

10 Secrets to Creating Sales Proposals That Don't Suck

Before I started my sales training business I worked in a corporate environment and during that time had the opportunity to review many sales proposals for a variety of products and services. Since then, I have had the good fortune (or misfortune in most cases) to read dozens more and I'm still underwhelmed by most of them. Most of the proposals I see make the same fundamental mistakes. Here are ten strategies you can use to ensure that your proposal stands out from your competitors.

Open effectively. The vast majority of sales proposals start with information about the seller's company. I have never figured out the rationale of this approach. Your prospect doesn't care about you or your company. They don't want to know how long you have been in business, what awards you have won, or what other companies you have worked with. Effective proposals always highlight the problem that the prospect is facing and the impact that problem has on their business. And they do this early. Not on page two, three or nine. **On the first page.** If you feel obligated to include this type of information place it near the end of the proposal.

Address their situation early. An approach that I have found very effective is to begin with a one paragraph summary of my prospect's situation followed by the key objectives they want to achieve. This demonstrates that you have a good understanding of your prospect's problems and concerns. I like to state the objectives in bullet-point form because it is easier to read and absorb.

Show the value. This does not mean expanding at great length about your solution. Instead, it requires that you identify exactly how your prospect will benefit by implementing your solution. A technique I learned many years ago is to include several bullet points with each point stating a separate value proposition.

Avoid corporate-speak or marketing mumbo-jumbo. The best proposals are written in plain, easy-to-understand language. Many sales people (and marketing departments) think that it is important to use ten dollar words when a simple word would suffice. Never, ever use terminology that might be difficult to understand. Although this is a simple concept, too many sales people include wording or technical information that just isn't necessary. I learned this lesson when I submitted my first proposal many years ago. After earning the business I asked my client why they chose me and she said, "Your proposal was easy to understand."

Keep it brief. I once read a proposal for a sales training program that spanned 24 pages. Decision makers are far too busy to read a long proposal. I understand that some proposals require a lot of information and detail,

especially if you are recommending a complex solution. However, the longer your proposal the more likely it is that your prospect will skim through it and flip ahead to the investment. It is much more effective to write a short, concise proposal and provide back-up information if needed.

Avoid the word "I" or "we". The more times these two words show up in your proposal the more evident it appears that the proposal is about you, not about your prospect or their business or company. This also includes mentioning your company name. Keep your proposal focused on your prospect and use the word "you".

Use titles or headings. This is particularly important if your proposal is relatively long although it is an effective approach with short proposals too. Headings make it easy for your prospect to find key information. Heading also break up the page and make your proposal easier to read.

Include at least one testimonial. Testimonials remain one of the most effective sales weapons and you need to incorporate them into your proposals. I like to add these in my P.S. after my signature although I know people who include several testimonials throughout their proposals.

Include a summary. Many people will skip the details of your proposal and flip to the last page. Effective proposals include a bullet-point summary of the services you will provide to your prospect.

End with a call to action. I used to close my proposals with, "If you require any additional information please feel free to contact me." Boring! Tell the prospect what you want them to do next. By the way, the next steps should ALWAYS be discussed BEFORE you write your proposal.

The purpose of a proposal is to demonstrate that you and your company have the best solution for the prospect's problem. Apply the concepts that were mentioned in this article and stand out from your competition.

© MMX Kelley Robertson, All rights reserved.

Get your FREE copy of *100 Ways to Increase Your Sales* by subscribing to Kelley's free newsletter, "59 Seconds to Sales Success" at www.Fearless-Selling.ca.

Kelley Robertson, author of *The Secrets of Power Selling* helps sales professionals close more sales at higher profits. Kelley conducts workshops and speaks regularly at sales meetings and conferences. Contact him at 905-633-7750 or Kelley@Fearless-Selling.ca.