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Ten Steps to a Power-Packed, Persuasive Proposal

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Writing proposals is a skill no businessperson should be without. Often clients will put out a request for proposal from three or more companies at the same time. In order to get their business, yours has to be the most convincing one -- the one that demonstrates the most value for clients' dollars. Here are ten steps to constructing compelling proposals that ensure your success.

1. As with any writing project, you first have to understand the purpose of your proposal and the people reading it. Usually with a proposal it is to get business, while they find the right vendor to solve a problem.
2. Understand your readers. Learn all you can about their needs. Ask lots of questions. The more needs of theirs that you address, the better your chance of getting the sale.
3. Underpromise and over deliver. Do NOT overpromise just to close the deal. For example, by pricing yourself too low, you will lose profit. Offering an unrealistic deadline will put your reputation at risk when you are unable to deliver on time.
4. Do your homework. Ask lots of questions during the course of your research. Make sure to fully understand your client's needs, and how your product will meet their needs. What are their expectations? How will they use your product or service? Also, learn their views on pricing and quality – are they willing to pay a premium for quality, or would they rather get a sloppy job for cheap? Also find out: * What problem are they

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trying to solve? * What would their ideal solution be? * What is the most important aspect of this project to them: price, quality, timing? * Who is the final decision maker? Will you have to deal with a large committee of decision makers? This might pose problems for you if you receive conflicting feedback.

5. Ask clients for a wish list. Tell them you can't deliver everything on their list of ideals, but you want to get as close as you can. Next, ask them to prioritize the items in order of importance. This way you will be able to realistically meet their expectations.

6. Organize the proposal to persuade. Focus on making the sale. Act as if everything is already in place and this is a contract about to be signed.

7. With research in hand, begin writing the proposal. This step should run fairly quickly now that you have done your homework.

8. Get to the point quickly – this doesn't have to be in the first sentence, but make it close to the top. Be sure they get your meaning quickly. If you don't do this correctly, your proposal will wind up in the circular file before it is read.

9. Make sure to tell clients how your solution meets their needs. As with any marketing piece, be sure to define for them how THEY will benefit from your services. ("What's in it for me?")

10. Add a sense of urgency. A proposal can sit on somebody's desk for months before they decide to do anything with it. By adding an expiration date on your offer, you will encourage them to make a decision sooner.

Be sure to include a cover letter and cover page with longer proposals. Adding a line for a signature at the end of the offer easily turns the proposal into a contract. With these guidelines in mind, you are sure to be a winner at any job you bid on.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander is a business writer and marketing consultant based in Longmont, Colorado, USA. Improve your writing skills at work! Subscribe to her FREE ezine. Write to the Point at lalexander@write2thepointcom.com or visit <http://www.write2thepointcom.com/articles.html>.

Ten Tips for Creating a Winning Proposal - Part 2

By Cavyl Stewart

Ten Tips for Creating a Winning Proposal - Part 2 by Cavyl Stewart

Part 1 of this series described five critical components for creating a winning proposal. In some instances, these components are all a prospective client needs to make a determination and award the job. Be sure to carefully review the request for proposal to determine the amount of information you need to include in your proposal. Remember, each proposal is unique.

Here are five more tips to keep in mind when preparing a winning proposal.

Tip #6 - Properly Estimate Job Costs

Selecting the right price for the proposed work is a delicate balancing act. Pricing the job too low could cause you to lose money on the job. Also, a bid that's too low might be perceived by the client as unrealistic and cause you to lose the bid. Take time to properly consider the amount of time and materials involved in completing the tasks you have outlined and price the job accordingly.

Tip #7 - Add Meat as Necessary

Proposal requirements vary greatly. If you're putting together a proposal for a major corporation or a government job, you'll probably need extensive documentation. Examples of additional information that might be required include sub-contractor agreements, non-disclosure forms, contingency plans, change order procedures, risk analysis data, benchmark results and more. If the request for proposal asks for it, be sure you include it.

Tip #8 - Don't Reveal Too Much!

When submitting your proposed solution to the prospective client's problem, you must not reveal too much information. You need to satisfactorily explain your approach while at the same time keeping some information to yourself. Sound confusing? How about this: If you tell the client exactly how to solve the problem, the client might decide to implement your solution without your assistance! You'll lose out on the bid, not because your approach was inadequate, but because you explained it so well the client did not need an outside company to implement it.

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Tip #9 - Proper Presentation

Once you've gathered all the important components for your proposal, take time to ensure it is properly presented. Put together a Table of Contents and check that all copies of all documents are proofread, smudge-free and in the correct order. Finally, insert the proposal into a suitable binder. Give the finished document a final review; it's your last chance to correct any mistakes. Submit the proposal according to the instructions provided and make sure it is delivered before the submission deadline. If possible, deliver the proposal in person. You never know who you'll encounter on the receiving end!

Tip #10 - Investigate the Winning Bid

If your company is not awarded the bid, try to learn more about the company that did submit the winning proposal. Put on your investigator hat. Find out the price submitted with the winning bid and the approach that was proposed. Research the company itself. Use whatever you discover as a learning tool for the next time. The information just might help your company put together the next winning proposal.

And there you have it - ten tips for submitting a winning proposal. Good Luck!



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