It's Not You, It's Me: Self-Centered Proposal Writing

Has all of the romance drained out of your business proposals? You used to spend hours thinking about the client's needs and wants. What would their ideal contractor look like? How could I show that we're the perfect match? But lately, things have become stale. You're less interested in them and would much rather talk about yourself. If your win rate is going down the tubes, now's the time to rethink your proposal writing strategy.

Generic is for Bagged Cereal - Not Proposals

Using boilerplate language and repurposing content is an obvious way to save time and effort on proposals. Keep in mind, however, that boilerplate is the launch point for writing content, not the content itself. The "find and replace" function in Word might seem like a lifesaver but, like its cousin spell check, it's not to be trusted. Referring to the wrong client or project can be grounds for automatic disqualification. These kinds of mistakes might seem trivial and nitpicky, but they speak volumes about your attention to detail and project management skills. Don't be the ironic submitter who brags about their company's detailed and thorough reporting but can't even get the client's name right 100 percent in the proposal. What you do in the proposal is a trial run for the project.

Identify Relevant Case Studies

Present evidence that your team can fulfil the client's needs by using relevant case studies. Determine relevance based on the scope of work, location of work, contract value, level of difficulty, or client work history. You can choose whichever case studies you want, but make sure you justify why each one is relevant. The connection may not be immediately apparent to the reader, so be sure to connect the dots. Otherwise, they may get lost reading between the lines.

Quick Self-Centered Test

Not sure if your proposals are all about you? Here's a quick test: Count how many times the client's name appears. Then, count how many times your company's name appears. How do the two numbers stack up? If the company-to-client ratio is greater than 10:1, it's a pretty good indicator that you've wasted a whole lot of pages talking about yourself.

Match Value Proposition to Client's Goals

Remember, a proposal is a persuasive document. Use measurable evidence and past client testimony to show value instead of grandiose marketing claims. Also, try to understand the real reason for the RFP. Is the client's goal to build something more efficient, more attractive, or safer? Asking yourself "why does this project matter" will help you develop a value proposition the client actually wants.

Key Takeaways:

- Be complete, accurate, and persuasive
- Glean client priorities by order of appearance in RFP
- Don't rely on "find and replace"
- Take the quick self-centered test
- Create a table to align client needs with your solutions
- A proposal isn't a price quote, statement of work, or company history

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