

How to Stuff Up a Competitive Bid

Here's a quick recipe for completely wrecking a bid – because sometimes it's easier to learn by aiming for the opposite of what you really want.

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.

Why is it that our business proposals never end up as good as they could be? No matter how important they are, there always seem to be things we could have done better. Is there some secret urge in all of us to undermine or sabotage the bid? Well if there is, where is the central text on how to lose properly? There are plenty of books on how to win, but nothing on 'Best practice for losing the bid' - how to really stuff it up. To stay within the rules, but to make absolutely sure you don't win. Here's a start.

Ignore the client, talk about yourself: Never recognise the client's business and what they are trying to achieve. Instead, talk about yourself. Start every proposal with the words "We are the biggest and the best . . .". This is guaranteed to switch readers off, irritate them, and perhaps even send them to sleep altogether. It works every time.

Be as boring as possible: Go for long sentences and big words. Use technical jargon and three letter abbreviations (TLAs) as much as you can. Cram the page full of text so you put them off as soon as they open the document – one paragraph per page is a good rule of thumb. Don't include any pictures and, if you just can't stop yourself, definitely don't include any captions to explain them.

Never use the 'b' word: 'Benefits' (and the word is used here purely for educational purposes) are dangerous things to play with, and may lead to instant success if you are not very careful. Don't play with fire.

Never give more than you are asked for: Remember that 'adding value' is a foolish concept. Low cost is everything. It makes certain that the client doesn't get excited, and that you don't make a profit. Never offer them anything more than they ask for.

Drown them in information: The more information you can squeeze into your documents and presentations, the less power the client has to understand what on earth you are talking about. Adopt the attitude "It's all in there somewhere if they want to look for it". This puts the onus squarely back on the client's shoulders and forces them to work hard to find any reason to choose you. Remember, they made you work hard to put the bid together, so make sure they regret ever asking you!

And never summarise what you mean, they may just get the point and give you the job.

Think mechanical: There are some schools of thought that business is done between one person and another. This is loose talk. Organizations are faceless machines that make automatic decisions based purely on logic and hard analysis. The human beings they employ are simply decoration – they are only there to keep the computers working properly. Do not recognise them as people, it makes them nervous.

Don't release the inner human: Never show that you are human either. Make sure personal presentations are dominated by PowerPoint slides full of words and numbers. Don't smile. Be very careful not to show that you enjoy doing a good job. Never get visibly excited or passionate about your work. Don't show that you care about your employees – and especially not about your clients.



Reinvent the wheel: Remember, consistency is the enemy. It smacks of professionalism and can almost win a bid by itself if you aren't careful. Never systemise your approach to competitive bids and don't train anyone how to do it. Use a different typeface and page layout each time so the client isn't quite sure who it's from.

Don't leave losing to chance: Some bright spark is bound to come up with something clever and simple that could win a job. Never give them the opportunity - just don't talk about the subject.

So there we are – some golden rules for losing it in style. Pin these rules to your notice board and insist people follow them. You should never win another contract again. And, in time, no one will ever ask you to put in another of those pesky bids or submissions.