

## 5 Silver Bullets That WIN Proposals

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Is there one “silver bullet” that wins proposals? Yes (kinda’). Trust is *close* to a “silver bullet.” Our customer must trust that we can deliver the solution at the agreed-to price with little to no issues. (Do you make it a habit of buying from people or companies you do not trust?) **No trust, no win.**

Definitively, there are no “silver bullets.” There is no one thing that *always* works; nor is there one thing that offsets a sea of negative influencers (e.g., bad reputation, noncompliant or poorly executed proposal, lack of customer insight). However, there are five “silver bullet” factors that greatly impact the likelihood of a win, and these factors require customer trust for them to prevail.

These five “silver bullet” factors historically tip the scales in favor of one solution provider over another. Which factor(s) to use varies according to circumstances. The five “silver bullet” factors can be cumulative and are relative. They are relative to one another and relative to other factors. In other words, relative to all other aspects of proposal development, one could call these “silver bullets” because of the historic weighting of these five variables. The following is a list of those factors:

### 1. Price

The right price can win a proposal. Especially, when the customer is focused on price (for whatever reason). For example, if the customer is downsizing and needs to buy your solution, there may be great pressure to spend less money. A low, *realistic* price is paramount. Signs that price is a “silver bullet” factor should be evident based on customer insight and RFP language and type (e.g., LPTA, a heavy weighting toward price in government RFPs and a high quantity of price-centric terms in the commercial RFP). Commoditized solutions are often purchased based on price.

Selecting the winning price requires insight and discipline, and it must be proven possible. If the customer does not *trust* that the solution provider can deliver the solution to their satisfaction at the listed to price, that solution provider will not win.

### 2. Sales or Capture

Most proposals are won before the RFP is released. Cultivating a strong relationship with your future customer is key. The more you know your customer (and the more they know you), the better your chances of success. It is common that white paper content supplied by a solution provider can be found in an RFP, which favors of the solution provider that supplied the white paper. The proposal is theirs to lose.

Learn all you can about your future customer. What are their hopes, fears, and biases? If possible, meet with them. Establish a relationship. Build *trust*. Help your future customer connect your solution with their problem. Make it easy for them to favor your solution by providing (easy to copy and paste) softcopy content that differentiates your solution from your competition (e.g., whitepapers, specifications).

### 3. Reputation

Buyers and decision makers are risk adverse. They fear making the wrong choice. There is a saying, “No one was fired for hiring (insert well-known company here).” If there are three companies vying

for one contract and two are unknown, the known company usually wins. It is safer. It is a *trusted* solution provider.

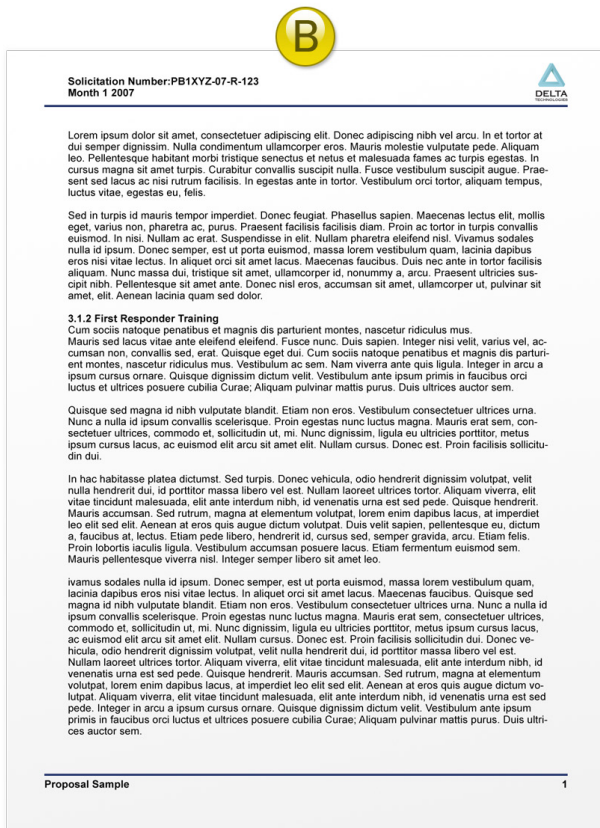
Solution provider reputation is often established over time and independently of a single proposal contract. Popularity, branding, marketing, and word-of-mouth are keys to building a strong reputation.

Unknown companies can leverage this approach. Use testimonials and past performance to allay fears (see “Proof”). Everyone claims to be capable—perhaps, superior—but very few prove it. Who says you are the best besides you?

#### **4. Professionalism**

Perceived professionalism, based upon the quality of the proposal, intrinsically transfers to the solution and the solution provider. All content the decision makers receive must support our professionalism to build *trust*.

An evaluator in an international bid told me that the winning proposal was so well done (i.e., aesthetically superior, easier to read and evaluate, used quality materials, was of a better print quality, and was customer-focused) that the evaluators considered not reviewing the other proposals. He said that it was obvious who wanted it more, was more dedicated, and who was going to deliver a better solution. Below are two proposal pages from the same solution provider. Which do you think will be seen as more professional by an evaluator—A or B?

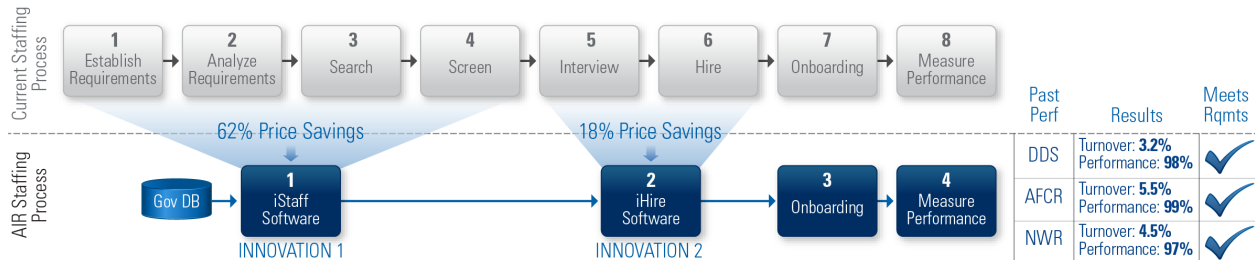


Content isn't king, contrast is.

To make your proposal stand out, use experienced proposal professionals, writers, designers, editors, desktop publishers, and printers. The quality of your document from cover to cover informs your customer's perception of your professionalism and abilities. (Relativism is significant. If all proposals are professional, then none stand out. Other factors become more important.)

## 5. Proof

Many proposals make unsubstantiated claims hidden behind jargon. Measured, quantified proof such as past performance and metrics validates claims and reassures buyers. Our customer believes (*trusts*) our claims. Use graphics, callout boxes, and highlighting to draw attention to proof points. For example, the following graphic helps prove how the price is 80% lower and provides past performance metrics.



These five “silver bullet” factors have one thing in common. They must resonate with the customer and build *trust*. For example, if the price is too low based upon customer expectations then the customer may not trust that you understand the complexity of the problem. Customer insight and an understanding of the problem are paramount to building trust. For this reason, some factors may trump others (e.g., reputation may trump price in some situations).

Know your customer. Decide what “silver bullet” factor(s) will work best and apply them. Measure your success and improve. This approach works well for me and it will for you.

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