



For
your

consideration

Submitting proposals needs careful thought, particularly when bidding to foreign organisations. Dave Chapman offers some guidelines

You must demonstrate an understanding of their customs and culture

HERE ARE FIVE key points to bear in mind when creating compelling propositions.

Use translation services carefully

Whether you are asked to submit your proposal in the local language or in English depends on the country and on the prospect organisation. Be sure to observe strictly all the requirements and instructions in the prospect's 'request for proposal' document.

If you have to submit the proposal in the prospect's language, it will probably be wise to write everything in English first and then have the whole document translated.

Be sure to choose a translation service that is familiar with the industry and market in which you are bidding. They also need to be well practised in the modern business language of that country. Just as you must check your English text thoroughly before you translate, so you should employ an independent person to check the work of the translator for errors and inconsistencies after translation.

Use the prospect's spelling and terminology

Most companies have a house style – a guide that sets out spelling and naming for consistency in business documents. Spelling all of the prospect's names and terms correctly is a critical courtesy.

If you are not using a translator and producing the document in English, you should bear in mind the business background of the prospect. If you are targeting the US, Canada and some South-East Asian countries with a strong American influence you may need to adopt American English. Whereas in India, for example, British English would be correct.

Look at the prospect's publicity material, documentation and websites and see how they use words, concepts and spelling. Some adaptations will help reflect that you appreciate the prospect's culture.

Put yourself in their shoes

It is critical that you not only develop an understanding of the decision-maker's issues but, in international proposals, you must demonstrate an understanding of their customs and culture. Keep in mind how the organisation will evaluate your bid and tailor your strategy to meet their criteria.

Bid managers should develop as much knowledge as possible about the prospective client before the proposal stage. Knowledge of the competition, their relationship with the prospect and their likely approach is also critical. Then you can demonstrate your unique selling points – what you have to offer that a competitor does not.

Use an active tone

✗ The project plan will be completed by 31 December. Regular meetings will ensure any problems are highlighted and solved.

✓ We will complete the project plan by 31 December. Our Project Team will meet with your Programme Office every week, at your offices, to discuss and rectify any problems.

This states clearly who will do what, where and when.

Use simple English and keep it short

Many bids include too much information, believing this impresses the evaluators.

- Short forms may be ambiguous, especially overseas
- Initially, spell out terminology in full. Abbreviations can follow in brackets and then used thereafter.
- Clichés and metaphors can have different meanings especially when English as a second language. ■

i INFORMATION

Dave Chapman set up Proposal Writers three years ago to fill the gap between in-house staff who lack writing skills and professional writers unfamiliar with bids and proposals.