



MB DOLPHIN & ASSOCIATES, LLC™

MB Dolphin WAVE

The WAVE is published by MB Dolphin & Associates, LLC
Offices in Manhattan Beach and Laguna Niguel, California and Dallas, Texas

Individual Highlights:

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Making Graphics That Communicate Clearly

Spring/Summer Events: "Writing Proposals That Win Business"

What's in a Typical Federal Government RFP?

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Proposal Layout and Design

By Sandra McClintock, MB Dolphin

If an RFP does not specify outline or format, or if you're writing an unsolicited proposal, you must supply your own formatting standards. The best standard to apply is how well it fulfills the proposal evaluator's expectations and how easy it is for the evaluator to know this.

Your proposal layout should make it highly readable and easy to

locate information. Make extensive use of graphics, because they enhance the readability of the document and convey information better than words. In the absence of instructions to the contrary, your headings, typefaces, margins, headers/footers, and other formatting attributes can be anything you want that achieves your goals.

Here are some formatting

rules we recommend:

- A serif typeface such as Times Roman for text
- A sans serif type for headings; possibly bold
- 10-12 point type
- 8-point type for headers and footers
- Text lines of no more than 6 inches
- Page margins of 1 inch
- Color whenever possible and appropriate
- Cross-references matrixes
- Section dividers with tabs
- Table of contents

Making Graphics That Communicate Clearly

Graphics communicate up to 60,000 times faster than text and can increase the odds that you will win work by 43%. To take full advantage of the power of visual communication, you must first focus on your audience. Your target audience is the sole reason why you are creating your graphic.

1. What do you want to say? (Why does it matter?)
2. To whom do you want to say it?
3. How do you say it?

1. What do you want to say?

You might be surprised at the number of graphics

that fail because the author did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to communicate. Typically, an author attempts to communicate many messages through one visual. The resulting graphic is unsightly, hard to read, and fails to communicate the intended information. How do you avoid creating a graphic that fails to communicate the right information? Decide what you want to say and know why it matters to your audience. Put yourself in the position of your audience. What would you want to know? You would probably want to know the following:

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





**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.

- How much does it cost?
- How fast is it?
- How long does it take?
- What makes it better than anything else?
- How will it help me and my organization?
- How much money will it make me?
- Why should I buy it?

The audience takes notice and begins to care if you can save them time and money, fulfill a pressing need, or reduce hassle and make their lives easier. The more the target audience cares, the more attention is given to the graphic. The audience will not care about your product or service if the focus is not on them and their wants and needs. Let them see themselves in your visuals. Developing an information graphic that reaches the audience on this level involves research and an understanding of the target audience's desires and challenges. If you can show that your quick service will save them 30% or \$140,000 per year over their current service, then they will listen and care. Solve their problem; show them the benefits they will enjoy; and help them become enthusiastic about the subject and the prospect of having, using, or implementing it.

Create a list of messages you want the graphic to

communicate. Every information graphic has a hierarchy of messages. First, discern the number one message. What is the most important point to be communicated in the graphic? What one idea most supports the primary objective? Then determine the secondary and tertiary objectives. There will be instances where not all the desired information can be communicated in one graphic. In fact, it is better to communicate only the most relevant and necessary data; otherwise, you may sacrifice clarity, which usually results in the graphic's failure.

Your messages should answer your audience's questions. What you say must matter to them. Show your audience the benefit to them and you take the first step to creating a graphic that communicates clearly.

2. To whom do you want to say it?

Have you heard someone use an acronym you did not know? How about a new slang term that was baffling? Were you ever lost while learning something new? How did it make you feel? You probably felt uncomfortable or agitated. To misunderstand or struggle with new information is not fun. It results in a host of

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**Spring/Summer 2011
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*

FREE WORKSHOPS

Visit our [Events Page](#) to reserve your seat.

June 22, 2011

Newport Beach Library
1000 Avocado Avenue
Newport Beach, CA
(949) 749-9667
6:00--9:00 PM

What's in a Typical Federal Government RFP?

Federal Government RFP format and composition is mandated by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). They are typically broken down into sections that are identified by letter. Here is a list of what is in each section:

Section A. Information to Offerors or Quoters
Identifies the title of the procurement, procurement number, point of contact (POC), how to acknowledge amendments and how to indicate "No Response" if you decide not to bid. Section A often appears as a one page form.

Section B. Supplies or Services and Price/Costs: This is where you provide your pricing. It defines the type of contract, identifies Contract Line Items (CLINs), and Subcontract Line Items (SLINs) for billable items, describes the period of performance, and provides cost and pricing guidelines.

Section C. Statement of Work (SOW)
Describes what the Government wants you to do or supply. Outside of your pricing, most of your proposal will be responding to this section, tell them how you will deliver what they need.

Section D. Packages and Marking: Defines how contract deliverables such as reports and material will be packaged and shipped. This information is important as these instructions may affect costs and logistics.

Section E. Inspection and Acceptance
Describes the process by which the Government will officially accept deliverables and what to do if the work is not accepted. This can also affect costs and identifies tasks you must be prepared to undertake.

Section F. Deliveries or Performance
Defines how the Government Contracting Officer will control the work performed and how you will deliver certain contract items.

Section G. Contract Administrative Data
Describes how the Government Contracting Officer and your firm will interact and how information will be exchanged in administration of the contract to ensure both performance and prompt payment.

Section H. Special Contract Requirements
Contains a range of special requirements, such as procedures for managing changes to the original contract terms, government furnished equipment (GFE) and property (GFP) requirements.

Section I. Contract Clauses/General Provisions
Identifies the contract clauses incorporated by reference in the RFP. These clauses will be incorporated into the contract.

Section J. Attachments, Exhibits
Lists the appendices to the RFP. These attachments can cover a wide range of subjects ranging from technical specifications through lists of GFE. It generally contains data you need in order to respond to the Statement of Work.

Section K. Certifications and Statements of Offerors: Contains things that you must certify to bid on this contract.

Section L. Proposal Preparation Instructions and Other Instructions
Provides instructions for preparing your proposal, including formatting, material organization, how to submit questions regarding the RFP, how the proposal is to be delivered, and sometimes notices, conditions, or other instructions.

Section M. Evaluation Criteria
Defines the factor, subfactors, and elements used to "grade" the proposal. Proposals are graded and then cost is considered to determine who wins the award and gets the contract.



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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Making Graphics that Communicate Clearly {cont from page 2}

negative feelings. For this reason know your audience.

Who will be viewing this graphic? What language do they speak? What are their "buzz words"? What are their "hot buttons"? What do they like/dislike (colors, imagery, detailed explanations, etc.)? What do they really want from this transaction (to work less, more free time, more money)? If you don't know much about your audience, find out! Ask them questions. Research their organization (visit their Web site). Talk with those that know them better than you. Without an understanding of the audience, you will not know what they want and need and how best to communicate that information. The more insight you have into your audience, the greater your chances for clear communication.

3. How do you say it?

A graphic should simplify data and present it in a way that highlights the most important points. We are presented with an increasing amount of stimuli: television shows and ads, news, movies, magazines, billboards, telemarketers, radio spots, and web sites all competing to get our attention. Some studies show that exposure to

this increasing din of stimuli shrinks our attention spans. For example, Dimitri Christakis, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle said that because things change quickly on television, kids' brains may come to expect this pace, "making it harder to concentrate if there's less stimulation." Considering the amount of stimuli to which your audience is exposed, your graphic needs to communicate the intended messages quickly and precisely. If the audience has to study your graphic for too long they will lose interest. The audience may become frustrated and lose faith in the presenter (the person, place, or thing most associated with the information graphic in the mind of the audience).

Keep it clean and simple. Unnecessary visual clutter and too much data interfere with audience understanding. Focus on reaching the objective of the graphic and the most important messages that feed the objective. Your visual will fail to communicate if the target audience cannot quickly digest or is confused by the information graphic.

If the graphic is too verbose or complex, the likelihood that the graphic will fail greatly increases. If needed, use another standalone information graphic to communicate what could not be included in one graphic. Avoid using too many different images, lines, shapes, patterns, textures, and colors. Limiting the number of visual elements and using a consistent style will help your information graphic communicate quickly.

Use the "10 second rule." This helps create successful information graphics: If the target audience doesn't know and understand the main point (the most important message) of your information graphic within 10 seconds, the graphic will probably fail to achieve its primary objective.

Edward Tufte, Professor Emeritus at Yale University and writer of seven information design books said, "**Getting it right is far more important than being original.** Successful information graphics explain that which is intended. Being innovative at the cost of clarity is not an option."

If the concept you are trying to communicate is

abstract or likely to be confusing, use an analogy or metaphor. For example, an umbrella protecting us from the rain can help explain the purpose of the earth's ozone layer (protecting us from the solar radiation). The concept of the ozone layer can be quickly communicated.

All visual elements should have a specific role in the explanation and a reason for being chosen and incorporated. This rule includes, but is not limited to, images, icons, symbols, shapes, colors, fonts, line weight, placement, and size. All aesthetic decisions should have a reason for being chosen that contributes to the graphic's objectives.

Use imagery and content that your target audience understands. When in doubt, err on the side of caution. Keep it simple. Always use recognizable images or quickly identify and explain any unknown imagery. If an image is introduced that is not recognized, understood, or quickly defined, the intended messages will be clouded or lost.

Be clear, be consistent and stay on message!