

PROPOSALS THAT WIN BUSINESS

Sales are often the thing we find the hardest in our business. The faster we want to grow, the better we need to be at getting new business. You go from a business - where word of mouth is the main 'sales machine' - to having to write competitive proposals, especially when you want to enter new areas and have higher worth \$\$\$\$ clients.

Below are some tips about writing a proposal that wins business.

BUT firstly, when will your proposal fail?

A proposal is a tool to get business not an information packet. The purpose of a proposal is to make a persuasive case that leads to a sale. To win the business, your proposal must overcome the following hurdles:

- *Do I know who this is?* If this is the first time the customer has heard of you, your proposal will be thrown out.
- *Is this proposal compliant?* If the customer provided a template for the proposal, proposals that don't follow that template will be thrown out.
- *Does this proposal make sense?* If the executive summary does not define the problem correctly or propose a reasonable solution, the proposal will be thrown out.
- *Does the solution provide value?* Of the proposals that met the minimum as defined above, the one that wins will be the one that provides the most value.

Below are tips that overcome all four hurdles.....

1. Know who you are writing the proposal for and the decision makers

You must research the customer --preferably be interviewing people involved in the decision-- to understand what's *really* going on.

Different customer groups will likely have different "takes" on what's needed and will use different terms to describe the situation. If your proposal will be evaluated by both engineers and accountants, for instance, you'll need to understand both, and be able to communicate with both.

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2. Lay the appropriate groundwork.

Your proposal will be thrown out unless you've done activities that establish recognition in the mind of the decision-maker. There are two ways to do this:

- Create a public presence. This consists of advertising, social networking, speaking to conferences, publishing whitepapers, and so forth.
- Create a personal presence. This consists of establishing recognition through sales calls, customer meetings, emails, notes, texts, and phone calls. For smaller businesses this is often the route we can 'afford' to take.

3. Brainstorm your proposal approach.

Use these questions to get the discussion started:

- What is the customer's problem or issue?
- Why is this problem important to them?
- What parts of the business are affected by this problem?
- What business goals are not being achieved due to this problem?
- What, precisely, will we propose?
- How will we do this work?
- What proof can we offer that we are qualified and competent?
- How can we demonstrate that the value we propose to offer is credible?

4. Write the executive summary.

Contrary to popular belief, the executive summary is NOT a summary of the contents of the proposal. It is a summary of the basic issues, the proposed solution, and the promised results. Effective executive summaries are structured like this:

- Problem, need, or goal.
- Expected outcome.
- Solution overview.
- Call to action.

5. Write the body of the proposal.

The body contains detailed explanations of how you will do the work, the people involved, your prior successful experience you have in this area, previous customers you've help on similar projects, and evidence of your core competency and financial stability.

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In many cases, the customer will have already defined the structure of the proposal or provided a template. If so, follow that structure *exactly*.

6. Mercilessly edit the whole thing.

Appearance is as important as content. There should be no obvious grammatical errors and an absolute minimum of typo errors.

SO.... hopefully this has helped you to write your next winning proposal!

Look forward to talking again next month! In the interim, feel free to email me if you have any questions or queries about your marketing or new business activities.

Have a successful SALES month,

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