

# Developing System Specifications

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## Overview

Last November, there was a Study Group thread on FoxUser that ended up running several hundred messages long. The topic: Developing System Specifications. As the thread kinda petered out, a number of people mentioned that it would be a good topic to discuss at DevCon. Since Microsoft wasn't able to include it in the official list of sessions, Doug Dodge and I decided to hold an informal get-together.

That session - held against formatl DevCon sessions on Sunday at 5 pm - attracted over 80 people in SRO mode. The conversations later that week and email that followed for weeks after that prompted me to propose this as a possible topic here at the Mid-Atlantic workshop.

The purpose of this session is to discuss the process of developing system specifications - all the way from that initial phone call where the voice on the other end of the phone grunts "Do ya write computer programs?" to the point where the customer writes out the final check for the system. While I am an independent developer who creates applications for other companies, most of the material I cover should also be relevant to corporate developers.

This handout is a collection of document samples that I use in the process of developing specifications. They are intended to be a starting point from which we can launch our discussion, not the be-all and end-all - the "Ultimate System Specification." <G> Just as the applications we write don't have every feature and utility that we'd like to include, these are a work in progress, and I hope to pick up some ideas to improve the process and the tools used during that process as well.

Boring Legal Information: Please note that I Am Not A Lawyer nor has this handout been written by or approved by a lawyer. This handout contains **ideas** for you to use in your own work. They are not to be copied wholesale and no-one - me or anyone else you could think of - will be liable for any damages you incur as a result of the use of this handout. You really oughta consult a lawyer before writing up your own specifications.

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# The Phone Call

## Demographic Information

Name, Address, Phone, and Where Did They Hear of You?

## Job Specifications

Wedded to FoxPro? Which version of FoxPro?

New, rewrite, or maintenance? If not new, why not use original programmer?

Purpose of system

Users - type, number of

Budget, time frame

## Explain the process

Phone call

Sales call

Engagement letter (acceptance starts the meter)

Specification development

## Ask for the Order

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# The Sales Call

## Define the Scope of Project

### Audit the Existing Application

Did they write a specification? Was it maintained?

Documentation (nyuk, nyuk, nyuk)

The code and design surfaces

### Their Resources

What materials do they already have?

Do they have staff to help - program, design, maintain, troubleshoot?

### Define the Environment

Hardware

Software

Political

### Explain the Process in Detail

Result of this sales call is an Engagement Letter

Result of the Engagement Letter is a ticking clock

The Specification is a blueprint for the system

### “Can you give me a ballpark figure?”

The only answer to this no-win question.

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# The Engagement Letter and Attachment

## The Purpose

Get them to commit to spending time - their level of participation here will have a significant impact on the success of the system.

Get them to commit to spending money - this is a valuable service, not a “pre-sale freebie.”

Give them an expectation of the order of magnitude of costs and spell out your terms.

Explain the process and the issues involved in software development, such as ownership of source code, contractor status, .and so on.

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# The Specification

## The Purpose

A written blueprint for the system with a price and time quote

## The Original Specification

See attached example

## Change Orders

Document all changes - even the most minor ones

Invoice for all changes - and include items with "N/C"