

Delivering Best Value with SMEs



The winning bid

In the third in a series of articles, **Eddie Regan** looks at how small companies can achieve winning tenders.

Many small, and even new, companies achieve success through the opportunities presented by public sector contracts.

When you are invited to tender you move to a different phase, one where an understanding of the public procurement process will greatly assist your potential for success. Simply put, there is an overarching need to demonstrate excellence in all that your company does. *When tendering, this means ensuring that your company's tender responses are:*

- timely and compliant
- clearly detailed
- set out in the same order as the notice lists, with any additional information properly indexed

You need to ensure that you always comply with even the smallest detail.

The initial tender announcement or advert can often seem to be overly challenging and the information requested may seem difficult to satisfy; however, if you study a few notices you will see they are all remarkably similar, since their format is determined by European legislation.

The items you are requested to forward are almost always the same. It is easy, therefore,

to build a database of required information, thereby improving your consistency of response.

The manner in which you submit information is just as important as the content. Remember that what you forward is a reflection on your company. Poorly presented, inaccurate or unintelligible information will give an unflattering representation of your company.

Good presentation and information which is to the point and neatly laid out in a clearly defined order will win marks.

Always remember, the first part of the selection process is rejection. Only when the rejection process is completed can the selection process start.

In order to maximise your chances of success, you need to consider how best to respond to requirements. You should always aim to produce bids that will achieve high scores, both technically and commercially.

In framing your responses, you should ensure that your bids are geared towards the specific requirements stated in the Invitation to Tender (ITT) and base your costings on these requirements. It will be essential to have a clear understanding of the contents

Part Three

of the ITT and to demonstrate that it is understood.

To improve your company's chances of success you need an understanding of:

- the processes and practices used by public organisations when tendering
- the legislative framework within which public authorities must act
- the criteria against which your tender will be evaluated

Information on how your potential clients consider these issues can be gathered by obtaining copies of their Standing Financial Instructions and Standing Orders. These are publicly available documents and can be requested directly from the relevant authority. Many public bodies also have 'Selling to the Authority' guides, providing in-depth information on how they procure and what conditions they expect suppliers to comply with.

Look to use your company's accreditations, such as ISO 9000, as an indication of your commitment to quality. If your company does not possess formal accreditation, demonstrate that you have other types of quality and training systems in place.

Likewise, ensure that every time you complete a contract for a client you obtain a letter of accreditation and forward copies of any relevant references with each new tender application.

You should seek, where appropriate, the opportunity to offer innovation within your bids, always taking care not to render them non-compliant. Responding to output specifications should lessen that risk.

Now, having considered these points, you should start to draft your tender, committing the appropriate resources towards achieving a winning bid. How you resource and prepare your tender response is a crucial factor in presenting a winning tender.

On receipt of the ITT document start a timescale diary. Log the receipt date and the due date for return of the document; then, based on

these dates and any other date, set out your timetable for the stages of your response and appoint a Tender Manager with the company to conscript assistance from other expertise within your company. *The Tender Manager's initial function is to:*

- decide whether to tender or not: if not, inform the client immediately
- duplicate the required number of copies of the documents and distribute to the Tender Team (if you have not received an electronic copy of the tender document, ask for one)
- produce a tender timescale diary
- read and re-read the tender document and send off for any relevant reference documents stated in the document(s) (log the date of request for this documentation and ensure its speedy receipt)
- decide what team of experts is required to complete the tender
- call an initial meeting of the Tender Team. This may include input from your production, legal, commercial and sales personnel. It is important to include any sales personnel who have knowledge of the client; they are likely to

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appreciate from their past contact any requirements the client feels are important – this can set your bid apart from your competitors

- check every member of the Tender Team's holiday dates to ensure that they can complete the tasks in the timescale required

First Tender Team meeting

At the initial agenda meeting:

- read through the tender documents together
- reconsider the decision to tender*
- assign different aspects of the tender to the appropriate personnel present

- note clearly on each copy of the tender documents who is responsible for each item
- having referred to the tender timescale diary, fix a date for a second team meeting by which time all assigned work is to be completed
- create an Action Point log and circulate to attendees
- * *Should you decide to decline to tender, notify the issuing authority immediately. Give clear reasons for your decision and express a wish to be considered for future contracts.*

If, as a result of your team's initial meeting, clarification is required, detail your questions for presentation at a pre-tender meeting or send the questions to the issuing authority for clarification. Note the date of your request in your tender timescale, and if there is no response within a few days contact the client personnel.

Written questions

The questions raised by any tenderer should be answered promptly by the client and these answers circulated to all tenderers at the same time. Normally the names of those asking the questions will not be divulged by the client; to be on the safe side, specifically request when asking questions

the contract holder to make you re-examine your tender proposal at the last minute, increasing the likelihood of mistakes being made in the tender presented.

Helpful pointer

The public procurement regulations specify that, for high-value contract opportunities, as a minimum in the contract notice the award criteria should be listed in the order of importance and the award criteria relative weighting clearly stated in the ITT. Ensure your tender response addresses the award criteria in an appropriate manner to reflect the importance placed on each element by the client. ☞

Next month: Finalising Tenders

Parts One and Two of this series can be viewed online at:

www.govopps.co.uk/magazine/previous/0709/openingdoorstosmes.pdf and

www.govopps.co.uk/magazine/previous/0710/openallvalues.pdf



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