



MB DOLPHIN & ASSOCIATES, LLC

MB Dolphin WAVE

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Five Steps to Successful Government Contracting

There are essentially five steps between you and your accounts payable. In a nutshell, you need to find a match between your capabilities and the government agencies with a budget to purchase them. Then you need to figure out who the buyers are and what their acquisition process is until you know what specific contract vehicles to target.

Research the customer, the opportunity, and the competitive environment. Along the way, establish a relationship with the customer so that they know your capabilities and qualifications.

Finally, if the opportunity will result in an RFQ or RFP, be prepared to submit a winning proposal. If your proposal is selected for award, it will result in a contract.

To put it in an organizational structure, here are the five steps to success: (1) Market Research, (2) Strategic Planning, (3) Marketing, (4) Sales, and (5) Contractual Agreement.

1. **Finding Customers:** In order to find customers, you've got to figure out the best targets. If you want government work, find out which government agencies or entities need what you have to offer. You can choose from City, County, State and Federal government clients. **This is called market research.**

2. **Getting Their Attention:** Now that you have found some likely customers, you

have to get their attention. This means finding the person or persons you need to target. **This is called strategic planning.**

3. **Contacting the Client:** Before you get a chance to talk to them or sell to them, you've got to contact them. **We call this marketing.**

4. **Selling the Client on Buying Your Goods and Services:** To get prospective clients to consider buying, you need to interact with them. **We call this Sales. When it's in writing, we call it a Proposal.**

5. **Closing the Deal:** In order to close the deal and get people to give you money, you must have acceptable terms and conditions. **In its written form, this is called a contract.**

Getting Your Proposal Written

Complex business deals must be put into writing. The legal form for this is the contract. However, the document that seeks to influence the decision whether to sign the contract is the proposal. Proposals are produced through a process that is often complex and can involve many people. It is easy to forget that the proposal process is about getting the right black ink on paper.

In fact, it is often the part of the process that involves writing that fills people with dread especially those who don't have any experience with proposal writing. When you ask them to write a proposal, suddenly people with solid expertise and otherwise good problem solving skills have no idea

how to proceed. You can tell them to write about the benefits, or why what you offer should matter to the customer, but while they understand your words, they still don't know how to get the black ink on paper.

Beginning Proposal Writing

Often people are intimidated by writing because they are focusing on the wrong things. It's not format, style, choice of words, or even grammar that is critical to success. All you need to do is give the reader the information they need to make their choice.

If you have read the RFP, outlined your section, and know what you are supposed to write about, but are still

having trouble putting black ink on paper, here is what you should do:

- Tell the customer what you are going to do for them. Just make a statement that sums it up, as if you were discussing it with them.
- Tell them how or why what you are going to will deliver/ensure/provide/result in what they want

If you are not sure what words to pick or what style to write in, don't worry. Any sentence that does these two things is a good proposal sentence. Remember that you can always have your material edited. Even Hemingway had an editor! At the paragraph level, do this first. Then provide any supporting details. Never [continued on page 2]



build to the end. Always put the most important information up front.

If you need to state a fact or provide a description and can't link it directly to what they want in the same sentence, split it into two sentences. Just make sure you always link everything in your proposal to what they want.

Intermediate Proposal Writing

It is not enough to deliver something that the customer wants. You have to deliver something that the customer wants more than any other option available to them. This usually comes down to them wanting you more than they want your competition. To achieve this, you must anticipate the attributes of your competition, and make sure that you give them better reasons to want what you are offering.

If you have a written RFP that includes instructions and evaluation criteria, first make sure that you comply with all instructions and requirements. *Step one in winning is to not be disqualified.* Next, focus on the evaluation criteria. While proposals are written, they are often not read. Instead, they are scored. If the customer will follow a written set of evaluation criteria, make sure that you score well against it.

Get graphic. Think about presentation. If you can replace words with graphics, it is usually better to do so. The more attractive the document, the more likely the customer will put the effort into reading it.

Advanced Proposal Writing

Advanced proposal writing has nothing to do with writing. It is all about preparation. In order to write about how you will deliver what they want better than the competition, you have to know a lot about the customer and more than a little about the competition. Advanced proposal writing is about doing your homework long before the writing starts so that you have this information available.

While you are gathering this information, there is something else you need to do. Develop a relationship with the customer. People buy from those they know and trust. If your relationship is solid, the proposal document is secondary to winning. Advanced proposal writing is about winning before the writing even starts.

If you need help with this, MB Dolphin can assist you. [Visit our website for details.](#)

Call Sandra McClintock, 949-495-4747, to attend one of several new workshops, "Writing Proposals that Win Business."



Spring 2010 Events
New Workshops offered in Orange County

Are you having difficulty with the government and public agency procurement process?

"Writing Proposals That Win Business" is a new workshop that exposes you to the full range of proposal elements and how to address each for success. Some of the topics covered are:

- ♦ *Marketing/capture*
- ♦ *Pre-solicitation activities*
- ♦ *Reading the solicitation*
- ♦ *Creating detailed outlines*
- ♦ *Kick-off team meeting*
- ♦ *Building win themes*
- ♦ *Preparing storyboards*
- ♦ *Writing technical and management sections*
- ♦ *Reviewing the first draft*
- ♦ *Conducting color team reviews*
- ♦ *Proposal production graphics*
- ♦ *Delivery to the client*

MB DOLPHIN Company Profile
Thirty-plus years of diversified experience in proposal development, publications management and improved business and technical communications have gone into the value-added consulting services that MB Dolphin offers to both the government and commercial business customers. Specialization includes design, providing and facilitating processes, implementing proposal solutions, writing and editing business and technical communications, and a wide range of training services.

FREE WORKSHOPS Visit our Events Page to reserve your seat.	
DATE	LOCATION
April 5, 2010	Orange Public Library 407 E. Chapman Orange, CA 5:30 PM- 9:00 PM
July 6, 2010	National University 3390 Harbor Blvd Costa Mesa, CA (714) 429-5100 9 AM--12 NOON
Sept 30, 2010	Yorba Linda Library 18181 E Imperial Yorba Linda, CA (714) 777-2873 6 PM—9 PM
Nov. 9, 2010	San Juan Capistrano Library 31495 El Camino Real San Juan Capistrano

Proposal Layout and Design

If there is no written RFP, or if the written RFP does not specify outline or format, then there are no rules for the layout and design of your proposal. The only standard to apply to the proposal's appearance is whether it fulfills the proposal evaluator's expectations.

If they haven't told you what they are or written them into an RFP, then all you can do is make your proposal legible. Your proposal layout should be highly readable and make it easy to locate information. You should make extensive use of graphics, because they enhance the readability of the document and convey information well. In the absence of instructions to the contrary, your headings, typefaces, margins, headers/footers, and other formatting attributes can be anything that you want that achieves the goal of your proposal.

Here are some standards:

- A serif typeface such as Times Roman
- 10-12 point type
- A column width of about 6 inches. Longer lines are difficult to read.
- Page margins of an inch or at least .5 inch
- The use of color whenever possible
- Extensive use of graphics
- Full use of front matter (Table of Contents, List of Figures, etc.)
- "Navigation aids" such as a cross-reference matrix
- Appendixes for data that must be provided, but disrupts your proposal's story
- If the page count is large enough, use 3-ring binders or other binding
- Use tabs that break the content into sections and make finding material easier

Final production

Final formatting and polish is often reserved for the end of a proposal effort. It's best to wait until all edits to the content are finished before applying final formatting and reproducing your proposal. On a large proposal, you may need several days to a week just for final production. Some organizations use sophisticated desktop publishing and artwork, others use MS-Word for their final output. The value of a better looking proposal must be weighed against the level of effort it takes to achieve it. Keep it simple, and don't overextend yourself by using an advanced layout that you have difficulty producing.

Written By Carl Dickson, Editor/Publisher, CapturePlanning.com



Explore SCORE, the Small Business Organization

SCORE is an organization sponsored by the Small Business Administration (SBA). It is staffed with volunteers who share their business expertise with small businesses, usually at no charge.

MB Dolphin's Chief Operating Officer (COO) Sandra McClintock will present SCORE workshops at several Orange County locations in Spring 2010.

The title is "Winning Government Business" and it's absolutely free.

Register for it if you want to know how to find

government business and make a winning bid on it.

SBA/SCORE
200 W. Santa Ana Blvd., Suite 700
Santa Ana, CA 92701
www.score114.org

SCORE offers many other services for small businesses, including advice from experts about specific opportunities for your business.

SCORE volunteers have a wealth of business knowledge and experience, and they have the insight to evaluate the strengths

and weaknesses of your business, and then suggest the actions to take to improve your prospects.

If you haven't contacted SCORE yet, don't wait to take advantage of this invaluable free service.

Contact SCORE to take advantage of this invaluable free service.

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MB Dolphin offers Proposal Team Staffing:

- Capture Manager
- Proposal Developer
- Publication Developer
- Technical Writer/Editor
- Professional Proofing
- Production Coordinator
- Graphic Illustrator
- Document Integrator
- Quality Assurance
- Software Development
- Systems Engineering
- Web Design
- Logo Design
- Specialized Graphics
- Portable Display Design
- Architectural Design Concepts

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Rules for Resumes in RFPs

A winning resume is highly responsive to the RFP requirements and, therefore, easy for the government to evaluate. In many cases, resumes are written to a formal job description for the position in question. In other cases, however, there is no position description, and you have to infer what the position requirements are. In this case, check with someone in Human Resources or Line Operations to sketch in the basic requirements.

Formatting: Some RFPs specify a resume format, but many do not. In this case, you have to develop a format suitable for the proposal requirements. A uniform format used in proposal resumes helps to standardize the process of producing and evaluating the resumes. Most resumes for technical personnel will have the traditional sections such as summary paragraph, education, and jobs starting with the most recent, as well as sections citing specific Hardware and Software systems experience. However, style of pagination varies widely and can be adapted to suit the personality and needs of each company.

Organize the Resume to Follow the Evaluation Factors:

The fundamental job of the resume writer is to conclusively demonstrate that the proposed person is well qualified for the position. *For even the most time-constrained proposal, the writer should completely rewrite the introductory paragraph, focusing on the requirements and the evaluation factors, if listed.* By organizing the resume to follow the evaluation factors, it will highlight any potential deficiencies of the proposed person – allowing the bidder to

get more up-to-date information from the person or to substitute more qualified personnel. The resume writer should also address the RFP's requirements in the individual jobs held by the proposed person.

Let's assume that the position description is limited to four requirements: A, B, C, and D. When recasting the introductory paragraph, the writer throws out most or all of the existing material and focuses on the relationship between the person's career and the four requirements. For example, you could say, "Mr. Jones has 20 years of professional experience including 4 years of A, 5 years of B, 7 years of C, and 4 years of D." His experience in A includes . . ." and so on. When time permits, systematically address A, B, C, and D in every past job the person has held in as far as honestly possible to do so. This makes it easy for government evaluators to document their decisions to provide a high score; it will also point out if a deficiency exists in the proposed person's experience or education.

Create a Matrix. To make sure the resume completely addresses the requirements, it's helpful to create a matrix. In the matrix, the writer develops a plan of how each requirement in the specification will be folded into every possible paragraph in the proposal resume. If time is short and you can only spend a limited time on the resumes, you may have to lightly salt an existing resume with a few details pertinent to the specification. This approach

is sometimes necessary, but if you want to win contracts, don't choose this method of formatting a resume.

Who Writes the Resume?

It can be the proposal writer, the person being proposed, or a combination of the two. From a cost standpoint, it might be efficient to have the owner of the resume prepare the first draft response to the specification, providing as much detail as possible. This approach costs less in terms of proposal budget. However, it requires a longer lead time and more of a coordination effort. Additionally, some personnel cannot or will not prepare written input or do not have the time to do so. At the other extreme, the technical proposal writer can do an excellent job of formatting a resume by obtaining the candidate's existing resume and filling in the facts through interviewing. It's best to use a combination of approaches, with the good writers doing their own resumes and with the technical proposal writers doing most of the work for the personnel who can't write.

Are There Missing Qualifications? What if your proposed personnel lack some of the required

qualifications? For example, the specification may require a B.S. degree, and the candidate does not have a B.S. degree. In these cases, it's sometimes possible to substitute. For example, federal standards commonly allow personnel to substitute two years of professional experience for one year of education. Therefore, if the candidate lacks two years on his degree but has four extra years of experience, you can write in the education section, "B.S. (equiv.)," meaning the person has the equivalent of a B.S. degree. You can always resort to the practice of "weasel wording" when confronted with a qualifications problem. This means carefully choosing words to obscure the deficiency, while being careful to not outright lie. When confronted with an opportunity to "weasel word," the first line of defense is to find another, more qualified candidate. Weasel wording is the last resort and should not be used except in extreme circumstances.

The importance of having good, responsive, well-formatted resumes in a proposal is critical. Without them, you may not win the contract. So it's best to just bite the bullet and budget the hours necessary to prepare winning resumes.

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