

What's of Most Importance to our Prospects in Choosing a "Partner"?

If you received an RFP, which of the following proposal components most impact your ability to win?

- Accuracy of the content
- Addressing the customer's needs and objectives
- Addressing the requirements of the RFP (Request for Proposal)
- Prior Experience, i.e., Case studies/success stories/references
- Clarity of the writing
- Compliance/Completeness/Conciseness
- Cost justification/ROI/life cycle cost analysis
- Graphics & 4-color layout of proposal
- Pricing
- Resumes
- Technical innovation
- Technical plan
- Vendor's history/capabilities/experience

Yeah, I know, they are all important! And depending on the opportunity, what matters most may change. However, research, interviews and personal experience indicate that 3 components matter the most:

1. **Addressing the customer's needs**
2. **Addressing the requirements of the RFP**
3. **Cost justification/ROI/Life cycle cost analysis**

In other words, people want to know that they are getting what they need, that you are going to "deliver" in a way that conforms to their expectations and that it will offer good business value. The other stuff? Background support. Substantiation. They are sometimes a reason to eliminate a vendor (even you, if what you are emphasizing is not important to them!), but ultimately, the other components are not as important. Question: Which vendor is most able to understand and/or address the above 3 components? Column A should be in the best position.

An anecdote: A few years ago, a major company asked 400 of its sales reps what was the most important factor in "winning a deal." Overwhelmingly, the answer from sales reps was: Price. Meanwhile, this same company surveyed 400 customers and prospects where they asked the same question. The number one answer: Reliability. In fact, price appeared sixth on the list for customers! But of course, this company's proposals were focused primarily on price. Even though they had a great story to tell on the issue of reliability, with several differentiators that set them apart in the industry, it was not being emphasized. This consultant concluded that it is tough not to feel that price is the primary factor in a competitive market. But sometimes we set ourselves up for that kind of price pressure by *not offering an alternative vision or by not meeting their top 3 interests.*

This research points to several topics that are stressed heavily in Solution Selling:

- **Reengineering:** The basic principle here is to "make yourself equal, before you make yourself different." Acknowledge the RFP requirements and prove that you can give them those capabilities. But if you are not "Column A", you then have to differentiate yourself around those 3 important attributes (using Anxiety?).
- **Transition:** If getting the prospect comfortable with "reliability" is so important, then you should strive to "build the bridge" for the prospect. Get them to understand how they are going to transition (perhaps with your help) from where they are today to where they want to be in the future. This could be your differentiator!