

# WHAT WENT WRONG WITH YOUR PROPOSAL?



SOMETIMES YOU PRODUCE A GREAT PROPOSAL AND IT STILL LOSES. IT'S BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN. IT HAS TERRIFIC GRAPHICS. THE WIN THEME IS CREATIVE AND STRONG. AND WHAT HAPPENS? NOTHING. IT DOESN'T EVEN GET DOWN-SELECTED TO THE FINAL TWO OR THREE. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

BY TOM SANT

What's up is that your seemingly great proposal might be doomed by a fatal flaw. Here are some of the most common mistakes that can doom your magnificent effort:

### 1. WEAK QUALIFICATION OF THE OPPORTUNITY.

The proposal was well written, true, but there was never a deal there in the first place.

**a. Ask yourself three questions:** Is the client serious? Can we be competitive? Can we win? If you can't answer these questions honestly, throw up a big red flag. Otherwise, you may be in for a case of proposal heartbreak.

### 2. NOT UNDERSTANDING THE BUSINESS.

You can be 100% compliant to the process and 100% a loser if you don't understand the client's real needs.

**a.** Suppose a bank discovers they have a serious problem with the security of their accounts, particularly in regard to on-line banking functions. They issue a tender, seeking help. Do you think they indicate exactly what the problem is, how serious it is, how many customers are at risk? No, no, and no. Do your homework!

### 3. NOT USING WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY LEARNT.

It's surprising how many companies invest millions in CRM systems, but don't use them to store information or insights into decision makers, corporate culture, or other factors that could strengthen the next proposal effort.

### 4. PITCHING TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T THERE ANYMORE.

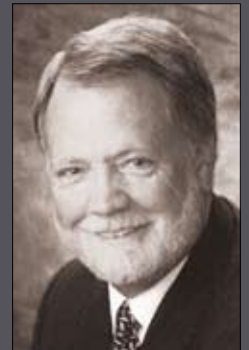
If we have a long-standing relationship with a client or a government agency, we might find ourselves unconsciously slipping into a traditional pattern.

We know what they want. We know how they like us to organise our bid. We share experiences and assumptions, so we don't bother to spell that stuff out. "They know that," we say.

"We don't need to mention it." What we may fail to notice is that those people have moved on. Some of them retired.

Some were replaced. Maybe a few of them transferred to new positions. And as a result our usual way of proposing may not work anymore. □

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## DON'T CLAIM IT, PROVE IT!

BY SANDY PULLINGER

"Marketing fluff destroys credibility and undercuts trust. We need to filter it out." - Tom Sant

Do you tell customers that you're 'leading edge', 'state of the art', 'best of breed', 'world-class', or 'uniquely qualified' without proving it?

If you make a list of your unique factors, can you cross out your company's name at the top of the list and insert your competitor's name? Then it's time to delete those trite phrases, rethink your unique factors and find some proof.

For example, are you first to market with something? Did an independent analyst rate you as the best in your segment? Or have you consistently delivered 99% customer satisfaction over the last 10 years? That's the kind of proof customers want.

It substantiates why they should pick you over your competitors. Having a great brand is no longer enough in today's highly competitive marketplace. Use facts and evidence of your uniqueness to persuade.

*Sandy Pullinger is the first chairperson of APMP South Africa. She has been writing proposals since 1992 and consulting in the field since 2001. She recently addressed the international conference of the APMP, where she met Tom Sant, whose world-renowned best practice nFold represents locally.*

