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RFP A SALESPERSON'S THREE FAVOURITE LETTERS

AN RFP OR request for proposal is music to a salesperson's ears. This is the key step in a sales relationship when your potential advertiser asks you to submit a proposal for partnership.

Before we discuss what to do with an RFP it is important to note what should be in place before the RFP arrives. A sales relationship is an ongoing tango between a brand and a potential client. By the time the RFP arrives, the tango should be in synch and ready to take out on the dance floor. Ideally, when you receive the RFP your brand should be positioned so that the request is not asking should you partner together but how your brands will partner together.

That said, the media environment is very competitive and your proposal submission may make the difference between your brand receiving the business or not, even if the potential client already knows your magazine is the right fit for their campaign.

Here are tips that will assist you in putting your best proposal forward:

- Don't fear questions. A media contact gets extremely busy when the planning cycle begins and sending their RFP is part of that process. Nonetheless, if you receive the RFP and have questions, you have the right as a potential partner to ask for clarifications. Keep in mind you might only have one chance with the contact, so have all questions ready for one conversation.
- Always follow the RFP template. The potential client prepares an RFP template specific to their requirements and their hope is that you'll follow their flow. This will mean consistency and ease when they are sorting through all of the submissions—do you want to be the brand that is out of step?
- Cover all bases if a template is not provided. If the RFP is more informal and there is no template, be sure to cover all points of the request. For example, if they ask for positions in three specific issues be sure to include a position for each. If they ask for a media kit, send it along with your submission. In fact, you can use their request as a checklist to make sure that you are sending along everything they asked for.
- Additional information is okay if provided in the right way. If you review the potential partnership and feel that the tango is not ready for the ballroom, it is okay to include additional pertinent information in your submission. This might include updated relevant reader research or circulation news. Since this was not requested and represents extra evaluation on the part of the media contact, you should include this information as an addendum and be concise, clear and limit the amount of extras.
- The clearer the better with savings and value. A media contact may be good at figuring out savings and value, but nobody can position these benefits better than you can. So, if you are providing a rate incentive, show the percentage of savings that you are proposing. If you are providing a guaranteed position in your best-selling issue, let them know about this special offer. If you included added value, show the dollar value of each option. The contact will consider this information when evaluating your proposal submission.
- Additional special opportunities should be included. If your brand has a special media or integrated opportunity that the media contact would not be aware of, it is a good idea to include this as an additional option with your proposal submission. Although not requested, if it is the right fit, the contact will want the opportunity to consider it as part of their media plan. Nothing is worse for a media contact than learning about a great special program that was never brought to their attention—even if it was not bought. A caution: this does not apply to any old idea that you think might be attractive. This should be for larger brand initiatives with sponsorship opportunities.
- RFP follow-up. As mentioned above, a media contact gets extremely busy when the planning cycle begins and sending an RFP is just a part of that process. Follow-up is good, and is part of your role, but monitor yourself so that you do not lean towards annoying (a voice mail message and email every day is not okay). That said, as a potential media partner you have earned the right to a response. If you are getting a cold shoulder, it might be a red flag that the partnership commitment is at risk.

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