

# The art of winning proposals: Outmanoeuvring 10 alternatives

The exploration of a lost bid is often a humbling experience, inviting us into the stark revelation that, quite simply, the customer chose an alternative. Another proposal might have been selected, or a different strategy adopted entirely. Winning proposals, however, don't rely on merely showcasing value - a winning proposal positions you as the customer's best and most feasible alternative amidst an array of options.

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Understanding the variety of alternatives available to your clients maximises your potential for victory. It is crucial to not only present a persuasive stand-alone proposal but to guide the client in making a holistic, favourable decision.

**The ten alternatives and your strategic response** Below are some possible alternatives and specific recommendations for your bidding strategy in each case:

## 1. Stagnating in Inertia

The status quo may feel safe to prospective clients in the short term. Use this consideration to convey the possible adverse effects of inaction. Emphasise the value your proposal will bring now and into the future.

**Recommendation:** Motivate them to action by clearly outlining the negative impacts of inaction and the potential gains from accepting your offering. A well-structured proposal that is rich with evidence-based benefits can help unsettle complacency. Show them clear and compelling reasons why sticking to the status quo could be harmful. Provide concrete instances of how your product or service will solve their problem effectively and efficiently.

## 2. Playing the Waiting Game

Indecisive clients may postpone their decisions. They'll consult, run it up their chain of command, or allow it to be consumed by other events.

**Recommendation:** Highlight the urgency and importance of your proposition. Make it clear why it deserves immediate consideration. Use your proposal to emphasise the urgency of their needs and why your solution is critical now. Provide compelling and data-backed reasoning that shows the risks or missed opportunities associated with a delay in decision-making.

## 3. Tackling It In-House

Organisations may choose to execute the project internally. In such cases, a pitch to outsource may not be welcomed.

**Recommendation:** Propose a solution to augment their in-house capabilities rather than replace them. Design a support package that complements and strengthens their in-house efforts rather than proposing a total takeover. This collaboration may involve training, consultation, or tools to improve their productivity and results.

#### 4. Wiping the Slate Clean

The customer might consider scrapping an unsuccessful or poor-quality RFP and starting afresh.

**Recommendation:** Assist your client in thoroughly analysing their requirements before issuing the RFP to avoid potential restarts. Assist your customers with strategic planning or scope definition, ensuring a firm foundation before the RFP is released. Involve their procurement department to ensure there is no conflict of interest.

#### 5. Size Matters: Adapt and Thrive

Clients may adjust their project's scope due to budget constraints or thoughtful strategic planning.

**Recommendation:** Propose a solution that's scalable and adaptable in size. Clients can begin on a smaller scale and, once comfortable with the concept, scale up as per their budget or needs.

#### 6. Aiming for the Gold Standard

Clients looking for high-quality proposals might be willing to pay a premium.

**Recommendation:** Understand their definition of "better" and tailor your proposal to meet those particular quality measures or strategic choices. Position your bid as a premium choice by demonstrating high-quality, value-adding features. Include testimonials, case studies, or industry awards that testify to the excellence of your offering.

#### 7. Frugal Choices, Maximum Impact

Cost-effective alternatives can appeal to clients, balancing tight budgets against adequate delivery.

**Recommendation:** Present a proposal that balances affordability and excellence, ensuring it provides sufficient value for their expenditure. Craft a proposal that offers solid value for money. Highlight how your solution delivers all the necessary features at a competitive price, ensuring they don't compromise on quality for affordability.

#### 8. Nailing the Negotiation

Agreements can be made with minor adjustments and negotiations to existing proposals.

**Recommendation:** Demonstrate flexibility in your proposal and show a readiness to adapt and negotiate the terms of your proposal to build a winning partnership. Open discussions about timelines, costs, or specific features can instil confidence in your commitment to client satisfaction.

#### 9. An Abundance of Opportunity

Why limit the client to just one option?

**Recommendation:** Create bundles or multiple solution variants in your proposal. By offering choice within your own bid, you offer scope for customisation that meets their unique preferences.

#### 10. Exploring Risky Relationships

Even with a compelling proposal, clients may opt for a competitor instead.

**Recommendation:** Ensure your unique selling point shines through and anticipate their objections and preferences. Reinforce your proposition with endorsements, built-in guarantees, or superior customer service to outshine competitors.

These potential alternatives apply in RFP-based procurements as much as in situations without a clear procurement structure. However, in RFP-based procurements, special rules apply that require strict adherence.

Understanding these alternatives is not about offering explanations after a bid is lost — it's about anticipating client behaviour, leveraging this understanding in your proposal strategy, and giving your bid the winning edge. Writing your proposal as the best alternative, rather than the only one, adds a valuable dimension to your pitch and positions you for success in securing a contract.

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