



**Bid** *Write*<sup>®</sup>

# KNOCKOUT SUBMISSIONS

**FIVE TIPS  
FOR BUILDING  
KILLER BIDS**

**ROUND 1: OPENING MOVES**

## Introduction

**Knockout Submissions is your free personal trainer in the world of competitive tendering.** When you pitch for business, you're competing for a prize with no second place, only a defeated contender. Knowing what helps organisations win bids and how to write and build them effectively will keep your opponents on the ropes and you shaping up as the odds-on favourite right from the initial weigh-in.

These five tips, the first in a series, look at the opening moves: building a team and taking the right approach to going the distance. We hope you find they make a difference when you next step into the ring. And if you need further advice, simply get in touch and we can talk some more. We're in your corner.

Good luck.

The BidWrite Team

“The third man in the ring makes boxing possible.”

Joyce Carol Oates

**Appoint one person whose only job is to make sure everyone else does theirs.**

It's vitally important for there to be someone who is ultimately responsible for the bid, through whom every action flows. A good bid leader will drive the bid forward and coordinate a submission delivered on time and on target. Without someone focused on the fight plan as a whole, your bid process could lose its way, at best a bit of a brawl; at worst staggering blindly like a punch-drunk pugilist waiting for the bell.

Proposals have a lot of constituent parts, prepared by many people who are all, quite rightly, intent on making their contribution count. Few people will have time to take responsibility for others and none of them will want the added migraine of overall delivery responsibility. Someone needs to have that job all to themselves.

Obvious choices for bid leaders are sometimes apparent: the sales director or account manager for instance. Sometimes not so. Some of those people may themselves have a big bid task to undertake, like the complex financial mechanics of the proposal or the winning themes and strategic narrative essential for a win. To make them the bid leader will take them away from their critical, specialist input and spread them too thinly.

Pick a good organiser and a popular team member to whom people will respond. If they're not the most senior person in the team, confer temporary authority on them from on high and make sure everyone knows it. And don't give them lots of their own content to generate or they'll lose sight of their pivotal role as coordinator.

Part referee, part trainer, part enthusiastic corner man (or woman), your bid leader will guide your up and coming bout to a decisive victory.



“If you fight that badly again next round, when you come back, nobody will be here.”

Unknown corner man

**Get a good team in your corner.** It's rare for an individual to put together a large bid completely on their own, but more often than not there is a tendency for one person to take on far more than they need to. It's not good for the individual, it's an inefficient use of the bid response time and the quality of the final submission will suffer. Utilise your colleagues across the company (and elsewhere) to build a wide-ranging team of specialists and your proposal will be completed with time to spare and resounding with confidence and knowledge.

Another recurring reason why bids aren't as strong as they could be is because the content has been produced by the wrong people. Technical sales consultants can create compelling and articulate content around project performance, implementation and price but perhaps they're not best placed to write about the company's five-year plan on diversity and the environment. That knowledge usually resides with the HR team. And your HR team probably shouldn't be creating, inserting and cropping images; that's the job of the marketing department. Similarly, the person responsible for physically compiling the bid - your document management experts - should not be asked to 'stick something in about innovation' or fill in pricing schedules. And yet all these things, and more, happen regularly in the frenetic and frequently under-resourced world of bid preparation.

Everyone in an organisation benefits from a successful bid submission, so there should be no shortage of willing, qualified participants. Ask freely for help with your (and their) bid, and everyone's a winner.

One last thing. Don't forget to take out your gum shield when you say please and thank you.



“I have two stools, one for Vinnie to sit on, and the other to throw at him if he doesn't listen to me.”

Lou Duva

**Brief well and set clear deadlines.** There is a period of time at the start of a bid submission where you brief your collaborators fully on what is required of them and how long they have to do it. Handle this well and it will pay dividends later in the bid production, culminating in a powerhouse performance delivered well within the time.

Sometimes, it can be difficult to know how to divide the workload. We suggest that you begin by reading the invitation documents in detail and assigning each question, section or task to a department or individual. Once every element of the bid response has a name next to it, you can then divide the various elements between the team members and brief each of them fully on what you need from them.

When you brief an individual or team, you'll get the best content back if you share with them how their work sits within the wider context. Summarise the project for them, and discuss how their contribution can have the greatest impact. If such information is available, tell them what marking percentage or weighting has been assigned to their section so that they can respond with equal emphasis. Agree with them what they'll be producing and confirm in a follow-up email.

One way to kickstart an effective and well-informed working team is to hold a group session where everyone can be briefed together, and ideas and suggestions can be shared among you.

Finally, set and communicate your deadlines. Give people enough time to respond fully, but don't set deadlines that are too close to the submission date. Keep an eye on progress and don't be reluctant to send polite but persistent reminders as deadlines loom. Because when the bell goes, it's time to face your opponents, ready or not.



“Everything Tyson’s got has ‘goodnight’ written on it.”

Mills Lane

**Start a library (and keep it in good shape).** Other than people, a well written and well tended content library is your greatest ally in preparing winning bids. It comprises all those well-honed classic moves that you can rely on to pack a powerful punch.

A bid comprised entirely of pre-written text is an impersonal and careless approach. A good content library however, kept up to date with new and revised material, can contribute to as much as 80% of your bid, providing you and your team with more time to work on the essential unique content that lies at the heart of every good submission. There are a couple of key points to remember here:

First, whenever you use library content in a bid, you should proof read it carefully and be prepared to edit it, if necessary, to fit neatly into your bid. At the very least, you will want to remove any fatal references to previous clients; in some cases, the library content will simply be a good starting point for a complete rewrite. If you make time and pay close attention to thoroughly proofing and sub-editing your submission, the library content will be indistinguishable from your new content, but you’ll have done half the work to get there.

Second, content libraries get tired easily, so keep them fresh. If you write new content for a bid and you think it’s got mileage for future use, add it to the library immediately (or you’ll forget). When you use library content, review and edit it for your bid and then make sure you add it back into your library, replacing the previous version. If you have the resources, consider appointing someone to manage the library permanently.

A good library won’t let you down and will always be there for you, but you’ve got to spar with it regularly or it will throw out-of-shape pitty-pat punches that won’t score.



“Don’t count the days. Make the days count.”

Muhammad Ali

**Channel your energies at the right time.** It’s midnight and there’s just you, the desk lamp and an empty pizza box. The world is tucked up in bed and you’ve been at it solidly for almost 15 hours. If you think this is a good time to write your sucker punch executive summary, the chances are it’s going to finish up as a glass-jawed palooka.

Your energy, enthusiasm, clarity and creativity will all fluctuate wildly during the bid writing process. If you use this natural ebb and flow to maximise your most productive periods, your bid will be all the better for it.

Write your most important content when you’re at your most fresh. If mid-morning is when you’re normally at your peak of performance, then that’s the time to crack on with those deal-making innovations that will crown the project. Going to be a late one? Then use your sharpest thinking early in the day for those complicated pricing strategies and save reformatting those health and safety tables for the late shift.

Reaching the last few tiring hours of a bid submission knowing you have a great body of work behind you and all you need to do is check the page numbering and write the contents page is one of the best feelings when putting a bid together. Having a major piece of original content still to be conceived and written two hours before the deadline is one of the worst. Don’t be concerned that you’re not doing things in the right order; that’s easy to rectify at the compilation stage when all of your hard work (and the work of others) will fit together like a piece of fine precision engineering.

We all have an admirable tendency to work hard and plough through, but you’ll get better results if you use your time more wisely. Become adept at the art of timing and pacing, and you’ll float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, not the other way round.



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