

# BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY

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# RIDING THE WAVE

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Bid Solutions recently celebrated 20 years in business, and I thought I'd witnessed pretty much everything in the bid and proposal profession. We survived a major global recession, battled through COVID, and are currently dealing with the UK's exit from the EU.

All that experience to draw upon, yet the explosion of activity within our sector that started in May 2021 has exceeded all our expectations. We knew there would be a 'bounce' post-COVID, maybe a flurry of activity for a quarter or two as businesses switched back on. What we didn't expect was 12 continuous months of record activity, with no real end in sight.

This wave of activity has been both a blessing and a curse. At times it has felt like riding the Banzai Pipeline as the crest breaks just over your shoulder. I see companies within our profession talk of record revenues and profits, but I also listen to people daily who haven't taken a break for over 12 months. The mental wellbeing of many was tested to the limits with the pandemic. With no respite, this tidal wave of opportunity has pushed people even further out of their comfort zones.

The wave has delivered unprecedented opportunities to candidates looking to progress their careers, seeking better working conditions, or simply securing a pay rise. Never have I seen candidates with so much power in the job market. I genuinely believe this is a good thing. Not only does it bring balance to a process that has historically been heavily in favour of those hiring, it also forces companies to rethink their talent acquisition strategies. Those that have adapted fast are hiring the best talent in the market – they have streamlined interview processes, they have developed hybrid employment contracts, and they are putting the candidates' needs at the heart of the discussion.


My best advice to candidates is to remember that with this new power comes responsibility. Don't be afraid to negotiate – either with your existing employer or with an offer you receive – but have a clear, balanced, and defined rationale for doing so. Whilst salaries have increased over the last 12 months, not all industries and regions have been on the same trajectory. Baseless salary demands tend to stick out like a sore thumb and can quickly lead to the retraction of an offer.

The wave has also led to a significant increase in the number of bid and proposal businesses serving our niche market – more freelancers, new software businesses, expanding consultancies. When we set out in business you could count the number of bid and proposal specialists on one hand. There are now over 1,000 unique businesses in the UK supplying services to our profession. Globally, I imagine you could multiply that by five.

So, is the current wave of prosperity we're riding a blip or fundamentally here to stay? There was debate amongst our experts about this question; the consensus of the 14 fantastic articles that make up this issue of BQ is an optimistic one. I really hope you can make the most of the opportunities out there and enjoy the ride.

# AVOIDING THE BIDDING WIPEOUT

## - LEARNING FROM A CAREER IN CONSULTING



Australia is an island nation, blessed with thousands of kilometres of coastline containing some of the best surf in the world. So it's no surprise that people from the Land Down Under know a thing or two about surfing. You don't have to look far to see evidence of this.

Australian professional surfers comprise 30% of the current men's and women's ranks of the elite World Surf League Championship Tour and since 1964, Australia's best surfers have amassed 42 world titles between them.

Unfortunately, I'm no surfer. But when discussing ideas for BQ13 with a work colleague (albeit a mad keen Kiwi surfer), he shed some light on the finer points of this maritime pastime. As he was breaking down the steps involved in riding a wave, the connections to the three decades of my professional bidding life seemed uncanny. The genesis of this article became obvious.

So for those who are contemplating becoming a bid consultant or want to grow a bid consultancy or are just interested in the ups and downs of the journey of Australia's largest bid consulting firm, then read on.



## STEP 1: 'THE TAKE OFF'

This is where it all starts. When you sense or see the swell building on the horizon, you have two choices. You can either paddle away to safety or paddle towards the swell to put yourself in the best position to catch the wave.

My 'take off' was in 1999, when I left the relative safety of corporate life to start my own bid consultancy of one. I sensed an opportunity to carve out a niche in this emerging profession. In fact, it was so emerging in those days I couldn't find a competitor in my part of the world to benchmark against.



## STEP 2: 'THE DROP'

This is the 'leap of faith' moment when you turn your back on the fast-approaching wave and pin your ears back. Once you've caught the wave, the drop can often involve free-falling and provides a very chaotic but thrilling 'hang onto your hat' moment.

My 'drop' lasted a little longer than a mere moment, more like a decade. My first consultancy (The Proposal Company) was rapidly gathering pace. I had more work than I knew what to do with but I was enjoying the unpredictable and somewhat scary drop of my own making.



## STEP 3: 'THE BOTTOM TURN'

This is one of the most practised arts in surfing and a key enabler for everything that follows. Using the momentum created by the drop, you have to quickly set your intended direction – right or left, tight or drawn-out turn, the high line or the low line? The bottom turn is less scary than the drop but still offers significant potential for trouble.

For me, the 'bottom turn' happened in 2008 when my lifelong friend Dave Lunn and I started our current firm, BidWrite. Boldly, some might say, given the early ripples of the global financial crisis. But Aussies aren't known for a lack of confidence. So, despite the reservations, fear and growing economic headwinds, we set our arc and leaned into the challenge.



## STEP 4: 'THE TRIM'

This is the step most observers would associate with the phrase 'riding the wave' – when you optimise your stance and the position and direction of your board so you can get the most speed out of the wave. Sometimes you have to stall, turn back, or just put your foot down and go. Whatever strategy you choose, the ocean always provides a feedback loop.

For the first five or so years of BidWrite (2008-2013), we were trimming perfectly – or so I thought. We had momentum, options, a growing reputation, and a thirst for doubling down. "Faster," we thought, "faster!" But little did I realise the optimum trim we were enjoying was only hurtling us more quickly towards something all surfers dread – a potential wipeout.

We had made the mistake of taking our eye off the ocean and the wave caught up with us. Systems were suffering, cash reserves were waning, cracks were starting to appear and, most regretfully, staff began suffering the consequences of our speed-wobbles.

### What's that on the horizon?

What I see is that the swell around our industry has increased. Bid people are busier and have more opportunity than ever. What a time it is to be a part of this fast-growing profession. It is the take off all over again, but at least the profession is no longer oddly niche. Talented and ambitious people can sense a professional bidding pathway leading to a long, rewarding, and sustainable consulting career.

But the message I want to leave is this. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security. The ocean is a fickle master – sneaker waves and wipeouts can happen quickly, catching you completely off guard. Keep an ever-present eye on the conditions and be prepared to adapt accordingly. And while you need to build cash reserves to weather some inevitable storms, remember that this is a give, not take, profession.

Set yourself up for a sustainable future by investing in yourself, your staff, your community, and your profession. Clients know what integrity looks like and will reward you in spades.

If these behaviours become part of your muscle memory, they will take you safely back to shore long after the wave has gone. Don't be scared off by occasional choppy waters and resist the temptation to be a 'one wave wonder' consultant. Their wipeouts could well be career ending, whereas you will live to surf another day.

# A WAVE OF WORDS

LISA READMAN

IN A BUSY MARKET, BIDS COME IN THICK AND FAST LIKE WAVES TO THE SHORE. CHOOSING THE RIGHT BID (OR THE RIGHT WAVE) TAKES PATIENCE AND KNOWHOW. YOU HAVE TO CHECK THE CONDITIONS (MARKET OR WEATHER). YOU HAVE TO BE PREPARED AT ALL TIMES (BID TEAM READY OR BOARD WAXED). TO SUCCEED, YOU NEED TO MAKE AN IMPACT. THE WORDS IN YOUR BID NEED TO MAKE YOU STAND OUT, LIKE THE SURFER WITH THE BRIGHTEST WETSUIT ON THE BEACH.

*Teamwork*  
*Follow the process*  
*Make a plan*  
*Winning*  
*Don't cut corners*  
*Proofreading*

I am passionate about words. As a bid writer, proofreader, copy editor and former Lloyds of London underwriter, words are my lifeblood. When I listen to songs, I hear the lyrics before the music. I embody Jasper Fforde's team slogan in his Thursday Next book series: *"Wordage is my business; grammar is my game."*

I know this is not a widely shared passion. SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) strikes fear into the hearts of many - but we shouldn't lose sight of its value in a "winning" business context. In a professional setting, poor language skills can taint your company's credibility and impact how your brand is received.

In her article "Yes, Good Grammar Is (Still) Important, and Here's Why"<sup>1</sup>, Megan Krause defines good grammar as a brand ambassador. She writes, "It doesn't matter if you're talking about your personal brand or your business brand – your grammar, spelling and punctuation represents you in the world. It sends the reader a message about your authority and attention to detail. It's a trust signal; it says, *I do good work. You can feel safe hiring me/buying from me/retaining my services.*"

Conversely, poor grammar harms your credibility and makes you look careless."

I agree wholeheartedly. So do most of the bid teams I work with - in theory at least.

If I ask a bid team if it's important for their document to be spelled and punctuated correctly, tell a clear story and engage the review panel, they'll emphatically say, "Yes!" Then comes the realisation they have to allow time for proofreading and editing in the bid timetable. And the emphatic "Yes" often turns to "Maybe..." and occasionally turns to "No, we don't have time."

# Communication Impactful

## I'm sorry...what?

Cutting corners by eliminating proofreading/copy editing may seem justifiable when bids are coming one after another, like a wave set on the California beaches I used to call home. But it is short-sighted and this is why.

Your written submission needs to provide concise and impactful responses to the tender questions. It needs to clearly lay out your solution and why it will work. A woolly response gives the client no confidence. It can also create a legal minefield as clients are increasingly incorporating written submissions into contract terms and conditions.

In addition, your written response should reflect the client's own 'tone'. Once you identify the language they use to promote themselves, you can mirror their approach in your response – but without compromising on good grammar. Formal language can seem confusing or even archaic but it provides a framework for clearly demonstrating competence to your client. It cannot be replaced by informal language in the business world.

Here are some key actions (which, as we all know, speak louder than words) for consistently incorporating proofreading/copy editing into every bid:

- **Build a minimum number of days into your bid timetable for proofreading and editing (a loose estimate is one day per 50 pages)**
- **Be clear on what you expect your proofreader/copy editor to do. Are they only checking for SPAG issues or are they also reviewing your response to see if (or how well) you've answered the client's questions? Confirm whether words in charts, graphics, tables or images should be included in their review.**
- **Keep the proofreader/copy editor in the loop! Whether an in-house team member or an outsourced specialist is providing the service, give as much notice as possible if there will be a delay in completing the written submission. Just because you've built a buffer for slippage into your bid timetable doesn't mean they have.**
- **When you get the proofed/edited version back, don't just click "Accept All Changes". The suggested changes will be grounded in grammar and best practice but they are only suggestions. The ultimate responsibility for the words in your written submission rests with you (the Bid Manager or solution approver).**
- **Never assume that price is always king and a poorly written submission doesn't matter. I once sat on a review panel where the top two submissions were equal on price and quality, so the contract was awarded to the bidder with the fewest spelling mistakes.**
- **Don't go for style over substance. A beautifully designed document will not paper over the cracks of bad writing. Submissions are increasingly portal-based, making it more difficult than ever to divert attention from mistakes with visual 'razzle dazzle'.**

World-renowned surfer Laird Hamilton said, "We're all equal before a wave", just as we're all equal before a bid review panel. He succeeded because he planned his approach and followed his proven process. He didn't cut corners. He stayed balanced - whether in the wave's peak or trough - so he could ride smoothly to the shore.

We can all do the same when riding a bidding wave. Make a plan, follow the process, don't cut corners, stay balanced. The best bid of your life is still out there. Surf on a wave of words to success.

<sup>1</sup> (Krause, 2018) <https://www.clearvoice.com/blog/yes-good-grammar-still-important-heres/>



**JON WILLIAMS**

# FALL BRILLIANTLY

**BACK IN MY DAYS AS A PROFESSIONAL SURFER IN AUSTRALIA, I ALWAYS USED TO SAY: "IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO ON THE CREST OF THE WAVE: IT'S HOW YOU GET READY TO FALL OFF."\***



We're in boom times. Jobs are a-plenty right now. Consultants - at least the good ones - have never had it so good.

But boom's invariably followed by bust, right? Because it's easy right now to take the money, to work flat-out chasing all of those RFPs, to reap the benefits of the good times. But bidding for most of us isn't a temporary gig: it's our career, our ongoing livelihood. We'll all go through the inevitable ups and downs of the economic cycle.

So here are half a dozen things I suggest you ponder, to position yourself so that the fall - whenever it happens - isn't too hard and you're best placed to respond when things do get tighter:

## **MOVE JOBS - MAYBE**

## **THINK ABOUT THE JOB AFTER NEXT**

## **BUILD YOUR SKILLS**

## **BUILD YOUR NETWORK**

## **GET CERTIFIED**

## **MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF**

### **1. Move jobs - maybe**

If you're working for a company that takes advantage of the goodwill and hardworking ethic of its bid and proposal people, now's the time to find somewhere that will treat you with more respect. (Simple test: if you've already worked three weekends in 2022 without truly wanting to do so, get out.) Likewise, if your company talks the talk about best practice but you feel like you're eternally pushing the stone uphill to get anything done, there are places out there that "get it" - who are investing to strengthen their already good practices and are probably looking for great people.

### **2. Think about the job after next**

Few readers of BQ are in the role right now that they'll be doing until they retire. So where's your career really going? What characterises you as a bid and proposal professional? Do you want to specialise in certain areas of the process? What sectors fascinate you? Does consultancy appeal as a vocation? Where do you really want the waves to take you?

### **3. Build your skills**

Sit down and do a thorough assessment of your current strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development. And make sure you push yourself to the next level, so you're the one who stays afloat when we all come off the wave. (Bid and proposal people love talking, right? And even the least insightful webinars and meetings bring some insights - even if it's just the confidence that comes from "I know all this already".)

### **4. Build your network**

Get to know people and get known. This is the time to tell your boss they really do need to sponsor you to attend events and conferences - if they want to keep you, motivate you, and see you continue to grow in

your career. APMP has emerged from the debacle of its failed rebranding last year stronger than ever. Be part of it. It's ours.

### **5. Get certified**

If you're truly a bid / proposal leader and you're not yet an APMP Professional, what are you hiding from? Atop the wave, you should be leading by example. If you're doing great things running bids, get your Practitioner qualification. If you're not certified at all, join the family: it shows that you're serious about a career in our profession. And look, too, at the newer and emerging micro-certifications: Capture. Writing. Price-to-win (the "next big thing" that's starting to be increasingly in vogue).

### **6. Make time for yourself**

Riding the wave takes energy. Lots of it. It's draining. It's never been more important to pause for breath between bids, to find that recovery time. To go for a long walk in the middle of the day. To spend time with family and friends. Let's not let the boom lead to a wellbeing crisis.

We're still in the midst of a pandemic. The global energy crisis is worsening. There's war in Europe (particularly personally painful, as I've had family links to Ukraine and spent a lot of time in Kyiv). The warning signs are all there. So enjoy riding the wave: it's exhilarating. But make sure this is a time that positions you for the next stage of your career success.

And whatever you do: do great things. There's money there right now for organisations to invest in getting better. Be the one who helps yours to do just that.

\* Or at least I would have done, had I ever been a professional surfer!

**RITA MASCIA**

# TALKING ABOUT RIDING THE WAVES... MORE LIKE A TSUNAMI



**IN THE 22+ YEARS THAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN BIDS NEVER BEFORE HAVE I SEEN SO MUCH ACTIVITY AS THERE IS NOW. BID PROFESSIONALS ARE SUPER BUSY. COLLEAGUES ARE STARTING CONSULTANCIES. OWNERS OF MICROBUSINESSES HAVE RECRUITED STAFF FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

But why is our industry having a period of great prosperity? In a pandemic especially? I sense that the reasons I suggest may resonate with others.

**|| SHALL WE  
CELEBRATE  
THIS CHANGED  
SCENARIO OR  
PROCEED WITH  
CAUTION? ||**



### Compensations and perks

It is a candidate market at the moment. Market forces have created this inflated compensation bubble. Was the market undervalued before? Hell yes! The perks have also changed. Working from anywhere (WFA) is the new equivalent of Google's free lunches and onsite laundromats (yes, some people like to wash their clothes at work).

Recently, someone approached me with a bid management role with an incredible package and great benefits. I carried out due diligence on the company as it seemed too good to be true. And it was! There are opportunities out there that you may never see again. Research them thoroughly.

### Virtual collaboration software

An avalanche of collaboration tools has sprung up, changing the way we do business. WFA is definitely easier now. Even your grandmother is using Zoom (other suppliers are available). These digital tools have also helped to attract new talent to our industry who may not have considered a career in bid management before.

### Impact of COVID restrictions

Pre-COVID, salespeople would go out to see customers. They would wine and dine them and build up enough rapport to secure a sale. They would often win a contract without participating in a formal procurement process. Briefly ignoring implications for transparency and anti-bribery policies that most companies now have, bid teams have mostly been invisible within this typical sales cycle. Bid professionals would operate unseen and mostly interact face-to-face with customers only at bidders' events, or negotiation stage. Otherwise they'd stay in the background.

Then COVID restrictions happened, and the scenario I've illustrated didn't work as well anymore. There was no travel. No appointments made to show customers the products and services on offer. No taking clients out for lunch to catch up on competitors' news. I witnessed salespeople's frustration first hand, with my sales colleagues who were unable to meet with their home-bound customers.

### Bigger role for procurement teams

Despite this, companies still needed to buy services and products. In the absence of flashy sales presentations or freebies given out at sales meetings, procurement officers withstood the worst of this new landscape. Did you know that New York State resorted to posting on Twitter to find vendors at the apex of COVID infections? On the other hand, even companies not subject to public procurement rules began running tendering processes that resemble those of current public sector bids.

In the absence of contracts won via salespeople influencing customers, bid teams got busier, aided by newly available digital bid management tools. While a salesperson is naturally talented at building rapport, they are rarely good at managing a proposal, especially remotely. In contrast, even younger or less experienced bid professionals finally had an opportunity to get in front of the customer (albeit virtually) and submit responses to increasingly higher numbers of opportunities.

### Shall we celebrate this changed scenario or proceed with caution?

I'll sit on the fence on this one. Definitely lots to celebrate. Finally, we are in demand for our skills and ability to respond with agility to 'unprecedented changes' (two words some companies use to justify poor customer service – but that's another article altogether).

Sure, opportunities and crazy salaries abound. However, do your homework before you jump ship. We still don't know for sure if this is a bubble. For the record, I didn't apply for that job vacancy. For me compensation is not everything. You may think differently and may want to secure a salary resembling those in the financial sector.

For those of you hiring without big budgets, make the most of the APMP apprenticeship scheme and partner with a bid consultancy on the important projects you simply must win. Consultancies can help you win in the interim while you build your permanent team.

Sales professionals meanwhile are keen to go back to what was the status quo. If you gained access to your clients in key accounts and developed virtual relationships during this period, make sure that as things go back to (the new) normal, you keep those relationships alive. Stand your ground with your sales teams and ensure that you are there for all the important conversations.

Personally, I am lucky to be a fully-fledged member of our commercial team. If you feel you are relegated to the position you had pre-COVID, push back and continue to find opportunities to develop that expanded role further.

As bid professionals, working with uncertainty and planning for all eventualities is what we do best. That's why we all thrived during COVID. We are good at herding our Subject Matter Contributor cats, even virtually, and are best at contingency planning. Suddenly, bid professionals in this changed environment are recognised as vital agents for achieving success.

### Long may this continue.

# **BE CYNICAL. BE RUTHLESS! DEALING WITH SURGING DEMAND**



**LORRAINE  
BAIRD**



**UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN LIVING IN A CAVE RECENTLY, YOU CAN'T FAIL TO HAVE NOTICED WE APPEAR TO BE DROWNING IN TENDERS RIGHT NOW. TENDERS TO THE LEFT OF US, TENDERS TO THE RIGHT. DROWNING IN POTENTIAL. CHOKING ON HOPE. WHERE HAVE THEY COME FROM? MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHERE ARE THEY GOING? AND WHY?**

As a proposal manager this is fab news, isn't it? Post-pandemic euphoria, right? Possibilities popping out of every orifice (no sniggering at the back). Work, work, work. Money, money, money. Joy of joys.

But, no, wait a minute. Not so fast.

We all know the world of proposals can be one of peaks and troughs. Sometimes Himalayan. We're clearly in one now. But is it a peak? Or is it a new normal? Can we cope? I have a great team of amazing professionals but there are only so many hours in a day. Twenty-four, the last time I checked. Work is just one part of life. There's sleeping, too. And eating. And living. All of which means I can't just tell everyone to buckle down and roll their sleeves up. Late nights and weekend working is just about acceptable now and again but it's not a sustainable option. Not by a long chalk.

During an opportunity surge like this, we're like kids in a sweet shop – so many goodies, so little time. Quick! Grab what you can, while you can...sugar rush, crash and burn, pocket money gone. Oops.

So, what should we do?

### **Two things. Be cynical. Be ruthless!**

If you think 'cynical' sounds a bit brutal, look it up in a thesaurus: "Sceptical, doubtful, suspicious". Tell me, bid and proposal folks, how often have those words summed up your thoughts sitting across from your sales leads describing their next "must-win" opportunity? (Cue wry smiles all round.)

As for 'ruthless', I'm not talking heartless piracy here. I mean relentless and inexorable.

Why am I recommending this? Think about it. We can't simply throw open a window and shout for more hands on deck. Top quality professionals don't grow on trees, you know. Nor can they be conjured out of thin air. We need to work with what we've got, which means working cleverly.

### **Cynical and ruthless. Step back, pick your target, strike.**

We need to qualify our deals more vigorously! Being cynical means starting off with a healthy dose of suspicion. Is this a deal we have a chance of winning? The **best** chance of winning? Can we deliver? And does the client really, truly intend to move, or is this just a fishing exercise? The first stage of ruthlessness is NOT qualifying in those deals that don't pass the 'cynical' test – and sticking to the decision. The second stage is acknowledging we're unlikely to have enough resources to relentlessly pursue five deals at once (even if we had five deals that passed the 'cynical' test). It's simply unrealistic. Once we've narrowed down our targets, we must narrow them down again. As a business, we need to take the tough decisions and agree which opportunities we are going to qualify in to continue.

We need to take priority calls within our organisations – together. Yes, that's right – we need to do it together! This means working hand-in-hand with sales, subject matter experts and your senior leadership team to work through the following five steps:

#### **1. Executive support to be ruthless.**

Your board needs to buy-in to this approach. If they want to keep swinging in the hope they'll eventually land the knockout blow, you'll never adopt the right culture to pursue the right deals.

#### **2. Pipeline planning.**

A good sales process feeds a healthy pipeline, allowing sales leads to filter opportunities and agree with senior management those to initially pursue. Gathering high-level information on these opportunities into a pipeline looking 12-18 months ahead will give you an at-a-glance view of any peaks to be aware of – being mindful there will be the inevitable 'unexpected' opportunities arising. And regular pipeline meetings between you and the sales lead will allow you to discuss the opportunities and begin early capture or pre-proposal planning.

#### **3. Qualify out until qualified in.**

We shouldn't chase a deal until we can justify why we're doing it and the resources we'll need. Take the approach that until you can satisfy your qualification criteria, the deal is not deemed as 'qualified in'. This will instinctively drive more positive behaviour, and more action, to gather the information needed to meet the criteria.

#### **4. Formal reviews/gate decisions.**

Structured and timely reviews and gate decisions ensure compliance, comprehensiveness and a higher probability of winning bids. Do you have the capabilities to meet your customers' needs and objectives? How do you match up against the competition?

#### **5. Qualify, qualify and qualify again.**

Because all good things come in threes! Qualification is not only completed once at the beginning of your capture phase (or you may class this as pre-proposal). Qualification should take place continuously throughout the capture planning process. Stages such as initial assessment, after solution definition (when new information becomes available), pre-proposal (after RFP receipt) and pre-submission. Set expectations with your team that this will be a continual process and feed the findings/outputs into your reviews and gate decisions.

That's it, really. Five steps that will help your business choose the right wave to ride in a sea of potential opportunities.

**AS MY BIDDING COLLEAGUES AND COUNTERPARTS BECOME BUSIER AND THE BIDDING INDUSTRY HEATS UP ACROSS GEOGRAPHIES, I FIND MYSELF IN THE FORTUNATE POSITION OF BEING IN A CAREER THAT SEEMS TO CONSTANTLY BE IN GREATER DEMAND.**

**MICHAEL  
BROWN**

This is obviously very good for the people who ended up on this career path, which is increasingly a profession in its own right. This article explores whether this is a fleeting moment or a more sustained professionalisation of procurement processes that result in the need for people like us, the bidding professionals.


#### **What is the driver behind the need for more bid teams?**

Anyone who works in medium to large companies (and increasingly even in small businesses) will be used to the mandatory training modules on conflict of interest and other business anti-corruption initiatives. This drive is led, in part, by the World Trade Organisation and their Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) 2012 which requires member states to adhere to these rules. National legislation is increasingly powerful as well. The UK Bribery Act (2010) allows prosecution for corrupt practices (even for companies outside the UK). The US's Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977 has similar clauses regarding enforcement of US companies even overseas. Most other countries have their own similar legislation.

The net result is that the drive for anti-corrupt practices has, over time, led to a professionalisation of procurement for goods and services worldwide. This corresponds to the need for professional bid teams to be set up across all sectors.

To put it simply, this means the need for professional bid teams is here to stay.

# **A BID BUBBLE OR THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF PROCUREMENT?**



**|| THE NET RESULT IS THAT THE DRIVE FOR ANTI-CORRUPT PRACTICES HAS, OVER TIME, LED TO A PROFESSIONALISATION OF PROCUREMENT FOR GOODS AND SERVICES WORLDWIDE. ||**

### Who benefits?

One positive reason for the probable sustainment of formal proposal processes is linked to the current economic climate. Our post-COVID world is steeped in inflation, sharp price increases and a turbulent global political environment.

This means that clients in both public and private sectors can much more easily demonstrate value for money and appropriate commercial clarity through the ability to compare bidders. For example, the ability to clearly assess the assumptions, exclusions and contractual red lines across a minimum of three bidders results in far fewer variations once a project has been won. Clear comparisons of companies' abilities, methodologies, CVs and insurance provisions lead to reduced risks for clients. This is thanks to a clear understanding of the 'small print' by professional procurement teams.

On the other side of the fence, professional bid teams must be set up to assess the commercial and technical viability of the projects they propose to bid for. These teams can be expensive and require investment. In the long run, though, they benefit the bidding companies by providing confidence that whatever they are bidding for has been thoroughly considered and assessed prior to submitting a proposal.

That said, it is possible clients may be more likely to return to informal procurement processes when the boom times end and liquidity returns. This could mean the teams dealing with RFPs would be reduced or disbanded. The production of informal quotes would be returned to the after-hours tasks of project managers and other fatigued professionals with day jobs and little time for detailed commercial and technical responses.

However, this backtracking is unlikely. Once clients (both public and private) have set up systems and processes that formalise the procurement of goods and services, they should remain in place thanks to the clear benefits mentioned above. The days of informal contracts being handed out without formal paper trails and auditable documentation are over in most established industries and geographies. Even in the developing world, formal procurement processes are increasing due to a combination of legislative oversight and global norms being implemented.

Multinationals who have been burnt in the past by questionable practices in the developing world are now often at the forefront of the drive for auditable and transparent securing of projects to allay the fears of shareholders. This is also backed up by the increased enforcement of anti-corruption legislation across the world.

### Conclusion

To reiterate the key point, there is a clear increase in a 'norms and rule-based system' of procurement processes across public and private sectors, and across multiple geographies. As a result, professional bid teams are here to stay.

# SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS

**WHEN ASKED BY MARTIN TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT HUGE GROWTH IN THE BIDDING INDUSTRY, I RESPONDED BY SAYING IT DIDN'T SURPRISE ME.**

## Back in the day....

I moved away from marketing management to concentrate on bids and proposals over fifteen years ago. The position was a new and rare one – but my experience (and success) in organising bid responses and designing pitches gave me the appropriate skills. My focus had the positive impact they were looking for.

I was introduced to the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) a year into the role. This served as a platform for the huge transformation in how opportunities were managed, beyond simply turning responses around quickly.

Extensive professional development, industry awards and additions to the team all followed. The 'Bids Team' was quickly recognised for providing specialist, valuable expertise and became a vital part of the company's growth strategy.

## More recently...

Fast forward to 2019. The opportunity to join a market-leading, global professional services business presented itself, again in a newly created position. I had greater experience and over a decade's commitment to professional development with APMP. I moved on. The result has been the same – a positive impact and success. Our progress has been much quicker, the impact has been greater and the role is much more personally rewarding.



## The difference between winning and losing is often very narrow

*“The inches we need are everywhere around us. They’re in every break of the game, every minute, every second. On this team we fight for that inch.”* Tony D’Amato (played by Al Pacino), Any Given Sunday

The markets most of us operate in today have never been more competitive. Client demands are naturally evolving, as are their sophisticated approaches to market engagement, led by supply chain experts. Additionally, many competitors across all markets are driven by strategies which are committed to professional sales teams, customer centricity, innovation and differentiation.

As a result, the margins between those who are appointed and those who are not (the winners and losers) is often extremely narrow. For me, expert bid and proposal management professionals are an intrinsic part of a successful business growth strategy. Embedding them into the process to increase performance, retain existing clients and win new ones is a no-brainer.

## If we build it, they will come

*“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”* Oliver Wendell Holmes

The UK bidding industry is unrecognisable from 15 years ago. The role of a bid team continues to grow and is more enriched than ever before. The days of simply co-ordinating submissions and smoothing responses have long gone.

I continue, though, to be surprised when new colleagues in client-facing roles compare the level of support our UK bid team provides with the support received in previous companies (either far less or none at all). It confirms there is still huge scope for people to make a difference.

That scope is represented by the continuing evolution of our bid specialist roles and the recognition of their value in supporting growth. Essentially, this value comes from applying processes that stimulate winning business: challenging people to think like the client and helping bid teams to perform at their best throughout the complete sales cycle.

We deliver value every day through well-structured pre-bid capture programmes, objective opportunity assessment tools, clear response development processes, creative design, coaching, pitch management, undertaking feedbacks, building content management systems, bid team wellbeing and performance analytics. We are also regularly involved with the development of content and presentations, helping senior leaders to articulate internal strategic messages.

I can also say with certainty that the value of our involvement is felt beyond sales teams. For example, the subject matter experts who make positive contributions to winning business gain incredible value from the challenge, coaching and support they receive. They and other stakeholders benefit from our leadership in creating and honing how business-line propositions are articulated and presented in a compelling way. Our UK proposition toolkits, which we have evolved with operational leads over the past three years, are acclaimed as world class by colleagues from across the globe.

## The bid industry is a growth industry

The impact of effective bid and presentation teams goes beyond simply increasing win rates. It drives focus and efficiency, stimulates confidence and ambition, and elevates the levels of professionalism experienced by the client at every stage of engagement.

Growth is the natural result. We are involved in three times more opportunities than we were three years ago. Our team is expanding as we prepare to support our company’s European bid teams. Our bid experts are increasing their knowledge and enhancing their value in the company and the industry overall.

**The bid industry is a growth industry and rightly so. Long may it continue.**

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**THE INCHES WE NEED ARE EVERYWHERE AROUND US. THEY’RE IN EVERY BREAK OF THE GAME, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY SECOND, ON THIS TEAM WE FIGHT FOR THAT INCH.”**



**Tony D’Amato (played by Al Pacino),  
Any Given Sunday**




PIPPA BIRCH

# FULLY MACKING CORDUROY TO THE HORIZON

|| LIFE SHOULD NOT BE A JOURNEY TO THE GRAVE WITH THE INTENTION OF ARRIVING SAFELY IN A PRETTY AND WELL-PRESERVED BODY, BUT RATHER TO SKID IN BROADSIDE IN A CLOUD OF SMOKE, THOROUGHLY USED UP, TOTALLY WORN OUT, AND LOUDLY PROCLAIMING "WOW! WHAT A RIDE!" ||

Hunter S. Thompson



It feels like I have been 'riding the wave' for ten years if I think about it. I walked out of paid employment in 2012, straight into my first contract, and I haven't really stopped since. The wave became too gnarly in 2020, which was why I felt compelled to add one bid writer to Pipster. That's right. One. Then I sneezed, and one became six. We are busy too – I would never have been able to help Pipster clients in the way we do now without #TeamPipster, and I'm not sure I could go back to working on my own again now I have got used to having such a wonderful team.

Unlike most businesses, Pipster's growth has not been based on a sound business plan, exceptional entrepreneurship, or strategic positioning. It has happened simply due to high demand. Pretty much as a result of a huge wave of work that started during the pandemic and has kept coming. It has felt like the 50-year storm in Point Break - that 'must catch' wave - and occurred simply because I hate saying "no" to my beloved clients. The great thing is, unlike Bodhi, it isn't my final wave. The breakers keep rolling in and all my lovely Pipsters have embraced everything I have thrown at them.

During this time, I have learnt many things about running the business and working in a new way with clients – and I am STILL learning. Here are my thoughts:

- **Dare to sit in the pocket of that wave without wiping out: Go with the flow. Don't be scared by it or it will consume you. However, things change – adapt and flex with requirements and situations or you will get mullered. Listen to advice but go with your gut. There are people out there who really know their stuff, but they aren't you, and you know yourself better than anyone else.**
- **Be part of the dawn patrol: Get out there early. Keep your eyes open, read the right stuff, and speak to your fellow bid professionals. We get booked up to four years in advance for some frameworks. Is this too much of a look ahead? I don't think so. I work on yearly quarters through a simple spreadsheet (soon to become a Teams Planner), which holds all confirmed enquiries. I can easily tell whether we can resource it, or whether I need to look at finding additional people.**
- **Gather the best surf buddies: It is still recruitment madness in our industry. Know what you want, make your expectations clear and don't settle for anything less. Yes, it is a job seekers market, but you alone know what you can afford and the sort of people you want working for you. Stick to your guns, but also be open to something a little different if it adds value.**

- **Don't be a wave hog: When you simply can't do it, say "No" – but offer a solution. I provide names of other trusted consultants. We are all in this together, and there is plenty of work to go around for everyone.**
- **Beware of the rip tide: This can sweep you out to dangerous waters before you know it. Taking on too much work without thinking it through is never a good idea, as it leaves the team stressed and emotional, and the efforts in bidding diluted. We need to feel in control of our workload, not swept along by it.**
- **When you nail those aerials, do it again: Celebrate the highs and the wins, and then conduct a thorough lessons learnt session. If you are to keep riding the wave at its crest, you need to work out why, so you can repeat success. And if that wave becomes a doubler, you need to be able to resource and plan accordingly.**

And what if the sea becomes still? This wave can't last for ever. Or can it? There is always a lull and some ankle slappers before the sea swells again. I personally think this wave is here to stay – people are always going to want to buy stuff, and the public procurement processes are going to continue to evolve. Companies are starting to understand, win, grow, and require extra resource – which, of course, needs bid professionals to keep doing their thing.

This wave keeps rolling. I am still getting several daily work requests from existing and potential clients, recruiters and other consultants. It seems to be on the up, which may be due to our presence on social media, word getting out that we are totally excellent at what we do, or it may genuinely be due to the public sector work increasing. Hunter S. Thompson once wrote, *"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a ride!"*. I say we ALL continue to ride this wave as long as it lasts, and if it does end, just get back out there and drop into the next tubular!

**Latronic...**



# A CHANGING TIDE: PUBLIC SECTOR BIDDING IN A NEW MARKET

ISABELLA STEVENSON

RIDING THE WAVE  
AFTER THE STORM

THE NEW WAVE

UNCHARTED WATERS

A NEW HORIZON

**THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION HAVE EXTENDED AND THE LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING HAS DEEPENED BETWEEN SUPPLIER AND BUYER. THIS IS SOMETHING TO BE CELEBRATED IN THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF BIDS AND TENDERS.**

### Riding the wave after the storm

'Riding the wave' in public sector bidding is an interesting topic within its own right. The last two years have seen a dramatic shift in our approach to bidding and interaction with buying authorities.

Much of the pipeline recovery can be attributed to the use of tendering to help rebuild communities post-COVID, as indicated in the Government's Green Paper, Transforming Public Procurement, published at the end of 2020.

### The new wave

Observing this new wave has been fascinating and is coupled with recently joining a sector that is still considered 'new' in many camps - Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure. This could therefore be described as 'riding the double wave'!

In its EV infrastructure strategy, the Government sets out the vision and plan for the rollout of an EV charging infrastructure in the UK, aligned to their commitment for net zero emissions by 2050.

The Government recognises the crucial role that local authorities play in meeting commitments, but also acknowledges this is a new and complex area for them to navigate.

With authorities getting to grips with the infrastructure requirements, this could impact the way in which they approach bidding and going to tender on these projects.

The impact is not necessarily negative though. In fact, it could signal new ways of working and communicating between buyer and supplier as this new market sector is bought into focus.

This is further emphasised by the existing On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS), which can provide grant funding to local authorities to install chargepoints. Covering these costs appears to signal a revised focus on the quality offering of the tender, not just the price.

Authorities focusing more readily on the quality element of bids will ensure the way they operate is more outcome driven. It feels like we, as suppliers and buyers, are riding this wave together to ensure successful project delivery and encourage the continuation of bidding best practice in a sector that did not really exist a decade ago.

### Uncharted waters

Entering into a less established sector provides the opportunity to try and apply all the best practice, expertise and insight developed throughout your career in bidding as the sector grows, including library development and model responses.

This could be considered a daunting prospect. It could also be considered an exciting opportunity for those involved in the tendering process (from wherever they are positioned within it) for collaborative working, stronger communication and, ultimately, successful project delivery.

In particular, I feel the lines of communication have extended and the level of understanding has deepened between supplier and buyer. This is something to be celebrated in the changing landscape of bids and tenders. For instance, a large percentage of EV infrastructure tenders are available via Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS) – flexible frameworks that suppliers can join at any time. As the need for EV infrastructure continues to grow, potential suppliers have more visibility of buyer requirements on the horizon, through open dialogue and a ready response to any clarification questions we may raise.


Additionally, a significant number of the EV infrastructure tenders that are being released have a less prescriptive feel to them. This provides suppliers the chance to showcase their technology, added value and innovation. In many respects, this feels like a new way of bidding, where the destination has been set but the road you decide upon is autonomous.

Similar to the more open dialogue that is occurring through the use of a DPS, the same could be said for the actual tender process itself. As suppliers of EV Infrastructure are a relatively new (and somewhat niche) addition to public procurement exercises, there seems to be more willingness from buying authorities to engage with us prior to tender submission.

This has become apparent through their swift clarification responses or through the conduct of an early engagement exercise (even before tender release).

### A new horizon

The EV infrastructure sector is set to continue to grow and evolve. I am excited to see how the arena of bids will move along with it. The necessity to maintain momentum in this sector and to ride the wave is key to delivering net zero road transport and helping to tackle the continuing climate crisis. We are riding the waves in uncharted water but safe land is on the horizon.



# TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST? THAT IS THE QUESTION!

ANDY HAIGH

## HOW WE DEALT WITH THE TURMOIL

I have not enjoyed the pandemic. Like most people, we adapted to the circumstances we were faced with and tried to carry on.

You may think that I am a bit 'sad', but I get excited by procurement and its challenges. Some years ago, I had the opportunity to spend time looking at the bidding and tendering environment for both sides for many contracts. I spent time with different parts of the Public Sector, who needed to act as both buyers and occasionally, sellers. I was able to see what they had to do to buy what they needed. I saw how they dealt with the many bids they had to evaluate. I found out how they would then justify their choice of the winner.

|| I HAVE FOUND THAT NO  
COMPUTER TOOLS CAN EVER  
GIVE THE ADDED VALUE WHICH  
COMES FROM DIRECT, FACE-TO-FACE  
COMMUNICATIONS. ||

It seemed to me that the different processes used by the buyers and sellers were disconnected. Often, the people writing the tender questions were not the people who would use the products and services. The bid team responding to the tender was made up of hostages from across the business. Mostly, they were technical experts, not employed to write sales text. They were only on the team because they were 'available'.

Typically, the bid writers were not writing in response to the client's needs or questions. Their responses were not presenting what the bid evaluators had to score. In any case, many of the evaluators were not experts. They, too, were only selected as evaluators because they were available. To make matters worse, the service delivery team on the supplier side would only become involved after contract signature. Little wonder that Public Sector procurements routinely went wrong! There was a lack of trust from the buyers towards the sellers. They thought the sellers routinely broke (and would break) their promises.

Going into the pandemic brought more incongruities. Buyers and bid teams were all working from home. Life was condensed into a screen supported by an occasional Teams or telephone call. Working hours became very flexible. All the contributors became isolated. Excuses blaming the pandemic were rife. The entire process became even more poorly joined up.

This physical isolation probably did not change our ability to help our clients improve their bids. Of course, I still get excited about working out how a business can win. This is the fundamental reason that we do what we do. However, the home working reduced our motivation to be engaged.

Instead of trying to improve the connection between buyers and sellers, we were just doing the jobs we were paid to do. The personal rewards of seeing the "lights come on" in the eyes of the people we worked with had gone. Even though we still had the incentive to go beyond the brief, the opportunity to do this was much reduced. I have found that no computer tools can ever give the added value which comes from direct, face-to-face communications.

**|| WE WILL BE WORKING WHERE WE ARE PHYSICALLY ALONGSIDE THE PEOPLE WE ARE WORKING WITH. WE CAN LOOK PEOPLE IN THE EYES WHEN WE MAKE A COMMITMENT AND BE BELIEVED. THE SPARKLE IS ALREADY COMING BACK! ||**

In terms of the bid documents, evaluators and decision makers were still relying upon trust as a key element of their buying decisions. Here I am using Neil Rackham's (author of *Spin Selling*) definition of "trust" which, in a sales environment, is created from three elements: Candour, Competence and Concern. Rackham pointed out that trust is also linked to the time people spend together. I like this definition as I think it gives us some important pointers about how we should create our tender responses.

If we get on with our buyers, a good interpersonal relationship makes it easy for us to discuss the issues the buyer has. If the buyer perceives us to be frank and open about our ability to help, this creates trust. If the buyer believes we are expert, this creates more trust. Then, if the buyer can see that we really understand the problem and its impact upon his or her business, we become even more trustworthy.

We can try to do all these by writing powerful text and having Zoom calls. However, these communication methods are not nearly as effective as talking face to face. When working remotely, the non-verbal parts of communications are muted or missing. As the pandemic continued, we found it was more difficult to leverage personal relationships to get the information we needed. Evaluators became dispassionate; this is what we did not want! We wanted to create bias towards our clients and their solution.

So, what do I take away from the last couple of years embracing a new way of conducting business? I discovered that we can be as (if not more) efficient through remote working. However, remote working reduces the overall value of what we can deliver. We can still do the job we are paid to do. Moreover, we can probably do it a bit more efficiently. But many of those intangible benefits, which we would normally get from close personal working, are lost. For me, working like this is less enjoyable and I am less enthusiastic about getting involved.

We have found that when we work remotely, bouncing around ideas between us does not work nearly as well. It makes it more difficult for us to tease out the ways to get better connections between the buyers and sellers. Innovation is diminished. This reduces bid effectiveness. Most of all, working like this is less fun!

More importantly, the relationship with the client became difficult. We have had to work much harder to prove our worth. We have had to prove our trustworthiness in every aspect of our written submission because the text has been the only route to do this.

Luckily, the tide seems to be turning. We are now starting to return to work in our clients' offices. We are planning to hold courses in hotels and conference rooms. We will be working where we are physically alongside the people we are working with. We can look people in the eyes when we make a commitment and be believed. The sparkle is already coming back!

HOLGER GARDEN

# COUNTING TIME ISN'T NEARLY AS IMPORTANT AS MAKING TIME COUNT

**CONSULTANCIES IN THE BUSINESS OF WRITING RESPONSES TO BID QUESTIONS WITH CLIENTS - AS EMPLOYEES, PARTNERS OR WORK-ALONE FREELANCERS - MUST BALANCE NEW WORKLOAD WITH CAPACITY. THE BALANCING ACT PRESENTS A GREATER CHALLENGE IN A BURGEONING BID MARKET, FURTHER AMPLIFIED WHEN CLIENTS REQUEST: "PLEASE TAKE ON ALL THE WRITING FOR US." WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EXISTING COMMITMENTS MEAN IT'S NOT POSSIBLE TO DO THAT?**





## Being able to help when you can't do all of it

It's necessary to discuss how the consultancy can help most effectively when existing workload prevents taking on the whole proposal and the client prefers not to find someone else. This happens when both the client's trust and the consultancy's knowledge of the client's systems, experience and people has grown through strong past performance on previous bids. Clients value such 'momentum' because the relationship between in-house and external resources means the bid can 'hit the ground running' to a large extent. To enable this, we discuss who can do which parts of the proposal and by when, recognising that neither party has time to do all of it on that occasion. This is about making best use of the consultancy as an external resource.

Developing relationships with clients, so they provide plenty of advance notice of bids, is obviously a sound idea in any market. While robust capture should give clients a good forward view, it's not always that straightforward: opportunities sometimes present themselves outside of the capture space. Add on a tight timeframe and you now have the need for swift mobilisation when the bid decision is GO.

I've found the following three topics important to help determine the division of work when time's tight.

**Win theming and competitor analysis:** These fundamental elements of bidding must never be missed out, even under time pressure. A fast way to provide a starting point is to review factors considered appropriate in previous bids in the same sector. Setting times in the diary for online meetings with the clients' customer- and market-facing colleagues enables past ideas to be challenged and updated for the current bid using latest capture intelligence. The capture might have been through a capture exercise required by a management system, or by less formal interactions that yielded important knowledge. Discussion enables the client's team to generate ideas by 'sparking' off each other (including evidence examples) and by addressing questions I ask to challenge existing thinking (having first read the relevant tender documents). Time-poor – and sometimes initially hesitant – teams feel more confident to start drafting responses or developing ideas once win themes, solutions and competitors' likely solutions are better understood.

**Framework for responses:** One reason for being asked to "take on the whole proposal for us" is uncertainty about how to write responses. Having a framework for each response makes a difference, even if it isn't a full-blown answer plan. Breaking down the question and providing prompts of issues to consider under each heading better equips the internal team to prepare a first draft for my review and editing (which is then returned for further development in response to my flagged-up questions and comments). This iterative approach involving both of us enables the bid to keep 'moving' instead of experiencing start-up inertia due to subject matter experts (SMEs) staring at a blank page when they're already busy. Many SMEs have told me this scenario is a confidence crusher. The iterative approach also enables the client's internal team to identify what's important when they don't see items in my lists they consider necessary: relevance by omission, if you will. That's why 'bouncing' plans off each other is always essential.

Clients have found coaching-style questions helpful for supporting SMEs' thinking and unlocking new thoughts. Examples are:

- **What makes this question important to your client (i.e. the procuring client)? What are the main drivers? What would the person/people have been thinking when they wrote this question?**
- **What's the most important aspect of this topic to be considered first? What makes it the most important aspect?**
- **What benefits to your client, and to the end user, do you envisage from your solution?**
- **What other steps in the solution rely on this step? How is that order important to your client?**
- **What challenges do you envisage in delivering your solution? How will you overcome them?**

Subject matter expert (SME) availability: By agreeing meeting slots and interim deadlines soon after the client makes contact, we give ourselves milestones to aim for, again to keep the work moving. The response framework proves useful for time-poor SMEs engaged on live projects. It also acts as an agenda of sorts for meetings with SMEs, enabling us to agree who will draft which parts and by when, or which aspects need further research among colleagues.

## Time is so powerful; it's given to us in small quantities only...

...so we have to make the best use of it, which means being smart about how we plan activities. After all, counting time isn't nearly as important as making time count.

SARAH HINCHLIFFE

# THE POWER OF NO

|| AS A FREELANCER,  
RIDING THE CREST OF  
A TSUNAMI OF WORK IS  
QUITE EXHILARATING  
- PEOPLE WANT YOU  
AND NEED YOU. ||

# WAVES ARE POWERFUL. THEY CAN LIFT YOU HIGH, BUT THE DESCENT CAN BE GENTLE OR TREACHEROUS. SO, SURF WITH CARE...

## THE CREST

It was a rainy day in London, February 2020. I had spent the day at Belinda Parma's APMP UK Empathy Workshop. The world was good – the pandemic seemed a problem far away. Except it wasn't. In March, the term "lockdown" entered our lives.

After that, I only returned to London once but I didn't mind – I was too busy to go anywhere. Throughout the pandemic, I thrived. I had more work than ever before, and never having to leave home meant plenty of additional hours.

When people asked me what I was doing with all my spare time in lockdown, what new hobbies I'd taken up, I felt somewhat embarrassed to say "zilch" - I was too busy working. If lockdown eased off, I'd cram in some weekend cooking for friends, then work. And as for holidays, my beloved Italy was off the agenda, and the concept of a 'staycation' was alien to me. So I just worked.

By January 2021, I thought we might be on our way back to normality. But no. More lockdown brought more months of non-stop work and no holidays. And after the summer, the bid world went truly bonkers. From September, I hardly knew which way was up.

As a freelancer, riding the crest of a tsunami of work is quite exhilarating - people want you and need you. The fear of a lean month evaporates. The money is coming in. There's time and only you to say, "Don't work evenings and weekends." Why disappoint the hands that feed you? Why say "No"?

## THE WIPEOUT

But there is a reason to say no. While riding my wave of work, I never rested. I had to dig deep to support my husband when he was feeling under par, grieve for our beautiful lurcher boy who died unexpectedly, fight off a persistent cold (twice), and get to grips with a new, traumatised rescue lurcher lady who joined us last November. By January 2022, I was mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted. My body told me: "STOP" – I won't go into detail!

Strangely, work was kind and started to ease off. I revived an old stress management technique with a trusted counsellor, gave up wine, got extra sleep and recruited help with the new dog. Three weeks later, I started feeling like my old self.

## SAFE SURFING

Have I learnt to say no? I sincerely hope so, if only a little. Here are my top tips for staying safe:

- **Listen when your nearest and dearest say they are worried about you, and to yourself when you find strange reactions. I'm not a tearful person but I kept welling up for no apparent reason, which I should have recognised as a sign.**
- **Talk about how you feel - it's not a sign of weakness, but of strength. Many of us, including me, will happily have a chat with a fellow bidder under stress. Or find a professional mentor or counsellor.**
- **Phone a friend for moral support and to share work. Even if you need to be the 'client face,' a trusted colleague who will work behind the scenes with you is invaluable (thank you, Isabel Moritz).**
- **Have a 'light touch' service for when you can't commit the time or don't want the work but don't want to let the client down.**
- **Don't be afraid to decline work that doesn't suit you, even if it's with a regular client. Just explain it's not your strong point, and you won't take on something you can't deliver to your usual high standard.**
- **Build a network of complementary fellow freelancers or small businesses who you can introduce – this can cut both ways when they call you back with bid work. I have people I can call on for deep-dive advice on social value, procurement, digital marketing and proposal automation.**
- **Stay on top of your finances and sales pipeline; knowing exactly how much money you need and where it may come from eases pressure. And consider setting quarterly income targets rather than monthly.**
- **Don't over-volunteer – choose activities because you want to, have real value to add, and, most importantly, have the time without sacrificing your home life.**

## BACK ONSHORE

I realise now that freelancers must provide their own pastoral care. Being naturally independent and pretty robust, it never really occurred to me before that I needed to be proactive. I'm lucky to have an understanding husband, stepsons and friends, and rather lovely clients. So, I didn't drown. I floundered around for a while feeling mentally battered and bruised, then bounced back to tell the tale and be wiser in the future. I hope it helps to share.

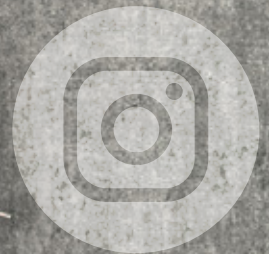
**CHARLOTTE REES**

# FOCUS ON RIDING YOUR OWN WAVE

**YOU SCROLL THROUGH LINKEDIN AND SEE ANOTHER PROMOTION. YOU WATCH INSTAGRAM STORIES OF PEOPLE LIVING INCREDIBLE, HAPPY LIVES. YOU LISTEN ON A TEAMS CALL AS ONE OF YOUR FELLOW COLLEAGUES GETS FANTASTIC FEEDBACK ON THEIR BID. YOU READ AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE PERFECT WORK-LIFE BALANCE.**

You compare yourself. Maybe you feel disappointed, anxious or like you're not enough. We've all been there.

With social media and the return of socialising and networking, it's really easy to look at what others are doing and feel pressure to do better, and to do more. This pressure can take many forms: committing to doing too much, over-working, feeling anxious about being good enough, or maybe just making you feel totally deflated.





### Why do we feel like this?

It's normal to compare yourself to others. We all have an innate desire to understand where we fit in, and understand if our lives and careers are 'on-track'. The bids and proposals industry is currently experiencing astonishing growth and competition for talent. This makes it easy for everything to feel pretty overwhelming, especially as competitive bid professionals. We can't help but want to strive for more!

### Take a step back

We're all on our own journey. There are some people thriving, some just chugging along, others who are really struggling to keep afloat, and some who feel as though they're drowning. And to make things even more confusing, these feelings can change from one day to the next.

Yesterday you may not have thought about where you are in life. Today, you suddenly struggle with a challenging stakeholder, and now you're questioning your skills and if you're good enough for your role!

### How can we 'ride the wave'?

We can take inspiration from others' success without comparing ourselves negatively. Here are some tips:

1. **Remember social media isn't always representative of real life! People show you what they want you to see. Through carefully curated content, they only show you a small, selected part of their everyday lives.**

**They won't always share the details about their terrible day at work on LinkedIn, or tell you how they feel completely undervalued by their team. While you may think you're alone in feeling a certain way, there's a strong chance there are millions of others who are going through the exact same thing. (Groups such as WIBAP are great for connecting with others in a more down-to-earth way!)**

2. **Consider who you surround yourself with, and who and what you're following. The people and content you engage with can have such a strong influence on how you feel. If you start noticing that someone or something is making you feel worse about yourself, it might be a good idea to reduce your interaction. This could mean unfollowing, steering discussions in a more structured way or, where possible, taking yourself out of the conversation.**

**This can be tricky in a professional environment, but think about what's right for you. What's going to have a positive and motivating impact? This is what you need more of!**



3. **Learn to understand your triggers. If you notice that your anxiety or negative feelings are triggered by similar things, it's worth reflecting on the reasons behind why they're consuming your thoughts. You can then start to explore these reasons and take action to address them, make positive changes or set new goals.**

**For example, if you're frustrated to hear the benefits of flexible working, but your employer is strict on being in the office 9 to 5 every day, it's likely this will continue to be a trigger until your situation changes. Could you have discussions about trialling a more flexible pattern? Or do you need to find a new opportunity if this is now a priority?**

4. **Step back to acknowledge the small wins. In our profession, it's easy to let the small wins go straight under your radar! Maybe you managed to influence a tricky stakeholder, logged off on time today, or were happy with an executive summary you wrote - WELL DONE!**

**These small wins shouldn't go unnoticed. While you may feel stuck or deflated, you're probably still doing awesome things along the way. Don't ignore them!**

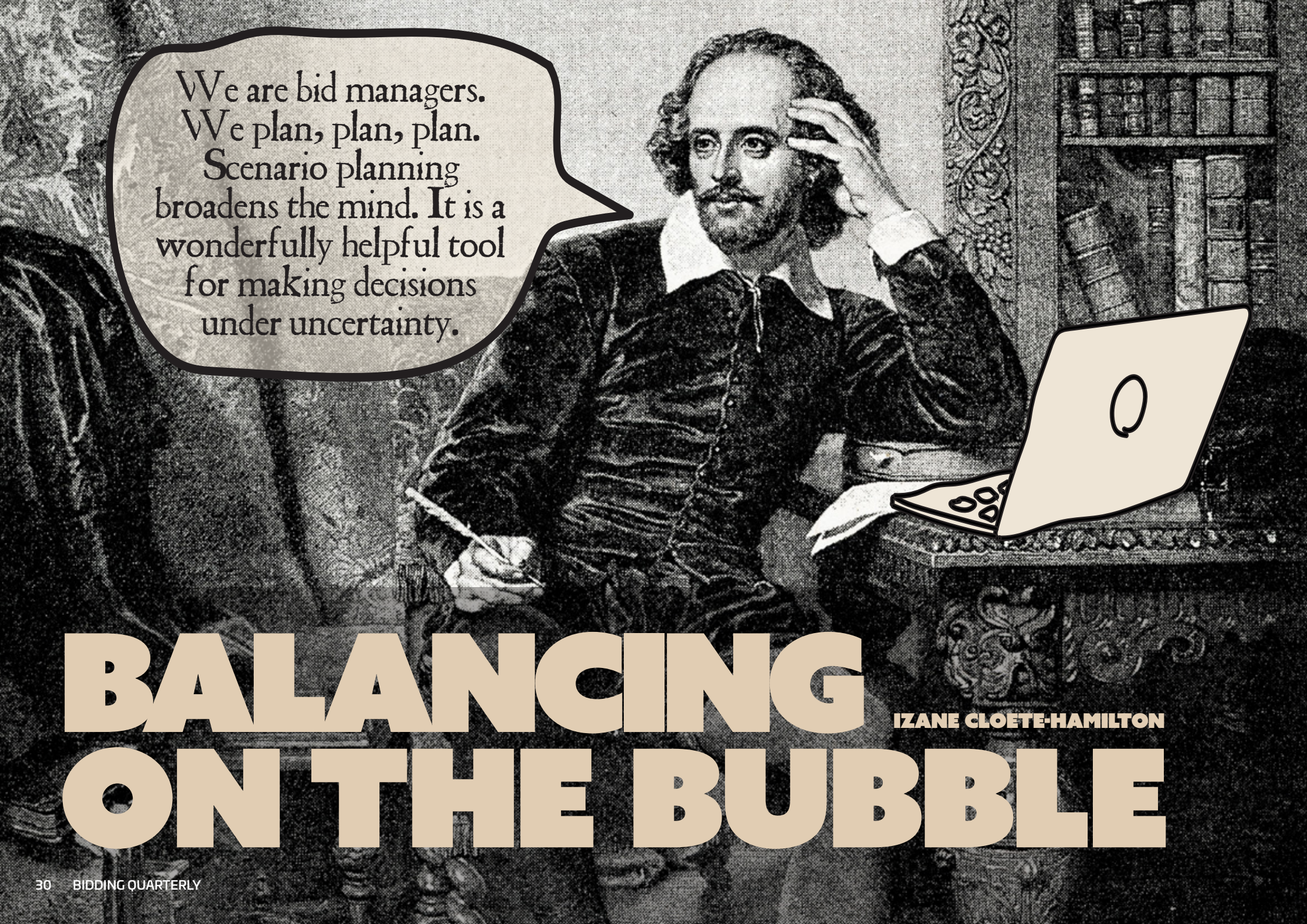
**And for managers and team leaders: do you celebrate the small wins? Could a compliment or a "well done" brighten the day of someone in your team? Let's not forget to shout about great achievements - no matter how big or small.**

We're not living life on a timeline. If you're not a manager by a certain age, it doesn't mean you've failed. If you're not as happy as you'd like to be in your current role, but not yet ready to take action, that's okay. If you have days where you feel unsure about what's next for you, don't panic.

You're on your own career journey and you'll always be developing and learning and doing great in your role. It doesn't mean you can't aim for more, but give yourself a break and do it on your own terms, not other people's.

It's important to remember that there's support out there. If you ever feel like you want more information or support for your mental health, don't wait to reach out for help - whether that's through talking to a friend or seeking professional help or advice. For more information on what's available, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health>.

**|| THE BIDS AND PROPOSALS INDUSTRY IS CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING ASTONISHING GROWTH AND COMPETITION FOR TALENT. THIS MAKES IT EASY FOR EVERYTHING TO FEEL PRETTY OVERWHELMING, ESPECIALLY AS COMPETITIVE BID PROFESSIONALS. ||**



We are bid managers.  
We plan, plan, plan.  
Scenario planning  
broadens the mind. It is a  
wonderfully helpful tool  
for making decisions  
under uncertainty.

# BALANCING ON THE BUBBLE

IZANE CLOETE-HAMILTON

## “DOUBLE, DOUBLE TOIL AND TROUBLE; FIRE BURN AND CAULDRON BUBBLE.”

The three witches from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* chant this delightful little jingle as they add ingredients to their cauldron to make a spell. Toe of frog (it is not specified if it is from the left or right foot), fillet of snake, eye of newt and other yummy ingredients all go into this brew.

Before their appearance in Act IV, the witches have already played an important role. When they first encounter Macbeth, they present him with possibilities of political advancement. As their predictions come true, Macbeth becomes too willing to accept their words as truth because he wants them to be true. Of course, we know the spells and predictions do not really have an effect. The witches simply present Macbeth with tempting, terrible choices which he is all too happy to make.

Fast forward 450 years and this could be a Hollywood blockbuster - a movie with a clever plot where the weird sisters create a false market, manoeuvre for massive salary increases and, in short, devise a strategy to create a bubble of trouble.

But we are not characters in a Shakespeare play, nor are we in Hollywood. We are a strategic proposal and pitch consultancy in South Africa - a highly resilient country with many investment opportunities which are increasing as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know there is recovery; perhaps not full-blown growth yet, but recovery. We know this from the pledges made for new investments in sectors that drive innovation, like digital services and the production of vaccines. We know recovery is blooming because we work with the difference-makers every day. We sit in their boardrooms, hear their fantastic plans, and (just about) feel their positive energy and determination in the air.

### However, upsides and downsides remain.

**Upside:** South African business confidence climbed in the first quarter of 2022. Our business is expanding quarter on quarter. We feel the upward shift because the volume of bids, tenders and sales proposals we are involved with keeps growing.

**Downside:** As we recover from the pandemic, employers are being forced to learn how to ride the resignation wave. According to McKinsey & Company, nearly half of the employees who voluntarily left the workforce won't return to permanent employment. The knock-on effect of this and other world events (such as the war in Ukraine) is that business confidence is jeopardised, which may lead to fewer opportunities.

To return to *Macbeth*, is the upside a result of the proverbial witches' spell? Is the downside a result of the choices we make? What if the upturn, the wave, the shift, really is a witch's

bubble brew? We can't say, we are not clairvoyant. But we are practical. We are bid managers. We plan, plan, plan. Scenario planning broadens the mind. It is a wonderfully helpful tool for making decisions under uncertainty.

The fluctuation between upside and downside is like driving uphill in a car. You can't stay in one gear the whole way. The important thing is that you keep moving. Our responsibility as leaders is to drive away fear and frustration in the workplace while maintaining confidence and keeping a long-term perspective. Your most potent tools to achieve this are your positive mind and spirit.

### Looking forward

In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the Prince of Morocco finds a poem with the line, "All that glisters is not gold." Not everything that looks valuable (like the current upside of business growth) is valuable - but we remain cautiously optimistic.

We treat each new and repeat client engagement as an opportunity to inspire success. We turn downsides into upsides, like embracing a blended model of permanent and consultant staff as a result of the resignation wave. We believe that if we keep adding value and helping our clients grow, we will create and retain jobs and improve lives.

This includes actively pursuing balance. The acclaimed performance coach Annastiina Hintsa said: "If you're worried about your work-life balance, you're missing the point. There is just life and your work is part of your life. That's it."

And if having balance is what it means to ride the wave, then hang ten while we fetch our surfboards.



# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



**Martin Smith**

Martin is passionate about helping clients win new business. With increasingly savvy procurement professionals, more competition and new technology changing the way we bid, it is his job as Managing Director to ensure Bid Solutions provides market leading people, tools, training and solutions to help you win more.



**Nigel Dennis**

Nigel has been called a proposal pioneer in Australia for his work in shaping the professional bidding landscape in the region. He has three decades of proposal consulting experience and has trained thousands of people. Nigel started the APMP ANZ Chapter, runs Australia's largest specialist bid consultancy and is a strong advocate for development of the profession.



**Lisa Readman**

Lisa is an expert Content Evaluator. She is a highly skilled proofreader, copy editor and evaluator of bidding, sales and marketing documents. Lisa established her own business, Readman Writes, in 2018 to combine her unique skillset and passion for words with a sensible, commercial approach to clear and concise written communication. Her services include pre-tender evaluations, document reviews and one-to-one technical writing training.



**Jon Williams**

Jon and his team work with clients worldwide to help them establish winning proposal capabilities and to capture major deals. He has built and led numerous bid and proposal centres; managed, reviewed and benchmarked countless proposals; worked in over 35 countries; and trained many thousands of course participants.



**Rita Mascia**

Rita's journey into the world of bids and proposal started while working for an award-winning language and culture business organisation. Rita is a bid professional with 21 years of experience in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Her expertise in the bid cycle includes business development, capture, bid management, bid writing, and contract negotiations. Her passion lies in leading teams to win business by producing persuasive proposals that deliver what they promise.



# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Lorraine Baird

Lorraine specialises in helping organisations to win - evidenced by her personal win rate of over 85%. She's recognised for equipping bid teams with the right skills and tools to produce winning proposals and pitches for their organisations. Formerly heading up the bid team at Aviva, Lorraine's career in sales and bidding spans over 20 years. Lorraine is qualified at the highest level of certification in the profession - APMP Professional - and also recently attained the new APMP Capture Practitioner certification.



## Michael Brown

Michael Brown is a seasoned bid professional, having won multiple projects across the built environment throughout Europe, the Middle East, APAC and North America. He is passionate about leading global teams to deliver top quality proposals and pitches to multinational clients.



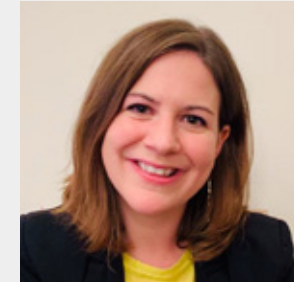
## Peter McPartland

Peter is recognised for his strengths in bid team leadership, innovation and performance improvement. One of the first law firm employees to achieve the APMP Certified Professional qualification, Peter is also a winner of an APMP UK national award for Innovation.



## Pippa Birch

Pippa has been a Bid Writer for 20 years, working as an employee for major companies within the Highways and Civil Engineering Sector before going freelance in 2012. Pippa and her team write for companies across a variety of sectors (construction, facilities management, custody and forensics) although core clients are from highways and civil engineering. Pipster Solutions has become a successful, sustainable business with over 40 clients.



## Isabella Stevenson

Bella started her career in bids over 14 years ago working for a recruitment consultancy co-ordinating their EMEA-wide bid submissions. For the last 10 years, she has worked as a Bid Manager, mainly within the built environment, but also in sectors as diverse as facilities management, security and dentistry.

She enjoys collaborating with technical teams via workshops and review sessions to build win themes, install best practice and develop creative thinking to win more contracts and help organisations meet their business development objectives.

# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Andy Haigh

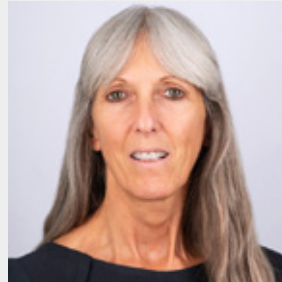
Andy is an expert in bidding and tendering, specialising in competitive formal bids into EU Public Sector organisations. He is an authority on EU procurement legislation and can bring all these capabilities together to initiate and drive major complex bids through to a successful completion.



## Holger Garden

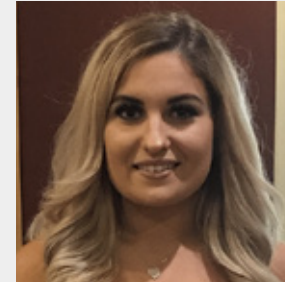
Holger is a bid manager and writer, and a personal/team performance coach. He spends most of his time supporting construction clients bidding for civil infrastructure and building projects, but his transferable skills have led to his work in the medical, charity and security arenas also.

He works with businesses of all sizes to help them win more work.



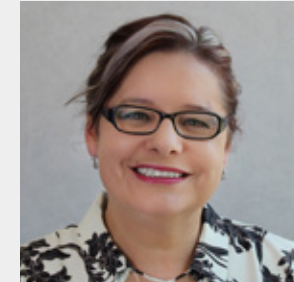
## Sarah Hinchliffe

Sarah has over 35 years' selling and bidding experience, which she loves to share through her freelance work, articles and presentations. A constant champion of creative storytelling and professional rigour, she never tires of encouraging sales and bid teams to join up, work as a team and win more business together.



## Charlotte Rees

Charlotte has worked in the bidding profession for nearly a decade, starting her journey as a bid and proposals apprentice for an engineering company. She has worked across several industries including IT services, facilities management and construction, and is currently an Associate Director Bid Manager, working within professional services. In 2018, Charlotte founded the Women in Bids and Proposals (WIBAP) community to target gender inequality within the profession and provide a space to share experiences and overcome the challenges we all face on a regular basis.



## Izane Cloete-Hamilton

Izane is the Master of Inspiration at nFold, a strategic proposal consultancy in South Africa. She is a compassionate leader with a rare and innate ability to develop people. She has held various senior management positions in business development, marketing, and bid management for over 20 years. Izane joined nFold as a partner in 2021, where she continues to inspire success in others through thought leadership, training and strategy development.

# BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY

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