

The Proposal: *Necessary Evil or Sales Necessity?*

By: Shipley Associates, an LSI Company

Sales professionals cringe when they hear a customer say:

“Just send me a proposal...”

“You’ll be receiving an RFP soon...”

“Sorry, but management wants to make this a competitive bid...”

Too often, the proposal is viewed as a necessary evil in the business development or account management process. Most sales methodologies teach us to avoid a proposal like the plague. Yet, most large opportunities with new or established customers require some form of a proposal – written or oral. Why then, do we treat the proposal development process as an afterthought, as a necessary evil?

To succeed, sales professionals need to:

- ✓ Understand the role of the proposal in winning strategic opportunities
- ✓ Improve customer focus in all sales communication activities
- ✓ Develop a real customer-driven value-based proposal
- ✓ Use a proven, 7-phase process for winning business

The Role of the Proposal

A proposal is a sales document, period. It is used to advance the sale to existing or new customers. It is not a list of features or a technical specifications document. If a proposal is not laced with customer language and linked to the customer’s strategic vision and business issues, it will fail.

Customer Focus – Will You Know It When You See It?

To some, being customer-focused means only being responsive – getting the proposal to the customer on time and meeting their requirements. Real customer focus is much more than that – it involves integrating customer hot buttons, business issues, and motivators.

Customer-Driven Value Propositions

Unless customers clearly see **more financial return** from your solution than what they are paying, they would be foolish to invest in you or your company. Value propositions are a key part of any winning proposal. The value to the customer must:

- ✓ Quantify anticipated improvements
- ✓ Specify timing of benefits and costs
- ✓ State the payback and ROI
- ✓ Specify how results will be measured and tracked

Too often, *value proposition* is confused with *solution* – a real value proposition is the solution linked to measurable results. In any winning proposal, the value proposition must be obvious to the customer and reinforced throughout the proposal.

A Winning Process

Account management and sales teams that meet revenue goals generally have a well-established process for winning business. As Michael Hammer said:

“If you take smart people and put them in stupid processes, you get stupid people.”

Process assumes discipline. Shipley embraces a proven 7-phase business development process and provides application tools to help ensure that the entire account management team is working together to win business.

Winning business in today’s shifting market is tough. Solutions that were once unique and customized now are being viewed by customers as a “commodities”.

Make sure you win your share of the strategic opportunities by applying discipline to your process and presenting customers with proposals that reflect your value and sense of customer-focus.

For more information on Shipley Associates, visit us at www.shipleywins.com or call 888.772.9467.

