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## Getting Top ROI on Your Proposal Process

*by Alison Chandless*

Creating a compelling proposal is critical to winning a deal. So why does the phrase "Give me a proposal!" make so many sales people cringe? Because a formal, written proposal takes time away from customers to manage a creative, but largely clerical effort. It may take days to locate, update, and validate content. In addition, most sales reps and pre-sales engineers lack the skills to write proposals that gain credibility and persuade customers that your solution best meets their needs.

Often the proposal process resembles a fire drill, requiring both Sales and Marketing to drop their other priorities to develop content ad hoc.

The result? A proposal process that is prone to error, ineffective, and a burden to both Marketing and Sales.

Enterprise customers are increasingly demanding formal proposals. If your productivity grinds to a halt and your sales strategy stops when your sales teams develop proposals, its time to invest in your process. In this article we share with you where you will get the biggest return on your dollar.

### **Investment #1 – Upgrade the Quality of your Content**

Few companies would consider launching a product without well-written collateral or a skillfully crafted web site, and yet these same companies virtually ignore their sales proposals. They leave proposal content for their sales teams to create and the results are often inaccurate and ineffective. Proposals may (or may not) reflect your company position, updated product capabilities or the messaging your team worked so hard to develop.

Consider investing in top quality, professionally-written proposal content that contains the right level of detail. Have Marketing review and approve the content, thus avoiding the liabilities of out-of-date or error-laden information. However, hire writers with proposal experience so you avoid proposals that sound too much like marketing datasheets. Provide centralized access to this content and examples of winning proposals.

The ROI is clear. With a good proposal your sales team can move more quickly through the sales process and on to their next opportunity.

### **Investment #2 – Automate Your Process**

Expecting sales teams to develop their own proposal content results in costly redundancies and inefficiencies. Leaving each team to produce their own product or service descriptions and value statements, corporate overviews, customer success

stories and executive bios becomes costly in preparation time, quality control, and arguably in lost sales.

Proposal automation tools that enable sales teams to easily assemble documents using centrally stored content can greatly increase the impact and reduce the development costs of proposals. Sales reps can invest their time on customizing the content to make it specific to the customer, rather than spending time gathering and updating content.

A recent KickStart client who is automating their proposal process estimates they will attain more than a 400% ROI in the first year. Each presales engineer will eliminate more than 40 hours per month dedicated to unproductive, administrative proposal tasks; each sales rep, more than 20 hours per month.

### **Investment #3 – Apply Sales Strategy to Proposals**

Seasoned reps navigate the sales process to avoid RFPs or tilt the RFP in their favor. Some will create proactive proposals to head off the dreaded RFP. But if the proposal cannot be avoided, apply solution-selling methodologies to ensure your proposals are customer, not product, oriented. Ensure that your sales team has the tools and knowledge to deliver a compelling sales proposal.

Many proposals are no more than information packets because sales teams invest their time gathering and updating information rather than customizing the content to present a clear business case to their specific customer. The ROI of a persuasive proposal extends beyond the time saved. You gain credibility, persuade customers, and increase your proposal win rate.

### **Next Steps**

Alison Chandless is a seasoned sales rep with more than 10 years of successful selling experience. She has helped architect and execute proposal processes for companies such as VeriSign and Vantive (now PeopleSoft). To get more information on how you can profit from an investment in your proposal process, contact Alison at [alisonc@kickstartall.com](mailto:alisonc@kickstartall.com)

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