

HOW TO WRITE A WINNING BID OR TENDER

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THE BID WRITER
Winning Words for Bids and Tenders

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Understanding the jargon

Like any other process, tender writing is full of jargon and acronyms. Whilst we all try and avoid jargon and acronyms, the fact that bid writing is a fast-paced activity means that their use is rather widespread.

Your handout contains all the commonly used terms, which you can take away and use. In the meantime, use the space below to answer the quiz questions.

Portal	PIN
EOI	IEO
RFP	SME
ITT	PQQ
SLA	Win theme
RFI	Method Statement
Ghosting	Added Value
Benefits vs Features	KPI
MIS	RFQ

How to find potential customers and markets

It's important to get a clear idea of your potential customers and market sectors before you begin the tendering process. You will be far more successful by doing this homework first.

1. Who are your current customers? Think about your current client base and the type of customers you current have. What type of business are they? Where are they based? What type of people are they? Where do they 'hang out'. Are they on social media? On which platforms can you reach them?

2. Who are your competitors and who are their customers? Is this different to your own?

3. Which is your strongest market sector? Is there a commonality between your customers? Do you know more about some industries than others?

4. Is your product/service suitable for the public or private sectors? Or both? Who do you sell to mostly? Could your product or service be valuable to other sectors?

Framework agreements

A procurement framework is an agreement put in place with a provider, or a range of providers, that enables buyers to place orders for services without running lengthy full tendering exercises. The framework tender ensures that all businesses who get through onto the framework have the desired compliance. The buyer is then free to choose to buy from anyone on the framework.

Frameworks are usually based on large volume buying. Due to the larger number of suppliers entered into a Framework agreement they offer businesses a higher chance of success should they wish to bid to go onto a Framework Agreement. They are often used by local and national government.

It is estimated that currently up to 45% of procurement in the UK is based on framework agreements, so it's something worth getting involved with.

Some businesses are reluctant to apply to go onto a framework agreement, largely because there is no guarantee of work. However, this just means it is up to you to win the business should you successfully secure a place on the agreement.

This can work to your advantage. By being an approved supplier, you will have already demonstrated your competence to supply, any questions about your capabilities have already been answered as part of the bidding process and you have been approved. This opens opportunities for you to 'sell' your services. If you are not an approved supplier, you cannot even enter into a conversation with the buyer no matter how good your services.

As a new business or a business that has never tendered before, framework agreements can be a great starting point. Success rates are often higher due to the number of places being awarded. Once you are successfully supplying a framework agreement you can use this as an example in any future tenders you decide to bid for.

As with other types of tender, you must still make sure you fulfil all the requirements of the agreement and that should you successfully secure a place on the agreement your business is capable and fit to supply. You also need to ensure your business complies with all the mandatory criteria set by the buyer.

Pros and Cons for your business:

Finding suitable tenders

Once you decide to have a go at bid writing, the next challenge is finding suitable tenders for your business. Firstly, you must decide the type of tenders you want based on their value. This will be determined by your current turnover figures, but you can build up to the large ones. This will also determine where you will find these suitable tenders.

OJEU thresholds

The European Public Contracts Directive (2014/24/Eu)

	Supply, Services and Design Contracts	Works Contracts	Social and other specific services
Central Government	£118,133 €144,000	£4,551,413 €5,548,000	£615,278 €750,000
Other contracting authorities	£181,302 €221,000	£4,551,413 €5,548,000	£615,278 €750,000
Small Lots	£65,630 €80,000	£820,370 €1,000,000	n/a
Utility authorities	£363,424 €443,000	£4,551,413 €5,548,000	£820,370 €1,000,000
Defence and Security authorities	£363,424 €443,000	£4,551,413 €5,548,000	n/a

Local thresholds

Detailed below are the thresholds for different types of tenders from a recent presentation from Walsall Council. Other councils and organisations may vary from this very slightly.

Strategic	£500,001 and above Public Contract Regulations Apply. At least 4 written tenders required
Major	EU Threshold up to £500,000 Public Contract Regulations Apply. At least 3 written tenders required
Significant	£50,001 up to the EU Threshold (£181,302) At least 3 written tenders required
Minor	£10,000 up to £50,000 At least 2 written quotations required
Low Value	£2,500 up to £10,000 Not subject to Contract Rules but subject to Best Value

Where are they?

This tends to fall into five categories as follows:

High-Value Public Sector Tenders / OJEU Tenders – TED

EU regulations stipulate these must be advertised across Europe. You can pay for services that alert you when a government type tender comes up that meets your criteria. But many smaller businesses just won't have enough suitable tenders to justify the expense – especially when you don't even need to need pay!

This is a fairly easy and free way for you to check for high-value public sector tenders (OJEU tenders) that are advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union and online at Tenders Electronic Daily (TED):

TED: <http://ted.europa.eu>

National Public Tenders (High and Low Value)

The government has a tender portal for all its contracts which is in beta version, but available for all to use. You can search by location or do a more advanced search. You can find this portal here:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Search>

Other UK Public Sector Tender Portals

There are many tender portals where you can find adverts for contract opportunities for councils, housing associations etc. You can create your own free account and set up alerts for tenders. Some allow you to post a profile so that public sector buyers to can search for your service/product.

London Tenders Procurement Portal for many London boroughs. Registration is free and once registered you will receive email alerts that match your profile. www.londontenders.org

Housing Procurement Portal is a tender portal for housing associations contract opportunities. www.housingprocurement.com

Other Free services

There are many tender portals around that are free for you to search for tenders. This I also where some of the councils and local government advertise their tenders.

<https://procontract.due-north.com/Register>

Paid services

There are several businesses that bring together tenders advertised on various portals into one place. To get the best out of these services there is a cost, some people like to pay for the convenience, others prefer to search the generic tender portals and save the money. There is no guarantee you will find tenders that suit you if you pay for these services, but you will be able to focus on specific locations and types of tenders.

Examples are:

<https://www.mytenders.co.uk>

<https://www.b2bquote.co.uk/>

<https://www.tendersdirect.co.uk/>

To bid or not to bid?

To start with, many businesses take an ad-hoc approach to tendering and bid on every single opportunity that comes their way, hoping they will win some tenders along the way. They soon discover that this is not a great use of their time.

Many businesses tell me that tendering is a waste of time and that they never win anything, and this is often down to a scattergun approach. They also fail to get the appropriate feedback which can help them to improve. In some cases, they haven't read the specifications properly and don't realise that they don't meet the minimum requirements – so they never had a chance in the first place.

It's very important to have 'bid – no bid' process in place before starting any tender, and this is what businesses who are successful at tendering have in place.

It's important to research your prospect and spend some time on the tender, even highlighting the appropriate sections and understanding the specification properly before you start.

Before you start working on your tender, ensure you know the answers to these 6 questions:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

When not to bid

There are many other reasons not to bid, for example:

- You don't have the resources to fulfil the contract without significant investment (taking on more staff, TUPE, buying more equipment, IT services, vehicles etc.)
- The contract is worth over 25% of your current turnover which might make this client too large for you.
- You can't offer a competitive price against larger competitors.
- You're already bidding for other contracts. If they all accept, you'll won't be able to fulfil them all.
- The contract is taking you away from the future direction for your business.

Getting your business ready to tender

If you are new to tendering:

Identify minimum requirements for tenders

Signup to tender portals

Identifying strengths and weaknesses

Review competitor information

Obtain relevant trade accreditations

Review policy and procedure requirements

Review / create case studies and evidence

Improving your success rate:

Analyse previous tender submissions

Review feedback from previous tenders

Create workable bid library

Review / create case studies and evidence

Competitor / SWOT analysis

Gap analysis and improvement action plan

Identify strong win themes

See the Tender Ready Checklist handout.

Industry standards and accreditations

1. Why do we need industry standards and accreditations?

2. Where can you find these for your business?

3. Can you list the most likely ones?

4. What ones do you have already?

Bid writing tips and tricks

Understanding the rules

- Read everything
- Understand the requirements
- Fully understand the specification
- Stick to the deadline
- Submit exactly as they ask you to

How to be compliant

- Meet the specification
- Possess all accreditations and standards
- Have in place all relevant policies and procedures
- Meet turnover requirements
- Have relevant experience and share it
- Compliance matrix

Dos and Don'ts

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify clear win themes • Answer the question • Review and proof • Be clear and concise • Provide evidence • Show added value • Ask for clarification • Create a good design and template if possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tender for everything • Underestimate resources needed to create bid • Go over word limit • Write in management speak • Leave it late to start • Submit non-compliant bids • Submit alternative bids unless allowed.

Writing your tender

Keep it short

Length: keep it as brief as possible. Which tender is the client likely to look at first – the 1,000 page one or the 400 pages? Average sentence length should be 15-20 words, try not to have many paragraphs longer than seven lines. You can of course vary sentence length for effect.

Keep it simple

Choose familiar words, words with concrete meanings (truck, not mode of transport). Overly abstract words can obscure meaning, avoid unquantifiable quantifiers, and embed complex terms that are unavoidable, in simple words.

Cut the padding

Don't bury your message in waffle. Get to the point quickly. Putting in padding is something we're virtually trained to do at school and college but in business this works against you. Practise pruning your prose!

Focus on the action

Are you over-using the passive voice? You want to aim for no more than 30% passive sentences.

Focus on your reader

Ask yourself what your readers need to get from your writing, or what you want them to do as a result of reading it. Everything you write should work towards this. What examples and language would be meaningful and relevant to your reader? How can you make it easy for your reader to do what you need? Write to express not impress.

Get it right

This is all about your credibility. Check your facts and check the mechanics like punctuation and spelling. Getting it right makes you look professional and thorough. Each mistake causes your readers to drop their estimate of your IQ by five points and gives them an excuse to reject what you're saying.

Make it look good

Good content can be ruined by bad presentation. Think about how you react to a slab of solid text—or to something laid out with a few headings, graphics and a bit of white space. Your reader will react the same way.

Point the way

Do your headings catch attention? How much of the story do they tell on their own? Do they accurately represent the text following them? How can you write good headings? Make sure that even a reader who skims your document takes away your message. What do you want the reader to do when they have read your document?

Tender Questions

Compliance element	Do you have a quality policy? You need to be able to tick the box.
Implication element	A supplier with a clearly defined quality methodology is important to us. What are the implications of this statement?
Process / method element	How do you maintain a sustainable approach to quality management? How will you do it?
Outcome critical element	What will the approach to the subject of quality mean to us? We need to show that they will gain something from us.
Key message element	How do you differentiate your approach to quality? This will link to a clear win theme.

What does good look like?

See your sample tender answers handout.

Social Value

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 became law in March 2012 and was live from January 2013. The public sector must now consider social value as part of any procurement. This means you will have to answer social value tender questions when bidding for public sector contracts.

Here are some ways you can add social value with your business.

Economic

- Local jobs created and sustained
- Apprentices
- Work placement schemes for schools and colleges
- Training opportunities e.g. your own staff, work-experience and customer staff
- Taking people out of unemployment
- Using local suppliers
- Any other local investment

Environmental

- Reducing carbon footprint / pollution
- Minimising waste e.g. re-use and recycling
- Using environmentally friendly goods
- Saving energy e.g. energy efficient lighting and equipment
- Sustainability e.g. FSC timber products
- ISO 14001 environmental management systems

Social

- Supporting local charities
- Helping local community groups e.g. amateur sports clubs or social groups
- Ethical supply e.g. Fair Trade
- Community engagement e.g. involving local residents
- Promoting social integration e.g. work opportunities for disadvantaged people
- Supporting local culture and heritage
- Volunteering

Social Value Exercise

What do you do now?

What could you do?

Outsourcing your bid writing

Benefits

List the reasons that you may wish to outsource your bid writing:

Selecting your bid writing partner

Experience:

Knowledge:

Capacity:

Writing quality:

Communication:

Project management skills:

Test run:

Summary

A	N
B	O
C	P
D	Q
E	R
F	S
G	T
H	U
I	V
J	W
K	X
L	Y
M	Z