

Twelve Tips for a Successful Proposal

by Jay Conrad Levinson and Michael W. McLaughlin

A few guidelines before you send proposals to clients.

- Create a powerful, but concise executive summary.
- Focus on results, which matter more than methods and processes. Clients buy methods and approaches only when they know you can deliver results.
- Be generous with your ideas; don't hoard them. Show clients how innovatively you think.
- The length of the proposal doesn't win, but quality does. Projects are not awarded because proposals pass a weight test.
- The proposal content must be about the client, not the consultant. Take a back seat and focus on how you will solve problems.
- Your liberal use of "best practices" will label you as uncreative. Find the blend of outstanding practices and innovative solutions that fit your client's needs, not answers that worked for someone else.
- Accuracy is essential. Validate all data and double check to make sure it's right before you present it.
- Sweat every small proposal detail, watch for typos, use high quality materials and make sure the right people receive the proposal on time.
- Rewrite your resume for every proposal. Highlight the skills in your resume that demonstrate your qualifications. Your boilerplate resume is rarely equal to the task.
- Let your proposal sit for a day and then reread it completely before sending it out.
- Let your personality shine through your proposals. Give clients a sense of the firm and your style of working.
- Don't let your proposal claims outdistance your true capabilities. Write an honest proposal or you'll pay dearly in the future with blown budgets and unhappy clients.

A great proposal can be decisive in winning a project; a poor one can cause you to lose a project, even if everything else in the sales process has gone flawlessly. Use these guidelines to write a killer proposal every time.