

## How to win bids and tenders

Competitive bidding is an essential part of everyday business; however it is often seen as a chore. People don't know where to start or how to organise their content. As such, they resort to pulling information from other bids, cutting and pasting to their heart's content. This approach rarely works as you are completely ignoring the client's unique needs, issues and objectives.

It is also worth noting that a bid is a sales document. What a bid is not, is marketing material and yet you'd be surprised how many bids I see which still start with standard company information, including numbers of offices, locations and company history. In order to be an effective sales document it is essential that you shift the focus away from your company and instead focus on the client's needs, explaining how your solution meets these needs and the benefits of your approach. But how do you do this? Here at Questas we have a simple, yet effective model to guide you through this process, regardless of the size of the bid, be it a letter or a complex multi-million pound contract.



*The Questas bid model – By following this simple model you can ensure your bids are client focussed, tailored to the client's unique challenges, needs and objectives and most importantly stand out from your competitors as the clear winner.*

### Q... is for question

One of my favourite quotes is “seek first to understand then to be understood”, and never has this been truer than with bidding. The absolute foundation of any winning bid is a thorough understanding of the opportunity and how this affects all the key stakeholders, from the CEO through to the end users. Imagine if you will an iceberg. Approximately one third of the iceberg you can see is above sea level. This represents the information at your fingertips, primarily the Invitation To Tender (ITT) or Request for Proposal (RFP). However below the sea level is two thirds of the iceberg and this is the information you need to find. What are the issues, challenges, needs, objectives and outcomes the client wants to

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achieve? It is said that a winning bid is a combination of insight and content, therefore the first part of creating a winning bid is obtaining this insight. How do you do this? The answer? Question, question, question.



### U... is for understand

The next step in your bid journey is to collate all of the information gleaned from the questioning phase and truly understand what this means, not only from the client's perspective but also looking at the competitive landscape. What are the client's biggest concerns or motivating forces behind the opportunity? These are often referred to as "hot buttons". Which have the biggest priority? There are a number of tools to help you through the understand phase, including stakeholder analysis, competitor analysis and SWOT analysis, all of which are designed to help you fully understand the opportunity and inform your bid strategy.

### E... is for evidence

Often overlooked is the power of evidence. It can be a scary and lonely place when making the final decision on whom to award the tender. What happens if it's the wrong decision? This fear can result in companies deciding not to award the tender at all and continue business as usual, this is why as an incumbent you are in a very strong position, better the devil you know. Our job is to allay these fears and persuade the reader to choose us. How do you do this? By demonstrating your credibility, that you have done this before with great results. Evidence can take many forms, such as case studies, client quotes, statistics, awards and most importantly CVs.

### S... is for solution

Next, get the team together and, taking everything you have gathered so far, including the client's hot buttons, brainstorm all the potential solutions you can offer. A useful strategy to do this is to have three columns entitled usual, surprising and crazy. Under each of these headings write the usual solutions, then think of solutions that would surprise the client and finally the downright crazy solutions, for example offer it for free. Whilst you may not use your "crazy" solutions it often opens the mind to other alternatives that you may not otherwise have considered. Once you have all your potential solutions you can narrow them down by asking: "What kind of outcome will the client get?" "Will it match up to their expectations for a positive result?" "Will it meet their criteria?"

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### T... is for themes

A good bid tells a story. This story needs to flow and the key foundations to this flow are win themes. But what is a win theme? A win theme is typically a feature of your offer supported by a benefit.

Remember, people buy benefits, not the solution. Think of anything you buy, you are not necessarily interested in how they do it, but what you get from it i.e. the benefit. Therefore strong win themes are those with the benefits that matter most to the client, be this saving money, time, reducing risk or increasing efficiency.



### A... is for answer

You would not believe how many times I hear people cry, 'I don't have time to plan', and yet when you plan what you are going to write you save time. Answer planning, also known as storyboarding, is an effective method of structuring your content. When writing a bid a primary objective is making it easy to evaluate and score. To do this you need to answer the question. This may seem obvious and yet often you see responses that do not answer the question. Once you have an answer plan you can start writing. If you have multiple authors be sure to have one person dedicated to editing your proposal in its

entirety, if you have multiple authors you hear the different styles and tones when reading and this in turn breaks up the story and ultimately how compelling your message is.

### S... is for submit

Often a part which is overlooked is the final production stages of a bid. Typically you should allow 20% of the total time you have for proof reading, production and sign-off. Remember how much first impressions count. You can have a great bid, insightful content, well written and yet if it is riddled with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes, then you'll probably not make the grade. Allowing sufficient time during this final phase is therefore essential.

By following this simple model you can ensure your bids are client focussed, tailored to the client's unique challenges, needs and objectives and most importantly stand out from your competitors as the clear winner.

Sarah Amery is a consultant at Questas. We work with professionals predominantly in the built environment space. We offer training in selling skills, bids and tenders and key account management.

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