

SA companies unfamiliar with bid process

By: Sandy Pullinger

There is a science of best practice that helps tenders and proposals win new business. Yet most South African companies - especially in our trying times - apply average to worst practice, because they're completely unfamiliar with the process that makes a bid succeed. Whether you're working on a small or a big bid, best practice shows that it works to follow a process.



As bid management expert Bill Graham says:

What's been sufficient in the past to win bids will not be good enough to win bids in the future. And unless your bid centre is a living organism, it will die. On the ground, as the recession hits hard, companies are cutting costs and trimming the very skills they need to get more business. Lower skilled people are being used for bid work, for example, sales people are being used as Bid Managers. They have no process skill and lack the knowledge of previous bids. They then go back to sales after the submission of the bid instead of following the whole process through to its conclusion, including win/loss reviews.

Graham and I see eye-to-eye on this one - when the tender environment gets more competitive is precisely when the art of proposal writing and bid management become vital skills that will mean the difference between holding your own and growing or falling by the wayside.

Critical functionality

If the bid centre reports into production rather than sales, then there is a trend in many organisations for it to drift towards being merely a copy shop. The critical functionality of opportunity assessment, qualification, bid management, value proposition definition, embedding golden threads and so on, all fall away. Most companies seem to select the wrong person as bid manager, and they use a secretary or PA as a coordinator.

Research released recently by the Business Development Institute shows that a best practice sales organisation has a bid process that is followed diligently. Experienced proposal and tender writers will deliver client-centred proposals that put the customer at the heart of the response and differentiate the company from its competitors.

Some companies grow in size without ensuring that the company growth is supported by mature processes, simply because they are ignorant of what is available - they just don't know what they don't know. Smaller companies could use external bid managers who would be able to quickly ensure a process is followed.

Benchmark

All companies should aspire to best practice bid management and use professional bid managers who belong to the APMP. Without this benchmark, there is no way of knowing how professional a company is performing in this environment.

Good proposal writing starts early in the sales cycle. Asking the right questions, uncovering the relevant information and understanding the client's business situation are vital to developing a winning proposal.

Having the right skills to choose the right words will make your company irresistible and means the difference between success and failure.

About the author

Sandy Pullinger, MD of nFold (www.nfold.com), has just returned from the international conference of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP). She addressed the conference on how to stand out from the crowd, and has returned with a range of tips and techniques learnt from other proposal specialists. As exclusive distributors for Sant Corporation, nFold represents the bid best practices promoted by Tom Sant - a world-renowned expert in effective selling and persuasive communication. nFold will be hosting a best practice 'Writing Persuasive Proposals' workshop locally on 7 July 2009. Email events@nfold.com for more.