

EXORCIZE YOUR PROPOSAL DEMONS!

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The “Extension Tension” Demon

Tension, an occupational hazard of the proposal profession, can be triggered by many issues. One of them is working against a tight schedule when you conclude there is not enough time for you to produce and deliver a responsive or competitive proposal by the deadline.

This can lead to the tension of debating—tactically and strategically—whether to ask the customer for a deadline extension to relieve the tight schedule. It is indecision caused by the Extension Tension Demon.

(Avoid this demon and the need for an extension by protecting yourself from other proposal demons that can impair the planning, management, and development of your proposal. Look to other Proposal Exorcist articles for learning how to oppose these demons.)



To stop the Extension Tension Demon from overstressing your proposal team, ask yourself the following questions to decide if you will ask for an extension.

- **Will an extension help you or the competition more?**—You can expect that if you ask for and receive an extension, your competitors will receive the same extension. You may be way behind in your proposal preparation schedule for many reasons. However, your competition may be further behind for even more reasons. Therefore, an extension for the competitors—giving them more time to resolve their problems—might help them more than you. Be alert for marketing

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Proposal Demons (Continued)

intelligence that suggests that your competition is progressing slowly or having problems in its proposal development and may need an extension.

- ▶ Have you heard that long after RFP release your competitors are looking for a teammate or subcontractors for the proposed or proposal consultants to manage or write their proposal?
- ▶ Is there anything in the questions submitted by your competitors (and distributed with answers by the customer) that imply they have problems with understanding the RFP requirements or developing a technical or management solution to comply with the RFP requirements?
- ▶ Did your competitors say anything at the bidders' conference to indicate they had any significant proposal development problems?

If you think your competition needs the extension more than you and you can manage without one (albeit painfully), do not ask for one. If you are the incumbent, be reluctant to ask for an extension. If as an incumbent you have issues threatening the proposal deadline, think about your competition that does not have your knowledge of the current contract statement of work or the personal relationships and past performance (and presumably all favorable) with the customer. An extension may provide the competition the time to close the knowledge, relationship, and past performance gaps between your proposals.

- **Will your competition ask for an extension?**—If you sense that your competition needs an extension, do you think it will ask for one? If so, and you do not want to be the one asking for an extension fearful of irritating the customer with the request, you could wait for the competition to ask. (I recognize this could lead to a game of chicken, waiting to see who will ask for an extension first—cluck, cluck.) However, if you think others will ask for an extension,

and you need one, it could be advantageous for you to ask. Your request in support of others might convince the customer that an extension is justified.

- **Will the customer grant an extension without being asked?**—If it appears the customer will issue an extension without being asked, it may best to continue your proposal work and wait for the extension. (This could relieve your fear of asking for an extension and irritating the customer by doing so.) However, you might consider asking for an extension to convince the customer that an extension is warranted. Here are some signs that an unsolicited extension might be granted by the customer.
 - ▶ There is little time left before the proposal deadline, and the customer has not released a question and answer amendment long after the deadline has passed for question submittal by the prospective bidders.
 - ▶ Close to the proposal deadline, you are expecting (maybe by a heads-up announcement from the customer) an RFP amendment, especially one with major changes to specifications or proposal instructions. This type of amendment may come with an extension to accommodate the work caused by the RFP changes. If it does not, the customer might grant one in a follow-on amendment after reconsidering the impact of the RFP changes on the proposal or responding to official (or unofficial) groans of discontent by the prospective bidders.
 - ▶ The customer releases many amendments with major or minor changes to the RFP. The sheer number of amendments, even if they contain minor RFP changes, may lead the customer to grant an extension for the benefit of the prospective bidders.

“What's the worst thing that can happen if we ask for an extension?”

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- **Will you continue work while you wait for an answer to an extension request?—**

Assume that you ask for an extension. As you wait for an answer, if your proposal team is not willing to continue working the proposal driven by the original deadline, it is doubtful that it will be able to make up for lost work even if an extension is granted. If you will not commit to continue proposal work after an extension request, do not ask for one, and consider a no-bid decision.

- **How much of an extension will you request?—**

Determine how much time you would like to have and how much you really need. Balance the two, then decide how much time you will request. You could ask for exactly what you need—or maybe not. For example, you might like a two-week extension, but feel you really need a one-week extension. Accordingly, you might ask the customer for a two-week extension thinking if the customer balks at it, it might counter with one-week extension. If you get an extension—whether it meets your likes or needs, are you sure your proposal team has the resources and commitment to produce a responsive and competitive proposal during the extra time? If not, do not ask for an extension, and consider a no-bid decision.

- **Can you justify the extension request?—**

Explain and defend your request. The extension may be needed because of something you or the customer did or did not do. If you are the cause of the request, it may require a strong dose of judgment on your part. It may not be helpful (or convincing) to justify your request because you have not managed your proposal properly. You might think it is the customer who caused the need for the extension; for example, the customer's setting of deadlines in the original RFP or amended RFP were not appropriate for the complexity of the required proposal or the customer did not consider the impact of the issued RFP changes. If so, be tactful in blaming the customer. In either case, explain the reason for the extension, framing your justification by how the exten-

sion would help you and, if possible, your competition and the customer. For example, more time to produce proposals for all competitors may result in better products, services, and prices for the customer. If you can not explain your request, other than admitting you need it because of your failings, the customer may not be sympathetic to your plight. If this is the case, you might take your chances by asking without any reason or justification, just press on without asking, or decide to no bid.

- **Will the customer grant an extension if asked?—**

If you think that a customer is open to an extension, it makes sense to conclude that an extension request may be successful. The following can help you measure the extension pulse of the customer.

- ▶ Informally contact the contracting officer (or procurement point of contact), and ask about the likelihood of an extension before submitting a formal request
- ▶ Analyze the track record of the customer in granting extensions (solicited or unsolicited) in the past
- ▶ Determine if the customer has indicated that a proposal extension will not be granted; for example, the customer may have a contract award or contract go-ahead date that is so firm that it will not or can not grant a proposal extension that could jeopardize meeting its procurement schedule or using authorized/budgeted funds for the proposed contract.

After answering all the preceding questions, what should you do if you are still not sure if you should ask for an extension? The Proposal Exorcist thinks you should ask yourself one final question: **“What’s the worst thing that can happen if we ask for an extension?”** If your answer is that the customer will say “no,” that could be enough of a reason for you to ask.