



Visually Conquer the RFP Response

Business Development Best Practices Series

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A winning proposal is a driving force behind the construction industry today. When a Request for Proposal (RFP) comes in the door, companies invest time and money to prepare, produce and track responses. The challenge lies in balancing your company's story and showcasing the recommended solution, so those who weigh in on the review process understand that your company is best suited for the job.

If you don't have a dedicated marketing person, it can be overwhelming to put together a detailed response, but it doesn't have to be. Responses to RFPs have two levels of importance: what you say and how you say it.

Telling your story relies on multiple components, but the most important (and often overlooked) element is how you visually represent yourself. The following are some considerations for a visual response that positively impacts customers and prospects.

Think Beyond the Binder

Typically, RFP responses are packaged in a three-ring binder full of information, adhering to the philosophy 'more is better.' Does it get the job done? Sure. Does it make people remember you? Absolutely not.

When was the last time a three-ring binder caused you to stop what you were doing and devote all of your attention to it? The physical container presents the perfect opportunity for using imagination to catapult a response to the next level. It could be as simple as including a pop of color, images that highlight your concept/idea or going beyond the binder and include Google Cardboard, or something similar, to build an immersive, virtual reality experience your prospect will never forget.

Think creatively and draw the customer into the response, so they can see themselves working with you.

Evolve Your Thinking

Technology provides vast opportunities to present your content. This is especially true in construction as the industry centers on the abstract during the RFP phase. From animated videos to drone footage, technology continually advances, and the time is right to take steps to allow your company to distinguish itself. Some methods for winning business include using tools such as:

- Video testimonials and case studies to highlight satisfied customers and successful projects
- 3D animation, BIM modeling, or other simulation software to help customers visualize how a concept will be achieved
- Photography (stock or customize) to solidify an experience or support the concept
- Website pages offer an interactive component that allows your potential customer the opportunity to see how your company solves construction related issues

Focus on the Solution

Most contractors borrow content from previous responses when developing foundational details. This practice makes for efficient use of time and reaffirms consistency of message. However, the main focus of the document must be your solution and answers the 'what's in it for me' question.

A significant component of detailing your firm's solution is to develop specific terms for the response. For instance, incorporate the actual name of the project every time you refer to it rather than how it is being referred to in the office. Be specific, even if it takes up space. Every company has its own language, and the last thing you want during an RFP response is doubt based on an odd reference to the project.

Not everyone retains information in the same manner, and you should strive to meet the needs of those reviewing the document to the best of your ability. For example, highlight the project management process, but don't include an 11 x 17, folded Gantt Chart. Those days are over! Instead, create a visually appealing flow chart with your project manager in the middle connected to all involved. Within an electronic response, create an interactive flow chart that details the biographies for your team members when selected as well as a short video of these counterparts working on similar projects.

The electronic response presents opportunities to showcase your company's creative approach to solving the customers' challenges. Interactivity and strong visual support assist all decision-makers in choosing the right company – yours.

Lastly, illustrate how your experience has successfully helped customers in the past. Case studies or project profiles are perfect examples. The critical point is to establish a value that only your firm provides. For example, do you have related experience or are you partnering with a company that brings experience specific to the project? Experience in solving construction-related challenges equals value to the customer.

Responding to an RFP answers two questions: what your company will do to achieve the desired outcome and why a prospect should work with you over anyone else. Combining your solution (what you say) and your unique differentiator (how you say it), marks a critical step in winning new business. While an RFP response is not a traditional marketing piece, it still represents your company. Firms who utilize creativity and visual support to tell their story through RFP responses will find success.

About the Author: As founder and president of Atlas Marketing, Chris Martin oversees the variety of campaigns that the company delivers. Throughout his twenty-three-year career, he has told stories for American icons and national heroes; and directed campaigns for a variety of national and international corporations. Visit AtlasStories.com for more information about the firm and learn how they tell stories for companies that build things.

