

Does the Competition Matter?

by Lindsay Diven, CPSM

When you're putting together proposals, how much attention should you give your competitors? Does knowing who your competitors are, change your strategy or what you write in your proposals? Should you change anything about your proposals because of what other firms are also submitting? Just how much does the competition really matter?

An easy answer is yes, competition does matter. But maybe not in the way you think it does. And, how much should it matter to you while you write your proposals? That answer isn't as easy. Let me explain what I mean.

Know the Competition BEFORE the Proposal is Issued

Ideally, as part of your pre-proposal positioning, you're learning about the project, client needs, and issues related to the project and also identifying what other types of firms are pursuing the client. Because these activities are done before the RFP is even advertised, you can take action and make decisions with feedback from the client.

You'll want to identify the potential competitors during this phase and begin identifying who might be on their team. With this knowledge, you can then begin to analyze your competition to formulate pre-proposal strategies, analyze your competitors' strengths and weaknesses, and best align your team to capitalize on the competitors' weaknesses and downplay their strengths.

Analyze the Competition

Once you've identified who your competitors are, you can start analyzing each of them. Identify your team's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats using a SWOT analysis. Then conduct a similar analysis for each competitor. Once this analysis is complete, you can compare how your team stacks up against the competition.

ABOUT LINDSAY DIVEN



Lindsay has worked at A/E firms for over 15 years helping firms create marketing and business development strategies to increase revenue growth and profit. She also trains marketing pros through Marketers Take Flight, a company dedicated to helping marketers learn proposal management, develop marketing strategies, and share technology resources. Contact: lindsay@marketerstakeflight.com

ABOUT ELEVATE MARKETING ADVISORS

Elevate Marketing Advisors develops marketing and business development campaigns to invigorate your brand, differentiate your firm, and drive business to your bottom line so you stay focused on design and delivery of your discipline.

We are driven to help people and firms realize their beyond through relationship, advocacy, and an elevated client experience. We do this through a daily commitment to our guiding principles:

- Embrace Authenticity
- Reject Mediocrity
- Invest in Relationships
- Deliver with Intention
- Have Fun and Kick Ass!

Does the Competition Matter, continued

Look at each competitor's weaknesses and see if you have any strengths that counter those. If you don't and you're still in the pre-proposal phase, what can you add to your team to turn it into a strength? Oftentimes you can do this by adding a specialty subconsultant or identifying a key staff member.

Conversely, it's critical to ascertain what competitor strengths align with your team's weaknesses. How can you overcome or downplay those weaknesses so that they don't prove advantageous to your competitors?

Shape Your Proposal Around the Competition

When it's time to write the proposal, use the information from the SWOT analysis to shape your proposal content. You'll want to develop content that:

- Highlights your strengths
- Mitigates your weaknesses
- Neutralizes a competitor's strength
- Ghosts a competitor's weakness

Ghosting the Competition

I want to point out a specific strategy around competition because it might be new to you. Ghosting is taking the opportunity to emphasize your strengths and contrast them against those that your competition lacks. It's a more polite or subtle way of pointing out your competitor's shortcomings without actually pointing a finger directly at them.

For instance, let's say you know that a competitor's specific expertise is located on the other side of the country — specifically, their team responsible for permitting. This team is hundreds of miles away from the design team, project, client, and local jurisdictions. Your ghost story might look like this:

"This project involves approvals from multiple local, state, and federal jurisdictions. Having a permitting team who lives and works locally and has the experience working with each jurisdiction will expedite the approval process and keep the project on track."

Balancing Competitive Intelligence

I shared how to use competitive intelligence in your pre-proposal strategies and writing proposals. However, I want to caution you to not focus so much on the competition that it stifles the actions that need to be completed to produce your winning proposal. You should still focus on what the client truly needs and is looking for, and then how to align your team to deliver exactly that. Yes, part of that is knowing your competitors and figuring out how you can differentiate, but the other, most important part, is staying focused on the client. You'll need to constantly balance addressing the client and project needs and shaping the competitive landscape.

To help you with this effort, I've put together a free template. This includes a way for you to capture strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for your firm and your competitors. To obtain your copy of the free SWOT analysis template, contact me at lindsay@marketerstakeflight.com.