

Going for it The art of bid preparation

Most often, the path to an export contract leads through Request for Proposal (RFP) territory—that tricky, sometimes thorny land of complex buyer requirements and competitive challenges. It's not always easy to navigate, and many companies can get lost along the way. So how do you make sure your proposal is the best it can possibly be? We put that question to the **Canadian Commercial Corporation's (CCC) contract specialists**. Here's what they had to say.

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Nail down the basics

Every RFP tests your ability to deliver a product or service, interpret what a customer is really asking for and to market all the strengths you have to offer.

It's true that many RFPs ask for the same kinds of information about the company, like its products, services and experience. And, for sure, it makes sense to have some ready-made answers handy—'boilerplate' content, as it's called.

However, no two RFPs are exactly alike. Review all of your pre-fab proposal material to make sure it reflects the nuances of the particular bid you are responding to. Sensitivity to details can make a big difference.

Think marketing

While RFPs describe what a buyer is looking for, some solutions do not exactly fit the bill. If yours doesn't, don't despair. The important thing is to explain where your proposal differs. Tell the customer why your solution is every bit as good as what's been asked for—or maybe even better.

Sell yourself. Just remember to be honest about it. Some companies may go too far and try to talk their way into a sale even though their solution really doesn't fit. There's no advantage to doing so; either you won't get the business, or else you will and be in way over your head.

Stick to the specs

You may have an absolutely full-featured product or service, but when it comes to winning a contract, more isn't necessarily better. Look at the specifications carefully and do your research.

CCC recalls a company that bid on a project in Thailand, only to find its price—which seemed reasonable for

Put the power of Canada behind your export sales



The **Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC)** is Canada's export contracting agency. CCC specializes in sales to foreign governments and provides special access to the U.S. defence and aerospace markets. Canadian exporters can gain greater access to government and other markets through CCC's contracting expertise and unique government-backed guarantee of contract performance.

CCC provides export contracting services that often result in the waiving of performance bonds, advanced payment arrangements and generally better project terms. CCC can provide access to commercial sources of pre-shipment export financing. When requested, CCC acts as prime contractor for appropriate government-to-government arrangements.

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what was offered—30% too high. The company lost the bid. The supplier sent someone over to Thailand to see what the winner eventually supplied: a truly bare-bones set up, but the exact minimum of what the RFP had specified.

The lesson? Stick to the specs. And if you really want to promote your fuller solution, include it as an extra option. The buyer then has a chance to see how you'll meet the basic requirements of the contract, and also how you're capable of delivering far greater value.

To access CCC bid or proposal preparation advisory services or to find out more about how CCC can help you put the power of Canada behind your export sales, visit **www.ccc.ca** or call **1-800-748-8191**. *

THE CANADIAN TRADE COMMISSIONER SERVICE

Access our market studies and our network of professionals at

www.infoexport.gc.ca

With more than 500 trade professionals in 140 cities around the world, the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service has helped thousands of companies succeed at doing business abroad. What follows is the fifth in a series of descriptions of the core services of the Trade Commissioner Service—available to you, the Canadian trader.

Face-to-Face Briefing

When you are planning a visit to your target market abroad, make sure you schedule the Trade Commissioner Service up front on your itinerary.

Visiting is by far the best method of developing a new foreign market. And one of the biggest benefits a market visit provides is the opportunity to meet and speak in person with posted Canadian trade commissioners working in the market on your behalf.

business in the market and point out any potentially sensitive issues.

We recommend that you plan a **Face-to-Face Briefing** for as soon as possible following your arrival in the territory and a second briefing at the end of your visit—to follow up on your progress.

What should I expect from a Face-to-Face Briefing?

In a **Face-to-Face Briefing**, trade commissioners provide market intelligence that has been gathered in the regions and that adds value to a company's prior research and planning at home. The briefing will be based on the expectation that you have already acquired at least a sound basic knowledge of the market and its territory. We suggest that you visit **www.infoexport.gc.ca**, the web site of the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service and **www.exportsource.ca**, Team Canada Inc's Web site. You should also visit the Web site of the embassy (accessible through **www.infoexport.gc.ca**) and the target country web site.

Trade commissioners will not divulge confidential information about other Canadian companies in the market.

What information will trade commissioners require from me?

First of all, trade commissioners need time to prepare for your **Face-to-Face Briefing**. Make sure you give them two weeks notice of your visit.

Also, they need to have as much information as possible about your company and your plans. When making your request for a **Face-to-Face Briefing**, be prepared to give detailed answers, in strict confidence, to the following questions:

- When do you plan to visit the market?
- What is unique or special about your company, product, or service?
- Who are the end users of your product or service? To whom do you sell in Canada and abroad, and how?
- Which countries or regional markets are you targeting and why? What do you know about your target market?
- How do you plan to enter the market—export licence, joint venture, or investment?
- How would you describe the typical buyer, distributor, agent, or partner with whom you want to work within your target market?
- Have you considered adapting your product or service literature and business cards to the market?

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