

APMP Winning the Business

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[hed] Different Audiences, Same Proposal

[dek] Getting into the minds of not only your government buyers but also the end users

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In proposal writing, writing to your audience may seem easy. After all, an RFP gives you a comprehensive rubric to follow. Your audience has literally told you what it wants. Simple, right? Wrong.

Distinguishing Between Buyers and End Users

In government contracting, the contracting office releases the RFP, evaluates proposals, and selects an offeror for award. The contracting office is the “buyer” of your product or service—and your proposal’s audience. What does the contracting office look for in the proposal? First, compliance with the RFP and responsiveness to its requirements. Beyond that, the contracting office wants to provide the best value and lowest risk to the government. You need to show the contracting office that your proposal meets the RFP criteria and that you can perform the requirements within the desired scope, schedule, and cost.

But the contracting office is not the end user. The end user is the agency customer who will use your product or receive your service should you win the bid. The agency customer, typically on

the ground, performs or oversees the completed work. The agency customer focuses on day-to-day duties and how your product or service will help provide solutions to the agency customer's problems. The contracting office and agency customer work together throughout the solicitation process, but their goals can differ. That means you have two audiences to satisfy.

Tools and Processes to Determine Your Audiences' Goals

Some of the best ways to gain insight into your audiences' goals are establishing relationships with the contracting office and the agency customer, attending industry events, and teaming up with other businesses. Most proposal writers, however, are not in control of these decisions. Luckily, there are alternative ways to get into the minds of your buyers and end-users.

To determine your audiences' goals, try:

- Conducting audience analyses.
- Building customer profiles through surveys.
- Interviewing technical experts and subject matter experts (SMEs).

Audience Analyses

To engage with both audiences' perspectives, pointed questions. What's important to them about your product or service, and how much do you expect each audience to know? For example, if you're bidding on a highly technical contract, the contracting office will most likely have a much more novice understanding than the end user. What are the demographics of each audience? And, finally, what is each audience hoping to learn from your proposal?

Customer Profiles Through Surveys

Some of the customer profile you can build yourself, through research. The size of an agency, its mission and types of projects, its number of employees, its centers of operations, and other information can usually be found online. Other parts of the customer profile are best built through surveys. Tailor your survey questions to each audience, your product or service, and how the two interact, with questions like these:

- What's the Number 1 reason that would prevent you from buying our solution?
- What makes our offer appealing to you?
- What's your buying process?

Technical Expert and SME Interviews

Interviewing technical experts and SMEs is critical to determining your audiences' goals. If you're selling a new software, the technical expert may be a developer within your organization who can help you write about the product. The SME may be a former program manager of a large government program who can speak to how the agency customer would use the technology.

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[hed] Key Takeaways

1. In a proposal, remember you're writing to different audiences: buyers and end users.

2. Before writing, determine the goals of each audience.
3. To determine the goals of each audience, conduct audience analyses, build customer profiles through surveys, and interview technical experts and SMEs.

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