

# 5 Steps To Building Winning Sales Proposals



A Guide for Software Companies



# Introduction

## “We lost the deal? What happened?”

Sounds all too familiar. And what’s worse is that software companies and their sales professionals often don’t know that it is not about the money . . . but the proposal itself. This paper will explain that a proposal is really a solid reflection of the relationship you have with your prospect, and furthermore, how the right process will take proposal writing from an administrative nightmare to an efficient system of best practices where everyone wins. This ebook details five steps for building winning sales proposals, forever changing your proposal success rate. . . and your business.

## Where Do Proposals Go Wrong?

We all know to ensure that leads are appropriately qualified with a solid relationship before even submitting a proposal. That means you should never respond to an RFP from a company you don’t have a relationship with. You should respond only to companies you’ve met with and know their issues. Also, proposals are not meant to be a document with a list of services and costs, but an encompassing business solution. If you share pricing before there is a relationship, then you’re probably not going to get the business, and what’s more, your pricing may be shared with a competitor who does have a relationship.

A proposal is a document that solidifies your relationship with your customer. The proposal should identify the business problem(s) and document your technology solution. In short, the proposal is a solutions document offering your company as the best solution, regardless of price. So how do you offer yourself as the best software provider and what key things can you provide as evidence? Look to your work and your reputation as your proof points. Offer references from existing customers, key studies you’ve participated in, articles your company has published, membership in professional organizations and your experience as a guest speaker.

Are there “Bad” Proposals?	What is a “Good” proposal?
Sadly, there are. As discussed, they are simply pieces of paper that don’t reflect a relationship. They are:	The opposite of “bad” proposals, of course! Good proposals are moneymakers. They are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unattractive</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attractive, informative, accurate</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivered late</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivered in a timely fashion as promised - or better!</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poorly branded—not reflective of who you are or the solution you offer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positively reflect the branding and image of the company</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uncompetitive</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competitive and impressive</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Error ridden (typos and poor grammar)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivered in a manner reflective of your technology</li></ul>

Ultimately, while “bad” proposals reflect poorly on you, “good” ones reflect positively on your business, your offering(s), and your relationship. A good proposal can help you stand out against your competition and promote you as the one IT solution provider who can solve your client’s business problems and help its business. We’ve discussed how proposals go wrong; now let’s turn our attention to making those proposals win with these five steps.

# 1 Keep it Timely

## Step One – Keep it Timely

Always keep your commitment for delivery time frames; your vast experience will help you to establish standards and goals for what is “timely.” Track your proposal responses to ensure that you’re meeting not only prospect deadlines, but also your own time line’s goals. Timeliness is the first commitment in your relationship and sets the stage for the future tone of your relationship.

Remember, that sales is a service and should be treated as one. During this stage of the game, regardless of whether you’re communicating with a current customer or a new prospect, you’re indeed in a sales cycle. You should treat the quote as if you are servicing, or assisting, an existing customer. In short, your response is a reflection of your services. Your proposal response should be as quick and as efficient as if you were handling a customer call.

And what are your best weapons against a lack of timeliness?

Two things: technology and an efficient process. Using an automated proposal tool to replace your formerly administratively slow process will allow you to be faster and more efficient, thereby helping you meet (or exceed) those deadlines.



Keep it Timely

1

Create Standardized Processes

2

Offer Meaningful Options

3

Remember, Image IS Everything

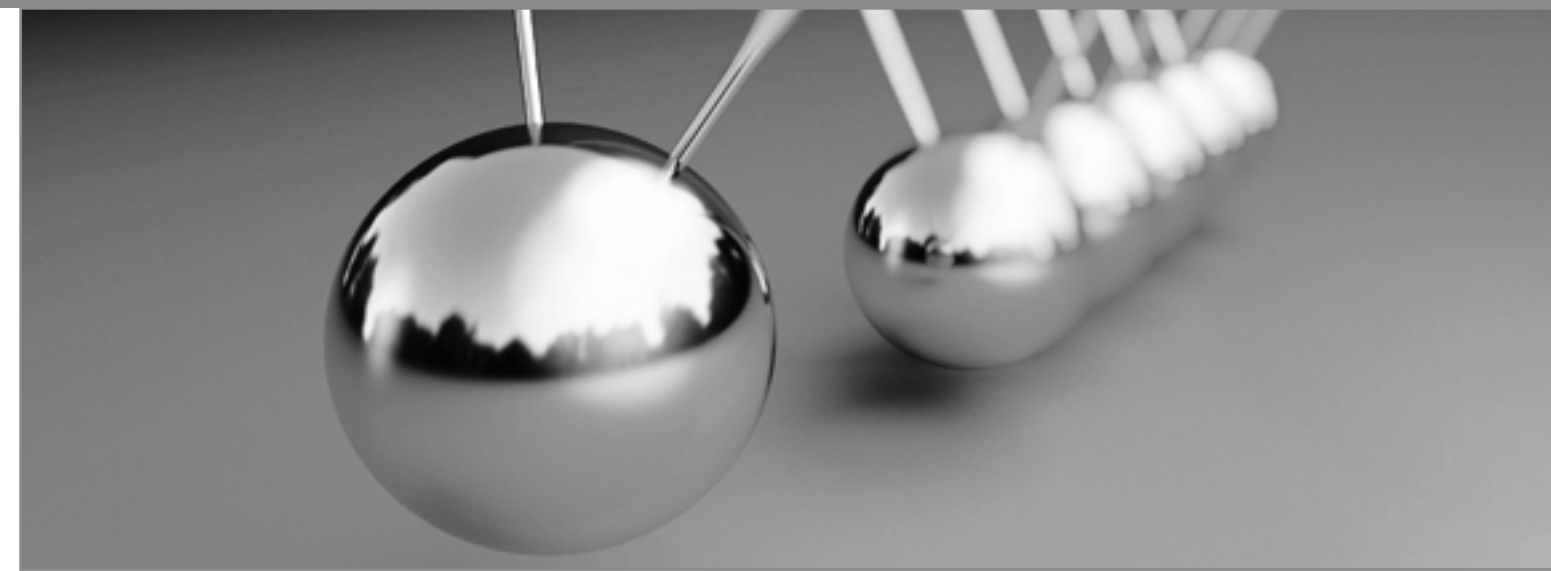
4

Integrate to Streamline

5



# 2 Create Standardized Processes



## Step Two – Create Standardized Processes

How do you generate proposals now? Is it chaos, where everyone involved scurries around contributing pieces to a proposal in hopes that the end result will be better than the means to get there? Or is it an organized, systematic, clean process where all involved offer their best, culminating in a first-rate end-product? Traditionally, the proposal process is administratively heavy, requiring the incorporation of multiple documents from various contributors (e.g. sales, finance and and professional services), which is often a tedious, error-prone load on a sales rep.

Making the effort to look closely at how you currently create proposals and investing the time to improve them will result in a standardized, repeatable proposal process with the highest quality product. Having this process will also make it scalable, allowing a faster ramp up for new employees. Furthermore, incorporating automated quote and proposal technology into your proposal process will streamline that former chaos, and your sales team will welcome the opportunity to easily and quickly generate a proposal, instead of dread it.



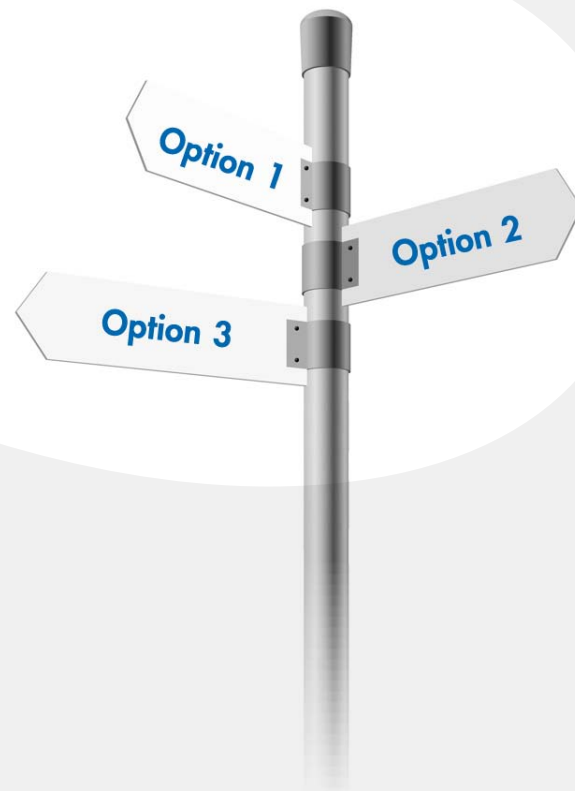
Keep it Timely	1
Create Standardized Processes	2
Offer Meaningful Options	3
Remember, Image IS Everything	4
Integrate to Streamline	5

# 3 Offer Meaningful Options

## Step Three – Offer Meaningful Options

How unhappy would you be if you went to the electronics department to buy a television, and there was only one TV to look at? Your customers are much the same. Your proposal should never offer just one solution; you run the risk of them being disappointed with their one option. However, if you expand your options to three –the “great” solution, the “greater” solution, and the “greatest” solution – you’ll make your customer aware of all your excellent services (and not just the one that solved the problem) AND they might just upsell themselves when they see all their options and all your great offerings.

What’s more, you should deliver your proposals with a clear course for customers to easily ACT on their option of choice – because they will!



Keep it Timely	1
Create Standardized Processes	2
Offer Meaningful Options	3
Remember, Image IS Everything	4
Integrate to Streamline	5

# 4 Remember, Image IS Everything

## Step Four – Remember, Image IS Everything!

Just because the proposal is typed and you've used a word processing program for some fancy bullets, it does not mean its professional quality. If your customer feels you didn't put any effort into your ordinary-looking proposal, they won't take the time to read it and won't feel confident that you'll put much effort into any work do you for them.

Your proposal reflects your company, its professionalism, its service, and its dedication to doing everything to the best of its ability and to the highest, professional quality standards. Be sure that your proposal contains no spelling or grammatical errors. Show your creative skills in your proposals. Not all solutions are cookie-cutter, and neither should your proposal be. If you took good notes during your interview session, incorporate some of those quotes into your proposal to show how well you listened.

Automated proposal programs have grammar and spelling rules already built into them, as well as features like style templates and structure, so when you use an automated proposal program, your proposals will look good – every time!



Keep it Timely

1

Create Standardized Processes

2

Offer Meaningful Options

3

Remember, Image IS Everything

4

Integrate to Streamline

5

# 5 Integrate to Streamline

## Step Five – Integrate to Streamline

Picture this: A sales representative walks into the office of his prospect with his tablet computer. They continue the conversation regarding some issues the customer is having and the solutions the sales rep is offering. The sales rep enters all this information into his tablet. From here, he can generate a proposal on the spot, the customer can sign the agreement on the tablet, and the sales order is processed instantly. Or he can email the proposal for the customer to complete electronically.

That scenario reflects a proposal that sells the way a customer wants to buy (electronically in this case) and further uses that technology to streamline the proposal process and integrate with the entire order fulfillment process. Specifically, you should merge your proposals with your opportunity creation and sales management system and your product fulfillment system. Integrate all these systems into one smooth streamlined process, and everyone's work lives will be so much better.

In the cloud world, there are quoting platforms that allow you to create and present your proposal document electronically through one easy-to-access link. Any updates or changes to the proposal are completed on the back end, and every time the customer views it, they see only one always-up-to-date version (which means no messing with "do you have the right version?" issues). For your electronic buyers, this is another example of how an automated proposal system will streamline and make the entire proposal generation process easier.



Keep it Timely	1
Create Standardized Processes	2
Offer Meaningful Options	3
Remember, Image IS Everything	4
Integrate to Streamline	5



# Invest in your Process

## Final Words – Invest in your Quote and Proposal Processes

You've talked through problems and solutions with your prospect and have developed a relationship, and now you're ready to offer your proposal. You know that the proposal is the first solid evidence of your work product. Invest in your proposal platform and process. Having a repeatable process based on the latest technology and streamlined with your Professional Services Automation (PSA) or CRM will ensure an efficiently processed order. Devote time and resources into training everyone associated with sales on the proposal process. And finally, invest in your branding, image and marketing to get that professional look that epitomizes who you are. Put these five steps together, and your proposal will stand out against a sea of lackluster competitors. Your proposal is a representation of who you are as a software company and the work you will do for them. This system will give you the competitive advantage to get your customer to say "Yes!" to a longstanding, mutually beneficial business relationship.

In this highly competitive world where you never get a second chance to make a first impression, the proposal process is possibly the most important process in your business and is your time to shine, so make your first impression your best impression.

## About ConnectWise

Available anytime, anywhere, 24/7, ConnectWise is the leading business management solution designed exclusively for technology organizations, such as software companies, hardware/software resellers, IT solution providers, MSPs and System Integrators. Created by technology professionals, ConnectWise provides industry-leading software for support and ticketing, CRM, project management, invoicing, time tracking, procurement, and sales quotes and proposals.

But ConnectWise is much more than just software. ConnectWise offers access to discounted tech certifications, community, best practices, forums, a robust online university, and business and technical consulting. Over 65,000 professionals, in 5,000+ companies, rely on ConnectWise to provide a 360 degree view of their technology driven organization.

