

## The Power of Capture To Win The Contract

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”

Peter Drucker  
Management Consultant

You have decided to bid on the contract and create a winning campaign. Now what? Capture. The goal is to get the offer completed before the RFP is released to the public. How? Capture. In the past, you created the best proposal but didn’t win the contract. What was missing? Capture.

Capture is the process of researching and dissecting all of the client’s needs and requirements.

After deciding to bid on an opportunity, elite competitors who frequently beat out the competition implement a “capture plan” because they know that a winning campaign is not a winning campaign if they have not first established a relationship with the client. Peter Drucker, Management Consultant, got it right when he said, “The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.” This is especially true when playing the RFP game. In the RFP and supporting documentation, the client will disclose the technical requirements that will get your proposal response through to the next stage of the selection process if you comply, but will not be sufficient to win the contract. You must assume that your competitors are also submitting awesome compliant proposals. Therefore, submitting a proposal is not enough to win the contract. You must also compete at the client-level not vendor-level and capture is the technique which catapults you to that level.

Client-level competing ups the ante because you are going above and beyond to uncover the real project requirements: the ones that the client does not make public. Capture is the core of client-level competing because it allows the client to freely express concerns and pain points that would not be in the RFP all because they trust that the vendor will handle them. Therefore, the vendor is fully prepared well in advance so they are not starting from scratch when the RFP is released.

Did you know that oftentimes by the time DOD, NSF, or NIH post an RFP in the federal business opportunities registrar ([fbo.gov](http://fbo.gov)), they have a clue about who should be in the final three and even sometimes know who should win the award? Being a service provider for 18 years, I thought this was so unfair because imagine submitting the “bee’s knees” of a proposal knowing that you have met all requirements just to learn that you didn’t win. But, when I became a contracting officer representative (COR) for the federal government, I witnessed how a few of the providers worked hard to build an ongoing relationship with the agency just to ensure that their needs were met. And, those same providers also submitted compliant proposals. Who should the client select for contract awards: the provider who submitted a compliant proposal or the one whom the client is familiar with, trust, and submitted a compliant proposal? Being a service provider is difficult because services do not exist when they are sold. Instead, it is a

promise that you will do a great job in the future. But, who likes to spend money with no immediate return? I don't. Neither do customers.

Keep in mind that by the time you read the RFP, your competitors are also reading the RFP – competitors who have possibly built a relationship with the client prior to the RFP release. These competitors know the “real project requirements” that are client-centric, not just project-centric. They know the client’s concerns and problems about the project. These competitors have learned the organizational culture and ensured that their names are familiar throughout the organization. Therefore, the client not only can clearly answer the question “why are you different than the others?”, but they can more importantly answer the question “why is that difference important to me?”. These elite competitors know a secret that many bidders do not know and that is, if you can influence and mold the requirements to your business, you face a greater chance of winning the contract. *Remember, not knowing all the requirements, including the “real requirements”, simply makes you a bidder, not a competitor.*

Here’s a summary of the capture process:

1. Hire a Capture Manager. It takes time and effort to perform the capture process. Therefore, many companies hire a “Capture Manager”. The Capture Manager will create a “capture plan” defining the entire framework for business development. The framework will provide your drug-testing company the best practices for managing opportunities. These best practices are:
  - Creating a proposed strategy based on the customer’s perspective, not yours
  - Influencing the customer to prefer your strategy and organization instead of the competition. This is done with a well-thought out strategy that clearly demonstrates you understand the customer’s pain-points. And,
  - Aligning your capture activities with acquisition phases. If you wish to acquire government or corporate contracts, you must be familiar with the acquisition process and its phases:

Name of Phase	Capture Activity to Perform
Requirements Definition	The Capture Manager engages with the client at this stage to influence the requirements that go into the RFP.
Acquisition Strategy	This phase occurs after the Statement of Work has been written. Engage with the client to explain how money can be saved and express how you understand needs.
Request for Proposal	This phase is known as “going dark” because Capture Managers must not engage with the client during this phase. This rule is described in the government’s acquisition for policies and procedures called the “Federal Acquisition Regulation” (FAR).

2. Create a project plan that coincides with the dates found in the capture plan. This project plan must include the resources needed to complete the activities and the time and budget constraints. Important dates to track are:
  - When the draft and final RFP will be released
  - The proposal due date
  - The dates for QA sessions
  - The oral presentation dates
  - Award date, and
  - When you will receive the first task order.
  
3. Perform a customer analysis. This is the most important step in the capture process. The Capture Manager gets to know the client to learn the following:
  - The organizational structure
  - The source selection process and the source selection team's buttons to not push
  - The buying and evaluation processes
  - The company's positioning with the customer (i.e. based on your competition where do you stand?)
  - The customer's goals and pain-points. And last but certainly not least,
  - Does the customer perceive you as a friend or enemy and if they are neutral towards your company or champion your past performances?

In a nutshell, how bad do you want it? Answering this question will determine if you are willing to do what it takes to beat out the competition. If you answered 'yes' to the question, then you must implement a capture strategy within your organization that

- dedicates time and effort to get to know the client
- captures all of the project requirements, and equally important
- captures the client's concerns and issues by building trust.

Your objective should be to make sure that the client is not only anxious to read your proposal, but is looking forward to adding your company to their team. And, this is not achieved if the first time the client learns about your company is when you submit the proposal.

Understanding and accepting the importance of building a sound client-provider partnership is key. After all, the foundation for partnership is trust and if the client trusts you, then your drug-testing company will stand out amongst the competition and will eventually compete less because you possess the ultimate differentiator – trust.



Tonya Bonner is the Director of Business Development for the Atlantic Consulting Group. She started and successfully nurtured companies for her portfolio and partnered with others to grow their businesses to fruition.

With 23 years of winning contracts with organizations such as MedStar, Department of Health, Northrop Grumman, and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ms. Bonner diligently works with companies as a prime and subcontractor on dozens of government and private sector contracts. The Department of Education certified Tonya as a Contracting Officer Representative (COR) and Systems Security Officer (SSO) and her business development articles are featured in Drug & Alcohol Testing Industry Association's (DATIA) quarterly publication, *Focus*.