Has the Pandemic Helped Re-shape Best Practices in Procurement and Bid Management?

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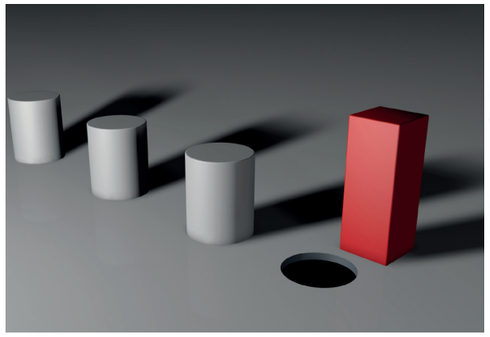
THOUSANDS OF PUBLIC SECTOR AND PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS COMPETE FOR THE RIGHT SUPPLIER TO FULFIL THEIR NEEDS ON A DAILY BASIS THROUGHOUT THE UK AND GLOBALLY. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY ORGANISATIONS FALL UPON USING THE INCORRECT STRATEGY, RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR THE JOB, WHICH CAN LEAD TO AN INAPPROPRIATE SUPPLIER SELECTION, OR THE CREATION OF A CONTRACT THAT IS NOT IN LINE WITH THE ORGANISATION'S ORIGINAL GOALS.

USING THE INCORRECT COMPETITIVE BIDDING STRATEGY IS AKIN TO TRYING TO FIT A SQUARE PEG INTO A ROUND HOLE. FORCING IT TO SUIT IS WASTEFUL AND MYOPIC. TO FURTHER COMPLICATE MATTERS, IN RECENT YEARS, NEWER, MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES HAVE ARISEN, TOUTING THE BENEFITS OF ALLOWING CUSTOMERS TO GAIN INPUT AND INCREASED SUPPLIER CREATIVITY. THIS HAS CREATED A MORE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT, MAKING BEST PRACTICE BIDDING AND INNOVATIVE THINKING EVEN MORE IMPORTANT.



Since 2014, Victoria Johnson CF.APMP and Head of Business Development at Barkers Commercial Services, has been researching the theory of 'Does Cost really outplay Quality' within a tender process. The results have been fascinating, revealing an almost equal split of importance.

Today, we have seen a huge shift in the importance of quality over cost and this white paper, acting as a guide to help businesses better understand how the shift in best practice has affected bidding models, explores how both Buyer and Supplier attitudes to a tender process have changed, becoming somewhat more demanding and elaborate.

By way of example, 6 years' ago, a Buyer may be looking at a quality and cost tender evaluation split of 60% quality and 40% price, providing high marks to organisations that demonstrate the ability to meet the scope of requirements with evidentiary support. However, as times have evolved, Buyers have recognised the importance of focusing on innovations, technology and social value aspects, making scoring criteria's more complex for tendering organisations. As such, building upon the transitional bidding best practices and streamlining the processes is crucial.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID19 ON BID MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us much about the way in which we work and has turned businesses upside down; rapid responses were needed to streamline processes that were required to be more agile and conducive to remote working. The result has been a swift introduction of innovations and improvements, which, in ordinary times would have taken months if not years to implement. This, coupled with the new 'virtual normality', has impacted both sides of Procurement and Bid Management processes, however, has this been for the better?

There will surely be an argument to both sides. Not all businesses have been able to adopt new virtual ways of working creating distinct challenges such as collaboration, team working and governance. Yet we have also seen more business-to-business support during these challenging times, enabling the sharing of knowledge and best practices that would support such organisations facing these challenges.

Traditionally, we know that a tender process requires a great deal of planning from both perspectives. This would include lengthy sales processes and tender execution planning, ensuring that all protocols and approvals are in place. However, the impact of the pandemic has resulted in a necessity for some tender processes to be turned around quickly ensuring consistency of supply and business as usual, where an extension to contract cannot apply.

This in turn has generated more competition, forcing some businesses responding to tenders to re-think their strategies and competitive edge – re-shaping their bidding best practice models to ensure that they stand out from the crowd with innovation and clear, succinct responses.

Today's sourcing professional should understand and enthusiastically embrace the entire suite of tools in their sourcing toolkit to carefully select the technique that is most appropriate for the requirement and situation.

As such, it can be argued that 2020 has significantly impacted the improvement of best practices within all areas of business functions, enabling more regime and focus.

It is evident that when working to timescales, pressure can result in lack of planning and storyboarding of the solution, with a focus on 'getting through to submission'. The unprecedented times have undoubtedly been challenging to many. With face-to-face collaboration now limited, it has become clear that planning, capture management and strategy focus is even more important, hence improving the trusted previous best practices. When an operating environment changes, improved processes that keep all contributors on the same page become much more important.

Having to respond with a more reactive approach and the challenges of setting up home working environments, have all had an impact. However, we have also seen that Bid Management processes have been able to take place in a more strategic and collaborative manner. Being able to schedule end to end process milestones through the use of online communications has established more robust approaches to best practice within many organisations.

Looking at how new behaviours and ways of working initiate change, according to researchers from University College London, it usually takes just 3 weeks to develop into new habits and 90 days for them to become embedded[1] . With the 12 month restricted period that we have recently faced, will businesses continue implementation of new best practices and improvements in 2021 and beyond?

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FROM CHALLENGE TO POSITIVE CHANGE

Below are suggestions on how to turn these challenging times into a positive approach to your Bid Management process:

1 TAKE TIME TO REFLECT
With a slight decrease in tender opportunities, find the time to look at previous ways of working and how you have had to adapt. What has worked well and how have you ensured to implement best practice into the challenge of fully virtual teams?

2 DOCUMENT YOUR BID PROCESS
Enhance your previous trusted process through documenting and embedding into your organisation and involve the whole business. It is very evident in many organisations that bid management is left to the sales and bid teams, however, opening this up to the whole business will allow all employees to appreciate the effort and requirement of a bid and how it is constructed. Many areas of organisations should provide important input into a bid response and therefore should understand the process.

3 ENSURE EFFECTIVE CAPTURE PLANNING
Implementing capture planning stages into your bid process is vital to understanding how your solution meets the requirements through a platform of added value. Enabling this step through collaborative storyboarding at the start of a bid will ensure consistency and clarity, thus developing win themes throughout.

4 REFRESH YOUR BID LIBRARY
With new ways of working and the consideration of remote service delivery in some industries, your content should reflect this. Developing a comprehensive bid and content library to support your improved best practices will ensure a more effective approach to future tender responses. A bid library developed in line with your Subject Matter Experts (SME's) will not only support the bid process as detailed above, but will engage colleagues.

5 DEVELOP COVID-RELATED RESPONSES
Buyers are inevitably, and have already begun, asking COVID related questions within tenders, especially in the public sector. They want to know how a business has adapted and ensured business as usual to provide comfort of service delivery and supply through robust continuity plans. Through a proactive approach, adding a review of current affairs to your best practice bid management will ensure you stay ahead of the game in a proactive manner.

6 EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY
Make working together as easy as possible for all. Project management systems such as Asana, Trello, Monday.com, and video conferencing platforms such as Teams and Zoom, and instant messaging systems are all useful tools for enhancing teamwork, not only in a remote environment but as part of a collaborative future model.

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CONCLUSION

Summarising the research of this white paper, it would be evident that the global COVID-19 pandemic has caused extensive changes to the ways in which businesses operate. Reverting to the question of 'Has the pandemic helped re-shape best practices in Procurement and Bid Management', it is certain that processes have had to become more streamlined due to the more agile requirements of working and operating, especially for commercial departments.

And if this has not naturally happened within your business, taking time to reflect on the steps outlined and re-visiting your traditional best practice procedures, will ensure the progression of continuous improvement.

REFERENCES

[1] P Lally et al (2010) How Are Habits Formed: Modelling Habit Formation In the Real World, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 998-1009 (2010)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victoria Johnson is a member of the APMP and has over 15 years' experience working in bid management helping organisations across a huge variety of sectors to secure additional business through successful bid wins. With an impressive 80%+ success rate, Victoria's track record is further supported by a portfolio of remarkable testimonials, evidencing her professional and detailed approach. Victoria is spearheading BWS Bid Writing Service, part of the Barkers family.

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