

# Tenders and Proposals

*Preparing proposals is enough to make most people cringe. They take far too long to prepare, they're absolutely boring to write and a real pain in the neck. Sound familiar?*

Having said that, proposals have an enormous bearing on whether or not someone is going to buy from you, so it makes sense to ensure that your proposal sells. The only problem with doing that is "normally" to create a really "flash" proposal takes time and that's something that most people simply do not have to spare. But as the saying goes, "You never get a second chance at a first impression". The way you present your document directly correlates to how your prospects perceive your business. A professionally presented document makes prospects feel you're a professional outfit, poor presentation – that you're inefficient.

If you've tried proposal templates before in an attempt to save time, you'll know that unless it's easily customizable, the document comes out looking like an impersonalized template which can leave a bad taste in your prospects' mouths.

When you get down to it, clinching that deal is all about salesmanship in print. It's about addressing the needs your prospect wants fulfilled, and proving how you fulfill those needs in the most result-orientated way.

The following will show you how to create a winning proposal that can have a dramatic effect on your conversion rates and then how to create a "template" so it looks as if you've written it from scratch for each individual prospect.

## **4 reasons why proposals are so very important**

Some sales people think that because they're great at selling face-to-face, they don't need to put a lot of time or effort into their proposals. That's where many of them come undone.

Unless your prospect hands you a cheque 'on the spot', there's still a chance they won't purchase from you. After all, once you've left their office, and a day or two passes, that's when the excitement levels start to fade and the fears and concerns start to rise to the surface.

**The competition:** There's a fair chance that your prospective client has approached

one or more of your competitors too so you're not the only company in the running for their business. Sure, your face-to-face presentation may have 'wowed' a prospect but if you're the first person they saw, who's to say that the other sales people didn't do just as good job.

**Selling to those visual types:** For visual people, it gives a visual representation of your selling argument in its entirety so these types of people are more likely to take in what's written on paper than what is explained to them.

**Long lead times:** If the decision making process takes some time, it's naturally important that your proposals re-sells them on your product and business to jog their memory.

**Convinces the 'non-present' decision maker:** In many situations, there's a fair chance that all the decision makers may not have been present at your initial sales presentation. A proposal that epitomizes 'salesmanship in print' does the selling for you so the decision maker doesn't need to rely solely on the feedback from the person you made direct contact with.

## **How to re-use your content without the text looking like it's regurgitated and impersonal**

As mentioned above, to achieve the most powerful results, the message needs to look like it's personalized to that particular business YET if you were to do that, there's a good chance you'd spend all your time writing proposals.

### **So, what's the answer?**

Your proposal master document will be made up of three types of information:

**100% templated material:** You can develop a set structure for your proposal with set sections and some of these sections can be re-used verbatim time and time again e.g. case studies.

**Macros:** There are other sections which, utilizing macros built into your word-processing program, you can select from

depending on the type of client. Depending on your macro programming skills you can actually have multiple-choice tick boxes that you check and the copy that relates to those tick boxes is then automatically inserted into your document.

**Totally personalized content:** This applies to specific figures, strategies and ideas that you may include at the beginning or the end of the document to add to the sales appeal.

### **Creating the 'meat'**

As with a verbal sales presentation, your written sales presentation should have a beginning, middle and an end.

The beginning addresses the prospect's situation, thanks them for the opportunity and identifies with their specific needs.

The middle includes all the selling information about your product / service and company.

The end includes the 'move forward' strategy including an action plan and 'the next step'.

It should also address the 6 questions of selling: 'Who, What, When, Why, Where and How' or more specifically:

- What products and services do you sell?
- Who is your target market?
- Why do they need your product and your company?
- How can you prove that your product or service fulfill their needs?
- When do they need to make a decision?
- Where can they get it? What's the next step?

When creating your 'template' document, answer each of these questions in detail.

### **1. The products and services you sell**

List each product. The easiest way to do that is to (in the first instance) create a table and list the following elements against each product or service. List as many as you can think of.

Also, list things like:

How does it compare with competing products?

If selling services, what process do you go through to ensure the client receives results?

Once you've done that, then turn this information into sentences within block of text that talk about the product, and list various benefits in order of importance.

This information can either be used in whole or you can create programmable functions that enable you to select the benefits that are most important to a particular client.

Create a table with the following headings:

- Product
- Feature
- Advantage
- Benefit
- Investment (price)
- What do they receive for their money

### **2. Who is your target market?**

Some businesses sell the one product to different target markets with different sets of needs. Others sell a range of products with one target market for each type of product. Then others still have a broad range of products and services with a variety of target markets buying a variety of their products.

By articulating which target markets you sell various products and services to, you can then match various benefits of your products to best suit the needs of your various buyers.

### **3. Why do they need your product and your company?**

What are their buying needs? What can you offer that your competitors cannot including details on both the product and the company. Find out why they are calling for tenders, why they want to undertake the project and what's important to them. Always include a corporate profile that outlines your company background, skills, expertise and qualifications of your key people, your results, and your philosophy.

### **4. How can you prove that your product or service meets their needs?**

Have you met all the technical specifications / requirements on the tender document? Let

them know what you can do for them, how you are going to deliver those results and what it will mean for them. Make sure you talk benefits.

### **5. When do they need to make a decision?**

How long is the decision making process? What is the timescale of the project? Don't just stop once you have submitted the tender. That is only part of the process. Develop a structured follow-up system that includes telephone calls and follow-up letters. These are designed to 'check-up', provide further information if required, and show that you're committed to helping them get results.

### **6. Where can they get it? What's the next step?**

Can you supply on time and the quantity required? What happens next? Include action plans so your clients know what to expect and

when. It's a little difficult to picture how a project is going to work, what needs to happen and when, especially with large projects. Including a comprehensive action plan, which clearly articulates each step, gives your prospective clients a much clearer picture of how you're going to deliver results.

And don't forget, just because you didn't win a tender, doesn't mean the company won't do business with you in the future. Keep in touch with them via telephone calls, newsletters, follow up 'how are things' letters, interesting news articles etc. This way you will always be considered for the next tender, and that will be the one you win.

