



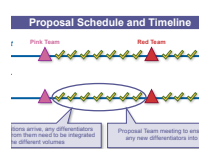
EXECUTIVE summary

Winter 2016 | Volume 23, Issue 1

This Issue's Theme: **Differentiating Your Company from the Competition**

Inside:

- 2 Discriminating Your Offer: 5 Steps to Competitive Edge
- 4 The Importance of Why
- 6 How Can I Make My Proposals Stand Out?
- 7 APMP-NCA Professional Development Program 2016
- 8 Differentiating Your Company from the Competition
- 11 What Companies Have Done to Survive After the Sequestration
- 13 Differentiating Yourself from the Competition
- 15 Delivering the Right Client Experience in Proposal Development
- 18 APMP-NCA 2015 Corporate Partners





Discriminating Your Offer: 5 Steps to Competitive Edge

by Lisa Pafe, APMP-NCA President, CPP APMP Fellow & PMI PMP

Welcome to Executive Summary eZine 2016! As your new APMP-NCA President, I am excited to continue to provide our members with thought-provoking content to help you perfect the art and science of winning new business. Our chapter, the largest in the United States, experienced record growth in 2015. With more than 1,200 members affiliated with NCA, your Board of Directors will continually strive to discriminate ourselves in achieving our mission: to support our members in advancing their professional goals and increasing their capabilities to win business.

As we look back on 2015 and ahead to the challenges of 2016, it is clear you must find ways to discriminate your bid from the competition. Discriminating your offer is especially difficult for service providers (vs. product providers) as the playing field is fairly level and more bidders are competing for less work. Market competition is a battleground, and your goal should be to win the war...or at least the must-win battles that comprise your target revenues.

This edition of the Executive Summary eZine focuses on discriminating yourself from the competition. In my experience, five steps are key to gaining competitive edge.

1. Understand Your Industry.

First things first! In order to

discriminate your bid, you must know who your competitors are. Amazingly, many companies have cut their competitive intelligence capabilities due to budget constraints. Reserve enough B&P dollars to at least research your industry and lines of business using subscription services, key word searches, and social media. Ask your customers their opinions as to who the best and worst companies are.

2. Analyze the Competitors.

Studying the competition allows you to find weaknesses. Perform ethical stalking. Subscribe to their newsletters. Check out their employees on LinkedIn. Search social media. Buy a product and note the logistics of the sales process. Network and speak to executives as many of these leaders will brag about accomplishments. Take note and

begin to brainstorm ideas for setting your bid apart.

3. Put Your Findings to

Good Use. Often, we gather information but fail to act on it. Once you understand the Who and the What, you can begin to identify the How. The How involves carefully perfecting your proposed strengths. By strengths, I mean ways you can exceed customer requirements without increasing costs. Strengths are not easy to identify in the services industry, but examples include creating the best customer service experience for increased user satisfaction; value-adds such as access to industry experts, training, research labs, and/or white papers; and/or increased efficiency and effectiveness through better Key Performance Indicators, Service Level Agreements (SLAs), and preventive action.

Competitive Edge Check List

- Understand your Industry
- Analyze the Competitors
- Put Your Findings to Good Use
- Fly Under the Radar
- Continually Improve

4. **Fly Under the Radar.** Meet with the customer to express your strengths, but avoid showcasing these strengths in public forums. After all, your competitors are performing the same ethical stalking as you are. If your company is over-exposed, then competitors will respond by ghosting your company in order to gain market share. Create quiet opportunities with the advance work you do during the capture phase, with a focus on shaping upcoming bids in your favor and winning sole source work wherever possible.

5. **Continually Improve.** With increased competition, the only way to maintain your lead is to stay one step ahead of the competition. Continual

improvement requires investment in understanding and growing capabilities to future advances in both products and services. It also requires that you keep existing customers more than satisfied by looking for ways to improve their experience through feedback loops and proactive improvement to retain their loyalty.

My goal for the upcoming year is to perfect our offering as a chapter. We want to better understand what you, our members, need and want and provide those offerings in a way that gains your loyalty and support for our chapter. APMP-NCA has a lot planned for you: Speaker Series, webinars, publications, networking events, the Mid-Atlantic Conference & Expo, our Member Appreciation Event, an improved

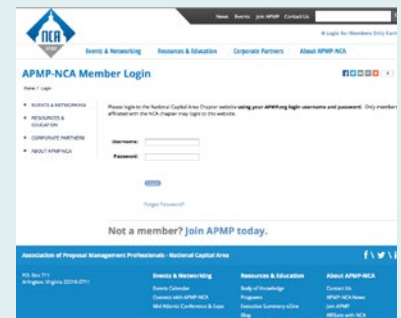
Body of Knowledge (BoK), and more! We welcome both your feedback and your participation. Please contact me at lisa@apmpnca.org to provide kudos or constructive feedback and/or to volunteer for one of our committees. Welcome to APMP-NCA 2016!

Lisa Pafe, Principal Consultant at Lohfeld Consulting Group, is a CPP APMP Fellow, PMI PMP, speaker, LinkedIn Publisher, and ISO Internal Auditor with more than 24 years of capture and proposal experience for small to large companies serving civilian and defense agencies. She is the President of the APMP-NCA and was the Chapter's Vice President and Speaker Series Chair for two years each. Prior experience includes: VP of Corporate Development at Ace Info Solutions, Inc., President of Vision Consulting, Inc.; VP of Business Development for GovConnect, Inc.; and Director of Marketing for MAXIMUS, Inc. She holds a B.A. from Yale University, MPP from Harvard University and MIS from The George Washington University.

Click here to check out APMP-NCA upcoming events!

APMP-NCA Members!

When was the last time that you logged into apmp.org and updated your profile information? It is easy to do and only takes a few minutes. Log in, and under "My Profile" go to Manage Profile and click on Edit Bio. Update your information and click on the blue "save changes" button at the bottom. It is that easy. Having your correct contact information makes it easier for the NCA Chapter to keep you informed on upcoming events and activities.





The Importance of Why

by H l ne Courard, APMP-NCA Vice President, J.D., CF APMP

Why -\ adverb 'hwɪ, 'wɪ :
for what reason or purpose.

At some point or other, everyone has been on the giving or receiving end of the infuriating “why?” game with a child:

“It’s dinner time, please go wash your hands.”

“Why?”

“Because you should wash your hands before you eat.”

“Why?”

“Because you have germs on your hands and we don’t want to touch food with them.”

“Why?”

“Because if you pass the germs onto your food then eat them you will get sick.”

And on and on it goes until either the child is satisfied with the answer or the parent pulls rank and ends the inquisition. It’s a frustrating experience to be asked again and again to justify your statements—especially if the why game is merely a delaying tactic—but this situation can end in a win-win.

Once a child’s curiosity is satisfied, the parent gets the child to comply with the washing of hands, but, more importantly, the child now has



a better understanding of how the world works, and what this specific issue (washing their hands) has to do with the greater environment, so that she will be more apt to (1) apply these lessons in other contexts where germs and health are concerned, and (2) to believe and trust the parent’s judgment in future issues.

On the flip side, if the parent shuts the argument down prematurely (“Because I said so!”), then it’s lose-lose: the child still doesn’t understand the purpose of the direction and the child is confused and feels alienated by the parent’s dismissal, hindering future open discussions and partnership.

Applying this concept to differentiating your offer, there is no more valuable tool than the objective “why?”

Assessing the offer from the client’s perspective strengthens the persuasiveness of the offer. By continually evaluating the value of the content with “why?” we can hone in on the critical elements we need to answer for our prospective clients and eliminate the non-essential text that often clutters proposals.

Embedding answers to “why?” questions in the proposal gives the client solid evidence to make the award to us. By answering questions the evaluator might have, you are providing concrete evidence that the prospective client can use as the basis for selecting your offer. This rigorous approach to writing will establish rational connectivity for each of the features you highlight and clearly articulates the value proposition of your proposal.

The Importance of Why

Just like with a child, this approach results in a win-win: the evaluation board wins because all the information they need to justify is the award is easy to locate, and their justification will result in you winning the award!

On the other hand, if you don't take the time to ask "why?" and imbed the answers in your proposals, you're asking the evaluator to simply trust that you're the best value offeror. In other words, if the evaluator asked why he should select your bid, you'd be like the parent telling them "because I said so."

To apply the "why?" game to proposals, select at least one person on the

team to ask the question "why?" from the customer's point of view. This person might ask—

- Why are we advocating for a certain solution?
- Why are we highlighting certain features?
- Why will our approach be beneficial for our prospective client?
- Why does this past performance reference demonstrate a strong likelihood of successful performance on this program?
- Why is this certification, skill, or select experience highlighted in the resume?

It may seem tedious at first, but asking questions from the customer's point of view is a win-win practice you can't ignore.

Why: Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/why>.

With nearly 20 years' experience leading and motivating teams to success, H el ene has been engaged with APMP-NCA since 2007. She has chaired several committees, mentored junior members through the NCA Mentor-Prot eg e program, and is currently serving as NCA's Vice President. She is the Director of Unisys Corporation's Global Proposal Center, leading a team of more than 30 professionals in the preparation and delivery of winning proposals worldwide for U.S. Federal, state, local, and commercial clients. She holds a B.A. from Saint Joseph's University, and J.D. from Santa Clara University School of Law.



Business Development Solutions to Grow Your Company

- ▶ Working too much?
- ▶ Not enough resources?
- ▶ Broken business development processes?
- ▶ No corporate support?
- ▶ Low win rates?

Call Rainmakerz Consulting now (202-255-2355) for a **FREE** Proposal Review to help **you win more and work less.**



Join the 180 companies who have won **countless billions in new business**, achieved **higher win rates**, and made **dramatic business development efficiency improvements.**



How Can I Make My Proposals Stand Out?

by Mike Parkinson, CPP APMP Fellow

After supporting and reviewing over 1,000 proposals, I have learned to quickly identify a winning proposal. All successful proposals are infused with a singular element that ensures it eclipses the competition. Before I share the winning piece to the puzzle, I want to explain how I discovered it.

Over the last 18 years, I came to the conclusion that trust is close to a silver bullet in proposals. Customers buy from people and solution providers they trust. Assuming there is more than one trusted solution provider competing for the same opportunity, how do you stand out and win? In the 2015 fall issue of the APMP-NCA Executive Summary, I shared five methodologies to rise to the top:

- 1. Do the unexpected.** Content isn't king, contrast is. Humans pay attention to that which is different.
- 2. Focus on your unique strength(s).** What is it about your company that is unique, superior, or special?
- 3. Make it easy to review.** Highlight the benefits of your solution. Connect the dots between your solution and the customer's goals.
- 4. Keep it simple.** Most proposal solutions are complex, but our explanation doesn't have to be. Einstein said, "If you can't explain

it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

- 5. Prove it.** Most proposals fail to prove their assertions. Back up your statements with evidence.

Each of these approaches differentiates your proposal, but there is an element that ties everything together. It's an observable factor almost impossible to fake: **passion.**

Like trust, passion is felt. Like trust, there are no specific evaluation criteria in any commercial or government proposal but both are critical success factors. Behavioral psychologists agree that most of our decisions are based on intuitive judgment and emotions. Herbert A. Simon, Nobel Prize winning scholar at the Carnegie Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, studied corporate decision-making and found that people often ignored formal decision-making models because of time constraints, incomplete information, the inability to calculate consequences, and other variables. Intuitive judgment was the process for most decisions. Neurologist Antonio Damasio studied research on patients with damaged ventromedial frontal cortices of the brain, which impaired their ability to feel but left their ability to think analytically intact. Damasio discovered that the patients were unable to make rational decisions even though their ability to reason was fully functional. He concluded that reasoning "depends, to a considerable extent, on a continual ability to experience feelings."

Proposals need to align the solution with evaluation factors; prove there is a self-sustaining, repeatable process supported by knowledge management; demonstrate the ability to manage change; provide relevant experience and past performance; have the right people in place; be compliant; and provide a competitive price. However, winning proposals include the extra essence of passion. The solution provider's passion for the subject must saturate every sentence, story, and fact. Sentences should have a clarity that originates from a deep understanding born from years of failing forward. Include stories that cast customers as the heroes. Give facts and data that prove performance is measured in an effort to constantly control and improve the outcomes.

Passion is almost impossible to fake because it manifests years before the RFP is released. It infuses what a company does for a particular solution. Be aware that passion is blindingly obvious when talking with the solution provider but is sometimes lost when writing a proposal. Team with passionate SMEs and solution providers who follow the five methodologies in this article will help you stand out and win more proposals.

Mike Parkinson, CPP APMP Fellow is an internationally recognized visual communications guru and proposal expert, professional trainer, and award-winning author. He is a partner and head of marketing at 24 Hour Company (24hrco.com) specializing in bid-winning proposal graphics. His Billion Dollar Graphics book and website (BillionDollarGraphics.com) share best practices and helpful tools with professionals. Contact Mike at mike@24hrco.com or call 703-533-7209.

APMP-NCA Professional Development Program 2016

By Terry Bannister, Mentorship/Professional Development Chair, CPP APMP

Below is a summary of our planned Professional Development 2016 activities. Don't miss out on scholarships and certification!

Mentor-Protégé Program

There are 30 APMP-NCA members participating in this 2016 program as either mentors or protégés, so we have 15 teams identified that match mentor expertise with protégé areas of interest. The kickoff meeting was held on February 3rd, and there will be quarterly meetings held throughout the year; teleconferences and webinars will be offered in the non-meeting months. Participants will graduate during the APMP-NCA Mid-Atlantic Conference & Expo in October. Many of the protégés (and mentors) will obtain their APMP Foundation certification at the session to be offered the day before the conference as a result of their professional growth that culminated in the program.

APMP National Conference Scholarship

The NCA Chapter provides three scholarships that cover the conference registration fees for the APMP International Conference that will be held in Boston in May 2016. The scholarships are offered to current APMP-NCA members who are fairly new to the capture and proposal development arena and would like to attend the extensive instructional sessions as well as to learn more about the various organizations and vendors who staff booths throughout the conference. An application for the scholarship will be posted to the APMP-NCA website with notices included in on our website and in the 5 Fact Friday email blasts.

APMP Certification

One of the areas targeted for development and implementation in 2016 is the addition of Chapter support for those members desiring to pursue APMP certifications for all three levels: Foundation (CF APMP), Practitioner (CP APMP), and Professional (CPP APMP). In addition to the aforementioned Foundation certification session this fall, we will provide one-day sessions such as the Practitioner Quick Start, the Practitioner Completion, and the Professional Introduction to assist members in getting starting and/or completing the Practitioner questionnaire and the Professional presentation that are required for advanced certification. Information concerning these events will be widely communicated during Chapter meetings as well as eZine, our website, and 5 Fact Friday emails.

Note From the eZine Chair and Chief Editor, Julia Quigley, CF APMP



We are always looking to improve the eZine and would love to hear from you!

What did you think of this issue of the Executive Summary? What did you think of specific articles? Have questions, comments or suggestions for the authors or the editors? What articles, and themes would you like to see in future issues of the Executive Summary?

Please drop us a line at ezine@apmpnca.org or contact Julia directly at 571-421-7766.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Differentiating Your Company from the Competition

by Shlomo D. Katz

You may think this has nothing to do with the proposal business, but one of the ways that contractors can differentiate themselves from the competition is by how well they perform their contracts. As Dr. Jonas Salk, the discoverer of the polio vaccine, reportedly said, *“The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more.”* Or, as Federal Acquisition Regulation (“FAR”) 15.305(a)(2) (i) says, albeit less poetically, *“Past performance information is one indicator of an offeror’s ability to perform the contract successfully.”*

It’s true that as proposal professionals you have little-to-no control over how well your company or client gets the contract work done. But, you do have a surprising amount of control over how the government will evaluate their performance.

Here’s why.

FAR 42.1501(a) says that past performance information *“is relevant information, for future source selection purposes, regarding a contractor’s actions under previously awarded contracts or orders.”* Past performance information includes, among other things, the contractor’s record of—

1. Conforming to contract requirements and to standards of good workmanship
2. Forecasting and controlling costs



3. Adherence to schedules, including the administrative aspects of performance

That’s where you come in. The proposal that you submit to the government is your plan for conforming to contract requirements. It describes the type of workmanship you will provide. It forecasts your costs and what you plan to do to control them. It sets forth your planned schedule and how you will deal with contingencies. If you make incredible promises, you may win the contract, but remember: your contract performance will be evaluated against how well it meets the promises you made. If your proposed performance measures are pie-in-the-sky, the results of your performance evaluation may not be pretty.

Let’s say that you are submitting a proposal to install a computer network

(or a control system, plumbing fixtures, vending machines, etc.) in a government building. You may be tempted to differentiate yourself from your competition with an aggressive schedule: *“We will complete installation of the system in 90 days.”* But, if you write that and then you do not meet that deadline, a negative comment on your past performance record is likely. It will not matter that the delay arose from the government customer’s failure to deliver promised equipment. You made an absolute promise.

On the other hand, if you propose the same aggressive schedule but include your assumptions—for example, *“We will complete installation of the system in 90 days if the government provides the government-furnished servers listed in Attachment A in 45 days”* you are much better protected. First, you have clearly reminded the government customer

Differentiating Your Company from the Competition

that it is an important partner in your performance. That alone may increase the level of cooperation you get. Second, you have set the stage for your client to be entitled to a schedule extension if the servers are not delivered on time. If your company or client nevertheless gets a negative past performance rating, you will have a defense.

Here are some more proposal statements that can set realistic expectations, demonstrate that you understand the government's needs, and possibly improve your past performance grades, all of which differentiate you positively from competitors:

- *"The following components are included in the price: . . ."*
- *"The following components are required for system operation but are not included in this proposal: . . ." (e.g., "Batteries not included")*
- *"This proposal is conditioned on the government providing . . ."*

.....

In addition to setting the parameters for successful performance in a proposal, contractors have some control over what past performance information is considered.

.....

By contrast, do not write in a proposal: *"The following components will be provided by others."* Who are the "others"? When will they provide those components? At what price? Who will make them do it? The government's proposal evaluators will be unable to evaluate your proposal based on such vague language and should reject it. If they do give you a contract because they actually believe that "others" will provide the components, you'll have a hard time winning an argument that the "others" are the government itself. You will receive poor performance remarks that will negatively discriminate you.

In addition to setting the parameters for successful performance in a proposal, contractors have some control over what past performance information is considered. Let's review the three primary sources through which agencies obtain past performance.

The first, perhaps the one best known to proposal professionals, is the Past Performance Questionnaire. FAR 15.305(a)(2) specifically requires agencies to *"provide offerors an opportunity to identify past or current contracts (including Federal, State, and local government and private) for efforts similar to the Government requirement."* That FAR provision also states that the solicitation must authorize offerors to provide information on problems encountered on the identified contracts and the offeror's corrective actions.

This is the information source over which offerors have the greatest control. Naturally, in identifying the customers to be contacted,

offerors should make an effort to select customers who will give good references. A dilemma arises when an offeror's most relevant experience is not his best and listing this reference will be determined on a case by case basis. If the reference is listed, the offeror should be certain to take advantage of the FAR requirement, mentioned above, that offerors have the opportunity to provide information on problems encountered on the identified contracts and the offeror's corrective actions. While this may be hotly debated by some, an argument can be made that it is better if the agency hears about problems on a relevant contract from the contractor itself rather than from the other customer. Your forthrightness may differentiate you positively from your competitors and, even if it doesn't, at least your side of the story will be told.

A second source of past performance information is a series of online databases such as the Past Performance Information Retrieval System ("PPIRS"). Databases such as PPIRS provide a query capability for authorized users to retrieve report card information detailing a contractor's past performance. In some cases, contractors are permitted to view and comment on their own data.

Accordingly, contractors should review these databases regularly and take advantage of all opportunities to comment on reviews of their past performance. While proposal professionals in larger organizations will not generally be involved in that process, they certainly could have a role in

Differentiating Your Company from the Competition

educating their internal or external clients about the importance of past performance information and the opportunities to influence its contents.

The third source of past performance information that agencies may, and sometimes are required to, consider when evaluating proposals is personal knowledge. The Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) has said many times (in ruling on bid protests) that an evaluator's personal knowledge of an offeror may be properly considered in a past performance evaluation. In fact, in a small number of cases, GAO has said that certain past performance information that was known to the contracting officer was “too close

at hand” to be ignored in the evaluation. This type of information is the most difficult to control.

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) has instructed contracting agencies that: *“Achieving a state where all potential contractors offer the same risk free, high quality service, and only cost plays in the source selection decision, is the ultimate goal. That is not likely anytime soon. If we did not assess and record contractor performance during the contract and then use that information in source selections, we would lose a significant motivator for contractors to perform all contracts at a high level. Past performance information improves your chances that all the technical and*

cost information provided is a reliable predictor of future performance.” For contractors and for the proposal professionals assisting them, doing what you can to control how your performance is judged, reported, and used will differentiate you from competitors and improves the chances you will be selected.

Shlomo D. Katz is Counsel in the Washington, DC office of the international law firm of Brown Rudnick LLP, a Corporate Sponsor of APMP-NCA. Shlomo specializes in all aspects of Government contracting and is a regular presenter at Chapter events. If you have any questions about the topic of this article or other proposal or contracting issues, please contact Shlomo at 202.536-1753 or skatz@brownrudnick.com

VPC by Intravation since 1998

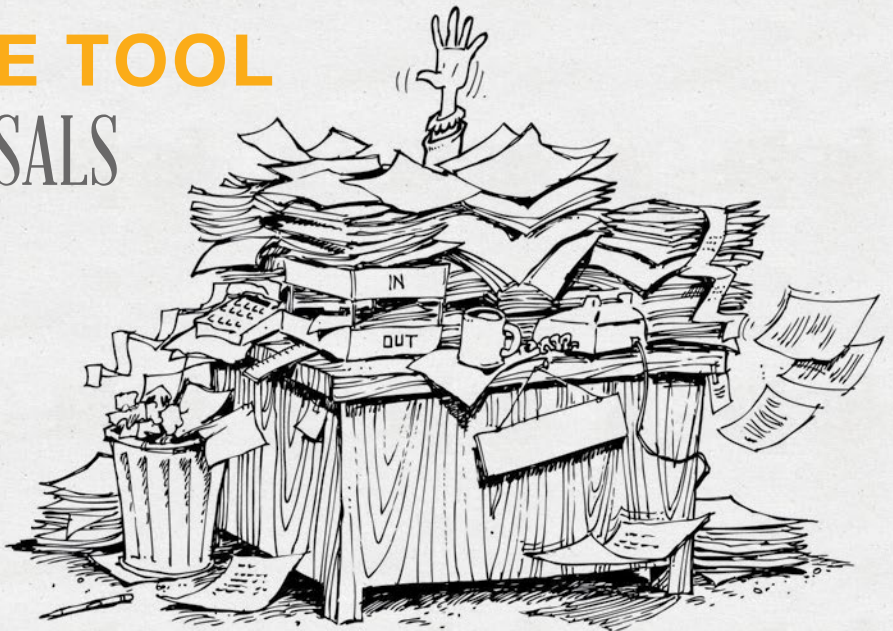
LOOKING FOR A COLLABORATIVE TOOL

FOR GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

that **WORKS**
OUT OF THE **BOX**

&

*gives you the control you need
to manage a dispersed team?*



info@intravation.com
www.intravation.com
847-299-6423

intravation
inc.



What Companies Have Done to Survive After the Sequestration

by Russell Smith, APMP-NCA Speaker Series Chair

On November 18, I served as speaker at the APMP-NCA fall Speaker Series meeting. I presented an analysis of what companies have done to counter a down market. The downturn in Federal spending is easily seen in Bloomberg reports: \$300B in 2001, growing to a peak of \$600B in 2009, but dropping to \$450B in 2014.

To determine how companies are coping with the substantial decrease in Federal funding, I surveyed 45 companies: 15 each of small, medium, and large businesses.

There were two parts to the survey:

1. Questions on solution development.
2. Questions on business development (BD).

With the exception of one written response, all surveys were administered in person or over the phone.

While the survey results presented are too detailed to summarize in depth, this article outlines some of the notable findings.

Key Findings in Solution Development

Decreased Federal budgets caused 70% of surveyed companies to change their approach to solution development. Many of those companies also changed their approach to pricing their solutions.

Changes in approach to solution development included the following:

1. Respond to all technical areas in solicitations they pursue, small and mid-size businesses have increased the number of partners they bid with.
2. Having both a discriminator and price to win.
3. Investing in technology as their discriminator.
4. Developing proposal libraries.
5. Increasing the number of SME architects used to develop their solution (especially small and medium sized businesses).
6. Improving the processes they employ, both internally and onsite in program operations.
7. Becoming more selective with the opportunities they pursue and the partners they use.

Key Findings in Business Development

In addition to making changes in their approach to solution development, most companies surveyed had also made changes in BD. For the purposes of the survey, we took a broader definition of BD to include capture and proposals. Most companies lost BD personnel; proposal development personnel saw the greatest losses.

Decreased Federal budgets caused 70% of surveyed companies to change their approach to solution development.

Companies have employed a wide range of tactics to keep winning business in the post-sequestration era.

1. About 20% enhanced their personnel resources, betting on the future.
2. Some hired more capable BD and capture people who have the skills for “*solution selling*.”
3. Some trained their program managers to assist in



What Companies Have Done to Survive After the Sequestration

business development and solution development.

4. Others worked their BD personnel harder.
5. Another subset better aligned their BD resources by focusing qualified BD personnel on target agencies and organizing the proposal personnel to perform specialist roles (such as the same people preparing past performance).

It's helpful to see how other companies have changed their practices in light of a challenge we're all facing; but one attendees question brings home the most important point: *how will all of this work out for the companies surveyed?*

I will follow-up this coming fall to assess how the various strategies and tactics have worked for these companies.

As stated earlier, this summary only addressed a fraction of the survey findings. Anyone wanting greater detail can find an extensive summary at <http://ociwins.com/resources/resource/sequestration-white-paper/>. Additionally, a video of the presentation can be seen at <https://youtu.be/wkrEtr3T0tk>.

Russell Smith has been president of Organizational Communications Inc. (OCI) in Reston, Virginia for 31 years. OCI provides best value proposal consultant services to customers nationally. OCI has the largest consultant list in the business and provides lower prices than other leading companies. Russell has been an active member of APMP-NCA since 1994. He served as president in 2004. Additionally, he served as Chairperson of the Speakers Committee from 2001-2003 and from 2014-present.

Proposal Tip...

Require writers to submit concepts for graphics during the storyboarding process – it leads to clearer illustrations in the final proposal and helps writers allocate space for graphic as they draft.





Differentiating Yourself from the Competition

by Anthony Shifflett, MA, MBA, CP APMP

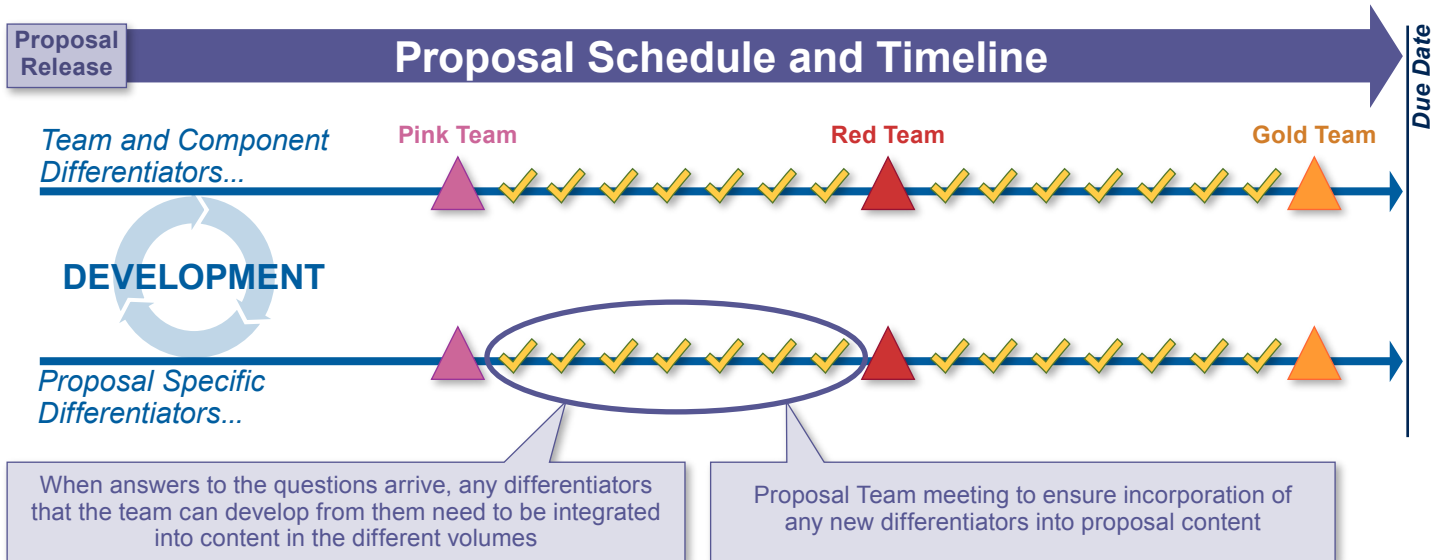


Figure 1. Differentiator incorporation and review points in the proposal process.

The key to getting a handle on company differentiators is to make sure to address the issue of differentiation from team construction. By the time one gets to the kickoff meeting there should be a slide devoted to differentiators, and depending on the proposal, differentiators can also be win themes.

Figure 1 illustrates that differentiators fall into two broad categories – differentiators related to the team and its components, and differentiators that can result because of the construction of the proposal, the PWS and the answers to the questions. Both are important, and capture and proposal managers need to work tightly together to ensure that all differentiators are incorporated throughout the entire proposal. As signified by the gold check marks in the diagram above,

the capture and proposal manager should check throughout the proposal development process to ensure the content reflects the differentiators. During formal reviews, reviewers should be informed of what the differentiators are, look for them, and identify potential areas where they are lacking.

The paragraphs below provide loose definitions of the major categories of differentiators. It is important to remember that the differentiators from one proposal to the next change, and that a “cookie cutter” approach between proposals is not a winning approach. It is important to remember that the answers to the questions can change and/or modify both categories of differentiators.

Team Differentiators

Leadership. A key differentiator is

team corporate leadership. Oftentimes the capture manager constructs proposal teams because a key, known leader is part of the upper management of a component. In this case, the Proposal Manager needs to ensure that this personnel differentiator is prominently displayed on the organizational chart and throughout the proposal at logical points.

Consulting Staff. Another key differentiator – similar to the leadership differentiator – is team consultants. Oftentimes capture and proposal managers are lucky enough to have known performers on their teams. Again, the Proposal Manager should ensure that the proposal content mentions these consultants throughout.

Past Performances. Past performances can be differentiators, depending on the agency and reviews that come back from the government

Differentiating Yourself from the Competition

on program performance. If a team has an outstanding past performance that clearly is a key differentiator from other teams, it should be the first past performance displayed in that section or volume. It is also important to mention this past performance throughout the proposal volume(s) where appropriate, either in the text or via callout boxes.

Technical Approach. In IT proposals, sometimes the technical approach itself can be a differentiator. This can be the case if the team has a unique technical approach that catches the eye of several evaluators due to their technical interests or predispositions. If the technical approach is a differentiator, then often this approach leans on the three categories above to rein-

force the uniqueness of the approach.

Management Approach. Sometimes how a team will manage the contract is a differentiator. For instance, some government agencies prefer flat management organizations. It is critical to establish early in the proposal process via intelligence gathering what the organization (and evaluators) prefer.

Proposal Specific Differentiators

Location. The location of the offices or deployed consultants of the different members of the team can be a key differentiator between teams if geographical proximity is an issue.

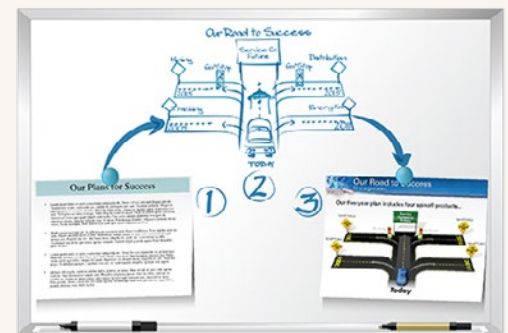
Other. Based on the requirements, customer, and program, a proposal can feature many other differentiators.

Establish early in the process what differentiators your evaluators care about. Obviously differentiators between these two broad categories are interchangeable. It is important as a proposal manager to get organized early, determine what the team's differentiators are, and apply them to the content.

Anthony S. Shifflett has been a Proposal Manager for over ten years and has produced a wide range of proposals of varying sizes and requirements for a wide range of government and commercial clients. He intends to work in the proposal field the rest of his professional life.

Proposal Tip...

Embrace the power of color: colors elicit different emotional responses and draw attention to features that can differentiate you from the competition.





Delivering the Right Client Experience in Proposal Development

by Kevin Switaj, PhD, CF APMP

When we think of high-performing, customer-focused organizations, companies like Chick-Fil-A, Amazon, Virgin Atlantic, and the Walt Disney Company come to mind. They are renowned for consistently exceeding expectations and delivering value and quality. Proposal development organizations can learn from these companies because our job is essentially the same – to deliver the best support possible to our internal client. High quality proposals put our companies in a position to meet the needs of our external clients. Below, I define what “*client experience*” means and some ways to implement this mindset in proposal development.

Client experience differs from *customer service* in two ways. **First**, the intent of the interaction is crucial. You have a transaction with a customer; you have a relationship with a client. In proposals, we sell a service internally to our primary client, the capture lead. We should, therefore, focus on developing a productive, long term, successful relationship with those we support.

Secondly, we need to look at the level and type of engagement. Customer service is too often looked at as a function. It can seem like someone else’s responsibility. In contrast, Denise Lee Yohn says an experience “*can be defined as the sum of all interactions*” you have



with a client.^[1] It is a core value that serves as the focus of the organization and everyone within it.

Proposal development organizations can differentiate themselves by focusing on providing excellent client experiences on each bid and to the company as a whole. From the initial identification of the opportunity through submission, we should concentrate on developing and enhancing our relationship with our internal clients. Proposal department leads should focus on three main areas of delivery to enhance proposal efforts – preparation, approach, and communications. While many proposal organizations take these points into account, focusing on the impact of our work on the relationships we

have with internal stakeholders builds trust and makes proposal professionals a central part of the bid team, instead of functioning as administrative personnel.

Preparation. Being prepared is key to meeting a client’s needs. Amazon uses data analytics to recommend books for you based on previous purchases. In proposal development, preparation focuses on being ready for the solicitation release and being prepared to tackle issues during the proposal lifecycle.

Having win themes and solutions brainstormed and documented, outlines and templates prepared, and an overall proposal strategy developed for when the RFP drops are key ways to be prepared. Working with the capture lead to have all of these actions completed ahead of the solicitation’s release minimizes stress

[1] Denise Lee Yohn, “7 Steps to Deliver Better Customer Experiences,” Harvard Business Review, February 3, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/02/7-steps-to-deliver-better-customer-experiences>.

Delivering the Right Client Experience in Proposal Development

and late nights for everyone post-RFP. Preparation also shows our client, and the company as a whole, that we have made each effort a priority and focus on doing all we can to win.

To paraphrase German military strategist Helmuth von Moltke, no proposal plan survives contact with the RFP. No matter how well we have strategized, issues will inevitably arise during the proposal lifecycle. Identifying potential risks and mitigations in the pre-solicitation period allows us to make sure small issues do not become big ones. Much like the visitor to Walt Disney World does not see the chaos behind the scenes of the attractions and events, proper preparation can make our clients happy with a proposal effort that runs smoothly, or at least appears to.

Approach. Good service and support does not happen by chance. Having a clear, defined approach allows teams to focus on client needs and not the steps required to do the job. For example, Virgin Atlantic has a rigorous training program for its new flight attendants, showing them everything from proper uniform set-up to emergency landings. By internalizing the necessary processes and procedures, flight staff can focus on the needs of their passengers.^[1]

[1] The training was detailed in the British documentary television series directed by Simon Draper, “Virgin Atlantic: Up in the Air” (ITV, July 7, 2015).

Following a structured, flexible proposal process is vital to bid success. Each organization should define, document, and circulate its basic approach that also accommodates adjustments as needed. Having your team internalize this approach allows them to focus on what is needed for bid success, such as strong win themes or how to improve the past performance write-ups, instead of the mundane details of the process. In addition, a common approach to proposals gives our internal clients a sense of familiarity, allowing them to be more comfortable throughout proposal development and eliminating any potential learning curve on subsequent bids.

Communications. Any client interaction fails without quality communication. Chick-Fil-A builds brand loyalty by meeting guest needs swiftly and attentively, going as far as walking the floor to ask if patrons need drink refills. This level of engagement makes the client feel connected and cared for, reinforcing that the patron receives quality support from the staff.

In proposals, communication allows everyone to know what is going on and what is expected throughout the process. Kickoffs, stand-ups, and regular email correspondence ensures the engagement of all parties critical to a bid’s success. In addition, frequent direct communication with our client

reinforces our commitment to the bid and builds the broader relationship, not just for the proposal manager but the department as a whole.

It is important to remember that focusing on the client experience does not mean giving in to everything the client wants. For example, if something would make a proposal non-compliant, we owe it to the client to say no. In addition, proposal department leadership needs to be engaged with their personnel and protect them from unreasonable demands. In such situations, you must be clear on the reasoning behind your decision and work to create a fair solution that is best for all parties and, most importantly, the proposal.

Proposal development professionals look to deliver the highest quality submissions while maintaining strong, productive relationships with those we support. Learning lessons from other industries focused on the client and customer experience can help improve our overall approach to winning new business and create a new standard for proposal organizations.

Kevin A. Switaj, PhD CF APMP is the Director of Proposal Development for LongView International Technology Solutions, a mid-sized Government contractor based in Reston, VA. He has been published in both Executive Summary and the APMP Journal.

APMP-NCA Board of Directors Meetings are Open to Members

The Board of Directors for APMP-NCA meets the first Tuesday of every month. Two out of every three meetings are virtual meetings. If you would like to join a meeting, contact us by going to <http://www.apmpnca.org/contact/>.

Special thanks to...

Executive Summary Editorial Staff

Executive Summary E-Zine Chair

Julia Quigley, M.A.

Lohfeld Consulting
ezine@apmpnca.org
571-421-7766

Editors

Patricia Gordon

GHD
patricia.gordon@ghd.com

Lisa Pafe, CPP APMP APMP-NCA President

Lohfeld Consulting
lpafe@lohfeldconsulting.com

Hélène Courard, J.D., CF APMP APMP-NCA Vice President

Unisys
helene@apmpnca.org

Layout and Graphics

24 Hour Company

info@24hrco.com
703-533-7209

Sr. Graphic Designer

Megan Skuller, CF APMP

24 Hour Company
megan.skuller@24hrco.com
703-533-7209

Circulation

Tom Skrobacz

tom@diamond-wall.com

Advertising Rates

Page Size	Width x Height	Rate
Full Page	8.5" x 11"	\$500
Half Page	8.5" x 5.25"	\$250
Quarter Page	4.25" x 5.25"	\$150

Rates are for digitally provided actual-sized color or black and white artwork. Minimum resolution is 150 dpi. Minimum of .25" of negative space on all sides. Artwork may be provided in .jpg, .ai, .eps, or .pdf format. Send all proposal/business development-related advertisement submissions to Sareesh Rawat, Executive Summary eZine Chair, ezine@apmp.nca.org (artwork only) and Eric Schwarz, Treasurer, Treasurer@apmpnca.org (copy of artwork and payment details or request for a PayPal invoice for online payment).

Payment may be made via check or paypal. Payment and artwork must be received by the advertisement submission deadline for the advertisement to appear in the corresponding issue of the Executive Summary. Late submissions will appear in the following issue.

Please make check out to "APMP-NCA" and send to the following address:

APMP-NCA
P.O. Box 711
Arlington, VA 22116-0711

If paying by paypal, please contact Eric Schwarz at Treasurer@apmpnca.org to have a link set up.

APMP-NCA reserves the right to reject advertisements for non-proposal or non-business development-related products/services or for content it deems objectionable.



NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA

APMP-NCA
P.O. Box 711
Arlington, VA
22216-0711

www.apmpnca.org

A Publication of the Association of
Proposal Management Professionals
National Capital Area Chapter

APMP-NCA 2015 Corporate Partners

Platinum Partners



www.LohfeldConsulting.com
abarden@lohfelddconsulting.com



www.smawins.com
info@smawins.com

Gold Partners



www.aockeysolutions.com



www.brownrudnick.com



www.enexdi.com



www.intravation.com



www.ociwins.com



www.proposaldc.com



www.privia.com



www.rainmakerz.biz



www.redteamconsulting.com



www.richterandcompany.com



www.r3bsolutions.com



www.shipleywins.com



www.winpros.com



www.24hrco.com
info@24hrco.com