About Executive Compass

Bid, Tender and Procurement Professionals

Over the ten years since we were formed, we have achieved unparalleled success in assisting both SMEs and large multinational companies to win public and private sector contracts across the UK, Ireland and Europe. We are a UKAS ISO 9001:2015 certified professional bid writing consultancy, providing our clients with the highest quality PQQ, tender writing and bid management services to improve your success rates and make your bid processes more efficient.

All our writers have in-depth knowledge of the requirements and the demands of tender writing and bid management, and are always fully informed and up-to-date with the latest laws and legislation that might affect the procurement process. We directly employ all of our bid writers for added security and quality management – giving you the peace of mind that your project is being managed properly, to the highest quality.

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About the Author

Neil Capstick is the managing director of Executive Compass, and is an MBA qualified Chartered Manager with an MSc in business research methods.

Neil has been writing bids for over twenty years. Since establishing Executive Compass in 2009, he has been involved in over 4,000 bid writing, training and management projects.

Neil is an active member of the Institute of Business Consultants, the IOD and Chartered Management Institute. He has been involved in bids with values ranging from several thousand pounds to tens of millions of pounds.
Top Tips for Writing Bids and Tenders

For small and large companies alike, bidding for work in the public and private sector can be one of the best ways to grow your business. The tender process presents an opportunity to create relationships with new clients, pick up lucrative contracts, and obtain a place on prestigious frameworks.

With the opportunity comes a unique set of challenges.

Writing bids, tenders and proposals is unlike writing other documents. You need a different approach, picking up on the specific nuances of the procurement process and engineering your writing to pursue high marks.

Here are some of our top tips for writing winning bids and tenders.
Top Tips for Writing Bids and Tenders

Tip One

Ensure Compliance

Make sure that you have a clear bid/no bid process based on a rigorous analysis of the opportunity. While it is important to be aspirational, don’t be led by false hope. Undertake a clear analysis of whether you can deliver the contract compliantly, as well as competitively, and whether you can submit a bid that meets the requirements in the specification.

If you are confident that you can proceed, this focus on compliance should permeate the rest of your approach:

► Read all the documents and portal-based guidance before you begin. Make sure that you fully understand what the bid is asking for and that you can deliver all the required elements. If you wish to submit a variant bid, always seek confirmation first that they are permitted.

► Create a central record of the minimum requirements of a compliant bid, and use it as a checklist.

► Respond in the format specified. The buyer may deem your bid non-compliant for seemingly trivial factors such as failure to use the specified font, modification of a provided template or failure to follow the defined naming convention for appendices. It may seem pedantic, but these instructions are often part of the buyer's approach to ensuring fairness and transparency in the process, and may also provide an insight into your attention to detail.

► If you are unsure about anything, raise a clarification question. It is always worth checking the clarification log in case your query has already been resolved. You can often learn about other bidders’ intentions through assessing the questions that have been raised. Conversely, be mindful that any questions that you raise will likely be shared with other bidders too, so balance the need to clarify with the potential disadvantage of revealing something about your strategy.

► Always respond on time. If a tender is submitted even a second late, it is likely to be deemed non-compliant and not considered by the evaluation panel. Close to submission deadlines, many bidders may be attempting to upload their submissions at once, so upload and submit early to avoid any potential technical issues.
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Tip Two

Tell a Story

Most tenders, particularly those in the public sector, ask a range of questions that invite standalone responses. This fragmented structure means that many bidders look at each question only in isolation, answering the question as asked and then moving on to the next one.

While it is important that every response does answer the question as asked in its own right, don’t forget that your tender must also tell a consistent story. A golden thread should run all the way through your responses.

Before you start to write, think about what could differentiate your bid from your competitors’. There must be something that you can do better or do differently – otherwise, why should the buyer award the contract to you over any other competent bidder? The theme should be consistent and easy to understand. Most importantly, it should be relevant to the actual needs and priorities of the buyer. A differentiator in itself is not a selling point if it doesn’t align to what the buyer values. Start by thinking about what it is that they value and then reflect on what it is that you do to meet that need.

Additionally, provide evidence all the way through. Why should the buyer believe you? Data on past performance, testimonials, case studies and other forms of evidence are great ways to gain confidence and offer peace of mind to a naturally risk-averse buyer.
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Tip Three

Be Specific

The more tenders you complete, the more often you will encounter similar questions that you have responded to successfully in the past. This brings the temptation to copy and paste prior responses as a quick and easy way to answer the question.

While this does certainly streamline the process, bear in mind that different buyers value different things: the specification for each opportunity will be different, and many things may have changed both within your organisation and within your competitors’ since the last time you submitted the response. You therefore need to be very critical and ask yourself:

► Does this content truly answer the question, or are we putting a square peg into a round hole just to save time?

► Is this response still as competitive and innovative as it was when it was first written?

► Will the reader see through the copy and paste and perceive our response as generic rather than specific to them?

For these reasons, we would advise avoiding – or at least minimising – the use of copy and paste. Where it is used, transfer short sections that are directly relevant to the question that you are answering and adapt the content to contract-specific requirements.

More broadly, remember that the buyer wants to know what you will do for them. Don’t rely on descriptions of your general approach. Provide a detailed, well-structured proposal for how you will meet their needs and deliver the specific service that they are commissioning.
Tip Four

Put the Customer First

Build on your identified bid theme and the specific, focused approach to answer each question by continuing to put the buyer first all the way through your submission.

The way that questions are posed typically invites you to describe what you do; what you have achieved; how you will deliver the service. However, what the buyer ultimately cares about is what they will experience and how their outcomes will be met.

Consider each element of what you write from the buyer’s perspective and place your focus on the things that they value. Engage the evaluator with a proposal that they would want to be a part of.

This will be the first step in creating a bid that goes beyond description and into persuasion. A descriptive bid can provide competent answers to each question; a persuasive bid tells the evaluator what the impact will be. Try to look at each element of service delivery from their perspective, and tell them what they will experience as a result of your unique way of working. Will they experience reduced lead times? Will cost be reduced, or whole-life value for money be improved? Will there be a collateral benefit for the local economy?

The key message is don’t let the reader make their own mind up – tell them outright why your proposed way of working will be the most effective means of delivering against their outcomes.
Top Tips for Writing Bids and Tenders

Tip Five

Avoid the Common Pitfalls

Finally, avoid the most common traps that lead to unsuccessful bids:

► Make sure you don't miss any part of what was asked by deconstructing each question methodically.

► Don't use excessive jargon, initialisms or highly technical language that the reader may not understand. Your aim should be to explain your proposed approach clearly – don't alienate the reader by showing off your knowledge, at the expense of taking them with you on the journey.

► Don't lean on your reputation or an expectation that the buyer will have a predetermined preference for your organisation. Within the tender process, you are only as strong as you are on paper. If you want your prior successes to be taken into account, describe them to the reader.

► Rather than describing your company and the way you do things generally, tell the reader what you'll do for them specifically and the benefits they'll experience.

► Never rush. Completing tenders can often be a balancing act and you may have conflicting priorities. However, don't forget that it is a competition and you will often be bidding against competitors with dedicated bid writers or who are using the professional services of a company such as Executive Compass. They will be dedicating time and attention to create a bespoke, high-quality bid that speaks directly to the buyer. To be competitive, you need to have the same focus.

Conclusion

Although evaluation criteria may be clearly defined, buyers can never fully control for the subjectivity of their evaluation panels. For that reason, bid writing will always be more of an art than a science. However, by following the right steps you can produce persuasive, detailed and evidence-based responses that give you the best chance of winning.
Evaluators’ Complaints

These are some real-life examples of complaints and feedback by tender bid evaluators. Make sure you address these points to give your company the best chance of making it through the process.

► The author did not follow the instructions
► The proposal contains no compliance matrix. As a result, evaluators spend a lot of time trying to figure out whether the response is actually compliant
► Emphasis is placed on the ‘wrong’ portion of the tender document (failure to understand the award criteria)
► Lack of meaningful proposal themes. No story is told to the evaluator
► Poorly structured response, illogical table of contents, and misuse of appendices
► Differentiators are not used or are unclear
► Many requirements not addressed at all. (Silence on the statement of work requirements means the bid is non-compliant or deficient).
► Statement of Work requirements not addressed with respect to the business
► Technical claims not substantiated with tangible, real data
► Difficult to read: straight text, no bullets, poor graphics, no white space
► Lack of section summaries. Points are buried inside long chunks of text
► Overuse of boilerplate responses. The response is not tailored to the business needs of the client or agency issuing the ITT
► Graphics not readable after copy and paste
► Prime contractors’ / subcontractors’ agreements not included
► Other back-up information such as copies of insurance and safety certificates not included
► Certifications / qualifications included but the dates quoted meant they looked out of date
► An insufficient number of copies sent
► Documents submitted too late
To find out how Executive Compass can help your company prepare winning bids and tenders call us FREE today on 0800 612 5563 or 0203 507 0314.

Alternatively email us at info@executivecompass.co.uk or write to us at one of the addresses below.

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