

Title:

Creating Professional Proposals

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1274

Summary:

Whether you are pitching your product or service to a multi-national firm or to the start-up down the street, a professional image can make all the difference. In this article, we look at how you can use the formatting features within Microsoft Office to create professional proposals and quotes that put your best foot forward. Using Microsoft Word, we'll walk through some of the formatting tips and tricks used by designers to give documents a professional layout and appearance (and you can do it all yourself for a fraction of the price a designer would charge.)

Keywords:

David McAmis writes articles for <http://www.microsoft.com/india/smallbusiness/>Microsoft small business

Article Body:

< p >Whether you are pitching your product or service to a multi-national firm or to the start-up down the street, a professional image can make all the difference. In this article, we look at how you can use the formatting features within Microsoft Office to create professional proposals and quotes that put your best foot forward. Using Microsoft Word, we'll walk through some of the formatting tips and tricks used by designers to give documents a professional layout and appearance (and you can do it all yourself for a fraction of the price a designer would charge.) </ p > < b >Begin with the content </ b > < p >To start, we need to look at what makes a proposal stand out. The content of your proposal should clearly state who you are, give a brief summary of your company's experience and detail the products or services you plan to provide, as well as the cost of these products or services. </ p > < p >Once you have decided on your proposal's content, you will want to create a new Word document and start creating your proposal. One of the easiest ways to make your proposal stand out is to make the formatting and style consistent throughout the entire document. Microsoft Word has built-in styles that can be applied to text in your document.</ p > < p >< b >Hint: </ b >If you are unsure of what content you should put into your proposal, you may want to check out the

templates that are available on the Office Template Gallery for examples of proposals for different types of product offerings and services.

Create a consistent document style

When working with fonts and sizes within Word, you may have noticed another drop-down list to the left of the font menu. This menu shows all of the available styles within your document. To apply a style to a section of text, highlight the text and use the drop-down list to select a style. The font and font size, character formatting, etc. of the style will be applied to the text you have selected.

By default, Word has a "Normal" style which is the default for the text in your document, but there are also styles for headings (i.e. Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) that are especially helpful when creating a document with multiple sections.

You can use these styles to apply formatting to the different sections of your proposal (ie. "About Us", "Products", "Pricing", etc. to maintain a consistent look-and-feel to your document.

An added bonus is that by applying these styles to the different sections of your proposal, you can also quickly create a table of contents for your proposal by going to the first page of your document and selecting **Insert > Reference > Index & Tables > Table of Contents** tab. You can then click **OK** to add a table of contents to your proposal— it's that easy!

You can also add or modify the styles in use by selecting **Format > Styles and Formatting** to open the **Styles and Formatting** side menu, that will appear to the right of your document.

You can use the drop-down list on each of the styles to modify the style, changing the font face, size, format, etc. Any changes you make to a style will be made to all of the text that has that style applied.

Add colour and images

In addition to a consistent look and feel, another easy way to make your presentation stand out is to follow some of the basic design principles. To start, you should limit your use of colour. It may be fun to change the text to be orange with purple headings, but in the end you are trying to create a professional image and convince the reader to buy your products or services.

As a general rule of thumb, the main body of your proposal should always be printed in black text, but you can use colour selectively to highlight text or make headings stand out.

Another way to tighten up your proposals is to limit the use of clipart and images. If you do choose to use graphics in your proposal, they should be relevant to the section of the proposal where they appear. For example, if you have a picture of the product you are selling, it is perfectly acceptable to include that image in the section where you are describing the product.

On the other hand, if you have

found some interesting clipart and scatter it through your proposal, you will leave your clients wondering what the clipart has to do with the proposal you have presented. When working with clipart or images, less is definitely more.

Include headers and footers

The final touch to creating a professional image is to add some headers and footers to your document. The header and footer of a document are the place where you can put the title of your proposal, the date as well as your company name and page numbers.

To create a new header or footer, select **View > Header and Footer**, which will allow you to edit the header and footer directly on your page and type text in the space allowed. To insert a page number, click the **Page Number** icon on the **Header and Footer** toolbar.

If your proposal has a title page, you may not want the header and footer to appear. On the same toolbar there is a **Page Setup** icon which will open up a **Layout** property page.

Click the **Different First Page** option so that you can create a header/footer for the rest of your document, without it appearing on the first page. When you are done editing your header/footer, click the **Close** button to return to your document.

Check spelling and print

And finally, it goes without saying that you should proofread and spell check your proposal before you send it out (**Tools > Spelling and Grammar**). If you are sending a printed copy to the customer, you may want to have the proposal bound or put into a presentation folder.