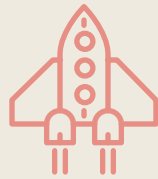


How to land your first big client





Landing your first big client is a milestone, an achievement, a stretch goal that all agencies have. It's a symbol of success after working with smaller clients and building your portfolio. In this guide, we'll show you all the things you need to do to land your first big client. Let's get started.

Introduction

Landing your first big client won't happen overnight and it will take work, perseverance, and planning. Here's what you need to do to land your dream client:

- **Plan ahead**
- **Learn how to find clients in unique ways**
- **Humanize your outreach**
- **Work with all kinds of clients (even the difficult ones)**
- **Perfect your portfolio**
- **Have all your systems, operations, and tools set up ahead of time**
- **Perfect your pitch**

Plan ahead

Think about the current state of your agency, and then think about where you want your agency to be in two, five, and 10 years. It doesn't matter how much experience your team has, you should always be planning for what clients you want to work with in the future.

“Look at groups you want to work with as a 2-year goal. Then start working with smaller, more local groups that might have some of the same needs or that the larger group would recognize as an up-and-coming player.”

- Matt Roberts, VP of Marketing and Sales at [Speak Creative](#)

Let's walk through an example. If your team has a goal to work with a big brand name in the shoe industry (such as Nike, Adidas, Skechers) within the next three years, you can start to do the work now to prepare your team. Start reaching out to similar clients in the same industry (in this case, maybe it's Allbirds or another smaller shoe company), or clients that have a similar brand and design aesthetic as your dream client. You can start to strategically build your portfolio in a way that makes your agency extremely appealing to your big client so that when your agency is ready to take that next step, you have the portfolio to prove you're the right agency for the job.

Another way you can plan ahead is to start building your network of contacts. You can never know too many people, so connect with employees at your dream clients' company. It's important to note that you'll want to build connections with multiple people, not just one; in case that person leaves the company, you don't have to start at square one. You'll also want to work



on building real connections with people, and not just spamming everyone with cliché LinkedIn messages. Have fun and bring in a little of the human element of networking!

Learn how to find clients in unique ways

Planning is part of the equation; the other half is finding your client. Here are a few unique ways to find clients, including the big ones.

Host an event

Consider hosting an event that brings leads right to your front door. It doesn't have to be a 200+ person conference or anything grandiose, but it should feel right and authentic for your clients and your agency's mission. [Idea Kraft](#) hosts a biannual rebrand event called Re-Kraft where their team volunteers their time and they dig in for 48 hours to rebrand a startup, non-profit, or small business in need of a new identity, all for free. This allows the agency to get its name out there, while also using their marketing budget to help the community. It's a win-win for everyone involved.

Don't forget about virtual events! These have become extremely popular in the last couple of years and there are so many ways to get creative, especially with a smaller budget. Look at what events your competitors in the area are hosting and find a way to replicate them, but even better and with a bigger impact.

Sponsor events

Maybe hosting events isn't your agency's forte, but there are always events that need sponsors. When you sponsor an event, you're helping fund the production while giving your brand exposure to the people you want to reach.

Consider sponsoring one that's important and relevant to your dream client. Be authentic and intentional in choosing these events and how those align with your agency's values. A great place (that you maybe haven't thought of) is award shows. This is an excellent place where you can show off all your amazing work and celebrate the industry. Agencies, like [Starletti](#), find clients all the time by sponsoring these events. "We're a partner of a big business award show. This way we meet a lot of new businesses and find new clients."

Be nice to strangers

Sometimes the best client relationships begin with being nice (or just a decent human being!) to a stranger. Random acts of kindness can start a friendly conversation that can later lead to talking about your jobs and what you do for work. Don't be afraid to talk about what you do, because you never know who might need your services later.



Humanize your outreach

Picture this: Your dream client finds your website from a simple Google search, is intrigued with the work in your portfolio, and submits an email through your form on your site. While this is a perfect situation, rarely (if ever) does this happen. Most of the time, you'll need to put in some work in your outreach process, especially for big brand name clients, but the key is to make your agency stand out in any way you can.

Take a second to think about what your agency is doing for outreach. Who owns the outreach? Is this process automated or owned by a person? How often are you doing outreach for new clients, when you need a new client or on a regular cadence? Once you start to break down your outreach strategy, you can analyze and start humanizing it.

What do we mean by "humanize"? Well, is the outreach you're currently doing:

- Intentional
- Meaningful
- Something you'd respond to

Humanize essentially means it feels like there's a human behind the outreach. So automated, robot-sounding messages aren't what we're looking for here; in fact, it has the opposite effect. In this day and age, the best way to approach outreach is to have a combination of traditional methods and digital outreach methods.



"We strategically introduce ourselves through meaningful outreach. Rather than sending emails or trying to make cold calls, we start our outreach sequence by mailing branded, local swag, and a handwritten note. Everything gets packaged in a highly-branded container, so (we hope) the overall effect is professional and impressive. Sometimes that's all that's needed for the first conversation."

- Matt at Speak Creative



One idea? Try handwritten or physical goods. [ONE18MEDIA](#) really embraces this approach. They recommend, "A good old-fashioned note in the mail or a gift card to have a coffee on us."

Does this mean you should retire all digital outreach efforts completely? Absolutely not. Instead, find a healthy balance of traditional and digital to set yourself, your agency, and your team apart. Traditional outreach lets the lead know you're serious and you're willing to put in the work to make a great first impression. Once you have their attention, utilize digital outreach to follow up, book that first conversation, and (fingers crossed!) sign on your new

Work with all kinds of clients (even the difficult ones!)

If you've been in this business for a while now, you know that not every client you work with will be your top pick. Sometimes you get clients that hold up projects, push back on every step of the process, or don't pay you on time. This can be incredibly frustrating and while you may want to kick those clients to the curb, at the end of the day, you and your team still need to get paid.

You have to work with smaller (and even a few difficult!) clients before you can get to the big ones.

The good news of working with these kinds of clients is that you're building your portfolio. Just because the client is hard to work with, doesn't mean you can't show off the project if you're proud of it. Either way, you're still learning how to manage not-so-easy clients, and you're gaining experience.

"Looking back, I've noticed that some of the most difficult clients I've worked with have been the ones that pushed me and my companies to the next level. No matter how much we liked to pretend like we knew everything, these clients disrupted that imaginary fairytale and taught us a lot about their industries and our very own processes.

I once had a client demand that I memorize every SKU they sold (out of hundreds of options). I kicked and screamed the whole time, but I came out of that project with a better understanding of how SKUs should be built, which carried over nicely into our sudden increase in eCommerce clients that came from that project.

There's a fine line between a bad client and a challenging client, and sometimes you won't know the difference until you're on the other side a year later."

- Davey Owens, Brand Strategist at [Oh Hello](#)



Every web design agency goes through a spell of difficult clients, and it's always worth it when you land your dream client later on. After going through this, you know how to deal with difficult or high maintenance clients, how to create a formal onboarding and offboarding process, and how to keep the relationship professional despite creative differences — all skills you'll need to know when working with a big client.

Remember: just because a certain client gives you some push back, that doesn't mean they won't appreciate (and share!) the finished work. According to [The Business of web design](#), "93% of web design professionals find new clients through referrals," and even clients that you think are difficult might love the work you do and refer you to their friend.

Perfect your portfolio

As a web designer, agency owner, or creative in general, you know how important it is to have a well-rounded portfolio that displays the best of the best work you've ever completed. Many times, all it takes for a big client to become interested in your agency is seeing the past work you've done:

"They knew they liked the design aesthetic from looking through their portfolio and once they reached out, it was all about making sure they knew we were competent enough and professional enough to handle their important project."

- Kristin DeKay, Operations Director at [Grain & Mortar](#)

A great piece of advice is to just do great work and get it out there on the internet. That means adding it to your portfolio, but also regularly sharing work on social and other places where potential clients can see it.

"Use every opportunity you have to create projects that are excellent, case study-worthy work."

- Kristin at Grain & Mortar

When [creating \(or sprucing up!\) a client-converting portfolio](#), here are some things to think about:

- Structure and flow: How is your portfolio site organized and what's the journey a site visitor takes?
- Project presentation: How is your work displayed?
- Copywriting and messaging: What are the words and images you use to convey your brand message?



- Contact and conversion: How can your site visitors contact you and how well do these methods convert?
- Design, UX, and brand: What does the user see, and how does the user interact with your portfolio site?

[Click here to see a full checklist and become a pro on creating a client-converting portfolio.](#)

Depending on your agency's niche or area of focus, the projects in your portfolio might start to look super similar, but that's not a bad thing. Let's say your target audience tends to be financial institutions and you've worked with quite a few in your state. Thinking back to the first tip "*plan ahead,*" if your dream client is a big financial institution, this strategy is spot on.

For other agencies, they work with a variety of clients so they can build a portfolio that shows a variety of strengths and skills. "*We value building a portfolio of clients that keeps us diversified. If we get too dependent on a single client or small group of clients, it can change our culture.*" - Matt at Speak Creative

However you decide to organize your portfolio, just make sure it displays the work and projects you're most proud of so you'll attract the clients that you actually want to sign on.

Have all your systems, operations, and tools set up ahead of time

One of the most important things to think about before signing on a big client is ensuring you have all your systems, operations, and tools set up ahead of time. You simply have to have the right infrastructure to handle the work that comes with a big client. Even more so, the expectations and pressure that come with a big client are 20x that of smaller clients. As you know, the consequences of a poorly designed website hurt big businesses far more than small businesses. Knowing this, it's important to have secure tools to store passwords, easy-to-use communication systems, and reliable workflow tools.

"We had all of our processes and systems in place from our day-to-day operation, so there weren't any major outages when we brought our first big client through the door." - Matt at Speak Creative"



Here are systems, operations, and tools we recommend:

- A secure app to store passwords
- An easy-to-use communication tool for team and clients
- One organized drive for client assets
- A project management tool
- High-quality web design tools and software
- A managed WordPress host you can trust



A secure app to store passwords

For storing credentials, consider investing in a password management tool such as [LastPass](#) or [1Password](#). Apps like these will keep login information secure while also speeding up your workflow. Instead of shuffling through papers or performing “Command + F” to try to find a password hidden in a document, these tools will allow you to sign in with just the click of a button. The stakes with big clients are even higher and they’ll value (or even require!) secure systems and processes, and a password tool is a great place to start.

An easy-to-use communication tool for your team and clients

Another tool you should consider investing in is a communication app that’s not email. While email may be helpful to send over important documents (like contracts!) and scheduling meetings, sometimes you need to send a one-off message quickly without typing up a long, formal message.

[Slack](#) has quickly become a favorite form of communication for many agencies. It makes communicating with coworkers and clients effective and effortless. It also integrates with lots of other tools you might already use (like [Google Docs](#) and [Google Calendar](#)!). Consider creating channels specifically for clients, especially those bigger projects you’re working on. A big name client will appreciate over communication (rather than under communication) and multiple ways to contact your team.



One organized drive for client assets

When it comes to organizing assets, you'll want to set up a solid naming system for your folders. If all of your files follow roughly the same pattern for each client, you'll be able to fly through folders to get what you need instead of trying to remember how you named something or where you saved it. This organization could be local on your hard drive, synced with [DropBox](#), or even in a [Google Drive](#) that you share with clients. Pro-tip: Once you determine the naming system, make sure everyone on your team knows to follow it. A system like this only works if everyone is following the same standards!

You should also consider creating a document for each client that details the theme, plugins, and any extra functionality you've built for their site. Your team will appreciate the ability to see that information all in one place, and then in a few months when that client has questions, you can quickly get caught up to speed. Plus, you can (and should) provide this document to the client to ensure a [successful site handoff](#).

A project management tool

You'll want a super reliable project management system, especially for a big client who likely has bigger projects with more moving pieces. The worst thing that could happen is you lose track of one piece of a project and fail to deliver on time. With [Asana](#), you can easily organize different parts of a project, set milestones, and so much more.

A couple other popular workflow tools for agencies are [Basecamp](#) and [Monday](#). Basecamp puts everything you need to get work done in one place. It's the calm, organized way to manage projects, work with clients, and meet your deadlines. Monday makes it super easy to plan, track, and manage any project from start to finish. With Monday, you can create detailed plans, streamline team communication, track project progress, and make data-driven decisions.

High-quality web design tools and software

You need web design tools to do web design work, so here are some of the best ones to help with big, (potentially high standard!) clients:

Avacode

There's nothing quite like discovering a new tool to help you collaborate with your team more effectively, and that's exactly what [Avacode](#) will do. For any designer collaborating with a developer (and vice versa), this tool will help simplify the hand-off process by including all the little details that each role needs. For example, designers don't have to worry about describing every little detail – Avacode will automatically generate the specs. And developers will have everything in one easy-to-access space and won't have to try to navigate Photoshop. It's a win-win!



Procreate

[Procreate](#) is the web designer's best friend where you can create beautiful sketches, inspiring graphics, and stunning illustrations with this award-winning creative application. It's like a complete art studio you can access from anywhere. When you land big-name clients who demand a higher level of design, Procreate will help you make your masterpiece when your load is full of one-off, special products instead of cookie-cutter web designs.

Adobe XD

This tool doesn't just tackle web design, but it goes one step further to handle UI/UX design for different mediums such as mobile apps, voice interfaces, games, and more. If you're a web designer who's a jack of all digital developer trades, you'll want to add [Adobe XD](#) to your team's wishlist.

Local

[Local](#) has everything you need to get more work done. It's a fuss-free way to locally develop WordPress sites thanks to its one-click installation, instant hosting connect controls, and great support when you run into a hiccup. It's trusted by hundreds of thousands of talented developers from around the world (and the best part — it's free)! Download the world's #1 local development application [here](#).

A managed WordPress host you can trust

[Managed WordPress hosting](#) is when the technical management and maintenance of the servers are overseen by a hosting provider, or as we like to call it, a hosting partner. Your managed WordPress host will take care of all your website house-keeping needs, such as WordPress updates and automated nightly backups, so you can focus on tasks like landing and managing your first big client. With Flywheel's managed WordPress hosting, we'll do that and so much more.

There's no need for a single security plugin because we've already optimized all of our servers with the best security practices for WordPress. If malware does find its way onto a site, we'll also take care of that, free of charge. Cleaning up a site full of malware can take days or even weeks, and that's the last thing your team needs, especially when managing a big client.

In addition to security, Flywheel offers functionality to speed up your workflow with your team with features like staging sites, a delightful dashboard, site templates, and more! Managed WordPress hosting is the ultimate solution for agencies working with big clients because you can focus more on your client and the work itself, while we take care of all the nitty-gritty details behind the scenes.

Flywheel's been helping creatives do their best work since 2013. Trusted by over 70,000 designers, developers, and creative agencies, we're happy to help you simplify site management, streamline your workflow, and scale your business. Learn more about our different plans [here](#).



Perfect your pitch

There's no such thing as perfect, but in the world of pitches, it needs to be damn-near close to it. Many of the agencies we talked to said their pitch was a huge reason they signed on a big client.

“Presenting our design process and workflow confidently was key, as was assuring them we could meet their deadlines.”

- Kristin at Grain & Mortar

For Matt at Speak Creative, his team always pitches a conversation to several different divisions of the same company.

“Marketing is the obvious place to start but those folks get pitched all the time. There are departments beyond marketing who have communication needs. These are great places to get experience with a company or big brand.”

- Matt at Speak Creative

Here are some guidelines on creating the perfect pitch to big clients:

- Ask the right questions upfront
- Abandon the wash/rinse/repeat pitch and solutions
- Make them believe you understand their customers
- Emphasize your process
- Use your small size as an advantage
- Make an “accusation audit”



Ask the right questions upfront

A successful pitch is almost impossible without a successful discovery session with the client. What challenges are they trying to solve? What goals do they have? Who is their target audience? What makes them different from their competitors? Learn everything you can about their problems.

Abandon the wash/rinse/repeat pitch and solutions

Oftentimes these clients have big budgets and they've worked with many agencies before on different projects, so they've heard every kind of pitch out there; the terrible ones, the cliché ones, the really great ones. Now's the time to amp up your pitch and take it to the next level. Make your agency stand out in every way possible.

Make them believe you understand their customers

When you're pitching to a potential client, you're essentially convincing them that you're the right agency for the job and the best way to do that is to make them believe you understand their users. There should be no doubt in their mind after the pitch that you don't know who their customers are. Dig deep and do your research beforehand. Anticipate questions and rather than leaving those questions unanswered, incorporate them into your pitch.

A great way to really understand a client's customer base is by getting a feel for their target audience, and seeing if your own personal network has any of those people. If you're not part of their target audience, there's only so much you can do to learn about them. Instead, search for those people in your network so you can pick their brains or even observe their online habits. What kinds of brands do they engage with? What kinds of content do they share? Showing a prospect that you understand their customers before they even tell you who their customers are is a pretty big swing in the first meeting.

Emphasize your process

This is one of the biggest opportunities for you to showcase how you're different from your competitors and show off your uniqueness. A website is a website. A process is oftentimes the thing that differentiates and closes bigger projects. Big clients like to see formal processes, structure, and organization. Your pitch, communication, and everything else should reflect all of that.

Use your small size as an advantage

If you're a smaller agency, you may be intimidated by the idea of working with a big client, but you can use your agency's size (and number of clients) as an advantage. Tie in phrases like, *"You are my sole focus"* into the pitch to ensure any possible doubt in their minds.



Make an “accusation audit”

This goes back to anticipating questions and answering them in your pitch. Create a list of things the other party might accuse you of, and then say it first. Most of these statements should start with, *“You probably think that...”*. Here are some examples:

“You probably think that our agency is small and hasn’t worked with a client of your size before.”

“You probably think that we don’t understand your industry.”

The key is to turn those statements around and make them believe you are the right agency for the job. Again, eliminate all doubt in their minds so by the end of the pitch, they can’t think of a single reason why you aren’t the perfect agency for the project. Matt at Speak Creative attributes their agency’s success partly to the pitch, and partly because of other factors:

“I’d love to say our pitch is so perfectly polished that clients just fall all over themselves to call us back. Honestly, it’s usually a matter of timing and persistence. If we’re reaching out with a great pitch to one group, it’s statistically improbable that we’re going to get a response from that group, even if our pitch and brand presence are top-notch. If we reach out to 10 or 20 groups, we’re much more likely to have someone who says that they’d like to have a conversation about what we can do and invite us into their problem and needs.”

Once you incorporate and master all of these pitch tips, you’ll be sure to land your first big client in no time at all!

Landing your first big client is a milestone, an achievement, a stretch goal that all agencies should get to experience. It’s a symbol of success after paying your dues, putting in so many hours of hard work, and becoming a pro at pitching new clients with complete and utter confidence. We have no doubt that with these new skills under your tool belt, you’ll land your first big client in no time.



Partner with Flywheel to reach that next milestone with confidence

Our Agency Partners Program makes it easy to earn recurring revenue from your clients and ensure your agency is set up for long-term, scalable success. Built on a base of rock-solid, reliable hosting, you'll be able to provide ongoing, automated services that go beyond billable hours. In addition, Flywheel will be there every step of the way with resources and dedicated account management to help you land not only your first big client, but every single client you sign on. Ready to join 2,500+ agencies and reach your next milestone?

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