PASTOR Framework

Idea In Short

Writing proposals is part of consultants' job description. A consulting proposal is a document sent from a consultant to a prospective client describing a job they wish to take on and the conditions under which they will do so.

If you want to sell your consulting services, you have to write compelling sales proposals. Through these proposals, the recipients - your potential clients - should easily understand the problem they have. Your proposals should clearly demonstrate how engaging your professional services firm will help solve their problem & achieve business outcomes. The proposals should exactly define your scope of services and the next steps a.k.a call to action. With the so-called PASTOR Framework by Ray Edwards you can write attractive sales proposals in a very short time. On the one hand, PASTOR is a metaphor that you can leverage to guide a client through their purchase journey. On the other hand, PASTOR is also an acronym for the major sections of your proposals.

The PASTOR Framework

The PASTOR acronym stands for:

- Problem: Name your client's problem
- Amplify: Point out why the problem is particularly bad
- solution: Describe how to solve the problem
- Transformation: Demonstrate your credentials how you have helped solve other clients' problems
- Offer: Describe your specific service offerings here
- Response: What should the client do next?

Problem

You must begin by identifying the problem that you are solving. The most effective way to do this is to ground the problem in the client-specific context. This has psychological underpinnings - the more accurately you can describe your client's problem, the more instinctively would they feel that you must have an answer to that problem. Use the reader's own language & terminologies to describe the problem. For example, if you are writing about fitness and weight loss, you might describe the problem such:

> You've tried every diet, started & stopped different exercise programs, joined several different gyms. But, the truth is you just can't seem to lose weight. Perhaps you're even feeling a little disgusted with yourself and your inability to control your eating and your weight. You feel like no matter what you try, it's not going to work.

As the great copywriting legend Robert Collier said, you have to:

> join the conversation that is already taking place in the reader's mind

Amplify

The next step is to amplify the consequences of not solving the problem. This is really the key to making the sale. It is also probably the most neglected step in the sales process. What will motivate people to buy your service is usually not the outcome framed in a positive light. It is rather, realising the cost of not attaining that outcome. Put differently, what is it costing them to not solve this problem? If possible, try to quantify the cost of not attaining the outcome. Again, this has psychological underpinnings - The Prospect Theory developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky in 1979. The idea is simple:

> People & organisations view losses and gains differently. When choosing among alternatives, people & organisations tend to avoid losses & optimise for sure wins. This is because the pain of losing is greater than the satisfaction of an equivalent gain.

Story or Solution

Once you have described the problem & amplified the consequences of not solving it, it's time to share the story of how you intend to solve the problem. Even in the B2B world, where proposals are passed back and forth between firms on a daily basis, all proposals are ultimately read by people. So, making your proposal engaging will improve your chances of winning the client engagement. According to behavioural scientist Susan Weinschenk, you use more of your brain when you listen to a story than when you listen to a series of facts. Hence, storytelling leads to a richer experience, which eventually results in an increased level of interest & interaction from your audience. Numerous studies suggest the ease at which we recall stories far outweighs our recall of facts. This is because our brain doesn't make much distinction between reading about an event & actually experiencing the event first-hand. For the purposes of proposal writing, storytelling can add context and perspective to what you do. This is especially important if several people in the client organisation is involved in the decision-making process.

Transformation

The next key step in writing your proposal is to remember that whatever you're selling is the transformation. The idea at this step is to remember that your client doesn't want the services you're providing; they interested in the outcomes & benefits. Simply put:

> they don't need an electric power drill, they need the hole the drill creates

The best way to demonstrate how your services can be transformative is by providing testimonies / references. By doing so, we can pre-emptively address the three questions our clients are likely to ask:

- Is this company able to do what they are promising?
- Has this company delivered similar outcomes to other customers / achieved the results they are describing?
- Is this company the right one to help me achieve the business results?

Again, this has psychological drivers - Social proof - a term coined by Robert Cialdini in his 1984 book, Influence. This effect, also known as informational social influence, describes the psychological & social phenomenon wherein people copy the actions of others in an attempt to undertake behaviour in a given situation.

Offer

So far, you have defined the problem, clarified the cost of not solving it, told the story of the solution, and helped your client visualise the transformation through testimonials from others just like themselves. Now is the time to describe exactly what you are offering for sale. This is the section of your proposal where you lay out your offer. In this section, focus on the transformation, also by describing the deliverables. When describing the deliverables, tie them back to the transformation & benefits your clients will gain. Make only those offers which are win-win for you & your client. Make honest offers — don't oversell. Resist the temptation to make claims that aren't true.

Response

If you do not ask for the sale, you will not make any. Assume that the customer is going to buy & just give them the instructions on how to. This is often the area where proposals tend to be the weakest. At this point, you should not be shy about making this request. You should tell the customer exactly what to do in order to engage your professional services. You should also remind them why it's important to do so. The original definition of pastor was means to be like a shepherd. Think of shepherding your clients to the decision you want them to make, in a way that is beneficial to them. The job of a pastor is to care for i.e. shepherd & guide those who are in his care. When it comes to your clients, your responsibility is the same. Persuasive, but not manipulative. Persuasion comes from channeling your client's existing motivations, whereas manipulation is outside pressure that did not originally exist.

Summary

Proposals are powerful tools for professional services firms to build trust with their prospects & clients. Proposals also demonstrate their value & ultimately close deals. Oftentimes, professional services firms will send a proposal after a prior conversation or meeting that didn't result in a concrete opportunity or go over it in a follow-up meeting. The goal is to provide the client with something at arm's length that's well-organised and easily compared with various other options and make the right decision. To connect with your clients and set yourself apart, you need to know what they care about. Thus, differentiation

requires knowledge. The most successful firms know who their clients are, what challenges they face & have strong differentiators that are relevant to the Client, true & provable. By effectively conveying this information through well-written proposals, clients can become a lot more comfortable when signing on the dotted line during the closing the deal.