

6 Keys to Improving Your Proposal Close Ratio

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Tired of spending countless hours responding to requests for proposals (RFPs) without seeing a commensurate return on your investment? It's not unusual for consultants to have close ratios well below 10 percent on their proposals! But this doesn't have to be your experience.

Here are 6 keys to dramatically raising your close ratio:

1. **Be selective about which proposals you respond to**

RFPs are sent out to vendors for many reasons other than to find the best suitor. Many times companies know who they want to work with, but they need to get at least three quotes. Or they may need another quote to use as leverage to negotiate their first choice down.

You want to qualify your prospect before you spend time responding to an RFP. One thing you can do is follow this simple rule:

Never respond to a proposal unless you can speak with your prospect first. If the prospect doesn't permit this, then experience shows that your time is better spent focusing on the next prospect.

2. **Fully explore your prospect's problems and results**

If you're able to set up a meeting with the prospect, you want to spend the time fully exploring the *problems they want solved* and the *results they want to achieve*. These are the two primary reasons consultants are hired.

This means also uncovering the **symptoms and consequences** the prospect is experiencing as a result of those problems, as well as the **benefits and rewards** that are theirs when they achieve the desired result.

Knowing these things allows you to write a targeted proposal instead of trying to guess what the prospect might want or need from you.

3. Assess the resource constraints

Before you spend time writing a proposal, you need to understand three things:

- **What's the budget for this project?** Make sure that you are both in the same range or else don't waste the time writing the proposal.
- **What's the time frame?** Helps you understand the urgency.
- **How does the prospect want to divide the labor?** Are you doing it and delivering it? Or are you and the prospect working together?

4. Understand the Decision-Making process

It's essential to know the answers to the following questions regarding the decision-making process:

- What are the steps in the process?
- Who is involved in each step?
- What are the criteria?
- How will the prospect decide among competitors?

If you leave any of these questions unanswered, you may very well be missing out on opportunities to increase your odds.

5. Do a "What-If" Proposal

Set up a meeting where you confirm with the prospect their problems and results and give an oral proposal where you can "test out" your solution. There are many benefits to doing this. The primary one is to get "real time" feedback that you can use to tailor your final, formal proposal.

6. Formalize the Agreement

If you follow all of the steps above, there's a good chance you may be in the driver's seat and be able to formalize your conversations in the form of a two- or three-page engagement letter rather than a hundred-page proposal.

Even if this doesn't happen, you will still be in the position to write a killer proposal that hits the nail on the head and you will significantly increase your "wins".