

PDS™

**BAXTER STRATEGIES INCORPORATED
PROPOSAL DEBRIEF SYSTEM**

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**WHEN IT COMES TO PROPOSALS
WINNING IS EVERYTHING**

Winning More Business

Nothing is more important to a business than insuring revenue and profit growth. One of the best ways to achieve this is to conduct ongoing and systematic proposal debriefings to increase the percentage of RFP wins.

Unfortunately, the reasons for proposal success and failure are all too often given no more than a cursory examination. The natural tendency to start working on the next project after a win or to put the bad news behind you and focus on the next opportunity after a loss takes precedence over the process of identifying the valuable feedback that can improve future sales.

Obtaining critical information such as why the project was won or lost, what you did right and what could be improved, and who the competition was, as well as identifying your most effective internal resources, can supercharge your proposal efforts and make them more effective. Only by incorporating the lessons of the past — both the strategies that brought you success and the costly mistakes that resulted in lost business, — will companies be able to transcend the status quo.

If a company only gets its “fair share of wins” it can maintain its market share, but real growth will stagnate.

Beyond the immediate benefit of improving a company's proposal win-rate, debriefings can also be a worthy marketing tool in their own right. They can help strengthen client relationships by demonstrating to prospects that their business is highly valued, that you are interested in understanding how to improve your relationship with them and are willing to expend your resources to learn how to serve them better in the future. Frequently this process turns current losses into future proposals wins.

Even after a project has been won, conducting a proposal debriefing demonstrates a continued interest in the client and a desire to fully understand the nature of the relationship, the low points as well as the high, and a willingness to solve any problems that may arise.

Besides improving your win-rate, proposal debriefings also provide the following additional benefits:

The reasons for winning or losing a proposal are not self-evident and must be carefully studied to be understood.

- Identifying proposal best practices
- Identifying sales staff training needs
- Fine-tuning pricing strategies
- Optimizing the use of sales personnel
- Staying on top of emerging competitive trends
- Presenting more compelling marketing messages
- Generating additional sales and profits
- Improving the accuracy of your sales forecasts

Proposal Debrief Considerations

The reasons for winning or losing a proposal are usually not self-evident. While you may get some anecdotal information about the reasons for winning when working with a new customer, this feedback is not complete and is usually not sufficiently detailed to be actionable. The reasons for losing are even more elusive and much more difficult to uncover.

Who Should Conduct the Debriefings?

In-House Systems

Some companies feel that having the proposal team meet to discuss the proposal process and their beliefs about why they won or lost will yield sufficient information to determine the reasons for success or failure. Others believe that they can have a member of the proposal team contact the prospect and debrief them about the reasons for the win or loss. While these approaches may occasionally provide useful information, the agendas and egos of the proposal team almost always color the true reasons for wins and losses.

Still other, somewhat more enlightened, companies recognize that debriefing the proposal team will rarely yield objective information and decide instead to use in-house personnel who were not involved in the proposal process. However, this strategy is also problematic. While it removes many of the self-serving biases that are likely to exist when the proposal team conducts the debriefings, the natural defensive tendencies that employees have when their company is being critiqued often color the feedback they receive.

Perhaps worse, the use of in-house personnel to conduct these studies fails to take into account the socio-psychological predispositions of most clients to be polite and avoid confrontation. The result of these predispositions frequently yields a “sugar-coated” report that avoids blunt truths. For example, a frequently encountered response when staff administers debriefings is to be told that the company came in “a close second” when, in fact, the company’s performance was anything but close. This type of response is often more polite than accurate and could actually mislead the company and encourage it to use losing strategies in future RFPs.

Using internal resources to conduct proposal debriefs frequently yield inaccurate, sugar coated reports that avoid blunt truths.

External Systems

The most fruitful approach for determining the reasons for proposal wins and losses is to use outside resources to conduct formal interviews with the decision makers and, if they can be identified, the influencers at the target company. Because they are conducted by an independent third-party, these interviews will generate more honest and accurate replies, uncover sensitive information and produce more actionable results.

Which Methodology Should be Employed?

No matter who is responsible for conducting the win-loss debriefs, several different research methodologies can be used. These can be categorized into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative Methods

Some approaches utilize qualitative interviews in which in-depth discussions and analyses are undertaken to obtain the reasons for the win or loss. Although this methodology frequently yields very rich information, the vital facts are generally buried in a great deal of irrelevant information and it may take a considerable amount of time to uncover them. The substantial delay between the debrief and the availability of actionable information means that other proposals in the pipeline can not benefit from the feedback.

Additionally, because each qualitative interview is different and often addresses issues unique to that proposal, it is very difficult to make generalizations to other proposal situations — a process that is essential to positively influence the outcomes of future proposal efforts.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative proposal debriefings overcome many of the shortcomings of the qualitative methodologies. They provide information in a more timely fashion and the information can be generalized to similar future proposal situations. However, quantitative methodologies often do not provide the depth necessary to understand the subtleties at play in the proposal process and are exceptionally poor at uncovering emerging issues.

PDS™ - A Better Approach

Responding to management's need for timely, accurate and detailed measures of proposal performance, we have developed the Baxter Strategies Proposal Debrief System (PDS™). PDS™ is a powerful tool designed to help our clients understand their performance on their major proposals and improve their sales efforts quickly, effectively and affordably.

Eclectic Methodology

This unique procedure combines the benefits of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the intimacy of person-to-person interviewing and the speed of internet reporting. PDS™ will tell you why you won or lost, how your performance compares to your competition and what you can do to improve. It not only has the strength of detail to provide your sales teams the information they need to refine their performance, but also permits management to monitor performance and better plan for future success.

The Baxter Strategies Proposal Debrief System will provide you with all the information you need to improve your sales performance.

Highly Trained Professional Interviewers

To conduct this research we utilize a team of highly experienced executive interviewers carefully trained to reach and communicate with senior executives. The PDS™ interviews combine the most powerful elements of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys into comprehensive telephone discussions with key decision makers. During these discussions they elicit in-depth information about every component of the proposal process including, but not limited to ...

- Overall performance
- Pre-proposal meetings
- The written proposal
- The oral presentation
- The individual or team making the presentations
- Firm resources and policies
- Pricing

Action Oriented Results

The Baxter Strategies PDS™ system highlights the critical issues necessary to improve the proposal effort. The components measured include:

- Key factors that caused the win or loss
- Strength and weakness of your firm vs. the competition.
- Impact of prior business or personal relationships on the selection process
- What could be done better in the future
- Future business potential of the account

Rapid Reports

No matter how good a procedure is, if the results are not provided in a timely manner, the data loses much of its saliency and usefulness. Our web based PDS™ reporting tool delivers information about each win or loss almost immediately, while the process is still fresh in the minds of the proposal team and feedback will have its greatest impact. Additionally, the speed of the reporting makes it possible to use the information in time to improve the outcomes of other proposals currently in progress.

Given the confidential nature of this data, all PDS™ reports are presented in a highly secure and controlled environment. Access to PDS™ reports is limited to those individuals you select and this access can be varied on a proposal by proposal basis.

Beyond standard reporting of your company's performance on individual proposals, you may opt for expanded reporting which combines multiple proposals and allows you to see how you are doing overall, team by team, region by region, and industry by industry.

When it comes to proposals Winning is everything

If you want to win more than just your "fair share" of proposals, your company needs and deserves the best win-loss proposal debriefing system available — Baxter Strategies' PDS™.

Baxter Strategies Inc.



Baxter Strategies Incorporated is a full service supplier of custom business intelligence and market research recognized for the quality of its analyses and the effectiveness of its recommendations. We are committed to providing affordable, high quality, timely information that will give our clients a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Among the many research methodologies we employ are secondary research, in-depth interview and focus groups, in-person interviews, mall intercepts, telephone, web, and mail interviews; all combined with advanced analytical and statistical techniques to provide our clients with information they can act on, and recommendations that will help them achieve success.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss how Baxter Strategies can work with you and meet the needs of your organization. We will be happy to show you exactly how the system works, and how it can be successfully integrated into your organization.

To get additional information, or to discuss our research capabilities, please contact either Steven Kane at (516) 367-1783 or Joe Katz at (561) 793-3010. Alternatively you may e-mail us at info@baxterstrategies.com