

Get Real About Winning Bids

The best bids are generally built around four key components: good client relationships, persuasive bid documents, compelling presentations and powerful bid strategy. This can make things a bit complicated but, thankfully, there's some solid research that points the way to success in each area.

MatchPoint helps organisations win bids, proposals and tenders. We harvest and build best practice, and provide our clients with expert resources, skills coaching and more effective ways to win. This tip will help make winning easier.

Client relationships – ask the right questions: This is not about interrogating clients, and it's not about 'selling' your offer. Instead, the trick is to get the client to say how your product will benefit them. So in place of asking "Would you be interested in the benefits of our offer?" ask "What are the implications of fixing that problem (with our solution)?" Research in the UK has shown that subtly changing the type of questions you ask can increase the success of sales meetings by 30%.

It shows that meetings with target clients should be carefully planned to build the relationship and explore the right issues. It also shows we need to change some mind-sets about what effective selling really is.

Persuasive documents – make it easy: We are all visual beings. Reading text is not a natural process (especially bid documents!). And most of us read by searching for familiar patterns, pictures and shapes. This has serious implications for writers – and how well their messages are picked up, understood and remembered by the reader. So how should we arrange information on the page? Some breakthrough Australian research shows just how important layout can be. For example, the simple discipline of putting your heading at the top left of the page can increase reader take-out by 38%. And using serif fonts (letters with the little flicks) for printed text can increase comprehension by a staggering 58%. (Interestingly, sans serif fonts work better for web pages.)

The thing is, in searching for new and exotic ways to give documents more impact, many people are forgetting the basics. Bid documents need to look good and get noticed, but they must also follow sound principles of layout. So fix your templates, stick to them, and improve them gradually over time.

Compelling presentations – hold a conversation: Good presentations are less about slides and content, and more about people and delivery. Research results vary, but there is general agreement that more than 50% of a presenter's message is conveyed through non-verbal communication – that's movement, emphasis and body language. So standing still and talking in monotone is not only boring, it destroys your presentation. Be excited, be passionate. Be you.

Your audience also needs to be reassured. Usually, they've invited you because they are interested, but a little anxious – they will almost always have questions and doubts. So you need to engage them and involve them. Avoid tightly planned monologues; instead plan to have a lively and dynamic conversation.

powerful bid strategy – aim at the target: A lot is written and talked about bid strategy, but it's actually very straight forward. Good strategy simply brings together two things - what the client really wants, and what you can do better than your competition. Sometimes this can just be lower cost, sometimes stronger capability. Other times a creative idea from left field will win it. The hard truth is that you can't be best at everything all the time. But if you can offer something different in a way that is meaningful to the client you're in with a shot.

So to win bids consistently, you need to do lots of small things right – and a few big things as well. There are always unknowns to contend with, but there are real ways to increase your chances of success over time.

Matchpoint helps clients achieve best practice through **better bids, sharper skills and stronger systems.**