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The Proposal Revolution

Written By Melanie Baker and Mike Lisagor

Government Proposal Solutions, Inc.

GOVPROP.com

Introduction

Government proposal development processes and approaches have remained relatively static for the past 20 to 30 years. We have refined, streamlined, improved, and honed our tactics and processes and approaches, but we haven't really turned the industry upside down since the introduction of computers. The information and social networking age in which we now live has dramatically shifted the proposal development landscape and most of us haven't even noticed!

The precarious state of the economy; the military drawdown in the Middle East; the low price technically acceptable (LPTA) federal contracting landscape; and the highly competitive marketplace in which contractors operate is driving the need for revolutionary change in the way they capture, bid, and perform work. Is it revolution or evolution that is on the horizon for bid and proposal professional everywhere?

A significant number of companies, both large and small, are being forced to downsize – do more with less. Many companies, as a result of cost cutting measures and overhead slashing exercises, eliminate some or all of their organic business development, capture, and proposal personnel. This is evidenced by Elance-oDesk, an online job resource in which they've stated that based on their assessment of the full work lifecycle, from demand through payment, including number of job posts, hours worked, and actual earnings of its members, that "Freelancing" is on the rise around the world. They cite a Freelancers Union report that says 53

million professionals are now freelancing in the U.S. alone. That's 34 percent of the entire workforce!

What Are We Doing To Evolve with the Industry Shift?

Are virtual proposals and “buying expertise by the drink” the wave of the future for business development, capture management, and proposal professionals? If this is the way the pendulum is swinging, what can we proposal professionals do to prepare for the imminent future? What will be required of companies that transition to a virtual consulting operating concept?

Government Consultants Prepare Yourselves for the Imminent Future—In just one online LinkedIn search, we were able to identify more than 12,000 community members with the key word “proposal” contained in their online bios and work histories. These members ranged from writers and editors to graphics, desktop, capture, cost/pricing, subject matter experts and proposal management professionals. This is evidence of stiff competition in a fiercely competitive market! How do these people differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack? That will be question that many of us will need to unlock to stay in the market.

Questions proposal experts need to answer when developing an online profile for LinkedIn, GOVPROP.com, or other social networking and industry targeted web sites are:

1. What makes me different?
2. What makes me qualified?
3. What experience can I post that will maximize key word searches?
4. How can my clients/potential clients validate that I'm worthy of fulfilling the role for them?
5. Did I proofread my profile entries to make sure they make sense and are typo and grammatically error free?
6. Did I pay the same attention to developing my online profile that I put into developing my resume?
7. Finally, what can I include that will substantiate in my claims?

Putting the time, thought, creativity, and innovation into developing online profiles on these sites will pay dividends. Once that's done though, you must maintain your profile to stay active

in the system(s). Update your information periodically. Post commentary (value added). Join special interest groups. Spark conversations in those groups. Create blogs. Contribute articles. All of these activities will keep your profile(s) active and get you noticed. As important as this is becoming, don't forget that nothing can replace your personal network! You must maintain your relationships as well.

When you land those consulting contracts you must deliver top quality work and make the client feel confident that they received the best value for the money and effort invested. The risk in this new information age is that with the click of the "post" button, your reputation is posted for all to view.

Contractors Get Ready - Get Disciplined—As companies lose their valuable organic business, capture and proposal development teams they must also modify current practices to meet the market shift. What will this entail?

Federal Government contractors requiring FAR-compliant procurement and bidding practices must implement mechanisms such as Basic Ordering Agreements, Master Services Agreements, or other contractual mechanisms with consultant clearing houses to "quickly" acquire resources to support time critical bid efforts. Elance-oDesk reports "unprecedented speed and efficiency" in online hiring: their metrics show that their typical online hiring process spans 3 days, versus an average of 43 days associated with traditional corporate hiring practices. GOVPROP.com expects to reduce this timeline to 24 hours or less.

The ability to obtain the right assets in an expedited fashion will allow companies to quickly ramp up customized consulting teams to prepare proposals and respond to Task Order Requests for proposals on very short turnaround schedules.

Coupled with the contracting mechanism, people responsible for identifying and acquiring the consulting resources must also be able to quickly develop job descriptions and work scopes/specifications with sufficient detail to result in a good online resource match so the consulting engagement will result in the desired end product.

These factors will force capture and proposal leaders to act quickly to identify the necessary proposal resources! Additionally, the designated representative(s) from the contracting organization will have to fully engage in the process to monitor work product, assess

consistency with the capture/win strategy, and ensure that the materials being developed are consistent with the corporate policies, vision, and quality standards. This aspect is not so dramatically different from what should be in practice today; however, it will force the need for commitment and engagement where it has been “voluntary” and somewhat inconsistent within many organizations in the past.

Where Do We Go From Here? — As a community, we must work together to redefine the rules of engagement for successful bid and proposal teams. This will require an overhaul of the virtual hiring and proposal processes, key performance measurements, and methods of coordination, compilation production. For the government marketplace, GOVPROP.com has been designed bottom-up to incorporate all the key elements of this new hiring paradigm as well as the proposal development from definition through delivery process.

Summary

As this growing freelance government proposal market matures, the most successful proposal experts will explore innovative ways to collaborate with other consultants that have synergistic skills and experience to offer a more comprehensive solution to government contractors. In addition, proposal experts with full time positions as contractor employees will be well advised to keep a close watch on their company’s near term organizational plans. This means being open to and prepared for entering the new government freelance market. The moral of the story is, “If you can’t beat ‘em. Join ‘em.”

Melanie Baker (Melanie.Baker@govprop.com) is a Government Proposal Solutions, Inc. co-founder and a seasoned proposal management consultant. Mike Lisagor (Mike.Lisagor@govprop.com) is also a GOVPROP.com co-founder and the Chief Knowledge Officer.