EIGHT GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL

The following guidelines will help you persuade your audience to approve your plan. Refer to these guidelines and Figures 13.5 and 13.6 both before and while you formulate your plan.

1. **Approach writing a proposal as a problem-solving activity.** Your purpose should reflect your ability to identify and solve problems. Convince your audience that you know what their needs are and that you will meet them, as Alissa Bond and Stacy Holton do in Figure 13.5, and as Neelow Singh and Jack Rosen do in Figure 13.6.

2. **Regard your audience as skeptical.** Even though you offer a plan that you think will benefit readers, do not be overconfident that they will automatically accept it as the best and only way to proceed. Brainstorm, alone or with your collaborative team, to anticipate and answer your readers' questions and objections. Use social media and online surveys to find customer information you can incorporate in your proposal. To determine whether your proposal is feasible, readers will study it carefully. If your proposal contains errors or inconsistencies, omits information, or deviates from what they are looking for, your readers will reject it.

3. **Research your proposal topic thoroughly.** A winning proposal is *not* based on a few well-meaning, general suggestions. To provide the detailed information necessary and to convince readers, you will have to do your homework. Research your topic by studying the latest technology in the field (as Alissa Bond and Stacy Holton do in Figure 13.5), shopping for the best prices, comparing your prices and services with what the competition offers, verifying schedules, visiting customers, making site visits, and interviewing key individuals. Make sure that any technology or equipment you use or sell complies with all codes, specifications, and standards.

4. **Scout out what your competitors are doing.** Become familiar with your competitors' products or services, have a fair idea about their market costs, and be able to show how your company's work is better overall. Provide examples; offer a demonstration. Read competitors' websites, social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, and print publications very carefully. Let readers know you have done your homework on their behalf. See how the employees who wrote the internal proposal in Figure 13.5 researched the industry average for losses due to unsold inventory and inventory discounts. Note, too, how the writers in Figure 13.6 prove that their product and service are superior to those of their competitors.

5. **Prove that your proposal is workable.** The bottom-line question from your readers is "Will this plan work?" Your proposal should contain no statements that say, "Let's see what happens if we do *X* or *Y*." Analyze and test each part of your proposal to eliminate any quirks and to revise the proposal appropriately before readers evaluate it. What you propose should be consistent with the organization and capabilities of the company and should respect its corporate mission and

Copyright 2017 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

culture. See how Alissa Bond and Stacy Holton argue how relevant, user friendly, and compatible Inventech is for their sporting goods company. For instance, recommending that a small company of eighteen employees triple its workforce to implement your plan would be foolish and risky.

6. **Be sure your proposal is financially realistic.** "Is it worth the money?" is another bottom-line question you can expect from your readers. For example, recommending that your company spend $20,000 to solve a $2,000 problem is just not feasible. Note how Figure 13.5 details both the cost of inaction and the amount needed to correct the problem and how Figure 13.6 stresses that the costs are in line with what the customer wants to spend. Above all, make readers believe that the benefits are worth the costs.

7. **Be ethical.** Your proposal needs to follow all the guidelines for ethical conduct (see "Ethical Writing in the Workplace," pages 26–37). You must be trustworthy and truthful about all the claims you make about products, services, and contracts and that you will be professional and respond to any questions or problems your readers voice. Later sections of this chapter discuss the ethical standards you must adhere to when writing either an internal proposal (pages 526–536) or a sales proposal (pages 536–541).

8. **Package your proposal attractively.** Make sure that your proposal is well presented (professional looking, inviting, and easy to read) and that all visuals are clear and appropriately placed. The visual appearance of your proposal can contribute greatly to whether it is accepted.

TECH NOTE

Document Design and Your Proposal

As we saw in Chapter 11, the overall design and layout of a document play a major role in its acceptance by an audience. This is especially true of a proposal—a key sales document for you and your company. Your proposal will be competing with many (perhaps 50 or 100) other proposals, and the first impression it makes should be attractive, logically organized, and reader friendly. If it is designed professionally and pleasingly, it will remain in the running. If not, your proposal may be rejected before your audience reads your first sentence.

Here are some guidelines to help you prepare an attractive and carefully designed proposal.

- Make sure you follow the RFP guidelines to the letter—in terms of spacing, title page, number of copies, appendixes, exhibits, and so on.
- Double-check to make sure your proposal looks professional. If you have to submit a printed document, use good-quality paper and a sturdy binding. If you have to submit your proposal electronically, make sure you follow the instructions exactly.

(*Continued*)

Copyright 2017 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

- Organize your proposal into sections that help readers identify and follow its various parts—for example, problem, solution, budget, timetable, personnel. If the RFP asks you to include certain sections, follow these instructions exactly. Otherwise your proposal could be rejected.
- Use clearly marked, logically ordered, and consistent headings (or, if necessary, subheadings) to separate sections of your proposal to help readers follow and understand your work easily, quickly, and clearly.
- Insert extra spacing between sections of your proposal so they stand out and show readers your work is organized.
- Use a professional-looking and easy-to-read font and type size. Do not try to cram more information in by resorting to an 8-point type.
- Include easy-to-follow indented lists, each item preceded by a bullet or an asterisk.
- Clearly label and insert all visuals in the most appropriate places in your proposal. See Figure 13.5, which does an especially effective job.
- Put budgets in easy-to-read tables; do not bury numbers in a paragraph of prose. Make sure each item in a budget is identified and highlighted or relegated to a footnote or an appendix.
- Keep your paragraphs to five to six sentences. Heavy blocks of prose slow readers down and make them think your work is dense and hard to follow. Consider your readers' comfort level.
- Do not fail to include and label any supporting documents or materials that are not a part of your proposal proper, for example, schedules, surveys, or samples, as in Figure 13.6.

INTERNAL PROPOSALS

The primary purpose of an internal proposal, such as the one shown in Figure 13.5 (pages 530–534), is to offer a realistic and constructive plan to help your company run its business more efficiently and economically.

On your job you may discover a better way of doing something or a more efficient way to correct a problem. You believe that your proposed change will save your employer time, money, or further trouble. (Note how Alissa Bond and Stacy Holton indentified and researched a more effective and efficient way for Challenger Sports to manage its inventory and to satisfy its customers in Figure 13.5.) Or your department head, manager, or supervisor may call your attention to a problem and ask you for specific ways to solve it.

Regardless of who identifies the problem, your proposal, generally speaking, will be an informal, in-house message. A brief (one- to three- or four-page) memo, as in Figure 13.5, or even a shorter email, should be appropriate.

Some Common Topics for Internal Proposals

An internal proposal can be written about a variety of topics, including the following:

Copyright 2017 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.