The following are some of our recommended best practices:

1. Tell your why

As every middle school journalism teacher will tell you, there are six elements to a good story: who, what, where, when, why, and how. It’s the same with RFP response.

**“Who,”** as we mentioned above, is about your company, not your founder (with an exception we’ll talk about in a moment).

**“What”** is the product or service. “Where” is less about your location than the product or service (e.g., Where will onboarding take place? Where are your products manufactured?). “When” should outline deliverable dates. “How” is pretty self-explanatory, but what about “why?”

**“Why”** is an opportunity to genuinely resonate with your audience. Perhaps your company began because your founders were once in the customer’s shoes, or they saw a need that they were in a position to fill.

It might be tempting to include “why” when responding to a question about your company’s founding date or one that asks about product specs, but you’ll run the risk of annoying your customers by using valuable space for what they might see as superfluous information in those contexts. Also, you might have character and space limits.

Unless the RFP offers organic opportunities to present your “why,” save it for the cover letter.

RFP response example:

If, for example, a company wanted to improve efficiency. Here at Responsive, we might say something like:

*“We understand your desire to improve efficiencies in your organization. We founded Responsive for that very reason. Our platform helps you take back time to spend with your customers, family, and of course, on yourself.”*

**2. Show you’re human**

Individuals and company decision-makers all want to feel good about their buying decisions. Highlight the good that your company does.

RFP response example:

At Responsive, we’re proud of our workplace ideals and culture. But simply patting ourselves on the back might seem inauthentic. We let our employees speak for themselves. In our RFP responses, we often include something like:

*“Responsive is committed to a diverse and inclusive work environment. Our employees voted this year, and*[*we were honored*](https://www.comparably.com/companies/responsive-89921/awards)*as a Comparably Award winner for Best Outlook, Best CEO for diversity, and Best Leadership team.”*

**3. Share a testimonial**

Who better to speak for your company’s quality and customer service than your customers?

RFP response example:

We might, for example, use the words of Responsive user [Brian Z](https://www.capterra.com/p/148054/RFPIO/reviews/):

“Hundreds of hours saved in responding to questionnaires and RFPs. Responsive offers very competitive cost savings over most of the larger RFP software providers. The same functionality at a fraction of the cost of the big guys. Customer support is top-notch — all questions or requests for help are addressed within the same day (or within 24 hours at most). Great, direct support from the management team — no call centers, no outsourced product support. You get assistance from people who helped build the product.”

**4. Customize answers with specific deliverables**

When an RFP asks about deliverables, the customer wants more than just a timeline. They want to know that you understand their needs. If you sell a product, how long will it take for the customer to receive it? If you sell a service, what is the onboarding process? Sure, it’s easy to answer these questions with dates or predicted time from purchase, but remember, you’re telling a story.

RFP response example:

Let’s pivot from Responsive for a moment. Perhaps your company offers SEO services. Rather than simply listing timelines, say something like:

*“At \_\_\_\_ SEO Consultants, we value partnership with our clients. First, we’ll meet with your content strategists to help devise a plan to leverage your strengths and highlight your values.*

*On average, we will deliver a detailed SEO strategy within X months.*

*By month Y, we will begin weekly strategy meetings with content writers and key stakeholders. Implementation will be ongoing but expect your first results within Z months.”*

**5. Be succinct and real**

Most products or services are relatively dry. If you’re in tech, things can get rather \*um\* technical. If you sell a product, you might have to explain its manufacturing or logistics.

Odds are, the procurement person looking at your proposal has high-level knowledge of what they are seeking, but their eyes might start getting bleary if you go into too much detail, especially technical detail. Avoid jargon as much as possible.

RFP response example:

If, for example, the RFP asks about your approach to project management. Rather than describing your methodology or Gantt chart, say something like:

*“Our project management team is agile. We tailor our proven process to each client’s unique needs with the main steps remaining consistent: build, test, and deploy to deliver value.”*

**6. Make life easier for the issuer**

Reviewing a (long) proposal is a tedious enough process, don’t also make the issuer do extra work digging to find answers. Rather than directing them to an attachment or a URL to find the answer they’re looking for, answer their question within the proposal itself. In addition, you can always provide an attachment to expand on your answer or offer supporting evidence for it.

RFP response example:

*“We practice secure application design and coding principles. Engineers are required to undergo security training for security awareness and secure coding.*

*We use third-party services to perform vulnerability/application security scans annually.*

*The most recent penetration report is attached to this package.”*

7. Elaborate when appropriate

You don’t want to be too wordy or provide unnecessary information, but there are instances where a bit of elaboration is valuable. Sometimes you have to read between the lines to determine what the customer needs. Rather than just providing the most direct answer to the question, try to understand what the buyer is actually trying to learn. If a more detailed response fits better, go for it.

RFP response example:

The customer may want to know how you communicate new features to clients. Sure, you could respond with something like, “Upcoming platform enhancements are communicated to customers via email. You can also access them from the Help Center.”

Yes, that answer is succinct, but does it set you apart from your competitors? Maybe they asked that question because their current vendor doesn’t listen to suggestions or communicate new features. Instead, try something like:

*“Our roadmap is heavily influenced by our customers through a feedback/enhancement request feature within the application. Customers can interact with one another’s requests, as well as with the development team. Their comments, voting, and status reports all influence future enhancements.We then communicate enhancements to our customers via email release announcements. This email will have the major highlights from the release, a document outlining all the release details, and a link to the release details that can be accessed 24/7 in the Help Center.”*

**What to Look for in an RFP Response Tool**

Responding to requests for proposals (RFPs) is often cumbersome and time-consuming, which is why many organizations look for [an RFP tool to streamline the response process](https://www.responsive.io/solutions/rfp-software/).

**8. Say no with style**

No one likes to pass up a business opportunity, but there are times when your company won’t be the right fit, and there’s nothing wrong with that. Rather than responding to an RFP and misleading the customer into believing that yours is the right solution, tell them “no” but do it the right way.

A well-composed “no” response might help open doors to future opportunities with the issuer.

RFP response example:

Imagine the customer is looking for a specific integration you don’t currently offer. Instead of a simple “No, we do not integrate with that tool,” say something like:

*“Currently, the solution does not integrate with XYZ tool. However, a potential integration is on our 6-12 month product roadmap. We would love the opportunity to partner with you in identifying the best path forward to build an XYZ tool integration.”*