

At A Glance

People read images not words. So you can increase the chance of winning by turning the pages of your bid document into a series of 'information pictures' – not just endless text.

helps organisations win bids, proposals and tenders. We harvest MatchPoint 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.

Read the following text as fast as you can – don't be put off because it looks a bit odd:

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at an Elingsh uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is that frist and lsat ltteers are at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by it slef but the wrod as a wlohe.

Isn't that strange? Did you find yourself reading and making sense of it surprisingly quickly? It shows that, to the human brain, words are just pictures which it instantly processes to infer some meaning. If the word starts and finishes with the right letter, if the length is about right, and if we can recognise some of the letters in the middle – our brains are very good at 'guessing' the right meaning and moving on. We assemble information from the outside in – not the inside out. We are naturally impatient and skilful at processing visual information this way.

And that's exactly how we consume a whole page of information.

Pick up a newspaper – what do you do? Check the main headline, look for some pictures, read the caption – skip between all those little quotes or sub-headers that are scattered through the articles? That's what most people do. They jump all over the page until something triggers enough interest for them to dive into an article. They've scanned the page, mapped what's on it, then made a decision about what they are going to read in detail.

Editors of newspapers and magazines know this. They have to – they compete to attract and entertain their readers. And they are very good at giving the reader just what they need to pull out the content and stay interested.

And this is precisely what a bid document should do – and sadly, seldom does.

So get ahead of the competition. Give your readers provocative headlines rather than bland old headings. Give them pictures – and make sure they have captions. Emphasize the important bits and put key facts in boxes or different colours. Break the whole thing up with sub-headers. Don't just write endless text – paint a picture, every page.

Doing it like this has a very important effect on the reader. It gives them an instant feel for the content of the page. It gives them a frame of reference and a range of options about what to read first. It gives them greater choice and control over how they consume the information. And greater control and choice means a more empowered reader.

If you can empower your readers, they will stay alert and interested longer. They will be more likely to engage with, consider and remember the messages in your bid. Which gives you the advantage, and makes your bid more effective than the competition.

This isn't about frilly decoration and gloss. It's about enabling effective communication and relating to your reader. And it could win you the bid.

So put into your bid documents what the reader needs to take out the information. Give them content and meaning – **at a glance.**