

The plate-spinner

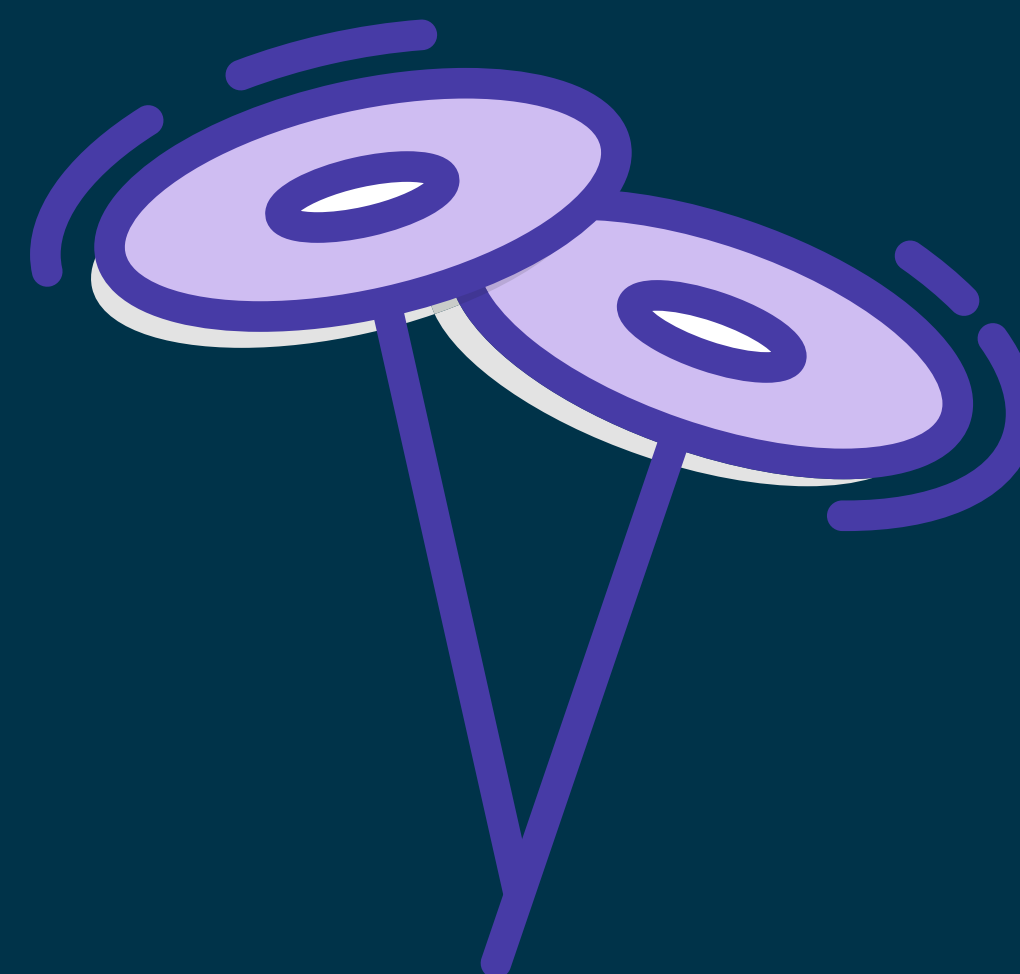


Plate spinners, as the name suggests, have a lot of things on the go at once. Sometimes, the environment they work in can seem a little chaotic, but they get things done. They normally pay you on time, but every so often they let it slip.



Getting the plate-spinner to pay on time

Building a relationship with this kind of customer is all about staying at the top of their to-do list. You need to show compassion for the challenges they face, whilst being persistent.

If the plate spinner is late paying you, it's usually because they're short of time. There are a few different ways you can make it easier for them to settle up.

There are also some innovative ways you can cut through the craziness that surrounds them to make sure your voice is heard. Take a look at our plan to see how.

Before you accept the job

Clearly communicate when you'd like to be paid and what the options are for making the payment. Ideally, put this in writing as well as discussing it face-to-face. Making this part of a wider conversation about the project helps minimise any awkwardness.

Also, if you're able to, give your customer payment options you can frame the conversation as a question (how would you prefer to pay?) rather than a request (I like to be paid by...).



During the job

The more responsive you are to your customer when your work or product is being delivered, the more likely they are to be responsive when it's time to pay.

When you're too busy to reply properly, send a quick text or email to say you'll get back to them later. It (quite literally) pays to keep them in the loop.

1. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge* (Penguin, 2009)

Just before you finish the job

Nudge, a book by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, explores the idea that small and apparently insignificant things can have a big impact on people's decisions.

"By knowing how people think, we can make it easier for them to choose what is best for them, their families and society."

If we apply this theory to invoices being paid, it suggests that you should be in regular contact with your customers to 'nudge' them towards paying. This is truer than ever if your customer is a plate spinner.

So just before you complete your work or deliver your product, remind your customer of your payment terms.

A principle that's explored in *Nudge*, called herd behaviour, suggests that people are more likely to do something that they see others doing. For example, people are more likely to pick an apple pie in a cafe if they see others asking for it.

You can capitalise on this by letting your customers know that, on average, people pay you within the first week (or whatever is true for your business). This could be a small note that you include at the bottom of your invoice – or it could be something you mention by email.



When you send the invoice

Because the plate spinner is time-poor, it's important to make paying your invoice quick and easy.

Ensure that you're giving them a range of ways to pay. Some accounting softwares will now give you the option to include a 'pay now' button in your invoices – allowing customers to pay online.

It's also worth letting your customers know if they can pay over the phone. This is often something you can tag on at the end of a call about something else: "While I have you on the line, would it be easier if I took the payment now?"

If you're going to see your customer, take a copy of the invoice with a 'thank you' gift. This is usually a low-value item with your branding on it. The idea is that it's regularly seen by the customer and keeps your company on their mind.

Here are a few ideas of gifts that you could have branded: a USB stick, notepad, portable phone chargers, fridge magnets, jam or marmalade.

If you're not going to see your customer face-to-face, you can email them and post the gift. Avoid referencing the amount of money due in the subject line as it can put them off opening and even trigger their spam filter to send your email to the Trash folder.



One week after invoicing

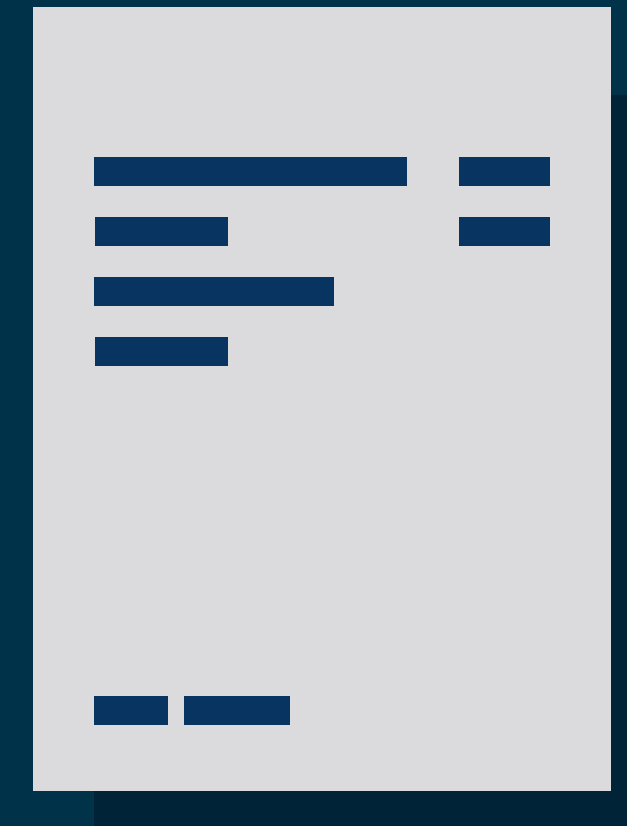
We recommend contacting your customer once a week after you've sent the invoice, so you can continue to 'nudge' them towards making a payment. This helps you stay at the top of their to-do list.

However, now might feel a little soon to be demanding payment. Instead, try asking for feedback on the work or product you have just supplied them with. It's a great way of showing that you value their opinion and of keeping your business on their mind.

Give your plate-spinning customers everything they need in one place by forwarding on your email with the invoice attached, rather than starting a new email every time.

Two weeks after invoicing

You don't want to come across as a pesterer, but it is important to keep talking to plate-spinning customers. Automated reminder emails can be a good way of reminding them to pay, without it looking like you, personally are chasing them.



Three weeks after invoicing

If you're struggling to get through to the individual you need to speak to, here are a few tricks to have up your sleeve:

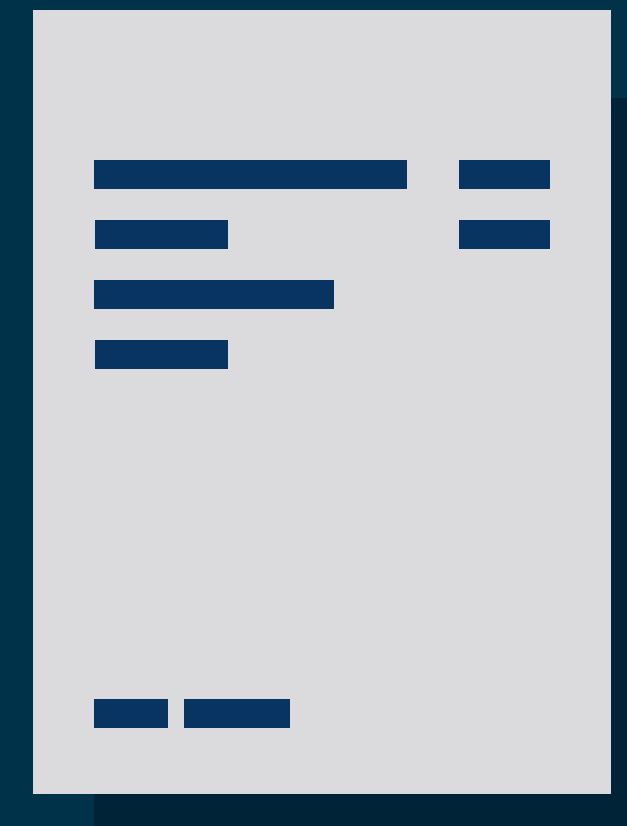
Search for them on LinkedIn and add them as a connection, sending a friendly message "to check that" they received your invoice.

If you're contacting a small business, ask to speak to Accounts Receivable rather than Accounts Payable. They are highly likely to be looked after by the same person, but it makes you sound like you're trying to pay them, rather than asking for payment.

Four weeks after invoicing

Unless your payment terms state otherwise, customers have thirty days to pay you.

If they still haven't paid after this time, you might want to consider some of these 'last resort' tactics. Any one of them could be the 'nudge' your customer needs to make that payment. It's also important to state clearly that they are in breach of your payment terms.



Last resort tactic **one**

Add receipts to your emails so you can see if the recipient opened them. If you're using Outlook, simply go to File > Options > Mail. The option to add a delivery receipt is under Tracking.

Last resort tactic **two**

Send them an invite to a short meeting to talk about the late payment. This only has to be a 15-minute slot, but seeing it in their calendar will help remind them that you need to be paid.



Last resort tactic **three**

For smaller businesses, you may wish to be lenient. You could offer to split the invoice over two months to help with their cash flow. You could also remind them that they can pay in the way that suits them.

Last resort tactic **four**

For bigger businesses, try sending them an audit of all outstanding invoices.

Appeal to your customer's better nature. Explain that you're a small business and that having payments made on time is crucial.

Whilst this might feel like you're revealing too much, it is possible that someone who works for a larger organisation simply hasn't thought about the impact not paying will have on your cash flow.



After they've paid

If you'd like to work for this customer again, it's worth finding ways of staying in touch with them after they have paid.

Invite them to industry events when you get the chance. Keep them updated about how your business is doing and any major changes you make. You can even send them Christmas or holiday cards to ensure you're on their mind.

Find out more

Powered by Stripe, our new invoice payments features make getting paid faster, clearer and simpler than ever before. It means no more late nights chasing invoices, and more time spent doing what you love.

[See the features](#)