

6 Questions To Answer For A Knockem Dead Executive Summary

Call it what you will; Executive Summary, Executive Overview, etc. but it is the first thing read in most proposals. These few pages set the tone for the remainder of the proposal and, admit it or not, it can be the only part of the proposal a busy evaluator actually reads. All too often more time is spent arguing over when it should be written than what it should contain. The Executive Summary is not a proposal plan so it doesn't need to be written first to guide the team to greatness. However, if you've started your proposal effort far enough ahead to have actually formulated a solution before writing begins, the Executive Summary can be used by talented writers or competent editors as a guide to creating a sales document. Unfortunately, for many companies, the solution isn't finalized until moments before final production, writers weren't that talented and there just wasn't time to do any editing.

In this case the Executive Summary truly is a summary and takes on greater importance because, chances are there isn't one word in the proposal that doesn't sound like a regurgitation of a tech manual or insurance policy. Before getting into the questions keep in mind that proposing is selling and no matter what you're selling the process is always about them and never about you. There are no such things as generic themes or universally accepted benefits anymore than there are generic, universal customers. No one cares about your unique, robust, state-of-the-art, best-of-breed solution but you unless it's a clear answer to:

"What's in it for me." Questions:

1. **How will the customer benefit from your products or solution?** Remember, fast isn't a benefit if the customer is going broke and cheap is of little concern if they're making front page news because they can't deliver to their customers.

2. **What kind of return can the customer expect?** Spending a million dollars for the latest gizmo doesn't sound too bad if your customer can collect two million dollars in overdue accounts five minutes after the things installed.

3. **What will your solution look like in the future?** Nothing is static so any solution you provide should be easily expandable to accommodate planned, and to a certain extent, unplanned growth and a migration plan should substantiate the claim. This applies to both products and services.

4. **How will your solution impact their existing environment?** This goes beyond equipment footprint. The existing staff may be replaced or workload lessened or additional staff may be required.

5. **If the evaluation is close what's the one thing that sets you apart from the next guy?** This is a discriminator it tells the customer of the product or service they can only get from you. If your bid is just a "me too", price becomes the deciding factor and if you live by price you will die by price. The next guy that can figure a way to cut out a few dollars will take your contract; no follow on or long-term, empire building cash cow. A discriminator may allow an evaluator to justify a slightly higher cost and make the award to you rather than the lower or equal cost competitor.

6. What do they say about you when no ones looking? If your company won any awards that are relevant or had any relevant, significant articles published or gotten any good press find a way to get them in the Executive Summary. Everyone reads the executive summary. If nothing else, ego demands that they see what the executive sees.

Dan Light Consulting works with services contractors and systems integrators who struggle with controlling cost and the realization that the business isn't reaching its full potential. Our clients have experienced a 95% reduction in the cost of under performing business systems and increases in new business win rates to above 80%.

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