

# Ten Steps to a Power-Packed, Persuasive Proposal

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Writing proposals is a skill no businessperson should be without. Often clients will put out a request for proposal from three or more companies at the same time. In order to get their business, yours has to be the most convincing one -- the one that demonstrates the most value for clients' dollars. Here are ten steps to constructing compelling proposals that ensure your success.

1. As with any writing project, you first have to understand the purpose of your proposal and the people reading it. Usually with a proposal it is to get business, while they find the right vendor to solve a problem.
2. Understand your readers. Learn all you can about their needs. Ask lots of questions. The more needs of theirs that you address, the better your chance of getting the sale.
3. Underpromise and over deliver. Do NOT overpromise just to close the deal. For example, by pricing yourself too low, you will lose profit. Offering an unrealistic deadline will put your reputation at risk when you are unable to deliver on time.
4. Do your homework. Ask lots of questions during the

course of your research. Make sure to fully understand your client's needs, and how your product will meet their needs. What are their expectations? How will they use your product or service? Also, learn their views on pricing and quality - are they willing to pay a premium for quality, or would they rather get a sloppy job for cheap? Also find out:

- \* What problem are they trying to solve?
- \* What would their ideal solution be?
- \* What is the most important aspect of this project to them: price, quality, timing?
- \* Who is the final decision maker? Will you have to deal with a large committee of decision makers? This might pose problems for you if you receive conflicting feedback.

5. Ask clients for a wish list. Tell them you can't deliver everything on their list of ideals, but you want to get as close as you can. Next, ask them to prioritize the items in order of importance. This way you will be able to realistically meet their expectations.

6. Organize the proposal to persuade. Focus on making the sale. Act as if everything is already in place and this is a contract about to be signed.

7. With research in hand, begin writing the proposal. This step should run fairly quickly now that you have done your homework.

8. Get to the point quickly - this doesn't have to be in the first sentence, but make it close to the top. Be sure they get your meaning quickly. If you don't do this correctly, your proposal will wind up in the circular file before it is read.

9. Make sure to tell clients how your solution meets their needs. As with any marketing piece, be sure to define for them how THEY will benefit from your services. ("What's in it for me?")

10. Add a sense of urgency. A proposal can sit on somebody's desk for months before they decide to do anything with it. By adding an expiration date on your offer, you will encourage them to make a decision sooner.

Be sure to include a cover letter and cover page with longer proposals. Adding a line for a signature at the end of the offer easily turns the proposal into a contract. With these guidelines in mind, you are sure to be a winner at any job you bid on.

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