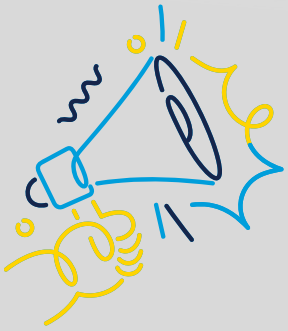
nFOLD
inspiring success

From paperwork to profit

How bid management shapes revenue, risk, and outcomes long before a contract is signed

LIVE WEBINAR serious about WINNING



Introduction
This article captures the essence of a live conversation from the Serious About Winning webinar series.

This is not a transcript in the traditional sense. Instead, it's a thoughtful rewrite of the webinar conversation, designed to surface the key questions and insights without the noise that comes with live discussion.

You can watch the full webinar recording here:[Insert recording link here]

About the Conversation
Izane Cloete-Hamilton, COO at nFold, moderated the conversation. Izane works in bid management and proposals professionally and is a certified APMP practitioner. This is not a theoretical interest.

She cares deeply about the role because she has seen what bid management can do when it is taken seriously and how much value is lost when it is not.

She was joined by three professionals, each bringing a different, practical perspective on bid management.

Maryke Otto, Senior Manager of a Global Bid Office, an experienced bid professional and APMP-certified practitioner, and Co-Chair of the APMP Sub-Saharan Africa Chapter. Maryke brings deep, hands-on experience across pursuits and proposal leadership.

Neil Philipson, based in the UK and originally from South Africa. Neil is an APMP Fellow and senior commercial and bid leader. He brings an executive-level view of how bids influence revenue, risk, and strategic business decisions.

Larissa Cornelius, CEO of nFold, a strategic proposal consultancy in South Africa, a certified APMP professional and Fellow, working at the sharp end of commercial strategy and bid delivery.

Together, the panel explored why bid management shapes outcomes long before submission, why the role is so often misunderstood, and what changes when organisations and individuals decide to treat it as the strategic profession it truly is.

Many bid professionals don't set out to build a career in bid management. How did you come into the role, and what eventually shifted it from something you "fell into" to something you chose deliberately?

Across the panel, a clear pattern emerged: bid management is often discovered, not planned.

Maryke explained that her career began in travel, tourism, and marketing roles that taught her how people make decisions. Later, she realised that bid management wasn't about documents, but influence and positioning. What felt accidental at the time turned out to be a logical progression grounded in human insight.

Larissa shared a similar story, entering through operations and sales. Initially, she viewed proposals as "just paperwork" until a pivotal moment reframed the role as a strategic, revenue-shaping function. That shift turned bid management from a task into a deliberate career choice.

Neil's route was through engineering. For years, he was designing solutions and pricing work without realising he was effectively writing proposals. It was only later, when formally appointed to lead a proposals function, that he recognised the profession and its impact.

The moment you understand why buyers decide, not just what they ask for, the role changes completely.

At what point did you realise that bid management was not just about producing documents, but about shaping decisions, influencing outcomes, and impacting revenue and risk?

For **Maryke**, the shift happened when she saw how decision-makers respond to framing, clarity, and confidence and not formatting. The work was no longer administrative; it directly influenced win decisions.

Larissa described a "light-bulb moment" when she understood that bids sit at the intersection of customer insight, competitive strategy, and storytelling. That realisation changed how she viewed both sales and proposals.

Neil's turning point came through professional certification. Learning structured best practice exposed how much wasted effort, burnout, and poor outcomes were caused by unmanaged, last-minute bidding. From that moment, he began reshaping both expectations and behaviour with executive support.

Most people arrive in bid management by accident, usually without realising the influence the role carries. Those who thrive are the ones who come to see its impact and make a conscious decision to treat it as a profession, not just a job.

What is the difference between sales support and strategic bid management, and why does treating bid management as a high-volume support function undermine win rates, quality, and long-term business outcomes?

Neil explained that in many engineering-led organisations, teams bid for almost everything. This creates volume but not value. Over time, win rates drop, margins erode, and teams inherit unprofitable or high-risk contracts.

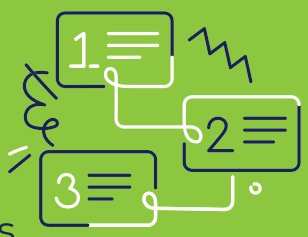
Larissa added that this problem has intensified since COVID. Even large, strategic bids are often left until the final weeks, turning bid teams into "dumping grounds" for late inputs. The result is burnout, poor quality, and damaged client trust.

Industry benchmarking supports this. Only a small minority of organisations run strategically mature bid functions, and those organisations consistently win far more while bidding less.

What breaks when volume wins over value?

- Win rates decline
- Teams burn out
- Quality and reputation suffer
- Organisations waste time and money

Strategic bid management focuses on the quality of decisions rather than the volume of bids, prioritising the right opportunities over simply submitting more proposals.



If we can't explain our value simply, we can't expect others to respect it.

How do you explain the value of bid management simply and clearly when speaking to someone outside the profession?

Maryke: "We help people make decisions by articulating value."

Neil: "I win work so project teams stay employed."

Larissa: "I help businesses tell stories that win and that resonates with both executives and clients."

To what extent do job titles in bid management actually reflect capability, authority, and real commercial influence?

Neil shared how his organisation deliberately reduced and clarified titles, aligned them to defined capabilities, and linked progression to skills and certification.

This created clarity, credibility, and real career paths.

Maryke warned that mismatched titles damage trust, both when capability exceeds the title and when the title exceeds the capability. Inflated titles can cause organisations to assume problems are solved when nothing has changed underneath.

What do organisations most commonly misunderstand about bid management, and how do those misunderstandings limit both the role's impact and its perceived value?

The panel agreed that bid management is still widely misunderstood as an administrative or process-only function.

Maryke noted that teams are often brought in too late and are expected to "just pull it together", without any influence over strategy or positioning. When that happens repeatedly, the role becomes defined by that limitation.

Neil described "panic bidding", which is usually driven by weak pipelines. Bid teams are treated as expendable resources rather than professionals. This damages morale and erodes long-term credibility.

Larissa highlighted that many organisations lack basic fundamentals:

- Opportunity qualification
- Customer insight
- Competitive analysis
- Alignment between what sales promises and what delivery can realistically provide

When bid management is consistently misunderstood and misused, the business and the people doing the work pay the price.

What happens to business performance and professional credibility when organisations consistently get bid management wrong?

For businesses

- Lower win rates
- Damaged client trust
- Poor-quality submissions
- Increased risk and unprofitable work

For individuals

- Burnout and disengagement
- Reduced credibility
- Being labelled as "the copy-and-paste person"
- Limited career progression

Maryke emphasised that professionals also carry responsibility: if we show up as admins, we will be treated as such. Changing the perception requires confidence, boundaries, and difficult conversations.

When bid management is treated as an administrative function, organisations don't just lose efficiency, they lose trust with clients, credibility in the market, skilled people through burnout, and ultimately money through poor win rates and unprofitable work.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to a bid professional who feels stuck, undervalued, or uncertain about their next step?

Maryke: Stop working in isolation. Join a community and start deliberate conversations.

Neil: Find a purpose: certification is a powerful place to start.

Larissa: Decide whether this is a career or just a job. If it's a career, you must own your value.

Is experience alone enough to be effective in bid management, or is structured professional development essential to delivering consistent, high-value outcomes?

The panel was unequivocal: experience alone is not enough.

Bid management operates in an environment that is constantly evolving. Buyer behaviour, procurement models, governance expectations, tools, and competitive dynamics all change. Relying only on "how we've always done it" leads to missed opportunities.

Structured development and professional standards, particularly through APMP (the Association of Proposal Management Professionals), play a critical role.

Neil explained that his career accelerated when he pursued APMP certification. From a business perspective, certification brought visible improvements: stronger processes, better facilitation of cross-functional teams, and greater confidence in challenging senior stakeholders.

Larissa reinforced that APMP offers far more than training. It provides a global best-practice framework, a shared professional language, and a clear standard that separates opinion from proven practice.

She noted that deeper APMP involvement shifted how seriously she was taken, grounding her confidence in understanding why practices work.

Maryke added that structured development, particularly through APMP communities and certification, also changes how professionals see themselves. When individuals invest in their professional growth, they show up differently with more confidence, stronger boundaries, and a clearer sense of value.

Experience shows what has happened. APMP provides the standards, frameworks, and community to understand why and how to do it better, consistently.

Growth starts by making a decision and then taking action.

In a profession that shapes revenue, risk, and long-term outcomes, development through APMP is not optional; it is foundational.

Final reflection

Bid management influences outcomes long before submission and signature, whether organisations recognise it or not.

What's at stake now is not awareness, but action. Every conversation delayed reinforces old assumptions and leaves value on the table that cannot be recovered later.

Start having the right conversations.

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