



The Ultimate Guide to Mastering RFPs and Sales Proposals

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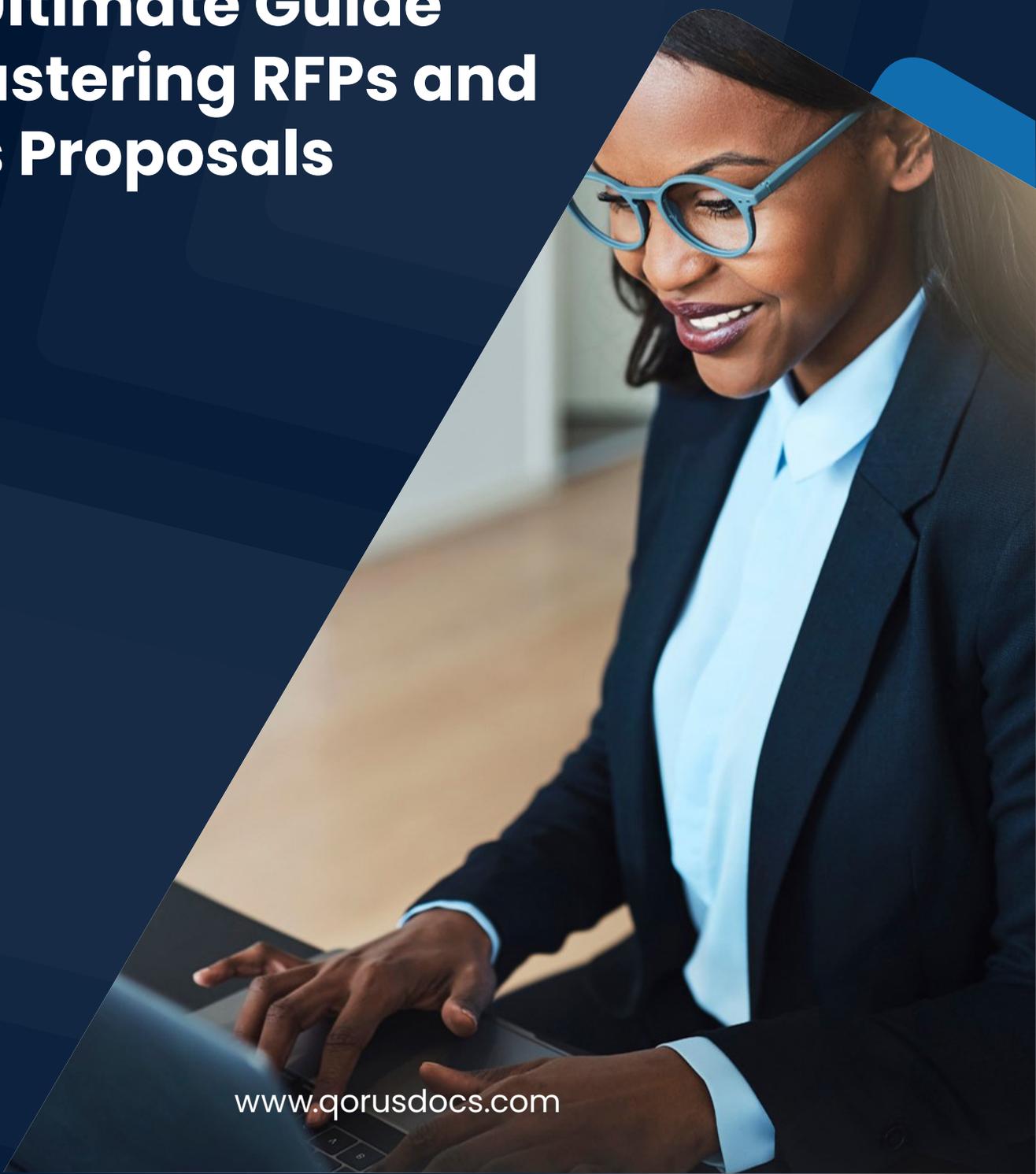


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It's no longer business as usual.

The disruption happening in the selling environment is turning over apple carts across the B2B landscape. The way purchasers buy has changed dramatically—and the way companies sell must adapt in step. Indeed, the pandemic has hastened the previously emerging shift away from traditional B2B buyer journey expectations to a [seller-assisted digital buying experience](#).

According to Garner [research](#), today's buyers are less keen to interact with sales reps and more interested in digital channels. In fact, [43%](#) of B2B buyers of complex solutions expressed a strong preference for a purchase experience **completely free from sales rep interactions**; of that group, 54% of Millennials preferred a rep-free buying experience! Gartner predicts that by 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur via digital channels.

Guiding the way

In an increasingly complex B2B buying environment, most B2B purchases involve many decision makers and follow a [complex, nonlinear path](#), creating a challenging experience for both buyers and sellers. To win deals predictably and consistently, sales leaders need to mitigate this uncertainty by providing in-the-moment [direction and advice](#) based on customer needs and pain points, via the digital channels the buyer prefers.

As prospects navigate the buying process, sales reps must serve as [guides](#) to connect and make sense of information for buyers, using their insight to help customers overcome or avoid obstacles they may not anticipate on their own.

The sales response process should support this objective, providing information to buyers in a way that simplifies the buying experience and enables them to complete [critical buying jobs](#): problem identification, solution exploration, requirements building, supplier selection, validation, and consensus creation.

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“Sales leaders must recognize the opportunity to evolve the role of their sales reps to be what customers need most: A guide who can help them navigate an uncertain, noisy information landscape to find the answers they need to make better decisions.”

Brent Adamson, Distinguished VP, Advisory, [Gartner](#)

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All eyes on the sales response process

With the shift away from in-person sales tactics, RFP responses and sales proposals carry an increasingly heavy burden of educating, engaging, and converting buyers. Customers want information—the right information delivered at the right time—that helps them better understand their pain points and how to overcome these challenges. Your proposals need to step up to the task, filling the gap left by the lack of in-person interactions and guiding buyers step-by-step to the purchase decision.

Are you prepared for the revolution in buyer expectations and the shift to a digital buying experience? Is your sales response process a well-oiled machine? Do you even have an established sales response process?!

Are your RFP responses and sales proposals highly personalized while clearly articulating how your solution meets your prospects' unique needs? Do you consistently produce error-free, on-brand critical sales documents that close deals?

Don't panic if your answers to these questions is 'no' across the board. And don't worry if you feel out of your depth in the world of RFPs and proposals. This guide will help you master all things 'proposal' and help you navigate the new B2B sales landscape with ease.

Let's start with the basics to help you understand the sales response process and how RFP responses and proposals fit into the process. (We'll get to the juicy bits later when we explore how to create killer proposals that can catapult you from 'zero to hero' in the B2B selling arena!)



The basics

What is an RFP?

A Request for Proposal (RFP) is precisely what it sounds like: a buyer asking you to send a proposal that articulates how your product or solution can solve their problem—a “[business document](#)” that announces a project, describes it, and solicits bids from qualified contractors to complete it.”

In more formal terms, [Gartner](#) defines RFP as “both the process and documentation used in soliciting bids for potential business or IT solutions required by an enterprise or government agency.” For example, if a company is looking to implement a sales enablement platform, it will send an RFP out to prospective vendors, outlining the parameters of the project and what the business hopes to achieve with the new solution.

The RFP may cover details of the required hardware and/or software, related procurement process, and evaluation criteria. RFP documentation may also include commercial terms and conditions, timeliness and activities involved, and specific information respondents should include in their RFP response.

The RFP response

After receiving an RFP from a company, the bid team (if you’re lucky enough to have one!) is responsible for turning around an RFP response in short order; the buyer will compare responses from potential vendors to help determine the best choice for their needs.



PRO TIP: Before responding to an RFP, use our [decision matrix](#) to qualify the deal and decide whether an RFP is worth pursuing.

The **RFP response is your money-maker**—your opportunity to win the business by demonstrating how your solution can solve your prospect’s problem better than any competitor. Did you know a recent benchmark [study](#) found that more than a third of enterprise respondents estimated they lost out on an average of \$875K in sales revenue by not responding to RFPs?! Don’t make that mistake.

RFP responses may include information such as:

- Front end design of your system
- Coding (front end & back end)
- Testing & QA
- Product features and interoperability (e.g., integrations, APIs)
- Operating systems & hardware requirements
- Technical requirements and industry compliance, if applicable (e.g., HIPPA compliance, financial industry requirements)
- Training & ongoing support you intend to offer
- Pricing and/or fee structure
- Social proof, e.g., testimonials, case studies

RFP vs. RFQ response

Some companies may eschew RFPs in favor of the more streamlined [Request for Quote/Qualification \(RFQ\)](#). When buyers know exactly what solution they're looking for and don't want lengthy product or service descriptions, they turn to RFQs.

Responses to RFQs provide pricing information for very specific products or services. Unlike RFP responses which are typically lengthy, in-depth documents, RFQ responses are short and well-organized with no extraneous fluff.

While you want your RFQ response to be concise, be sure to include proof points to demonstrate specific qualifications for the submission, e.g., sales figures from a similar successful project, relevant awards or certifications, or specific skillsets on your team that will be an asset on the project.

What is a sales proposal?

Designed to illustrate the value proposition of a solution, a sales proposal has a similar purpose to an RFP response but with its own unique flavor and style. Sales proposals tend to be shorter, executed more frequently, and allow more room for differentiation and personalization. While RFP responses typically fall under the purview of the bid team, sales proposals are often completed by the sales team (the clue is in the name).

To consistently win business, your sales proposal should showcase your **understanding of your prospect's needs** and **how your solution can address their requirements**. A combination of key company information, your unique selling proposition (USP), and other details (e.g., deliverables, pricing) will set the stage for further negotiations and, ultimately, help you close the deal.

A sales proposal typically includes:

- Executive summary
- List of clear objectives and quantifiable goals
- Product or service information and specs
- Overview of team who will be invested in the client's success
- Description of ROI customers can expect from working with your company
- Success stories of customers within the prospect's vertical or industry, or who have the same pain point, who have reaped big results from partnering with your company (reinforced with stats and data)
- Pricing
- Terms and conditions



PRO TIP: Don't just talk about your solution. Instead, focus on how and why your solution will solve your prospect's problem. Use the sales proposal as an opportunity to emphasize your USPs and demonstrate your solution's proven ROI.

Optimizing the sales response process

Now that you've learned the nuts and bolts of the sales response process, let's dig deeper into how to optimize the process—and why you should care. First of all, would you like to get a piece of the \$7.72 trillion B2B sales market? Of course you would! (And that's the 2021 valuation!) The B2B sales industry is on fire, speculated to grow at 18.6% CAGR between 2021 and 2028.

Optimizing your sales response process to create killer sales proposals and RFP responses is your golden ticket to securing your share of the lucrative B2B market. Your goal is to build a streamlined sales response process that consistently and efficiently produces sales documents that inform and educate prospects, demonstrate your USP, and provide the proof buyers need to confirm that your solution is the best option to solve their problem.

Success boils down to which vendor can provide the information prospects seek, the information they need to better understand their pain points and potential solutions. To consistently close deals, your RFP responses and sales proposals should convey your understanding of the business landscape your prospects are operating in and your knowledge of the challenges they face—both from a solution and market perspective.

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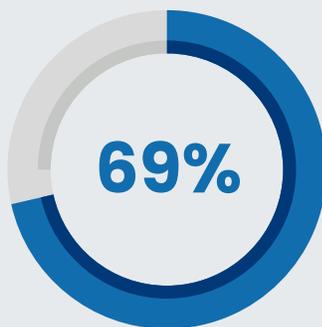
“Helping today’s B2B buyers buy isn’t a sales challenge, nearly so much as an information challenge (or, alternatively, an information opportunity).”

Harvard Business Review, February 2022

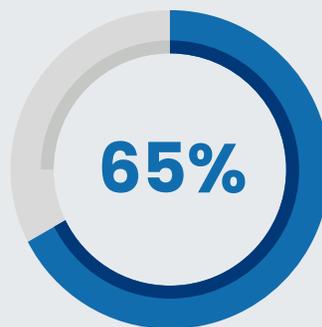
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According to a Salesforce [report](#), 68% of buyers want brands to understand their unique needs and expectations. In fact, the [top three drivers](#) behind why B2B buyers select one vendor over another are the vendor’s knowledge of the solution and business landscape (69%), the vendor’s knowledge of the buyer’s company and needs (65%), and the vendor’s ability to provide content that made it easier to build a business case for the purchase (62%). **Sales proposals and RFP responses are your optimal vehicle for meeting these expectations—and getting a piece of that B2B sales pie.**

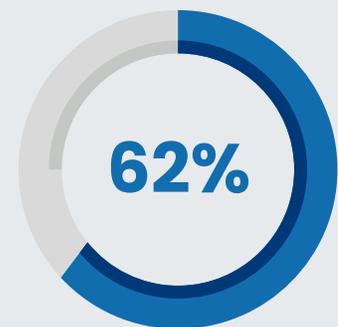
Top Factors Influencing B2B Buyers’ Choice



Vendor’s knowledge of the solution and business landscape



Vendor’s knowledge of the buyer’s company and needs



Vendor provided content that made it easier to build a business case for the purchase

Source: DemandBase

Mastering proposal creation (hint: manual is out)

We've established the critical role sales proposals and RFP responses play in meeting today's buyers' expectations of information and insights delivered digitally vs. in-person interactions. Given the importance of these sales documents, how do you create RFP responses and sales proposals that meet buyers' needs while standing out from the competition?

Best practices for creating outstanding proposals

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating an effective sales proposal, following proposal best practices will help you craft a concise, accurate, and winning sales document, from start to finish.

Always keep in mind that a sales proposal is essentially serving as a front-line sales rep for your brand; proposals should showcase your understanding of your prospect's needs and how your company's solution is able to address their requirements. By combining key company information, your USP, and other information such as deliverables and pricing, you'll set the stage for conversion.

Here's a basic checklist of elements to consider as you begin the process of creating a winning proposal. (For a deeper dive into how to create intelligent sales proposals, check out our [Comprehensive Proposal Checklist](#).)



1. Process

Outline

Begin by outlining your sales proposal, paying special attention to your executive summary to ensure you keep it customer-focused. For more in-depth RFP responses, consider creating a compliance matrix to help you get a sense of the workload and where the prospect's questions are focused.

Have you created a high-level outline to discuss with your team? Do you have a set of proposal planning templates that you can reuse every time you have a new sales proposal?

Collaboration

Like many projects, compiling a proposal typically involves a team effort, with many people contributing. Have you set aside time to collaborate with subject matter experts (SMEs), taking their locations and, potentially, different time zones into consideration? Have you set up efficient ways of collaborating with people on proposals, with the necessary resources, technology, and tools to support these processes?

A key goal of collaboration with SMEs and other stakeholders is to gather input to clearly define and communicate what the outputs of your work will be and how it will benefit the prospect's business.

Execution

Creating sales proposals using proposal management software is much less time-consuming and arduous than attempting the process manually. Using technology to streamline and accelerate the sales response process enables your team to focus on creating the compelling content that will give your organization an edge against the competition.

Have you planned the execution process, including managing key content, working with brand-aligned templates, and collaborating with colleagues to develop winning proposals? Don't forget to leave sufficient time in your planning process for review.

2. Objectives

Customer centricity

An effective sales proposal is not all about your organization; the focus should be on the customer. Your proposals should convey that you understand the prospect's top challenges and goals and the nuances of their industry and business landscape.

Have you addressed how your organization will add value to the prospect's business and help solve their problems?

Personalization

Does your proposal show your prospects that you understand their business environment and summarize how your offering will help them achieve their unique goals? Have you subtly and tastefully mimicked the prospect's branding by adopting their color scheme, style, and tone throughout the proposal?

These small personalization tactics go a long way in convincing buyers that you can walk in their shoes, giving them confidence that you can successfully address their challenges.

Differentiation

Often sales proposals don't do enough to make it clear why the buyer should choose your solution over the competition. Sales proposals are your chance to differentiate your organization, its expertise, and its people—to clearly identify why your organization stands out from the crowd.

Make sure your proposal showcases the quality of your practice, gives the prospect a clear and positive impression of what it will be like to work with you, and demonstrates the value you'll deliver.

3. Layout

Essential sections

While the structure of your proposal will likely depend on the specific project, the following sections should generally be included in a winning sales proposal:

- Summary
- Objectives
- Project details
- Responsibilities
- Credentials
- Fees and terms

Length and navigation

Your prospects are likely evaluating multiple proposals and don't have time to dive deeply into every single detail you provide. Instead, they will skim your proposal in search of the most important and compelling information.

Have you created the most organized, attractive, and user-friendly proposal of the bunch?

4. Style

Language

Your sales proposal should be succinct; your language should be direct and simple, as though you and the prospect were having a business conversation. Avoid confusing terminology and jargon and break up longer sections with subheadings for readability.

Visuals

Using images in sales proposals can be helpful when you want to make a lasting impression on a buyer—but make sure the images and graphics are intentional and personalized for your prospect, as appropriate. Consider personalized videos for a special touch.

Dive in with RFX and sales response starters

What would an Ultimate Guide be without complimentary templates and quickstart helpers to simplify and accelerate your sales response process? We've got you covered for every critical sales document you need, from RFP responses and sales proposals to RFQ responses and Statements of Work (SOW).

- If you're looking to craft a sales proposal, check out our [Proposal Template](#). We've even got a comprehensive [Proposal Checklist](#) to keep you on track.
- Get down to business with our [RFP Response Kit](#) which includes a step-by-step template and more.
- To simplify and expedite the process of creating an SOW, we've got a handy [SOW template](#) for you.
- Looking to respond to an RFQ? Our [RFQ Response Kit](#) will make your life easier.
- Need to write an InfoSec questionnaire (aka vendor risk assessment questionnaire or IT risk assessment questionnaire)? We've created the [Everything-you've-ever-wanted-to-know-and-more Guide to Security Questionnaires](#) to help you complete questionnaires with ease.

The trick is in the tools

Creating sales proposals and RFP responses that catapult your company's offering to the top of the buyer's list comes down to the tools you're using to manage the response process. The right technology makes document creation easy, fast, and accurate, helping to shorten deal cycles and keep those revenue streams flowing. In fact, outdated, time-consuming, and error-prone manual processes have no place in the modern world of proposal management.

Whether you're building RFP responses or crafting sales proposals, the process must be simple, efficient, and sustainable for bid and sales teams—and the **only way to achieve the level of accuracy, speed, and professionalism required to win deals consistently is with proposal management software** driving the process. Companies still fumbling around with documents saved on their desktop and chasing down information spread across folders, directories, and siloed departments like some sad Easter Egg hunt are going to be left behind.

Proposal management software in a nutshell

In simple terms, proposal management software is a tool used to propose a business project or idea to an existing customer or prospect. This software automates the document-building process and enables collaboration across the entire organization, streamlining and simplifying the sales response process to accelerate the sales cycle.

Whether you need to respond to RFPs, RFQs, or security questionnaires or create sales proposals, SOWs, or pitches, an AI-powered proposal management platform makes easy work of branding, templates, content management, collaboration, and analytics.

Turning responses into revenue

With buyers' preference for a primarily digital buying experience, sales documents take center stage—and the spotlight is on proposal management software to simplify the work of the bid and sales teams and help them create winning RFP responses and sales proposals, efficiently and effectively.

Let's walk through the many ways proposal management software can help you boost your bottom line with accelerated deal cycles and increase win rates.

Feel the need for speed

Proposal management software intelligently automates the creation of the most important sales documents your team produces, enabling you to respond to multiple opportunities without the stress, headaches, or long hours toiling at your desk. Imagine having the ability to create content-rich, personalized proposals in minutes instead of hours.

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“I completed an RFI in 20 minutes using QorusDocs. It took my team 6 hours to complete the same document without QorusDocs.”

Global consulting firm

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Proposal management software helps you meet and beat your deadlines without the burnout. In fact, a recent benchmark [study](#) found that 70% of respondents were able to process a higher volume of requests, with a 54% median improvement in the number of requests processed. Similarly, 77% of respondents felt that proposal management software helped them decrease the amount of time spent completing a response.

Single source of truth

By uniting team members and projects with a **centralized content hub**, you can dramatically reduce the manual hours your team spends on creating RFP responses and sales proposals, while helping them quickly find winning content that sets your sales documents apart from the crowd. Your bid and sales teams will thank you—and your bottom line will reap the benefits.

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“The QorusDocs Content Hub plays a vital part in our partner enablement programs. IT enables us to equip our partners with all the sales and marketing content they need in order to sell confidently.”

*Briana Lau, Cloud Marketing Manager,
Microsoft Cloud, Ingram Micro*

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Quality AND quantity

High-quality sales documents stand head and shoulders above the crowd. With a proposal management solution guiding the process, you can create professional, concise sales proposals and RFP responses that are on-brand and error-free. You can ensure your sales documents are highly personalized and clearly articulate your customers' unique needs and how you can solve for them.

In fact, [77%](#) of survey respondents using proposal management software noted a positive impact on the quality of their responses, with a 55% median increase in quality. Not to toot our own horn, but [94%](#) of QorusDocs users, specifically, reported that the software is 'effective or highly-effective' in improving the quality of their proposals.

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“Standardizes the format of our proposals and produces a high-quality document over and over that saves time to present to our customers, improving the overall sales cycle.”

Alden H., Enterprise Sales, IT and Services

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Efficiency gains = Happy teams

Proposal management software reduces the stress and friction bid and sales teams face when managing the sales response process. Did you know, [28 people](#), on average, are involved in creating a proposal? With so many cooks in the kitchen, the process is ripe for a preponderance of errors, collaboration headaches, and stressed out team members working long hours.

Plus, repeating the same manual, time-consuming process for every RFP is a recipe for burnout—but thanks to proposal management software, bid and sales teams can build accurate and engaging sales response documents, efficiently and effectively.

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“Game changer! Our team uses QorusDocs to collaborate and create sales proposals, SOWs, and RFPs. I love how easy it is to pull in SMEs and how much faster we can respond to customers.”

Marketing and Advertising, Mid-market

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Proposal management software automates and simplifies the response process through streamlined and simplified collaboration with SMEs and key stakeholders across teams, departments, and geography. By removing the friction from collaboration efforts, a proposal management solution ensures accuracy, completeness, and consistency—no matter where team members are working.

Insights drive constant improvement

Would you like to know which content, themes, images, quotes, contributors, etc. lead to a better win rate? Proposal management software offers a hyper-detailed view of your proposal performance and insights into prospect engagement to gain a competitive advantage.

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“Enables our sales and extended teams—allows for content to be easily shared and tracked. Not only a pursuit management platform but also sales enablement.”

Administrator, Enterprise IT Technology & Services

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AI-powered proposal management solutions, such as [QorusDocs](#), provide dashboards to view how clients and prospects are engaging with your content, including how long readers stay on each page, what they click on, and what they share. Your team can use these valuable data-driven insights to tailor targeted follow-up communications and create smart, customized responses that set you apart from the competition.

Endgame: more wins

A proposal management solution is a gamechanger for bid and sales teams, boosting win rates and accelerating deal velocity by simplifying and streamlining the creation of sales documents. Did you know 72% of proposal management software users experienced a positive impact to deal velocity—a 50% median increase—according to a recent benchmark [report](#)?

With proposal management software in your sales tech stack, you can transform your sales response process to win the deals that really matter, hit and exceed targets, and keep your teams focused and performing at optimal levels.

Tips for proposal management software buyers

As the popularity of proposal management solutions grows and more vendors enter the marketplace, your purchase decision becomes more involved. What features should you look for when selecting a proposal management platform?

Here are five key features you want to ensure your solution of choice can deliver:

1. Simplified, streamlined, automated process

- Content management (the ability to easily access and search consistent, compliant, and approved content)
- Data-driven content recommendations
- Easy, repeatable build steps for each project or content piece
- Auto-answer feature
- Intuitive user interface
- Customizable, formatting-enabled, Smart Template options

2. Seamless collaboration

- Labeling to help track active pursuits and assign tasks
- Integrations with your most used applications, e.g., Microsoft 365, CRM
- Tailored dashboards, fields, data points, and analytics
- Easy-to-pull, meaningful metrics and KPIs

3. Artificial Intelligence

- AI-powered system that gets smarter with each use
- Recommendations engine that suggests optimized content with ease
- Answer and content insertion capability

4. Security

- Remote-enabled software with e-signature to securely share and sign documents from anywhere
- Robust security and privacy controls to ensure data is protected
- Housed by a confident provider, e.g., Microsoft Azure's hybrid cloud

5. Tracking and analytics

- Built-in measurement tools
- Detailed insights or metrics that show how your document has been received and interacted with
- Smart content library features that store your latest and greatest materials

Proposal Management Software Vendors 2022

With your checklist of key features in hand, you're ready to explore the proposal management tools available today. Here are a few options to get you started:

1. [QorusDocs](#)

Call us biased but we think QorusDocs is the crème de la crème of **enterprise proposal management solutions**, tailored to both **sales teams** creating a steady stream of **sales proposals AND bid teams** building complex **RFP responses**. The platform automates and accelerates your response process to consistently create winning sales documents.

The award-winning QorusDocs boasts proven success (and [high praise](#)) in helping clients of all sizes and industries uplevel their response process, plus unparalleled customer support that truly cares about your success.

QorusDocs enjoys world-class partnerships and robust integrations—[Microsoft Office](#), [SharePoint](#), OneDrive, [signNow](#), Salesforce, [Highspot](#), [Intapp](#), Drupal, Sitecore, [PowerBI](#), Microsoft Dynamics, [Microsoft Teams](#), to name a few—that simplify and optimize your sales response process and daily workflow to drive efficiencies and win deals.

2. [Loopio](#)

Loopio is focused on streamlining the RFP process with its RFP response platform, a mix of intelligent automation and collaboration tools that reduces the time spent scouring documents and chasing teammates for information.

3. [RFPIO](#)

Having recently acquired RFP360, RFPIO's (RFP) response management platform brings together teams and increases win rates through in-app collaboration, advanced content governance, and multiple integrations.

4. [Proposify](#)

With a focus on creating a predictable, scalable closing process, Proposify's online proposal software helps customers build winning sales proposals, agreements, and contracts.

5. [PandaDoc](#)

Empowering teams to communicate with customers through personalized documents that can be created in minutes, PandaDoc's all-in-one document automation software streamlines the process to create, approve, and eSign proposals, quotes, contracts, and more.

Arm your sales teams with power tools

Sales proposals are essential tools in the sales rep's toolkit—especially given the preference of buyers to gather information and make purchase decisions with little face-to-face interaction. Plus, with larger buying committees weighing in on the purchase of products and services, powerful and compelling proposals are a necessity for closing deals. By optimizing proposal creation with the right technology, companies can get a leg up on the competition.

An innovative proposal management solution not only helps the bid team automate and simplify its RFP response process but it's become the sales team's new best friend, simplifying and expediting the creation of [winning sales proposals](#) that bolster the bottom line.

Putting the proposal management software into the hands of sales reps enables them to consistently create personalized, accurate, and on-brand sales proposals. By saving them countless hours and collaboration headaches during the response process, proposal management software helps the sales team shorten the deal cycle and win more business. Plus, reps can track how prospects engage with proposals and use the data to inform content recommendations for future sales responses.

Spotlight on sales teams

At QorusDocs, we've seen firsthand the benefits of empowering sales teams with proposal management software, as demonstrated by our wildly successful customers. With the QorusDocs and Highspot integration—which features a consolidated and streamlined workflow of proposal management, CRM, and sales enablement platforms—customers such as [ManpowerGroup](#) and [Teladoc Health](#) are benefitting from optimized content management, proposal creation, and sales acceleration.

ManpowerGroup is able to fast-track proposal creation, leveraging templates and a controlled, consistent content environment. As a result, ManpowerGroup's sales team can create and pitch a personalized proposal to a client in less than five minutes! Plus, sales reps can track how the prospect is interacting with the pitch content and use the data to inform content recommendations for future sales responses.

Companies like [CDW](#), Panasonic, DLA Piper, Insight, and Vodafone are also empowering their entire sales team with QorusDocs' proposal management software. As a result, sales teams can deliver sales responses easily and intelligently at scale, without sacrificing nights and weekends to do it. They're using data and analytics to identify precisely which content, images, infographics, structure, etc., lead to a win in order to optimize future responses for a successful outcome.

Looking ahead

Are you ready to take your sales response process to the next level? The right proposal management software can make a huge impact on sales and bid teams—resulting in higher adoption rates, bigger deal sizes, and more consistent wins. In fact, 95% of users reported that QorusDocs is effective, or highly effective, in increasing their win rate.

If you want to see firsthand how QorusDocs' intuitive and easy-to-use proposal management software enables you and your team to quickly respond to complex RFPs and create customized, professional-looking sales proposals, get in touch for a personalized, one-on-one [demo](#).