



Do's and Don't's: Winning Tenders and Proposals

While definitely not most businesses' preferred way to win a new client or retain business, tenders and formal procurement processes have become a fact of life in many sectors.

This is especially true if your business works with government, banks, insurers, listed companies and other big corporates.

If winning work through tenders is important to your business, read on for some of our top tips to reduce angst and stress at tender time.

Don't sit back and wait for an invitation to tender

To pursue the ideal work you really want, with dream clients, you need to be prepared to invest effort and play the long game (which can take years). Build the perception (and reality) with a prospective client that you're an expert in the field who's great to work with. By properly positioning your business, you will increase your chances of being invited to tender in the first place.

- Further reading: [Playing the long game](#).

Do qualify the "opportunity"

Before you put pen to paper, make sure you have properly sized up the bid opportunity and assessed your strategic position. You must critically evaluate:

- how much the work is worth to your business
- how hotly the tender will be contested
- how your business compares to [likely] competitors
- whether there any threshold issues your business cannot meet
- the strength of your relationship with the tendering organisation.

Helpful "bid or no bid" tools are available on the web to help you run through key considerations so you can be sure it's a real opportunity.

- Further resource: See our ['Bid or no bid checklist'](#).

Do get evidence ready ahead of time

When it comes to tenders, winners are separated from losers by strong, evidence-based submissions. While you can never know ahead of time the exact questions that will be asked in a tender, you can be sure that you will need to provide certain key evidence that includes:



- service or product descriptions – not just listing features but clear explanations of how they benefit clients
- mini case studies, project highlights and project lists
- statistical indicators
- policies and procedures including corporate social responsibility
- flowcharts of key processes
- longer case studies or success stories highlighting core expertise
- client service credentials or quality processes
- strong, focused references or testimonial quotes and other social ‘proofs’ from satisfied clients.

Additionally, tenderers are increasingly looking to reduce risk and are seeking proof by requesting full details (or actual copies) of business governance and management policies and procedures.

It’s no longer enough to just describe or allude to your standards and processes you need to show them.

Getting items prepped ahead of time will ensure you’re on the front foot well in advance of any RFT release.

- Further reading: [Exhibits A through Z: essential evidence for your tenders and proposals.](#)

Don’t ask clarification questions if you’re not sure you’ll like the answer

Ambiguously worded questions in tenders are not uncommon and can work to your advantage. They allow you to interpret and respond to the question in a way that is compliant, but potentially favourable to you.

On occasion, you may genuinely need to seek clarification, for example to cover a situation unique to your business. But before you ask questions, consider if the answer make a significant difference to the way you address the request.

Or can you work around the question in your responses in a way that keeps you compliant?

- Further reading: [Should you ask clarification questions during a tender process?](#)

Don’t be indecisive

Make early, clear-cut decisions on the scope of your bid – this may include choosing areas of service or product categories and geographical areas to bid for, as well as nominating account and other service team members. Late changes to any part of the scope may have far-reaching implications and affect many sections of the tender response. They will certainly add to the overall time, cost and stress of production.

Don’t underestimate the time it takes to put a bid together

Tender turnaround times for in many sectors are becoming increasingly truncated. Businesses can have as little as 10 days to complete a response, and three to four weeks, or 15 to 20 business days seems to be average.

You cannot afford to start your response late!



Don't assume you can write a strong, competitive response in your first draft. In our experience, most tender responses need three rounds of drafting and editing before they are of a high enough quality to be truly competitive.

So, for your contributors, the time for suggestions, commentary and feedback on drafts is early in the process. Resist the urge to involve multiple team members as your stop point approaches, and have a single senior person responsible for the final sign off. Approve and sign off on standard sections (for example contact detail pages) as you go so you are not trying to review 200 pages on hand-in day.

For hardcopy submissions, we recommend you have a stop point 24 to 48 hours before the delivery deadline to allow adequate time for printing, collating and delivery of your submission (essential if you need to deliver interstate).

- Further reading: [Rock, scissors, paper – the power of three tender reviews](#)

Don't assume prior knowledge of you and your business (even if you are incumbents)

You can never be 100% certain about the procurement process, so don't assume the evaluation committee has any prior knowledge of you, your services, products or your business. Even if you have strong relationships with internal staff, they may not be involved in evaluating tenders or have any decision making power.

Remind evaluators of the great results your services and products have achieved, and reinforce the relationships you have developed with the tendering organisation by evidencing these in your response.

Do be clever about constraints

If the tender request is restrictive, either through page limits or word counts, consider appending supplementary supporting material.

Most tendering organisations will allow supporting material to be included, provided it is relevant, adds value, is clearly flagged as additional content and is not mixed in with your main response.

If you do include additional material, you will still need to provide a compliant answer in your main response document and then clearly refer the evaluators to the appropriate attachment.

>> Ask us about our tender, bid and proposal win services

Success in tendering, proposing, and pitching to clients (and procurement) is critical if you need to win or retain work with government, insurers, or large corporates.

Our consultants understand what works (and what doesn't) in competitive procurement situations.

Our average win rate each year for clients is 82%.

If winning tenders, bids and proposals is important to your business, we can help.



Our tender, bid and proposal support includes:

- writing and editing
- strategy
- management
- creative and design
- readiness.

Get in touch and find out more about how we can help you.

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