




Six Stages to Pitch Success

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

CLIENT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP



Every day in the UK fee-earners, marketers and business developers are putting thousands of hours into producing pitch proposals and tender documents that they hope will win fee-income that justifies this time investment. Why don't all of these 'fabulous' presentations hit the mark? Why don't they win the business they aim to? Why is all the time and energy invested in them then a huge waste?

We have devised a 6-stage 'Bullseye' guide to help improve your chances and above all make sure you don't miss the mark with all your time and energy.

1 Rethink your energy levels – where should you invest your time?

We would argue that in winning a client only 20% of the effort should be devoted to the pitch itself. In our experience, the remaining 80% should focus on getting to know the client itself and this should have been set in motion months before the pitch document lands on our desk. Whilst the rewards are great, this is obviously very time-intensive. We therefore need to be more focused about what business we want to win and what we will pass up. If a bid lands on your desk and you don't know whom the organisation is or you haven't built a relationship with its key people – should you really spend your valuable time going for it in the short time available?

2 Plan to build relationships

Invitation to pitches by their very nature causes us to be very reactive. The time frame involved rarely gives a good opportunity for a firm to really get to know the prospect client, let alone put together a really tailored solution. We therefore need to be more proactive about the pitches we go for and that means developing a business development plan or process that ensures we win the clients we want. We would suggest that such a plan comprises the following elements:

- A target list - of prospects that we would really like to have as future clients. This list has to be manageable and therefore should not be too long.
- Key priorities - its all very well listing the prospects we want, but just because they meet our criteria doesn't mean we meet theirs. Some prospects may also be harder to win than others, so we need to be able to devise a process for deciding which prospects are really right for the firm.
- Intelligence - Investing time getting to know these organisations before they have a real need means that we are building our knowledge of the issues and opportunities facing the prospect. Knowledge will help us to develop a competitive advantage over other firms who will be competing for this same prospect and their work.
- A 'get close' plan - This is our individual plan of action for each key prospect. It identifies whom we need to get close to in the client firm, which of our people are going to be involved and how we expect them to do so.

3 Truly, truly understand the client – their needs and their wants

Intelligence dramatically influences our choice of action and with superior intelligence we have a stronger chance of 'outwitting' the competition in a pitch situation. The more information we can find out before the client decides to go out to tender, the greater a head start we'll have. Through a mixture of desk research and dialogue (preferably face to face) with the client, we can build up a picture of:

- Their industry – its dynamics, opportunities and pressures
- Their business – its products/services, goals/targets, problems/challenges, opportunities, politics, key decision makers, decision making process and basis of decision-making in relation to our services, budgetary issues and potential competitors they favour.

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4 Confirm your understanding – check before going ahead

Where possible we should crosscheck our understanding with the client. We should do this before we make any attempt to present or offer a solution or suitable way forward. If we don't, we risk missing the mark or failing to take account of something that is vitally important to the client. Not only will this build credibility in the mind of the client, it will also prevent us offering solutions that are inappropriate and not relevant. In a pitch situation, we should always confirm with the client that our perceptions are correct. Only then can we ensure all our energies are focused on the right solutions.

5 Employ the right skills and behaviours to win

How successfully we build a relationship with the client, will depend largely on our skills to do so. Here pitch presentation training won't necessarily fulfil all of our needs. We need a more comprehensive toolkit that helps us uncover the information we need, enables us to confirm our understanding and then present our solution. Fee-earners who are successful in this regard tend to have excellent questioning, listening, active listening, presentation and negotiation skills.

6 Check what works and what doesn't – gain feedback and learn

Clients are human after all and if we have been unsuccessful in winning their business, they do not want to hurt our feelings. This is one of the reasons why firms find it difficult to assess their performance in pitch situations they have lost. Some research suggests clients do not always give the full reasoning behind their decisions. On the contrary, a client is likely to tell you why you won a particular pitch. This isn't a case of being ego-stroked. Such valuable information can alert you to the factors that enabled you to win and those that caused your competitors to lose.



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