FIELD NOTES

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VERY SERIOUS TOOLS

III

THE ESSAY

WHY WE LEAVE.

Most service businesses are built to be needed. We built ours to be finished. Notes on the day we hand over the keys.

WHY WE LEAVE

BUILT TO BE FINISHED.

Most service businesses are built to be needed. We built ours to be finished. That isn't modesty. It's a design decision, and it has costs.

WORDS: VERY SERIOUS TOOLS | ABOUT 6 MINUTES

Most service businesses run on the same quiet maths. The longer a client stays, the cheaper they are to keep. So the work slowly arranges itself around staying: the login only one person has, the report only the agency can read, the "quick change" that needs a ticket. Nobody plans it. It accumulates, like cables behind a desk.

Clients notice. The average relationship with a digital-focused agency lasts 2.47 years, the shortest of any agency type in a 2025 ANA and 4As study.[1] We don't read that as clients being fickle. We read it as clients finding out, a couple of years in, that they've been renting something they thought they had bought.

So we start from the other end. Before we build anything, we write down the day we leave. Handover Day goes into the plan in week one, with a date and a checklist, and everything before it is judged by one question: will this still work when we're not in the room?

That question changes small decisions. Accounts are created in the client's name, not ours, even when it's slower. We pick the boring, well-documented tool over the clever one only we understand. Error messages are written for the person who reads them at 3 a.m. And before we go, someone on the client's team changes one thing in the tool themselves, while we watch and keep our hands in our pockets.

A TOOL WITHOUT A MANUAL IS A DEPENDENCY WITH BETTER BRANDING.

The manual is the part people underestimate. Often the reason companies don't use the tools they could isn't interest. It's know-how. Of the EU firms that considered AI and didn't adopt it, 70.3% named a lack of relevant expertise.[2] A tool without a manual is a dependency with better branding. So the manual isn't an appendix. It's the product. The software is the part that does the boring bits.

Here's the catch, because there's always one. Leaving costs us money. A retainer is predictable; a handover is a goodbye. We have to find the next problem instead of living on the last one. And some clients don't want to own things. They want someone to call. That's a reasonable thing to want, and we're the wrong people for it. We'll say so in the first meeting.

Sometimes tools break after we leave. Software depends on other software, and other companies change things. When that happens, the manual should get you most of the way. If it doesn't, call us. We fix it, charge for the fix, and then fix the manual, because a gap in the manual is our bug, not yours.

This is how tools worked before software made renting them so easy. You buy a good drill, you read the leaflet once, you own it. The shop doesn't send someone round every month to hold it for you.

So: we build it, hand it over, teach you to use it, and leave. If you call us again, we'd like it to be for a new tool, not a rescue.

THE DEAL, IN FOUR LINES

WE BUILD IT.

WE HAND IT OVER.

WE TEACH YOU TO USE IT.

WE LEAVE.

1 ANA / 4As, client-agency relationship tenure study, 2025: digital-focused agencies average 2.47 years, against roughly 6.8 to 7 years across agency types. ana.net/content/show/id/pr-2025-04-tenure

2 Eurostat, Use of artificial intelligence in enterprises (2025 data): share of EU enterprises with 10+ employees that considered AI but did not use it, citing lack of relevant expertise. ec.europa.eu/eurostat, "Use of artificial intelligence in enterprises"