How can your Chambers create more persuasive tender submissions?

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www.tenandahalf.co.uk
info@tenandahalf.co.uk

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contents

1 how do you build tenders that follow the proven 3-step 'persuasive structure'?

The 3-step 'persuasive' structure is:

1. Repeat what the purchaser wants
2. Explain the type of service provider that is required to deliver what the purchaser wants
3. Explain why you are exactly that service provider

It is not about flushing the pages with information about chambers, your members' CVs or the year you came into being.

Successful tendering is about directly answering the call for tender and working towards establishing yourself as the right choice once the purchaser is clear you have a full grasp of what they need.

2 what should be included in each of the three sections?

The first stage is to repeat what the purchaser wants. To do that you need to take some time out to go through the call for tender line by line.

In the majority of cases I would title this section something like 'Our understanding of your situation'. It is literally just a case of listing out all of the key points you took during your analysis of the call for tender.

By doing this you immediately focus your response on the purchaser rather than you as the respondent. It is proven to make the reader realise you are on their side and therefore more disposed and sympathetic towards your response.

The second stage is to set out the type of supplier they need.

I would title this something like 'What type of chambers could deliver everything you need?'.

This section should be anonymous but direct. It should also be very closely related to all of the possible selling points you highlighted during the planning and research stages. It also needs to stay very close to the list you put forward for the first section.

For example if you were a family set tendering for a local authority's child care work you may want to say:

- You need a chambers with a large team of recognised childcare specialists so that they can always provide the level and quality of service and speed of turnaround you require
- You need a team with a proven success record in advocating cases involving every type of child-related issue
- You need a chambers who have a long history of working with local authorities and understand the pressures they are under and, as a result, the best and most efficient ways to provide the advocacy support they need

2 what should be included in each of the three sections?

You'll notice that in the examples on the previous page we have tried to explain why you need these things and put a positive sales spin on each – that is all part of the subliminal process of getting people thinking about what they really need to achieve the delivery they've outlined in their call for tender.

And if you're struggling to get to that extra explanation, just ask yourself the question "so what?"

So they need a combination of childcare experience and experience of working with local authorities, so what? What will that specific combination of experience deliver? The members on your proposed team should be able to help you here as they're on the front line. If they tell you it's implicit, tell them it very often isn't and even if it is, it needs to be spelt out as part of this process.

Just adding these dozen or so extra words will really draw the reader into your submission, and therefore, make them much more disposed towards you.

The third stage is to underline why you are the right provider. I'd title this something like 'Why [x] chambers is the right choice to deliver all of the services you need'.

Up to this point you haven't even mentioned yourselves or your skills. That's because you're going to close them at this stage. So far you've repeated what they want and told them what they need to achieve what they want. Now you're going to underline why they should choose you.

What you need to do is take each of the points raised in the previous section and tell them about the relevant barristers, the relevant client experience and the relevant cases you've worked on (all of which you will have unearthed during the research phase so you can spell out your credentials clearly and concisely against each of those criteria).

If you can also back each claim up with a client testimonial and/or an anonymised case study that will add even more weight to your submission. One trick I have used is to incorporate a client testimonial into the footer on each of the pages of this section (in a different colour and font) rather than just add them into the main body of the text and that has been well received.

3 how do you invert the focus of the content from the writer to the reader?

Too many chambers still write from their perspective rather than the purchasers but if you think about normal life, when you try and talk someone into doing something (and that's all the tender process is) you would always try and direct the conversation towards the person you are talking to, not towards yourself.

The simple way to make sure your tenders are directed towards the reader ("you") rather than the writer ("we") is to use the find/replace function in Word and physically change every 'we' to a 'you' and then make the sentences make sense.

Again this is a simple refinement but it will have a substantial effect on the level of engagement your document engenders.

4 what else can you include in your structure to strengthen your position even further?

We cannot stress just how much testimonials and case studies will add to your submissions.

With testimonials it is always better to have the name, job title and company name attached to them but even if you have "General Council of an AIM listed PLC" or "Head of Department at a Top 25 City Law Firm" they will still add weight to your pages.

With case studies, these should be around 150 - 200 words so the reader can get the key points without having to wade through too much text. The model we use to build case studies is CAR:

Context: Why did the client come to you? What did they want you to do/solve for them?

Action: What did you do to achieve that outcome?

Result: What positive result was reached as a result of your actions?

We'd also strongly suggest you include:

1. A contents page: This is the first thing the reader will see; it allows them to turn straight to the page/s they're interested in and just generally makes the document look more complete, more professional and easier to use.

2. An Executive Summary: This is a precis of your 3-step response not of your 'About Us' page and should incorporate the key points of all 3 stages. It should be written in language that everyone "from the CEO to the janitor" will understand as you don't know exactly who is going to read it or what their level of understanding on certain subjects is going to be.

The reason this is vital is that some members of the decision making panel (quite often the most senior) won't have time to read the entire document but they will need to see the crux of your argument so they can play the part they need to play in the decision making process.

N.B. To make sure it is a summary of the response we tend to add this in at the end of the process which we feel helps (and speeds up the process).

5

where do you put the supporting info on chambers and your team so it doesn't clog up your response?

Having said not to lead with pages of information about chambers and its members within the 3-step 'persuasive' model, that doesn't mean there isn't a place for that information.

It definitely should be in there but it is much more effective to include it within the appendices.

In very general terms:

Appendix 1: One page on chambers, its specialisms, its landmark cases and its history.

Appendix 2: A team sheet (relevant to the work being tendered for) with photos, year of call, noteworthy cases, contact details and a brief (i.e. 80-100 words) 'pen picture' summarising their experience, key specialisms and the role they'll play on the team.

Appendix 3: 'What our clients say', if you can add a page of testimonials (not repeating any you've used in the body of the response), these are often very powerful as it's nice things said by people just like the readers rather than by yourselves.

Appendix 4: 'Additional information', this could be relevant trade press, self-published blogs or articles or synopses of recent presentations you've given for relevant trade bodies or at relevant events – anything that further cements your position as an active part of the sector or geography your purchaser operates within.

6 what else should you bear in mind when it comes to writing a persuasive tender response?

In our experience the critical success factors that must be included within/established by a tender submission are:

- Certainty over fees
- Certainty over the quality of advice
- Certainty that chambers has the capacity to deliver with no drop in service levels
- Certainty over the 'added value extras' you will provide if appointed

As well as using testimonials and case studies, make sure you mention any relevant awards or CSR activities to give you an edge over your competitors.

Invest in design, lay-out and production quality; these will all mark you out as totally professional and genuinely interested in the opportunity and could again give you an edge over your competitors.

If you are tendering for work from local authorities or the public sector, make sure you give the required consideration to any relevant regulatory issues.

And lastly here are 4 very common errors we come across far too frequently when we're helping clients improve their tender submissions:

- They haven't taken the time to really understand what they are being asked for
- They treat all tenders as the same and as a result their submissions look generic rather than tailored; this will not flatter the reader!
- The submissions are not proofread properly and contain typos and formatting errors which will not suggest you have the attention to detail clients demand
- No distinction is made between what is required in your written submission and, if you are selected, the follow up interview; the interview is about proving the personal fit and should never be a regurgitation of your tender document

How else can we help you?

This special report has been created for the readers of *Counsel*. If you have found the content helpful and would like to discuss a specific tender submission on more detail, please email douglas@tenandahalf.co.uk.

However, tender responses are not all we can help with. We provide a comprehensive range of business development support for barristers and clerks that includes:

- Client research programmes
- Business development training
- Marketing support

To find out more, please email claire@tenandahalf.co.uk to organise your first free 45 minute consultation.

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