

USE YOUR NOSE TO WRITE BETTER PROPOSALS

By Sandy Pullinger, MD of nFold

DO YOU HATE WRITING PROPOSALS? MOST SALES PEOPLE AGREE THEY'RE A PAIN. THEY TAKE HOURS TO WRITE, THE INFORMATION YOU NEED IS NOT EASILY AVAILABLE AND NO ONE HAS EVER TAUGHT YOU HOW TO DO IT RIGHT. IMPROVE YOUR PROPOSAL BY FOLLOWING THESE 5 SIMPLE POINTERS... AND CRACK THE NOD!

1. Focus on the client, not on your products

If your proposals are focused on you – in that they describe features of your product or service, provide line item pricing and have no controlling strategy – then it's time for a change. They may be perfect for explaining your solution, but they fail to put the customer's needs first. Keep asking "why" until you get to the root of your customer's problems and uncover the iceberg hiding beneath the surface of what he's told you.

2. Use your NOSE

Winning proposals present the right information in the right order to create the right impression. Customers want to know that you understand their Needs, issues or business challenges. Will your solution help them to achieve the business results, improvements or Outcomes they seek? As the expert in your field, they are looking to you to recommend a specific Solution rather than bragging about your product features and confusing them with irrelevant technical details. Last but not least, provide Evidence of your ability to deliver and give them compelling reasons to select you rather than a competitor or alternative.

3. Consider how evaluators make decisions

Evaluators look for a single factor in your proposal before they

stop and decide. They ask themselves four questions:

- 1) Will your solution do what they want?
- 2) Can you deliver it?
- 3) Does the value exceed the cost by more than the competitors' or alternates'?
- 4) Why should they pick you?

The ONLY question you should be asking yourself is whether your proposal answers any of these questions.

4. Show the value graph

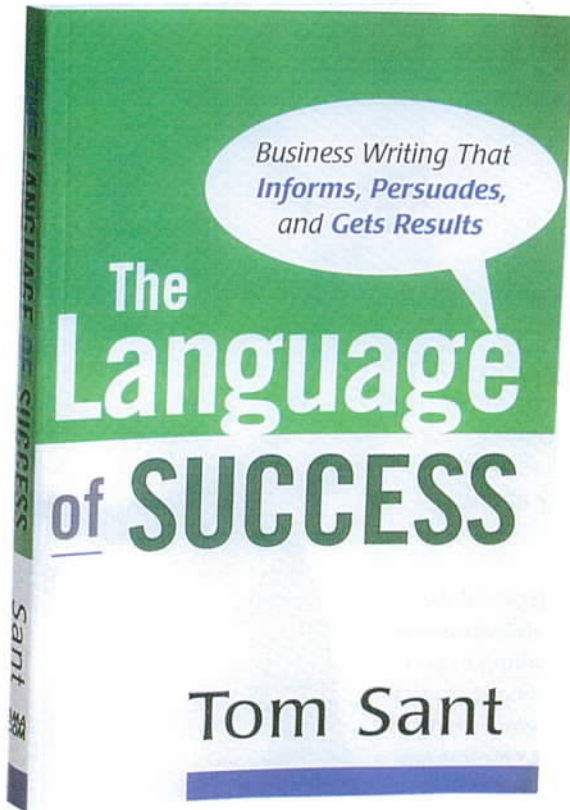
It's important to quantify the payback of your solution, and a picture certainly paints a thousand words. According to Dr Tom Sant, graphics and colour increase persuasiveness by 47%. Next time, present a visual graph that compares the current costs of doing nothing to the value that your solution will deliver over time, and show that this value exceeds the cost of your solution and by what amount.

5. Write clearly and directly

Use short words, short sentences and write in the active voice. Say "we will install" rather than "it will be installed". It helps build trust. And if they trust you, they are more likely to buy from you.

“In sales, the only opinion that really matters is the customer's. We may love our proposal, our boss may think it's terrific, but if the customer doesn't find it clear, compelling and persuasive, it's a loser.”

Dr. Tom Sant



The Language of Success

In life, and sales, it's imperative that we all deliver clear, accurate messages that inform, persuade and motivate. And it's important that we steer clear of Fluff, Guff, Geek and Weasel. Sound intriguing? Well, it's all about communication and speaking a language the client can understand.

Thankfully Dr. Tom Sant's latest book *The Language of Success* helps us do just that. As a world-recognised expert in effective selling and persuasive communication, his offering is a super resource for all sales people looking to get their message heard.

It provides practical techniques to writing exceptional sales proposals, effective e-mails and persuasive presentations. To order a copy, email info@nfold.com or call +27-11-486-2418. nFold sells the book for R350 incl VAT and delivery in SA with a R50 discount for orders of more than 5 books).

nFold has pioneered the proposal industry in South Africa since 2001 and co-founded the local community of APMP together with Deloitte in 2007. As local representatives of Grant Corporation and Concurrence, nFold complements proposal and bid software with best practice training and consulting. For a calendar of local events, see www.nfold.com/nFoldEventsSchedule2009.pdf

Get in the Zone

The persuasive zone is where your proposals convince your customers to pick you. Use the NOSE to win more deals.

Needs

Describe the pain your customer feels. Be sure to understand what he needs for his business. Usually this has nothing to do with your solution. For example, he lost revenue because his accounting system failed and he was unable to issue invoices.

Outcome

Why is the problem worth solving? What will your customer gain by addressing his pains? For example, by buying a new accounting system he will be able to issue more invoices in less time and improve business continuity.

Solution

Make it clear to your customer how your solution is the best one to meet his needs and achieve the outcomes he wants. He doesn't care about features, only benefits. For example, your accounting system allows clerks to view orders while they invoice so they make fewer errors.

Evidence

Now prove to your customer that you are the best way for him to solve his problems. Avoid vague claims like "best of breed". Use facts he can verify independently. For example, your accounting system won an award or was rated by customers as the fastest.

