

## Small Business Proposal Development

There are companies that espouse, and make a good living teaching a very comprehensive and workable proposal development methodology. This methodology constitutes the menu of proposal "best practices." If you are one of the big guys like Northrop, IBM, Booz and a few others, you can follow the best practices and get great results because you have the necessary resources and bench strength to fund them. You can start before the RFP is released because you have a marketing and sales group whose job it is to develop long lead time accounts. And you more than likely have sales engineers whose job it is to develop solutions on spec.

In smaller companies everyone has to be direct charge, there is no budget for sales and marketing groups or sales engineers. Everyone bills the customer and very often everyone is working on a customer site. When a new opportunity is identified there is no one to work it properly until the RFP hits. Notice that the company isn't caught flat footed or bidding out of the CBD they're just doing all they can do with the resources available. Because Small Company Inc. wants to grow and prosper they've sent people to be trained by those companies espousing the best practices and they would like to emulate those they wish to become. All that Big Company Inc. may have been doing for a year or more to get ready to bid, Small Company Inc. now tries to squeeze into a 30 to 120 day period. It would be stressful to do this once or twice in a year but some companies go through this insanity perpetually.

The few good people that get stuck on proposal teams burn out quick. Between the proposal and the customer and other company responsibilities the quality of work suffers; the proposal, the customer or the company. The best practices need not be abandoned or specifically re-written for small companies. It's the responsibility of the small company to identify which best practice will get the greatest bang for the buck when there are very few bucks. If you only have 30 days to develop the solution, assemble the team and prepare the proposal something has to be left out. For instance, storyboarding is a very good technique when properly used. However, the day the RFP is released is not the day to begin teaching the technique to a group who has never used it or is reluctant to use it because they've never experienced its value. There is no time for multiple formal reviews.

Structure the review cycle to reflect the compressed situation. Past performance and team resumes is also a stumbling block for many companies. A Project Manager that's had to tailor the project description five or six times in the last month won't be real enthused about having to do it a seventh time. Resumes follow the same pattern. The solution lies in accepting reality and designing process and procedures to reflect it. You can still go to your association meetings and claim to follow best practices to the letter but in the long run you will have reduced your B&P cost, produced better proposals and helped retain your better people by not burning them out trying to keep up with the big guys.

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%.

Contact Dan Light Consulting today for a no obligation discussion of how we may benefit you.

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