



## Debunking the Endangered RFP Myth

# “Are RFPs \_\_\_\_\_?”

Worth responding to? A waste of time? Even read? Extinct? You've probably heard it all, and maybe even worse. Responding to a request for proposal is undoubtedly consuming of time and effort, but many companies are profitable in doing little more than responding to RFPs. Proposals are still relevant and, moreover, are critical in acquiring and penetrating client accounts for nearly all types of businesses across every industry.

It would appear that the attitude towards RFPs and responses is that they are inherently rigid or siloed. Yet, proposal writers are aware of the wealth of insight RFPs and responses contain. From fresh client perspectives to critical competitive analysis to winning multi-million dollar bids, request for proposal responses are not only here to stay, but thriving.

# Map Out Your Response

The goal of responding to proposals is to win, but before you even begin writing there are some essentials that must be addressed:

**Start with the destination.** Writers are the wordsmiths of an organization. Sales, operations and business development teams are regularly pressing writers to complete proposals on a tight deadline. Yet, experienced proposal writers have the knowledge and experience to make authoritative decisions. Sometimes bidding on an RFP isn't worth the time and effort. Ask whoever approaches you to evaluate the opportunity with you. Is this opportunity a good fit for your organization, and can it be won?

**Plan for obstacles.** Begin to separate and break apart the RFP requirements into subcategories like administrative, content, formatting or legal. In each subcategory you can flag any questions that may interfere with winning. These

problems could be anything stemming from scheduling, outsourcing, customization and staffing conflicts. Once identified, figure out ways around or ways of undercutting these weaknesses.

**Avoid competitor bias pitfalls.** Questions that make up an RFP don't fall from the sky. Keep an eye out for questions that are inherently framed towards competitor bias. Formulated, detailed questions are usually woven into RFPs and are likely prompting writers to demonstrate capabilities or industry knowledge to compare and contrast against the already favored competitor. You can overcome bias by building answers that further education and awareness - know your competition and your differentiators.

# Speak the Language

Readers want you to get to the point of what's being asked.

You can't expect someone to literally read every single word of your proposal, especially when they're tasked with reading the numerous proposals competing against you. If your response isn't tightly focused, it's heading for a quick trip from the proposal pile to the recycling bin.

Here are 4 ways to get in the mind of your reader and keep your proposal at the top:

**1) Use the primacy principle.** Answer what's being asked first. Then provide an explanation. The primacy principle mandates that the most important information is in first part of an answer.

**2) Write in an active voice.** 90 percent of normal, everyday speech is spoken in active voice. Content that is written in a passive voice is difficult to read because decoding it requires more effort and attention.

**3) Keep language simple and concise.** Readers should understand what's written after reading it once. Avoid jargon and complicated answers. Maximize readability with short and focused sentences.

**4) Write to win.** Focus on what the client needs. Write content that meets requirements and provides the positive outcomes or results being sought after.

# What Makes Winning Content?

Winning teams have effective proposals because they apply a formulated process to writing content.

Increase win rates by incorporating these 5 methodologies into your RFP writing process:

**1) Demonstrated Understanding.** A proposal may contain a lot of information about your organization, but it is really not about you. Keep the client's requests, needs and questions at the forefront. Content should substantiate the positive outcomes for the client when your organization's product or service is implemented.

**2) Thematic Strategy.** Proposals are very much like going on a first date. If your date starts spewing out unasked information about how wonderful they are across the board without directly answering your questions, you're probably not going to ask them out for a second date. If

you understand what the client requires, develop a strategy that answers those requirements fully without adding unnecessary content. Winning content always has a strategy.

**3) Appropriately Target Content.** Hitting Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V is really easy, but it's not enough. Copying and pasting content into an RFP can be really damaging. Since every client is different, the approach to RFP content must be adapted. Persuasively repurpose content specifically for the client and the client's questions.

**4. Smooth Transitions.** An RFP response should be easy to understand. Iron out the technical details to provide real value. Transitioning from paragraphs written in a business casual tone to

technical metrics lowers comprehension and engagement. Represent more technical content effectively through charts, graphs and other graphics.

**5. Gleaming Design.** It's not on any evaluation team's wish list to read hundreds of pages written in black 12 point, Times New Roman font. Sit down with your creative team and work together to establish an RFP template. Typefaces, font sizes, colors, pagination, graphics and other formatting elements should be consistent throughout the entire RFP. Your template design is an opportunity to communicate your personality, professionalism and organization.

# Catalog Your Strengths

Those that read your proposal have a heaping pile to compare it against.

Make your content unique to the client and provide information that communicates a clear and full understanding of what's being asked.

## Executive Summary

Some readers may not continue past the executive summary. Your summary should be equally strong and compelling.

## Concise Overview

Paint a clear picture of your understanding by restating any known objectives. Emphasize awareness of current issues and expectations, and preview how your organization can offer the best approach and solution.

## Functional Schedule

Map out key dates and milestones in the contract schedule. Compose a general expected outcome of the finished work tracks without bogging down readers in granular, unnecessary details.

## Contract Management

Address how ongoing and future communications, quality assurance, reporting and supervision will be conducted. What should your client expect?

## Implementation Plan

Tie together the schedule, assumptions and project details. This is the ideal time to voice any risks and potential issues, and provide the contact information of team members (including project staffing).

## Highlight Past Successes

Illustrate past success stories that relate to the prospective client and recommend the appropriate products or services. If permitted, attach case studies or other marketing collateral referencing clients that faced similar issues.

# Curate Excellent Content

Most RFPs contain generic questions regarding a company's background or certifications. Assign all of your responses to a content library for an à la carte selection. You can keep your proposal content substantially evergreen with these 5 practices:

1



Make content accessible  
and centralized for RFP  
team members

2



Update content as  
you progress

3



Routinely review content  
in your library

4



Log any changes, reviews  
and updates

5



Categorize and tag content  
so it's easy to find

# Automate and Streamline Your RFP Process

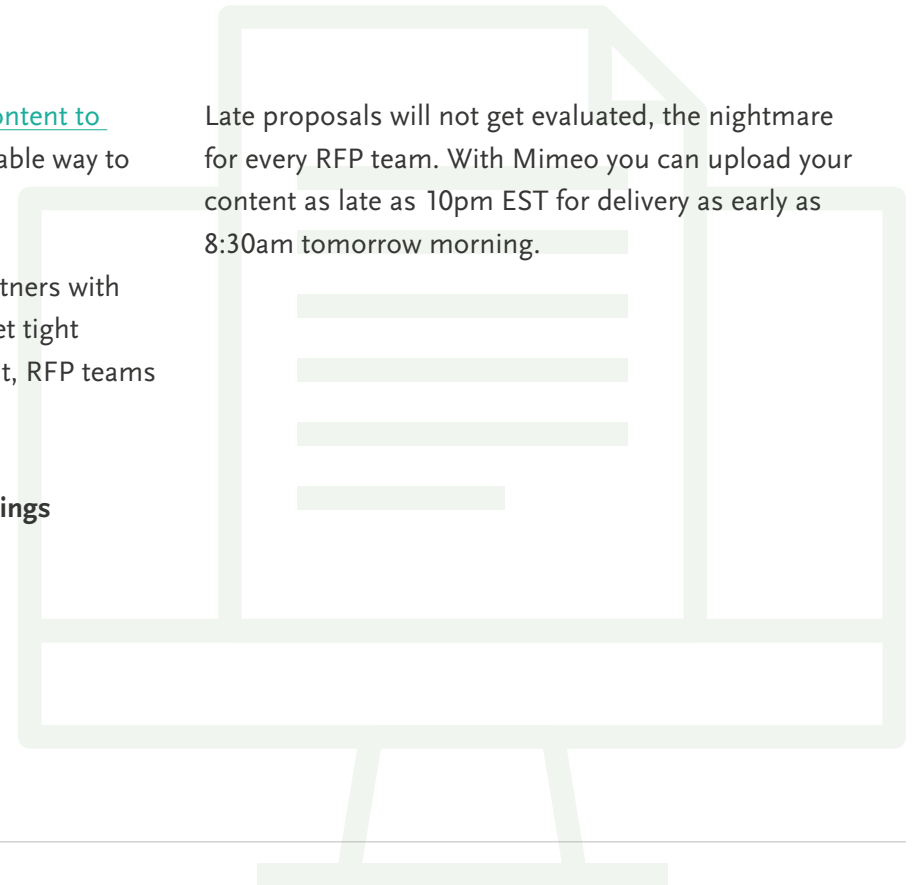
The 11th hour isn't going anywhere. Neither are we.

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- **Build a document library**
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# For more information...

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