

Learn how to:

write winning bids—quality, persuasive bids that convince owners that you're the one for the job.



Eight Tips to Write a Winning Bid

OVERVIEW

Today, everyone in construction wants to maximize their opportunities. With greater competition for every job, it's critical that when you issue a bid, your submission gives you the best chance of success.

While many see bid submissions as simply the cost of doing business, it's important to recognize that it is still a cost. So if you're going to invest, you'll want to see a healthy return on your investment.

The first step is deciding whether to bid at all. While some bids offer significant opportunities, others may be foregone conclusions that distract you from pursuing more profitable alternatives.

But let's say the opportunity looks good, and you want to go for it. How do you ensure you stand the best chance of success? Here are our eight top tips:

1 GET THE BASICS RIGHT

Too many bids are lost due to basic errors. Contractors make assumptions that aren't accurate. They don't spend sufficient time reading the request for bid document. They make errors in their calculations. So before submitting your bid, double- and triple-check the details. Go back to the RFB and ensure you're covering the detail of what's being asked for. Show that you have the required skills and manpower to do a good job, and be clear about when you can start and finish. And ensure your bid document is professional to look at and easy to understand [you may also want to consider having a designer create a set of templates for your firm].

2 DEVELOP A SYSTEM

While every bid is unique to some degree—design, specification, materials, location, etc.—many share a large number of common features. Having a system in place for completing bids can save you time and improve your effectiveness. Rather than having to reinvent the wheel for every new opportunity, develop an easily accessible store of well-written answers to frequently asked questions. You can then access and adapt these as necessary for each individual submission.

Producing a Professional Submission

Construction can be a highly competitive industry. Projects put out to bid will have multiple firms all trying to out-do the others. So, you need to consider whether you have the time and resources you need to put together a potentially winning bid.

You may have all the skills and experience the owner or architect is looking for, but if you don't get that across in your bid submission, you're unlikely to succeed.

3 CULTIVATE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR SUBCONTRACTORS

Many general contractors struggle to create the best bid they can because they only get all the information they need right at the last minute. Often this is because subcontractors delay giving their prices out of fear the GC will use multiple options to drive down the price. While it's important to keep prices competitive, it is arguably better to develop levels of trust that will give you what you need earlier, allowing you to do a better overall job on the submission. This can often be achieved by pre-negotiating on general terms outside of any individual bid.

Who Else Is Bidding?

For every lead that results in a competitive bid, you'll need to assess your strengths and potential weaknesses against the other bidders. The more you know about the competition, the better you'll be able to position your firm against them. You'll need to match their strengths where you can and highlight key competitive differentiators wherever possible.

Too many bidders make the mistake of looking and sounding identical to their competitors. If everything else is the same, owners will simply focus ever more closely on bottom-line price. And this can tangibly impact your chances of winning (and your profitability if you are successful).

Before deciding whether to bid on a job, ask yourself:

- Who is the competition?
- Do you have a good track record against them?
- Where have you succeeded in the past?
- Where have you lost out?
- Your warranty clearly written?
- What can you include that will give your firm a chance to shine?

4 CONSIDER THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

The reason most owners put a job out to bid is that they want to engage the best firm at the best price. For them, any construction project is viewed as high-risk with multiple things that could go wrong. So it's important to put yourself in their shoes when responding to a bid. Consider what they're really asking. Why are they asking it? What are their real concerns? Then ensure you address these head-on in your submission.

5 DON'T INCLUDE UNNECESSARY INFORMATION

Everyone is busy. No one has time to read material that's not directly relevant to the job itself. So only include information if it makes your bid more likely to win.

6 BE SMART ABOUT YOUR COVER LETTER

Your cover letter is your chance to answer the questions you wish had been asked. It's where you can highlight your firm's particular strengths and show why you're the right company for the job. Simply, it's another place where you can stand out. As such, be careful not to sound just like everyone else—tease out what really makes you different and better.

7 DON'T BE AFRAID TO QUESTION THE BID

While you will need to address the precise detail of the bid itself, you don't have to leave it there. Owners are buying more than simply your ability to build to specification. They're also buying your insight, experience, and problem-solving abilities. So you shouldn't be afraid to include additional thinking around value engineering and alternative approaches that could create a better, cheaper, or faster outcome.

Is the Job in a Good Location?

Traditionally, many general contractors have stuck to working in areas they know well. However, with increased competition and sometimes scarce opportunities, many are looking farther afield.

If you are bidding for contracts outside your area, you need to do some due diligence. Many aspects of the job will be exactly the same as you are used to, but others may differ. You should build in extra time to do the due diligence you'll need to ensure you have all the information to make an accurate assessment.

8 RUN A POST-BID ANALYSIS

It's tempting to forget about a bid submission once you've either won or lost. If you won, you focus on starting the job itself. If you lost, you move on to the next opportunity. But doing so can leave money on the table. Running a post-bid analysis on every submission can help you improve your next bid and consequently increase your win rate. Take some time to look at what went well and what didn't. Ask what you could do better next time. And look at what the competition did well. Build these learnings into your process.

RECIPES FOR SUCCESSFUL BIDDING

Having an efficient, effective approach to bidding has never been more important to succeeding in construction. By getting the basics right, choosing your battles, and going above and beyond, you can put your firm in a better position to win. Good luck.

Further Help and Resources

There are a number of ways we can help you be more successful—from helping you size market opportunities and prioritize prospects through to strengthening your market position and improving your win/loss ratio.

To discover the full details, simply visit our website. In particular, you may want to take a look at:

The Dodge Lead Center: where you can find local projects to bid dodgeprojects.construction.com

Dodge BidPro™: the bidding alert dashboard where qualified leads find you dodgebidpro.construction.com

About Dodge Data & Analytics

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Additional Resources

To learn more about how we can help you grow your business, visit www.construction.com.