

How to Write Winning Proposals

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When organizations need a specific task performed, they often call potential bidders and invite proposals for a competitive bid. Following the proposal review process, the most qualified bidders are usually called in for a presentation of the ideas presented in their proposal. Therefore, your proposal must be convincing enough to result in an invitation to present your ideas.

You have to identify the appropriate strategy that will set you apart from your competitors. If the client intends to select the contractor strictly on the proposal evaluation, your proposal must position you as the obvious choice. The strategy you select will be the overriding theme in your proposal.

There are several different strategies that are effective in persuading your prospective client to choose you:

1. Show the client what will be gained by hiring you. Do you have a unique asset that you competitors don't have such as proprietary software or an established reputation for technical superiority? Have you successfully solved similar problems for other clients? If so, you can use that as basis for illustrating your expertise and ability to produce a workable solution. You might even be able to use your previous clients as a reference testifying to the quality and value of your work.
2. Show the client what might be lost if appropriate measures are not taken. Identify or create areas of concern for which the client must be particularly careful. These so-called "worry items" may be fundamental issues that other bidders may feel are too trivial to mention. You will often score points for your attention to detail in such cases. This demonstrates three very persuasive points to the client: 1) your awareness of the issues involved in solving the client's problems, 2) your concern for doing the job properly, and 3) your ability to satisfy the client's problem.
3. Show the client how you can meet the required schedule at the lowest cost. This strategy is most often used when the client's problem can be solved by a routine solution and there are several qualified people competing for the contract. Exercise caution when proposing a low cost. An unusually low bid might result in a loss of credibility by raising doubts in the client's mind about your abilities to perform the work for such a low price.

As a consultant or small business, you might feel that you inherently have a disadvantage over larger well-established corporations. You can turn your size into an advantage by letting the client know that, unlike a large organization which probably will not put its best staff on the project, you will put your brightest and most experienced staff on it.

Also, as a small enterprise, you probably are not working on million-dollar contracts. For large companies, small contracts (the type that you focus on) are not very profitable and therefore are often not awarded the same attention as larger ones. Point this out to your prospective client in your proposal.

Once you have performed the necessary background research regarding your prospect's needs and identified the best strategy for your proposal, you can begin your first draft. Unless you have been given strict guidelines for the format, such as with government contracts, you should include these six sections: Background, Objective, Suggested Approach, Schedule, Qualifications, and Cost.

Be clear when you write and remember to work in your strategy throughout the text. Include figures, graphs, etc. to break the visual monotony of pages of words. Have your proposal reviewed before giving it to your prospect. Errors in grammar and spelling reveal a lack of attention to detail which may cost you the contract.