

Why are so few developers really good?

Let's be honest, most people who hire freelance developers have a bad experience. We personally know because up to 50% of the work our company is hired to do is to salvage projects other developers have failed to deliver.

But why is that so, and why is our team so different?

This document attempts to answer this question, step by step, but here is the summary:

1. It's a question of training
2. It's a question of experience
3. It's a question of accountability

It's a question of training

There are 2 main types of jobs: **Skilled** and **Unskilled**. Don't be fooled by the names, their meanings are not 100% obvious, for an unskilled job doesn't mean it doesn't need any skills:

- **Skilled** labour is any job which requires formal training prior to employment.
- **Unskilled** labour is any job for which training can be done on the job.

Would you hire a medical doctor without a medical degree expecting him to learn on the job?
Would you hire an attorney without a law degree based only on her experience?

The vast majority of developers are hired despite a lack of formal training

Why? Because technology changes faster than schools can adapt and as a result, it is **falsely** perceived that experience and learning on the job is a better alternative for formal education.

The truth about formal training for developers

The reality is that formal training is only a single step in the construction of a developer. A diploma isn't enough to guarantee the developer is able to do his job, but **formal education provides a stable foundation upon which he is able to build his or her career.**

Our Senior Developer's formal training

He has a diploma in "*Technologies des Systèmes Ordines*" (Computer Systems Technologies) from the prestigious *Institut d'Ordinique du Québec* of the Lionel-Groulx College, from which he received **3 mentions of honor: Best student of his program**, two years in a row, and **best student of the province**, from Québec technicians order (*Ordre des Technologues du Québec*).

Not only did he learn the basics of programming in C++ and assembly language but he **also learned valuable skills which cannot easily be learned from online tutorials:**

- How to write code with testing in mind
- How to properly test your code so that you leave few bugs
- How to write your code so that it is easy to maintain, so that if you or a co-worker needs to update it a few years later, it is still understandable
- How to optimize your code so that it runs faster and takes less memory
- How to communicate with a client during development

He could have stopped his formal training there, but as he began his career, he took evening classes at the world-renown McGill University to get a degree in **System Analysis and Design** where he learned even more:

- How to evaluate the complexity of a project to properly break it into manageable pieces
- How to properly evaluate the length of a task
- How to create databases which will help you manage your data instead of hinder you
- How to see hidden problems at the start of a project to prevent it from failing later on
- A strict code of ethics which places customer satisfaction above all

But more importantly, he managed in both schools to learn how to learn. To keep his mind sharp and to constantly push the limits of my knowledge.

In all honesty, he can say that without his formal training, he would be a shadow of the developer he is today.

It's a question of experience

Most careers are full time or at least, cyclical jobs. A tax accountant might only work hard a few months per year, but it's every year.

Some local developers however have large periods of inactivity between contracts causing two major problems:

- Years of experience no longer mean anything, since it's unknown how many hours per year they actually work
- They need to prolong each contract as long as possible since they have no idea when the next contract will be, forcing them to charge unplanned extras

Our company has notably worked with a designer who sends us the coding for his design clients. Recently he hired us to integrate his design for his **third** Wordpress client, in over 7 years! In those 7 years, this designer managed to only work on **three** actual design contracts, that's not even one contract every two years!

The vast majority of consulting firms switch to building in-house projects due to their inability to get a steady flow of clients

If you add to this fact that technology moves faster than most full-time developer can keep up with, you end up with an industry built by part-time developers that after years, still haven't reached the level on which a person can be considered an expert.

According to Malcom Gladwell, a person becomes an expert after 10,000 hours of practice or roughly 5 years full time

Our Senior Developer's experience

He graduated from the Institut d'ordnique du Québec in 1998 and was hired by a now defunct company, Avantron to lead their windows development team.

Gaining valuable work experience during the day, he tuned his skills in the evening by learning from McGill University.

In 2001, he founded Cablan.net to help designers he had met at McGill get development and hosting support for their own clients. Ever since, our business model has remained true: in addition to our own clients, **we help a vast network of designers, marketing firms, consultancies and other such companies complete their projects.**

This unique business model allowed to build a backlog of development projects so that our team could remain busy full time instead of waiting for the next client to come.

We've been so busy by our clients that we barely have time to work on our in-house projects!

We had then picked TYPO3 as our main content management system, since it was, in 2001, the best out there. Since then, we've added Wordpress to our tool list, but our Senior Developer's personal TYPO3 experience (which is almost directly transferable to Wordpress) is the most impressive:

- **Most experienced TYPO3 developer in North America** with over 14 years of actual full time development work with TYPO3 (part-time since 2015, with Wordpress taking the rest of the time)
- **Writer of the highest number of custom TYPO3 extensions on the planet**, with over 1800 custom extensions, more than triple the second more prolific developer
- Second typehead (former TYPO3 ambassadors to a country) nominated, and **only typehead to remain in function for the whole duration of the program**
- Clients in over 33 countries

Why is it important to have customers in multiple countries?

We mention everywhere that we have helped customers in over 33 countries, why is that?

Having international customers puts a firm in contact with more competitors, forcing them to adapt and learn from different cultures

For example, we've helped for about 2 years an University in Switzerland (the University of Neuchatel) which has strict quality and budget control. We learned to adapt to their requirements, allowing us to tackle other strict customers like the World Council of Churches or multiple financial institutions.

We've also worked with customers in Nigeria, Cambodia and Turkey who didn't have clear reliable Internet access, forcing us to anticipate their needs, helping learn how to deal with customers who are not always supervising each step of the process.

We've worked with customers in Europe who have to deal with multiple languages and, even more importantly, with different legal rules requiring website adaptations depending on the country of the visitors.

We've worked with highly competitive organizations like an University in Japan, a Casino in the US or a Bank in the Bahamas which require the utmost secrecy so that the best we do is mention their sectors of industry and their country of origin but can't even name the client or the level of work done.

For reference, here is a list of the 34 countries we have helped customers in:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1. Algeria | 12. France | 24. Nigeria |
| 2. Argentina | 13. Germany | 25. Reunion |
| 3. Australia | 14. Hong Kong | 26. Russia |
| 4. Austria | 15. Iceland | 27. Sweden |
| 5. Bahamas | 16. Ireland | 28. Switzerland |
| 6. Belgium | 17. Israel | 29. Thailand |
| 7. Bolivia | 18. Italy | 30. Turkey |
| 8. Cambodia* | 19. Japan | 31. Turks and Caicos |
| 9. Canada | 20. Malta | 32. United Kingdom |
| 10. Denmark | 21. Netherlands | 33. United States |
| 11. Dominican Republic | 22. New Zealand | 34. Venezuela* |
| | 23. Nicaragua | |

** In all honesty, for Cambodia and Venezuela, the client was in those countries, but the firms which hired us were in Canada and the United States, respectively.*

It's a question of accountability

Development firms often work small contracts for relatively unknown customers and as a result, when they fail to deliver on a project no one knows about it.

It's easy to select only the customers which had a positive experience and pretend the others do not exist.

A case studies document is only a recollection of various successes of a company, not an accurate measure of its abilities

For example, we'll freely admit that we had a very bad experience with a few customers who had unrealistic expectations regarding the development process or clearly hostile intentions, from a single-mother in British Columbia, Canada who expected a million dollar site for less than 10,000\$, to an American con artist who only paid his initial deposit and expected us to complete the rest of the project without paying an additional dime, passing by a government bureaucrat who hired us without permission of her employer to cover her inability to complete her own work, leaving us without the ability to invoice or even sue anyone for the work we did.

Our solution to accountability

Sadly, there is no global solution to this problem: when a firm fails to deliver on a project, it is relegated to the past and forgotten.

Our team's solution therefore relies not on finding a way to better disclose our successes and failures, but by preventing failures from occurring in the first place.

We have a rich history of working with project management tools to help us keep our customers happy and their project successful.

We also try to make invoices as clear as possible so that customers are able to easily see what they are paying for.

More importantly, we actually test our tools and offer free technical support to fix bugs.

*Since bugs are caused by the developers, not the client,
fixing bugs should **not** be paid by the client*

We've even fixed a bug for free for the University of Neuchatel a little over 5 years after development had stopped!

Conclusion

The problems with software development (including web development) aren't systemic. The main issue is that **the low barrier of entry means that there is a wide availability of development firms who are simply not able to deliver on their promises.**

The nature of the Internet also means that firms that are better at advertising themselves will find clients more easily than firms that are actually better at delivering their projects.

At Cablan.net, we've focused on project delivery and over 50% of our revenue comes from firms who spend most of their energy on advertising, letting us handle the actual work when they fail.

After all, we've been delivering successful projects since 2001...



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