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Article

3 Reasons Why Product Knowledge (Not Price) Is Crucial When Bidding on Security System Projects

Published: JUNE 22, 2016 | by **Robert D. Grossman** | [Edit](#)

Too often security dealers complain that consultants only evaluate price when looking at bids. That's not the case.

In our consulting practice we frequently get questions from bidders about products we have specified. And while I certainly don't speak for all consultants — or even any consultants other than the ones that work for our firm — I think I'm on pretty good ground here. If your experiences vary, or you're a consultant that disagrees, I'd love to hear from you. My goal here isn't to describe "best practices," but rather to inject some clarity into a process that bidders clearly feel is murky at times.

When we write a bid specification, we have to describe the features of the security system (or systems) in question, and usually some, if not all, of the individual products of which it integrates. For example, you can't specify a CCTV system without describing camera performance at some level. Access control needs a description of card readers or other authentication devices. You get the idea.

In order to go about this, we describe products in three ways:

- General specification** — We describe the features that we are looking for and look to the bidder to provide the products that they like to use that best meets these features. This generally applies to mature products like fiber optic modules, media converters and network switches. As long as the product has the specified features and performance, we don't care. In fact, when asked about wireless video network equipment on a recent project, our response was, *"In areas where a specific manufacturer and/or model number are not listed, bidders are encouraged to provide products that they are comfortable using and supporting and on which their staff is trained. These products must perform as specified, but we feel that the benefits of training, support, experience and spare stock outweigh any brand preference the Consultant may have in that area."*
- Or approved equal** — Sometimes we may have the performance characteristics of a specific product in mind but also understand that there may be other products that are as good (or better) that we just haven't worked with yet. For example, we routinely provide camera manufacturer and model numbers to make it easier for bidders to identify the specific performance level required for a project. We understand that many bidders work with other brands of cameras and bidders are encouraged to substitute cameras with comparable or better performance, construction and reliability. In such cases we ask only that the bidder be prepared to substitute the listed camera in specific areas where the substitution they intend to use does not meet the required performance level, at no additional cost to the project.
- Directed specification** — Finally, there are times where we don't want to entertain substitutions. It could be that the client uses a specific type of access control system at other facilities and wants to maintain a standard, or a host of other reasons. In those cases, the specific make, model, version or other identifying characteristics are provided and we'd like to see that reflected on the bid. If you're a bidder and you want to present something else, my advice is to present it as an alternate, and provide a compliant bid as well. You may point to cost savings or performance enhancements that we're just not interested in, and you may not have the big picture. Unless it says "or approved equal" after the product identifier, it's safe to assume no equal will be approved.

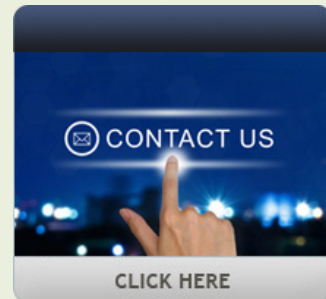
So why do I bring all this up? Mainly because it is frustrating to listen to bidders complain that we only look at price when all you give us to look at is price. Everyone has great references, a nice Web site and some really sharp people working there. But not everyone has the product knowledge to improve upon our specifications and add value based on their "real world" experiences. If you have that kind of knowledge, let it show in your bid responses and proposals. We're all looking for happy customers and a reasonable profit margin, and if you've got ideas that can move a project in that direction, you may just have the "special sauce" the client is looking for.

Also published as:

3 Reasons Why Product Knowledge (Not Price) Is Crucial When Bidding on Security System Projects on the Security Sales & Integration blog.



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