

# The tender process

**Tenders may be** either open or selective. An open tender is where anyone can tender for the business. When you see a tender advertised in the paper, this is an open tender. All Government agencies work this way. A selective tender occurs when a client decides which companies will be invited to tender for the business. You may not necessarily have an existing relationship to be invited to tender, you may have made contact at some point during the last year and sent your brochure which has been kept on file.

Incidentally, a selective tender may end up being as big as an open tender. I know of instances where over 100 recruitment companies have been invited to tender in a 'selective' tender.

## Visit your client to take a pre-tender brief

If you can visit your contact.

### Questions to ask:

- What is the current recruitment spend?
- How many agencies do they currently use?
- What is important in terms of service?
- Do they utilise more permanent placements or contractors?
- What is the motivation for going to tender?
- Will the tender be open or selective?
- How many agencies will tender?
- Who is it that will make the decision?
- On what factors will the decision be based?

You need to walk away with enough information to know how to pitch your services. What will suit your client in terms of a solution?

## Decision to continue

When you have received and read the tender document you will need to weigh up whether or not you will proceed. Tenders take a huge amount of time and effort and unless you work for a recruitment organisation with a department of people devoted to this market, there will be an opportunity cost involved. There is absolutely no point in submitting a sub-standard document so unless you can devote a large proportion of your time to completing the document, don't start it. I have heard many business owners and managers say that they weren't successful owing to not being able to compete on a level playing field against the larger agencies. When probed, they started the document 48 hours before it was due because they had been busy doing other stuff. Rarely was any planning involved in the preparation of the document. They are of course correct in saying the playing field is not level as the larger

agencies devote a large amount of time to the planning and preparation of such documents which is why they so often win.

The other option of course is to out-source the preparation to another party. The Recruitment Training Company has been providing those services for some time. However, if you are not prepared to work with the writer and provide the information required in a timely manner, it's a waste of money.

Either way, you have to devote some time and effort to putting the document together.

The best way to decide whether the time invested is worth it is to prepare a table like the one below. You may have different criteria, however, it is imperative you make a reasoned decision.

- Can I devote the time needed?
- The recruitment spend of the client – is it over \$500,000 p.a.?
- Does senior management of the organisation support the PSA decision?
- The extent of competition – do we rank in the top 3?
- Is this client of strategic importance to us?
- Probability of winning – more than 70%?
- Will we have access to senior management in order to identify buying influences?
- Can we offer a viable staffing solution to this client?

If more than 50% are 'no' then the opportunity cost of your time in preparing the document may be too high.

## Pre-preparation of document

Read the tender document through once without being disturbed. Read again, this time highlighting client needs. E.g.

*XYZ Company seek a supplier who can provide 24 hour service. Describe your approach to managing your accounts.*

I would highlight '24 hour service' and 'managing your accounts'.

Then prepare a timeline for the document to ensure it is completed in time, leaving 24 hours to spare (in case something goes wrong).

Once this is completed, you also need to consider the following:

- Get annual reports/information from Internet
- Who needs to be involved?
- What information do you need? Highlight relevant parts of the tender document
- Identify client buying influences
- Pricing
- Account Management

## Presentation of the document

One aspect that is certain to set you apart from your competitors is presentation of your proposal/tender document.

What can you do to stand out from the crowd? Before getting to creative, take into consideration:

- Client image
- Your image
- Their corporate colours
- Your corporate colours
- Style of writing; conversational, formal, etc
- Font
- Desktop publishing – internal or external?
- The overall look of the document
- What you want it to say about your company

## Develop your own unique style – it will pay off longer term

The important factor to keep in mind during the writing and creative is your audience. Remember that they are judging you based on this document. Many of whom may have not met you or heard of you.

Incidentally, always seek permission to use a client logo.

### Layout tips:

- Look at the document – is there too much/not enough white space?
- Check the grammar
- Is there enough variation in layout?
- Is it uniform?

The Cover is very important because it is the first contact the audience will have with you. It is always safe to use their images, however, blending in yours as well.

Tendering like recruitment is an art, so if you want to be successful, spend time understanding what is involved and involve experts when you can.

*This is an excerpt from Gaynor's book The Art of Recruitment. ■*



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