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WINNING PROPOSALS CAN GAIN NEW BUSINESS

by Gary E. Lofstrom

Attendees at the February 2002 Kansas City/IABC entrepreneurs special interest group (E-SIG) meeting shared experiences writing and producing proposal documents. Gary Lofstrom of Lofstrom & Company Marketing Communications led the meeting. Lofstrom shared his insights, gained from previous experience producing proposals for an international accounting and consulting firm. Following is a summary of Lofstrom's "Proposal Essentials."

Proposal Essentials

Winning proposals contain certain qualities. As you put your proposal together, check to see how your proposal measures up.

Organize your thoughts

Before you start writing, consider the reader's point of view. What are the issues? In what order do you present various points? Ask another person to review an early draft for basic flow and readability.

Write conversationally

Good proposals can be a very personal communication vehicle and yours should be written in a less formal, personal manner. Avoid phrases like "Pursuant to our conversation of."

Indicate you listened well

Most importantly, clients want to believe you listened to them and have a good understanding of their problems, concerns and opportunities. Prior to writing the proposal, obtain as much information as you can about the client through personal meetings or conversations. Read any existing literature (company brochures, business and industry publications, financial reports, etc.) on the client and the client's industry.

Offer solutions

Mention your ideas, proposed solutions and methods for solving their problems. Discuss how you can help them achieve their goals. But don't give away so much that the client thinks they don't need you!

Sell yourself

Persuasively present yourself and other service team members' credentials and unique qualifications to serve. (Two or three sentences on individual qualifications is plenty.) Carefully draw the line between too little, versus too much "sell." Hard sell will repel the client, too little sell will leave them wondering if you really want the business.

Describe your work plan

The client wants to feel comfortable you can start and finish the work in a timely and orderly manner.



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Price fees competitively

Consider your competition's fee structure and pricing strategies. Ask for fees commensurate with the value received.

Be concise

Winning proposals can be as short as one page or as long as one hundred. The client will appreciate a concise and businesslike document that focuses on the issues important to them. If you find it running a bit long, review your copy, your original notes and the outline. Get the red pen out and include only those points salient to the bid.

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