

Five tips for avoiding just-in-time bid delivery (or worse)

You might know the feeling – it's the one where every second before the deadline counts. Palms are sweating. No-one in the bid team has had enough sleep. Tension mounts. The question hangs (unspoken) in the air: "After weeks of work on this important tender, will we actually meet the deadline?"

While just-in-time delivery is an efficient way to manage inventory, it's a risky business submitting tender responses at the last minute. With 'down to the wire' deadlines, there's no wriggle room to allow for technical gremlins, power outages, traffic jams, or stress-induced human error. Unfortunately this is a scenario faced by many bid teams, but it doesn't have to be this way.

Winning the next tender could be the difference between your company's sustainable growth and success, or downsizing. Although it may seem like a hassle at the time, responding to tenders is the lifeblood of many contracting businesses. So, what's driving teams of professionals to jeopardise their chances of success by risking a late tender response? Is it because they like the adrenaline rush? Or is it because they don't have a plan? Or, perhaps they had an initial plan but nobody managed the process?

Adrenalin's best on a mountain biking track or the rugby field. To avoid nail-biting, just-in-time tender delivery or worse (i.e. submission of a poor quality bid or missing the deadline, completely), here are some of our top tips for submitting a winning tender, on time, without the last minute stress.

1) Sort out your win strategy early on.

Spend some time at the start of the tender process to understand what will make a difference to your client. Be specific about *this* contract. Ask your team for input on what makes your client 'tick'; what delights them; and what behaviours they get annoyed by. Identify how you will deliver this contract for your client in a way that's better than any of your competitors. Shape your response around these key points.

2) Make a plan and factor in definite milestones.

Your tender will probably include a programme which details how you will deliver for your client. Apply this approach to your tender submission by creating a critical path. Key milestones should include firm internal deadlines for initial content from technical experts and regular progress reviews.

And, although the deadline might still seem a long way in the future, consider submission logistics early. Plan for and factor in printing and delivery timeframes. For submission via email, make sure your file size won't clog up your client's email system. Or, if the bid is to be delivered through an online portal, register as soon as possible and become familiar with the system. Give yourself enough time to upload your files with some room to spare. If worst comes to the worst, and there is a technical glitch, get in touch with the system administrator straight away about the issue.

3) Get the 'buy in' of senior management from the start for both your win strategy and the bid plan.

This is really important. Don't leave big decisions which result in a complete rewrite of the bid till the last minute. This is inefficient at best and, at worst, risks derailing the whole bid process.

4) If you're serious about winning, manage the process like you've already won.

Pretend your performance on this contract is already being measured. Make sure your bid team and contributors understand this, and have them commit to the plan. Proactively prevent and address bid 'programme creep'. Make sure that management commits resources to where they're needed. Getting support from senior management early on is key here too.

5) If writing isn't a strength, consider getting professional tender writing help.

Think about your key bid contributors. Do they prefer talking to writing? If they prefer writing – and be honest here – are they any good at it?

Too much technical jargon and long-winded statements can detract from a great proposal. Similarly, typos and lacklustre presentation can be 'red flags' to some tender evaluators.

A great bid writer will capture your technical experts' thinking and present it in a compelling and clear way. They'll help you to identify your win themes and will weave these seamlessly throughout the document. They'll continually consider the benefits of what's being presented to your client.

And, they'll allow your technical experts to get on their day job – important if you're the incumbent contractor or have other clients to keep happy.

Wouldn't it be interesting if tender evaluators were a 'fly on the wall' during your bid preparation process? It's worth thinking about.

Following these tips will not only greatly reduce the chances of a nail-biting deadline, they'll set up your team for tendering success.

Good luck with your upcoming tenders!



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