your company's), with the developer invited
If the developer disappears, you still control your product.

2. A: A deposit, then pay per accepted milestone
Milestone payments keep both sides protected and progress visible.

3. B: Test it yourself on a preview link against its acceptance criteria
Acceptance criteria make 'done' something you can check.

4. C: A written change request with the extra time and cost
Change requests keep scope creep visible and fair.

5. D: A README, the list of accounts, a walkthrough and a support plan
A handover means you (or anyone you hire next) can run and change it.