

Five Main Sections of a Sales Proposal

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Everybody, it seems, is selling a twelve-step program guaranteed to help us become successful in some aspect of our lives. The problem is that most of us rarely get past step number five. The good news for those of us in sales is we don't have to go past that fifth step to craft a contract-winning sales proposal. Many proposals drift from point to point, and yet might never hit upon the issues that drive a potential customer to a buying decision. With a well-organized proposal, broken down to five proven sections, you can go from offering cookie-cutter solutions to providing customer-driven solutions that should significantly enhance your chances of closing the big deals.

These five sections in a winning sales proposal are interrelated and customer-focused. They categorize information and provide a logical sequence of information and ideas. In summary, these five main proposal sections are:

1. Background Information

This section identifies the buyer's current situation-related strategy and improvement opportunity—the buyer's unresolved problem or unachieved opportunity. This section must reflect your empathy for the buyer. It must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the buyer's business, particularly the function or functions associated with the improvement opportunity. More importantly, the section must document the findings of the buyer-seller partnership's improvement opportunity analyses. It must include the buyer's key performance indicators such as current revenues, cost, and productivity levels as they relate to your proposed product or service.

2. Proposed Solution

This section presents the buyer-specific product or service application—how you can add value by helping the buyer achieve the improvement opportunity. This section must provide the buying decision makers with a clear understanding of your proposed solution and describe how it will help achieve the profit improvement opportunities identified in the Background Information section. It must also demonstrate your ability to define a realistic application for their proposed products or services to fit in the buyer's business. Further, this section must present the decision makers with compelling reasons to make a change.

3. Implementation Management

Section Three discusses your company's methods for implementing the proposed product or service. This section should describe your standard implementation methods or project management practices. It should define the steps, phases, and activities that your company normally follows when implementing the proposed product or delivering the proposed services. This section also should include estimated project or engagement resource requirements and timeframes. It provides an ideal opportunity for you to overlay the buyer's unique implementation requirements with their standard business methods. The result is a custom project plan that indicates you have thought through the how, who, and when.

4. Seller Profile

This section discusses your company's qualifications and business practices. Of the five proposal sections, this section contains the most standard wording. However, it does not mean the section represents boilerplate; rather, it means that its contents will require the fewest changes for use with different accounts. Much of the information contained in this section requires considerable thought and effort to develop. However, once developed, you will find that you can easily tailor this section to fit each unique sales situation.

5. Business Issues

This section groups all business-related items for ease of review and reference such as fees/prices, expenses, and invoicing schedule. One of this section's primary goals is to avoid buyer surprises after the sale. Therefore, you should clearly document all the business issues regarding the proposed solution.

So, while it may take twelve steps to quit smoking or lose 50 pounds, you can significantly enhance your sales proposals in only five. When you put those five sections together, you have the opportunity to open eyes and move your prospect into the win column.