



# How to rescue an out of control software project

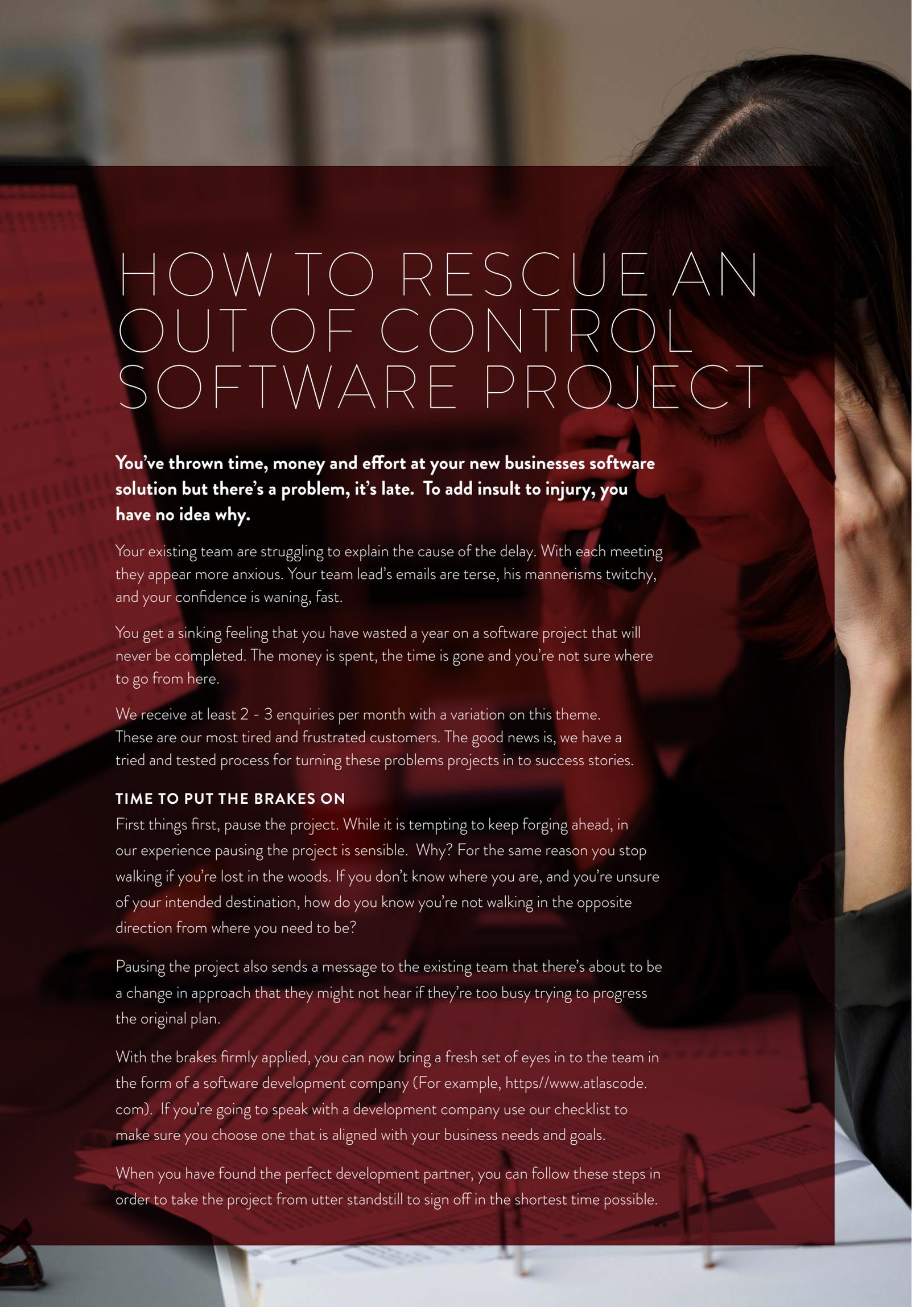
Simon Swords, Managing Director, Atlas Computer Systems Limited



Bespoke software  
that helps your business grow

<b>How to rescue an out of control software project</b>	<b>3</b>
Step 1 – Get a non-disclosure agreement in place	4
Step 2 – Get your existing team on side	4
Step 3 – Schedule a meeting with your existing team and the new team	4
Step 4 – Code review	5
Step 5 – Perform a functional requirements review and gap analysis	5
Step 6 – Create a detailed development plan with milestones for project completion and launch	6
Step 7 – Development and testing	6
Step 8 – Launch and support	6
<b>In summary</b>	<b>7</b>





# HOW TO RESCUE AN OUT OF CONTROL SOFTWARE PROJECT

**You've thrown time, money and effort at your new businesses software solution but there's a problem, it's late. To add insult to injury, you have no idea why.**

Your existing team are struggling to explain the cause of the delay. With each meeting they appear more anxious. Your team lead's emails are terse, his mannerisms twitchy, and your confidence is waning, fast.

You get a sinking feeling that you have wasted a year on a software project that will never be completed. The money is spent, the time is gone and you're not sure where to go from here.

We receive at least 2 - 3 enquiries per month with a variation on this theme. These are our most tired and frustrated customers. The good news is, we have a tried and tested process for turning these problems projects in to success stories.

## **TIME TO PUT THE BRAKES ON**

First things first, pause the project. While it is tempting to keep forging ahead, in our experience pausing the project is sensible. Why? For the same reason you stop walking if you're lost in the woods. If you don't know where you are, and you're unsure of your intended destination, how do you know you're not walking in the opposite direction from where you need to be?

Pausing the project also sends a message to the existing team that there's about to be a change in approach that they might not hear if they're too busy trying to progress the original plan.

With the brakes firmly applied, you can now bring a fresh set of eyes in to the team in the form of a software development company (For example, <https://www.atlascode.com>). If you're going to speak with a development company use our checklist to make sure you choose one that is aligned with your business needs and goals.

When you have found the perfect development partner, you can follow these steps in order to take the project from utter standstill to sign off in the shortest time possible.

## GET A NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT IN PLACE

You need to be able to have an open discussion with your new software partner and this will involve sharing highly confidential information about your business. So get a mutual non-disclosure agreement (NDA) in place to ensure that you can speak freely and share data unhindered.

Don't worry if you don't have a non-disclosure agreement to hand, reputable software companies have a template NDA they will share with you free of charge.

STEP

1

## GET YOUR EXISTING TEAM ON SIDE

Hopefully your existing team are well aware that the project is not progressing well. Therefore it should come as no surprise to them that you're looking for help to finalise the project.

In our experience, while the existing team might initially fear new people meddling in their work, they're eventually relieved that they now have more shoulders to bear the weight they have been carrying alone. This is especially true of small in-house teams working in-house for an otherwise non-tech focussed business.

When you do meet with your existing team advise them that the brakes are now on. Explain to them that you're not looking to apportion blame, you're grateful for the work they have completed to get to this current point in time. On from that, ask them if they would be prepared to work with you and your new technical partners to get the project finalised.

If there is friction, or the potential for friction, now is the time to address it.

STEP

2

## SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH YOUR EXISTING TEAM AND THE NEW TEAM

It's important that you get your existing team on side from the outset. Their input will be vital in helping your new team members assist in completing your project. Particularly the knowledge the existing team has of what he has already completed versus what is still outstanding.

This step is also an opportunity to understand how development has been completed to date, including the technology, tools and processes used.

You're ultimately looking to form a relationship between the existing and the new team. This is a chance for the existing team to honestly and openly reassess their perception of where they find the project versus where they wish to be.

This also gives your new team the opportunity to ask relevant and helpful questions. If this step is carried out correctly, this should be a bonding exercise between your existing and new teams.

STEP

3



## CODE REVIEW

With your teams now in place and ready to move forward you now have to check to ensure that the work that has been completed is a solid foundation that will meet the demands of your business for the foreseeable future.

A code review will ensure that what has been built can be completed to a satisfactory level of quality in a timely manner, and that it will be robust and scalable. As part of this discussion the new team will work closely with the existing team to better understand what has been created so far.

If there are any show stopping issues within the work completed to date, this is where you find them. This review is essential, as it ensures any gremlins hidden in the detail are extracted and dealt with before attempting to forge ahead.

Failure to take stock at this level means there is always the risk of those gremlins rearing their heads down the line, only for the project to be halted again.

If possible, this is also a good opportunity for the existing team to create some basic documentation around what has been built to date. We could write a huge guide (and probably will!) on the areas you should document. However, the most important things to document at this stage are all the non-obvious decisions that have been made by the existing team.

STEP

4

## PERFORM A FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS REVIEW AND GAP ANALYSIS

With step 4 complete you have established that the work completed to date is sound. You have confidence that you can take the project forward because there are no identifiable technical reasons that the project cannot be completed.

Now you can attempt to understand the distance between where the project currently sits, and the work that is required in order to bring it to completion.

If there is an existing requirements specification this is the document to start from. The new and existing members of the team should work together to identify what has been completed, and what is still left to do.

With an understanding of the work that is still outstanding, all remaining work should be carefully considered for whether it is definitely required for the completion of the project. We always recommend that anything that is not essential be trimmed from the requirements and moved to a later phase.

The business gets a greater benefit from the absolute essentials being completed quickly, rather than trying to stick steadfastly to the original requirements and the project taking longer to complete.

STEP

5



## CREATE A DETAILED DEVELOPMENT PLAN WITH MILESTONES FOR PROJECT COMPLETION AND LAUNCH

It's now time to lock a new plan down. If you're working with Atlas, we'll take the opportunity at this stage to create a detailed proposal, plan and corresponding timescale and costs breakdown.

You can review examples of the level of documentation we would provide in our example proposal and project plans.

This level of documentation is essential, it ensures that everybody has considered the risks and requirements for your project to a level of detail where you and your business will have confidence required in the new proposed dates for delivery. This is especially important when you're trying to fix a failed project as any further delays or hiccups will destroy the trust rebuilt by the new team.

STEP

6

## DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING

Development can now begin again.

Even with development now underway it's important to continue to monitor the health of the project. This includes regular progress reports, a weekly call/meeting, and various other updates to ensure that you're ahead of the curve.

In our experience, it's usually a good idea to perform preview/test releases of the software being created so you can see the solution coming together.

This gives the business the opportunity to see the fruits of your labour, and will increase their confidence that delivery is possible! This can also be an opportunity for various people in the business who will use the completed software to perform User Acceptance Testing as the project unfolds, rather than saving all of this work until the end which can be a mammoth task and leaves the highlighting of issues in the delivery too late.

STEP

7

## LAUNCH AND SUPPORT

Success! The project has been finalised and is ready to be launched.

The launch itself needs to be planned, particularly if the new solution is replacing an existing software solution.

Once the launch is complete, if you require ongoing support and maintenance your bespoke software partner should be able to assist you with that. Atlas provides a cost effective bespoke support and maintenance agreement giving you access to our support desk for SLA driven responses to any issues that may arise.

STEP

8



# IN SUMMARY

Not all software projects that find themselves floundering are beyond repair. We've used these eight steps to take many a project from failure to success here at Atlas.

Simon Swords, Founding Director, Atlas Computer Systems Limited

Give us a call on: 0800 133 7948

Give me on: [SIMON@ATLASCODE.COM](mailto:SIMON@ATLASCODE.COM)

Or visit us online at: [WWW.ATLASCODE.COM](http://WWW.ATLASCODE.COM)

ATLAS COMPUTER SYSTEMS LTD, UNIT 7, BRITANNIA BUSINESS PARK,  
COMET WAY, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA, ESSEX SS2 6GE





**ATLAS**  
\_CLEVER SOFTWARE

---

**BESPOKE SOFTWARE THAT HELPS YOUR BUSINESS GROW**