WRITE A COMPELLING RFP RESPONSE
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Responding to an RFP is one important way to start a conversation with a vendor or service partner. You want to be sure that you represent your company accurately and in the best light possible. There are many ways you can polish your response to make the most professional documents and they generally fall within two categories: what you say in your written content and how you say it with the layout and design elements structuring your content. Read on for some specific ideas.

What You Say: Content

- **Walk in someone else's shoes.** As you review the RFP and requirements, take a little time to think from the issuer's point of view. What is most important? What does the company really need and want?

- **Answer the question.** Make sure you are providing the information the reader wants and needs right away. Resist the temptation to throw in all your standard content on the subject.

- **Differentiate yourself.** What sets you apart? What makes you better than your competition? Why YOU? No, it's not the price.

- **Limit jargon.** Including some sales buzzwords, acronyms and abbreviations can be appropriate and is certainly expected, but when you write more like a real person would speak, your reader will be able to follow along and be convinced more quickly. Include everyday language and structure sentences in the active voice. After all, real people are responding to the RFP.

- **Speak their language.** Just as you don’t want to overuse your own sales language or industry language, you do want to echo back the issuer’s language. Show that you understand the company's needs and culture.

- **Show, don't tell.** You may not think of an RFP response as storytelling, but it is. And the more you can show with real results like case studies and testimonials, the clearer it will be that you are a good fit for the situation.

- **Write focused copy.** Make each paragraph short and concise. Keep sentences simple and scannable. After all, it’s a social media world and everyone’s attention only lasts a moment. Start on a larger scale, cutting paragraphs (or even unnecessary pages), the start cutting words. Again, make sure you are answering the question.

- **Check your tone and voice.** Sometimes you’re pulling copy from old RFPs or your database of stock answers. As you copy and paste, make sure that your tone and voice remains consistent despite pulling from disparate information sources.

- **Include a call to action.** Your ultimate goal is to win the business, so be sure you ask for it.

- **Top it off with a smart executive summary.** When your strategy and content are set, create an executive summary that highlights your strengths and keep it to one page. Consider combining the cover letter and executive summary into a tight one- or two-page document.
How You Say It: Layout and Design Structure

Although an RFP response is not an ad or a marketing piece, you are still promoting your company. Therefore you want the finished look to match the same high quality of writing. Due to the way many RFPs are submitted electronically, you don’t always have the luxury of formatting the response the way you like, but here are some ideas as you work through the process.

- **Show your alignment.** Read up on your requestor’s mission, vision, philosophy, etc. How do they match up with your company? Create a short tagline using some of those visionary words that shows how well you align, then consider putting using that as a theme—perhaps in the header or footer or as callouts in the text.

- **Make headers and footers count.** Include page headers and footers with important details like the requestor’s name, RFP title, your company name, etc. If you feel confident you can respectfully include the requestor’s logo, go ahead.

- **Build in white space.** Designers know white space is your friend, and in a written response, less is more. Make it easy for your readers find what they want and need. Keep it clean and inviting.

- **Left justify your text.** It’s easier to read copy with a ragged right-hand margin than copy that’s fully justified.

- **Create a specific style.** Define how your headers, subheads, bullets, text color, etc. will look and then stick with it consistently. This will also help readers move smoothly from topic to topic.

- **Make sure formatting is consistent.** Even if you are doing some copy-and-paste work, make sure all your fonts, font sizes, etc. are the same. You don’t want to look like you were copying and pasting text.

- **Add compelling visuals.** If your formatting allows, include appropriate images, charts, graphs, etc. Can you tell the story or highlight and important point with visual cues instead of text? Again, use a consistent look and feel—no cheesy clip art!

Need more inspiration for RFP writing? Check out this article from High Point Creative. If you’d like some help as you create or respond to an RFP, call 651-426-4012 or email kate@highpointcreative.com.