Good Goals.

Before you jump into production, remember that interactive media project success, creative and financial, is charted **before** production. Goals identify the purpose and establish the anchoring rules for all time, money and people decisions.

Good goals include your professional, financial and lifestyle criteria for success as well as those of your clients/investors. If you ask the difficult questions up front, you will protect your schedule, your budget and your relationships.

Be certain that you (and your clients or investors) are clear and aligned on the project goals and criteria for success:

Professional Goals

Decide professional goals related to visibility, credibility, local and international image, industry position, technological leadership, etc. Consider goals for staff development, e.g., how you want to grow the professional skills and careers of yourself and your team members. If your goal is to capitalize on the synergy of a great project team, you will want to position your company to meet the competing demands of developing multiple simultaneous projects. Address company infrastructure issues such as development of smoothly functioning production processes and communication systems. Once established, these processes and systems can be the groundwork for reaping the greater financial rewards and security that can come with producing a range of products.

If you are producing custom projects for a client, make sure that you understand the client's corporate political workings—and make sure to keep your finger on that pulse. When annual budget sessions or stockholder meetings press top executives to show results, their goals may change.

Financial Goals

Your financial goals will provide fundamental criteria for success. You can look at such parameters as creating a financially self-sustaining product line, an X% return on investment, a Y% increase in revenues tied to a Z% increase in expenses.

Pay attention to both the stated and the hidden financial goals; often, especially in custom corporate internal training or reference projects, there will appear to be no financial returns expected by corporate management. It is important to state up front, in measurable terms acceptable to your client, the nature of the returns expected. You can suggest measurement of employee productivity based upon increased revenues per customer service employee, decreased time per employee to perform tasks, etc.

Lifestyle Goals

In deciding project and corporate goals, it is essential for the project team to be aligned on work schedule and lifestyle choices as well as communication ground rules. If the project

team leader expects around-the-clock workers while the interface designer and writers expect to spend weekends with their families, even the most marketable project can be jeopardized.

Because interactive media project work teams bring together talented professionals who often are accustomed to working independently and separately, it is important to bring to light the preferred workstyles of your team members. If you have paired a team of writers, be prepared to discover, at the outset, that one writer is a nightowl and the other an early riser or that one normally works weekends and the other is committed to weekends outdoors.

Set communication goals and groundrules to achieve them. If your goal is that all team members be well-positioned to support the project goals, the client and other team members, there are actions you can take to empower them. Be clear on lines of communication, and set up the types of verbal and electronic systems best for your type of business. For instance, if most of your team members work in remote locations and you want them to be able to participate fully, you will need to emulate in-person meetings as closely as possible. Be sure that you set up the voice and electronic data systems that will facilitate conference calling, data transfer and faxing.

If you set a goal that each team member play a responsible role in creating the project, remember to communicate the context for each request. For instance, you will ask your writers to write text according to specific standards and using a specific interface design. If your client decides to change the delivery platform midstream, be sure to communicate the the changes needed by outlining the underlying issues; in this way, your writers, who are closest to the content, can advise you on important conversion issues to address as well as possible solutions. This type of ongoing communication will also set up your team to be your eyes and ears when they interact with your client—a good way to take advantage of new business opportunities.

Vigilence
Write your goals and objectives using language as concrete as possible. Before you begin the project, be sure that the project goals are clearly communicated as well as the goals of each team member.

As the project progresses, revisit your goals to be certain you and your team are on track. Our marketplace and technologies can change rapidly and unexpectedly. If major events or new information significantly impact your goals, call a meeting to reclarify your goals and criteria for success.

Writing these goals and criteria is a measure of your clarity and alignment. As you move through the stages of product development, you will return to these goals and criteria as the foundation for all of your project decisions. Later will come the decisions which will make or break your project success—decisions about: marketplace, technology, content structure, writing standards, interface standards, design standards, sales, distribution and the schedule, budget and project team to accomplish your goals.

Clear contracts

One sure sign that all parties are clear and aligned is a written and signed statement of these goals. The process of clarifying and communicating these goals is the foundation for negotiation and management of good contracts and business relationships.

Often independent producers sit in the uncomfortable position of waiting for a client to sign a contract. If your own professional, financial and lifestyle goals are clear, either you will have planned for this waiting period by accumulating a financial cushion to sustain you and your company or you will know at what point you need to let go of the project.

If you find yourself in negotiation and you have not yet clarified your own goals, you have entered a danger zone. Take the time and set up support to decide what is good for you and the team members in your company. From that vantage point, you will be in a better position to assess what is good for your client. When you can see the project benefitting all parties and meeting all the essential goals, you will be creating together with your client rather than battling to win a contract.

Once you have signed a contract, establish regular meeting times with your clients or investors. Keep these meeting times sacred, even if you feel that there are no problems to discuss and even if you are concerned about sacrificing the time when a deadline is pressing in on you. Use the time to listen to client/investor concerns; issues discussed at an early stage of concern become the foundation for stronger trust as well as correcting problems before they become unmanageable.

Monitor your project goals according to milestones set out in your plan. These should be denoted in your contract. Completion of milestones reassures your clients/investors that they are on track with their goals and that the plan is becoming reality. Milestones are important check points: use the occasion to show the milestone accomplishment as a step closer to the goals and to reaffirm the validity of the goals.

Most importantly, dare to stop the project when agreements, responsibilities or accountabilities are unclear; continue only after all responsible parties have communicated and have signed-off on the plan. Your goals, and your contracts based upon them, are the foundation for all your time, money and people decisions.

Carole Berkson is a Multimedia Project Strategy consultant

Carole Joy Berkson is an 11-year pioneer in interactive media, the developer of many multimedia "firsts". Ms. Berkson authored the original Apple Computer "Videodisc ToolKit" in 1987, continuing to consult for Apple Computer and other established and newcomer clients. Her "look before you leap" consulting process clarifies goals, marketplace realities and critical decision points as a prelude to charting schedule, budget and staffing plans. Ms. Berkson has recently joined Luminare, a training performance communication company in San Francisco. As Projects Director, Ms. Berkson is focussing on optimizing the team synergy and streamlining the interactive and collateral production processes.

For further information, contact Ms. Berkson via her AppleLink: INTERMEDIA or 415•381•9433 in the San Francisco Bay Area.