

Mastering the art of persuasion in bidding



By **Heather Murray** (left) and **Erica Welsford**, senior consultants at Plan A. Over the past six years, they have been working with local and international clients, including many in the water and wastewater sector, to develop winning proposals.

Long gone are the days of throwing together a tender response using a bunch of previous bids to answer a set of generic questions.

Procurement professionals are producing tender documents with targeted questions and stringent evaluation criteria to ensure they are getting the best value from their supply chain.

With the supplier quality premium model being used more and more, price is not always king. Tenderers have an excellent opportunity to demonstrate why they are the best for the job without being beholden to submitting the cheapest bid.

Tenderers with high scoring attributes have succeeded in persuading the evaluator that they are the best. Writing persuasively may seem like a challenge. It's not. If you have taken the time to understand your client and their objectives, and linked your solution to them in a way that demonstrates clear benefits – you have mastered the art of persuasion in bidding.

The three steps to mastering the art of persuasion are demonstrating understanding of your client, providing clarity and commitment to your solution, and communicating this effectively.

1. Understand your client and their drivers: When your client feels understood, they will feel compelled to buy from you. First and foremost – take the time to do your research.

It is important to focus not only on 'what' your client needs, but 'why' they need it. Carry out an assessment of their risks, values and objectives to ensure your solution is fully aligned with what they hope to achieve.

It's not just about a client-focused introduction to your executive summary. Showing you know what they want, and proving you can deliver it must be interwoven through your entire bid. Every aspect from explaining the relevance of projects to presenting your team must demonstrate an understanding of their objectives. The closer these are aligned, the more likely it will be that they'll see your proposal as the winning solution.

2. Be clear and commit: Create clear links between your content and what your client is looking for by explaining relevance and providing examples and evidence. Often evaluators have a lot to read so make it easy for them to see the value you will bring. This requires some thought. A cut and

paste approach will only get you average scores. Thoughtfully written answers, tailored to the exact bid questions, will score more highly.

Simply telling evaluators you bring the most experienced team means nothing if you cannot make the connection between your team's expertise and the added value they will bring. What really lights up evaluators' eyes are clear benefit statements that are well evidenced.

Put some skin in the game. Make a promise that your solution is achievable and measurable. And commit.

3. Communication: Speak to the client and use the language of persuasion. When you want a client to buy from you, they are more likely to do so if you give them a reason why. This makes 'because' an important word as it is the lead-in to the reasons your client will select you.

Avoid waffly language such as 'we will try to' or 'we aim to'. There is no promise in that! Rather, state what you 'will' do, how it will benefit your client and where you have done it before.

Unless you are certain your evaluation team are technical experts, avoid technical jargon. If your reader gets bogged down in terminology they do not understand, they will feel frustrated and will become harder to persuade. For example, instead of setting out the very technical tasks required to upgrade a water treatment plant, rather focus on the value and benefits your approach brings to minimise risk and disruption.

Make it about them. Avoid broad-brush statements and most importantly, don't talk about yourself too much. Remember this is about your client. Tender evaluators are not looking for a company overview. They want to know how you will minimise their risk and deliver a solution.

This is how the art of persuasion is used: by focusing on what the client wants and linking to how you can provide it with clear evidence, you'll show your credibility and convince the evaluators that you are the company for the job. **WNZ**

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- Plan A is New Zealand's largest and longest established tender writing company, specialising in support for bid teams. For more information, see www.plana.co.nz/resources for more advice about tender writing.