

Article



Want to Increase Bid Response Success? Consider Outsourcing an Eye for Detail

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Attention to basic writing skills such as grammar, spelling and punctuation may count more than your technical response in many cases. Hiring a proofreader can differentiate you from the competition.

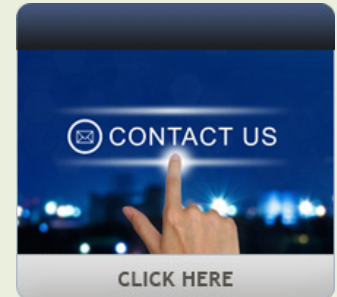
Back in 2010 I wrote about how attention to detail in a written proposal (“**Spelling Counts**”) can make or break a bid response in unexpected ways. Those comments are as timely now as they were then, and the examples which I thought to be humorous are now seemingly routine.

While I don’t want to repeat myself, one paragraph stands out as particularly true, and I’d like to provide a fresh take on it here:

In fact, grammar, spelling, and punctuation may count more than your technical response in many cases. Why? Two reasons come to mind. First, the person writing the checks may not understand the technical issues but he sure knows how to spell the name of his company. Second, a sloppy proposal equates to sloppy work in people’s minds. I know it shouldn’t — the person writing the proposal isn’t the person doing the work — but it is a hard barrier to overcome.

You may have read about how people don’t communicate the way they used to, with the advent of text messages and email. Well, rest assured the people reading bids and quotations know how to communicate, and the bias against poor attention to detail is alive and well. As it should be. If going the extra mile is your hallmark, what better place to show it — or blow it — than your bid response.

There’s another factor that merits attention as well in the attention to detail department — consistency. I’ve seen proposals that promise a one-year warranty in one place and a (specified) three-year warranty in another. Pricing for indoor cameras that is higher than the environmentally-rated, vandal-resistant outdoor version of the same camera. And paragraphs inserted with different fonts or point sizes than adjacent material — a sure sign of a poor cut-and-paste job. And this is in addition to the other examples I had previously mentioned.



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In fact, I'm questioning my previous recommendation about looking for a high school student to proof things if you aren't staffed sufficiently to do the job yourself. While I'm not questioning the skills of high school students, in many cases that's a half measure. Sure, they'll catch some things but not the more complex issues that make a big difference in accuracy and appearance. My revised advice: Outsource it if you can't handle it well in-house.

When you think about it, spending a little more money in that area just makes sense. You hire an accountant in most cases because of specialized skills and the need to have certain tasks done the right way. If your financial house is not in order the penalties can be pretty significant. Applying that same logic to give you an edge in winning jobs makes sense as well. And, remember, a lot of what you put in a proposal is reusable, so the actual cost per proposal to have an expert go through it for appearance, formatting, consistency and grammar isn't necessarily as expensive as you would think.

Where do you find such a person? Ask around, check Craigslist or other websites that specialize in matching freelancers, and network. You might also look at people you know who do this for a living by day and have a parttime business on the side.

I have a friend who does this and have recommended her to some integrators who have been pleasantly surprised at the difference this can make in their success rate. A reputable person will let you "try before you buy," showing you what they can do with one of your documents at no cost if you're not happy with the results. Keep in mind they'll get better as you use them more and they learn your particular style and preferences.

As many head back to school, those of us left behind in the working world shouldn't forget the lessons we were taught when writing a term paper. Only this time it's OK to have a friend to help you out while you get all the credit. How good is that?

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