

# Irrefutable Evidence

## FOUR SIMPLE STEPS TO MORE PERSUASIVE PROPOSALS

By Chris Sant



1. When should you have ready-to-go evidence?
  - To address frequently encountered objections.
  - To prove the value of your differentiators.

If your company recently had a public scandal, you'll need evidence to counter any negative impressions.

2. Repetitive evidence has diminishing persuasive value. A good rule of thumb is that a second item of evidence that establishes the same concept has only 25 percent the value of the first. Beyond three examples of the same thing, there's little added value.

AT A MINIMUM, BASIC HUMAN SKEPTICISM LOPS 20 PERCENT OFF YOUR STATED VALUE – AND GOD HELP YOU IF YOU DIDN'T EVEN QUANTIFY THE VALUE OF YOUR SOLUTION.

IMAGINE YOU'VE JUST been named juror No. 5 for a business dispute trial, despite all your best efforts to get out of it.

Company A and Company Z are suing each other for \$15 million. At the end, you'll have to decide which company receives the money. How will you make your decision? Flip a coin? Consult an astrologer?

Let's consider some possibilities.

If Company A presents evidence on each key issue you want to know about, and Company Z doesn't, who are you going to vote for?

If Company A presents evidence from accountants, managers, eye-witnesses, and third-party experts, and Company Z puts just one manager on the stand who repeats over and over how experienced the company is, who are you going to vote for?

If Company A's evidence is specific to the issues you want to know about, and Company Z's evidence is irrelevant and amounts to little more than "We're good people who have been in business a long time, so you should trust us," who are you going to vote for?

Your proposal readers are your judge and jury—and sometimes executioner. They react the exact same way you just did. They don't want to be there. They have low expectations. They get bored from hearing

repetitions of insignificant, generic evidence. And they get angry when they've skimmed through your entire proposal and haven't found concrete proof about their central concern: Is their specific problem solvable?

### EVIDENCE WINS

Clearly, it's no surprise that the side with evidence wins. Our entire justice system is built on collecting, analyzing, and presenting evidence. No jury—or selection committee—is going to choose the company that presented only a few vague platitudes over the side that presents specific, relevant, and credible evidence on each key point. You know that. I know that. But how do we do it? How do we stop trotting out the same tired map of all of our office locations and start giving them what they want?

### STEP 1. PUT SOMEONE IN CHARGE OF EVIDENCE.

The No. 1 reason proposals fail to have persuasive evidence—and, as a result, fail to win systematically—is that no single person has final ownership of the evidence. No ownership means no responsibility. Ideally, the one who owns the evidence should be the same person who is in charge of your content library. After all, winning evidence that no one uses

represents time, effort, and opportunity down the drain.

### STEP 2. FIND PRE-EXISTING EVIDENCE AND CREATE NEW EVIDENCE.

Fundamentally, your goal is to demonstrate that the perceived value of your solution minus the perceived cost is greater than the perceived value minus the perceived cost of the next best alternative.

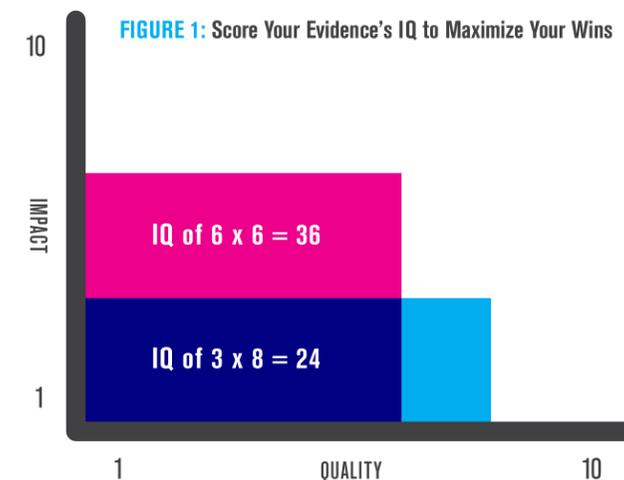
$$(pValue_s - pCost_s) > (pValue_{nbs} - pCost_{nbs})$$

Why is it the *perceived* value and *perceived* cost? Frankly, because the buyer doesn't trust you. You can say your solution delivers a \$15 million benefit and costs only \$10 million all you want. But the buyer has a word for people who take numbers like that at face value: gullible.

Instead, the proposal reader discounts the anticipated benefit. At a minimum, basic human skepticism lops 20 percent off your stated value—and God help you if you didn't even quantify the value of your solution. If you've never worked with the client and it's a new product or a new service area, those doubts and fears can easily amount to discounts of 50 to 80 percent.

The same is true with costs—but in the other direction. You say it costs \$10 million. But they have a dozen other vendors who say it costs only X, when it actually ends up costing X plus Y plus the delays and stress and aggravation. This is the reason for loss aversion, where people demand paybacks of two or three or four times the cost before they'll make a purchase.

As a result, every section of your proposal that discusses the value or cost of your solution needs solid evidentiary support. If you don't have it, you need to find it or create it. If you don't, buyers will either demand much more benefit or much lower prices. Sound like any client you know?



### STEP 3. SELECT THE RIGHT EVIDENCE FOR THIS CLIENT.

The only useful evidence is that which responds to *this* client's fears and desires. This requires effort and collaboration between sales and proposals teams. The RFP may be about help desk services, but the underlying need is probably about cutting costs in response to stock market pressures or increasing revenue to respond to competitors or simplifying the corporate structure. Whatever the client's key fears and desires are, you need persuasive evidence for each one.

So, what makes evidence persuasive? Persuasive evidence has a high IQ, where *I* measures the impact the evidence has and *Q* measures the quality of that evidence. For instance, a case study about a \$40 million benefit demonstrates a bigger impact than a \$4 million benefit, which is bigger than vague significant benefits. Likewise, a testimonial from a CEO in the same industry as the buyer is higher quality evidence than one from a middle manager in an unrelated field. By scoring the *I* and *Q* of each piece of evidence on a 10-point scale (from the client's point of view) and multiplying them, you get the IQ value of your evidence (see Figure 1).

Your goal is to present, in the course of your proposal, between

100 and 150 IQ points worth of crisp, distinct evidence for each of the client's key fears and desires.

### STEP 4. IMPLEMENT A SYSTEM TO REGULARLY REQUEST AND RECEIVE NEW EVIDENCE.

Make it a point to follow up with clients to request testimonials and other evidence. As an added benefit, this system will keep you in much better touch with how they're doing—leading to more satisfaction, more referrals, and more repeat business.

### THE 30 PERCENT BOOST

Research we've conducted shows that clients find evidence-backed assertions at least 30 percent more persuasive than evidence-free versions. In fact, we've found that with enough high IQ evidence, clients will completely eliminate their loss aversion and discounting toward your solution. High IQ evidence results in clients who trust you and your solution, and that means you walk away with more wins. ●

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