



Win Themes & Differentiation

What's the most important factor in winning your bid? Many would say price. And there is no doubt that you have to get the commercial offer right. However, feedback from purchasers consistently shows that the winning proposal is the one with clear win themes that most appeal to them.

But what are win themes and how do you land on the right ones?

Win Themes vs Value Proposition

Bid Teams are very hard-working and frequently have to pull out all the stops by enduring long nights and working over weekends. So it's quite wrong to call them lazy!

However, sometimes lazy thinking at the start of a bid development cycle can have a disastrous impact on the final result. Investing effort into developing meaningful win themes is associated with better results from proposals. But what exactly are win themes?

If you ask Bid Managers to articulate the difference between the Value Proposition (VP) and the Win Themes for their current bid many will struggle. Aren't they the same thing? Well, not quite. Whilst there is a very close relationship between the two the main difference is audience ...

Even if you have brought in the big brand experts to develop and hone your VP in the past, VPs tend to be somewhat "generic".

When you detail the features and benefits of your products and services on your website, in sales presentations and brochures, for example, you don't really know exactly who your reader is.

So, if your bids are simply trotting out your established VP then, no matter how good your VP is, your proposal win rate will be compromised because your proposal may come across as somewhat bland and generic.

When developing the winning proposal you have to really know your audience and their needs. When you know your audience then - and only then - are you able to put in place compelling win themes.



The ability to communicate clear and compelling win themes that resonate with purchasers is the single most important determinant of bid success.

Win Themes and Storytelling

The Winning Proposal invariably has just three to five killer win themes that put very clear water between you and your competitors and which consistently serve as a “golden thread” across all of your proposal materials.

Winning proposals always tell a compelling story that hits your readers – your audience – both in the heart and the head.

Powerful win themes underpin your story by mapping out – from the reviewer’s perspective - exactly why you will provide the very best solution to the issues raised in their Request for Proposal (RFP).

What are Good Win Themes?

A win theme:

- Ties the features of your proposed solution to **clear customer benefits**
- Enhances the solution by **increasing the attractiveness of your solution** description as perceived by your readers
- Contains **specific information about your solution’s benefits** that are directly relevant to and tuned for your audience

- Provides hard, **incontrovertible evidence** of how your proposed solution has worked in the past in identical / similar circumstances and further proofs that the solution will work well in the future for your current prospect.

This brings us to a better understanding of the difference between your VP and your win themes for your proposal ...

Whilst elements of your “generic” VP may well be retained for your bid, they will need, as a minimum, to be re-cast; described in relation to the benefits that will be enjoyed specifically by your prospect, reinforced by proofs that are directly relevant to reviewers, thereby **compelling them to desire your solution above all others.**

Features vs Benefits

Developing strong win themes necessitates understanding the distinction between features and benefits and then articulating features only in so far as is required for the benefit to be grasped in full.

Features are aspects of your solution that at least meet – and ideally exceed - **the requirements of the specification or**

the RFP (Request for Proposal).

Features may include things like software functionality, hardware resilience, your implementation methodology, supporting business processes, on-going support arrangements, performance levels, project personnel etc.

Benefits are the business advantages that the prospect enjoys in relation to your solution solving the prospect’s problems.

Benefits include things such as cost savings, reduced risk and higher performance levels.

Benefits often boil down to increasing your prospect’s core profitability, although in sectors such as healthcare and education increased quality will be right up there as the most important factors.

You may have hundreds of features and benefits that you might consider describing in your bid. What should we include?



Win Theme

=



Feature

+



Benefit

+



Evidence

+



Audience



Duncan [Cranmer of the Winning Proposal] is a strategic thinker and skilled facilitator who is expert at getting a group to push beyond surface knowledge to truly understand new concepts. He is quick on his feet and able to command an audience. Highly professional and easy to work with. Duncan would be an asset to any organisation and someone I highly recommend.

EMEIA Service Quality Lead, EY (Ernst and Young)





I just wanted to share with you that I just closed one out of my two sales deals that we discussed on the course. (Second is progressing well too). I am very grateful for all I have learned from you and I truly believe that your course was a significant aid in my sales process! A big thank you from Switzerland.”

Front line sales, Bloomberg Tradebook Europe



Bloomberg

Selective Differentiation

Describing hundreds of features and benefits is unlikely to win you the bid. Your readers don't have the energy or inclination to wade through a never-ending field of weeds!

The winning proposal persuades buyers that you will meet their needs better than your rivals. Persuasion of the required type necessitates a limited number of vital differentiators coupled with plausible evidence that puts very clear water between you and your competitors.

Only in this way can you enjoy the confidence that reviewers will be convinced that your proposed solution will work best for them and offer real value.

A good win theme consists of:

Theme = Features + Benefits + Proof + Audience Perspective

A strong win theme exhibits differentiation, setting your capabilities apart from the capabilities of others.

A poor win theme may only describe a feature and fail to provide details of any associated benefits and / or proof.

The very worst win themes cite no benefits, don't leverage any proofs and completely fail to take into account the particular needs of their audience.

The Golden Thread

In developing win themes we encourage you to involve key members of your bid team, sales personnel and other senior participants in a "kick-off" meeting.

Securing the early involvement of key players fosters shared ownership of the agreed win themes, meaning that everyone fully commits to and believes in the bid right from the outset.

Win themes, when agreed up front at the start of the development cycle, then serve as a "golden thread" which unifies the entire proposal, allowing your contributors to consistently "sing from the same hymn sheet".

Even your most remote and minor contributors can now be quickly and easily briefed on the three, four or five big win themes that must be reflected in their answers.

From your prospect's perspective memorable and resounding benefits with plausible proofs are in evidence throughout your proposal, convincing them that you are the right partner to do business with in the future.

The golden thread of your key win themes leads to more shortlisting presentation opportunities. And when developing your shortlisting presentation, the carefully

filtered win themes from your proposal can quickly be incorporated in to your presentation, again securing consistency of sales messages and really nailing down benefits that will accrue to your buyers.

In the final analysis, strong win themes improve your win rates, increase revenue streams and bolster your market credibility.

Developing Good Win Themes

In our facilitated workshop we guide you and your team to consider, filter and finally select the most appropriate win themes for your target audience. We show you how to choose and position the best evidence to support your bold promises.

The start point can be a set of draft win themes that have already been prepared. Results tend to be stronger, however, where we work with you on your win themes "from scratch", that is, before any proposal development work has been undertaken. This approach takes us away from any previous, potentially biased thinking and established patterns of working that can perpetuate poor practice (i.e. weak or non-existent win themes).

As a result of our win theme workshop you will have the strongest set of win themes for your bid, plus an understanding of how to develop powerful and attractive win themes in house for future proposals.

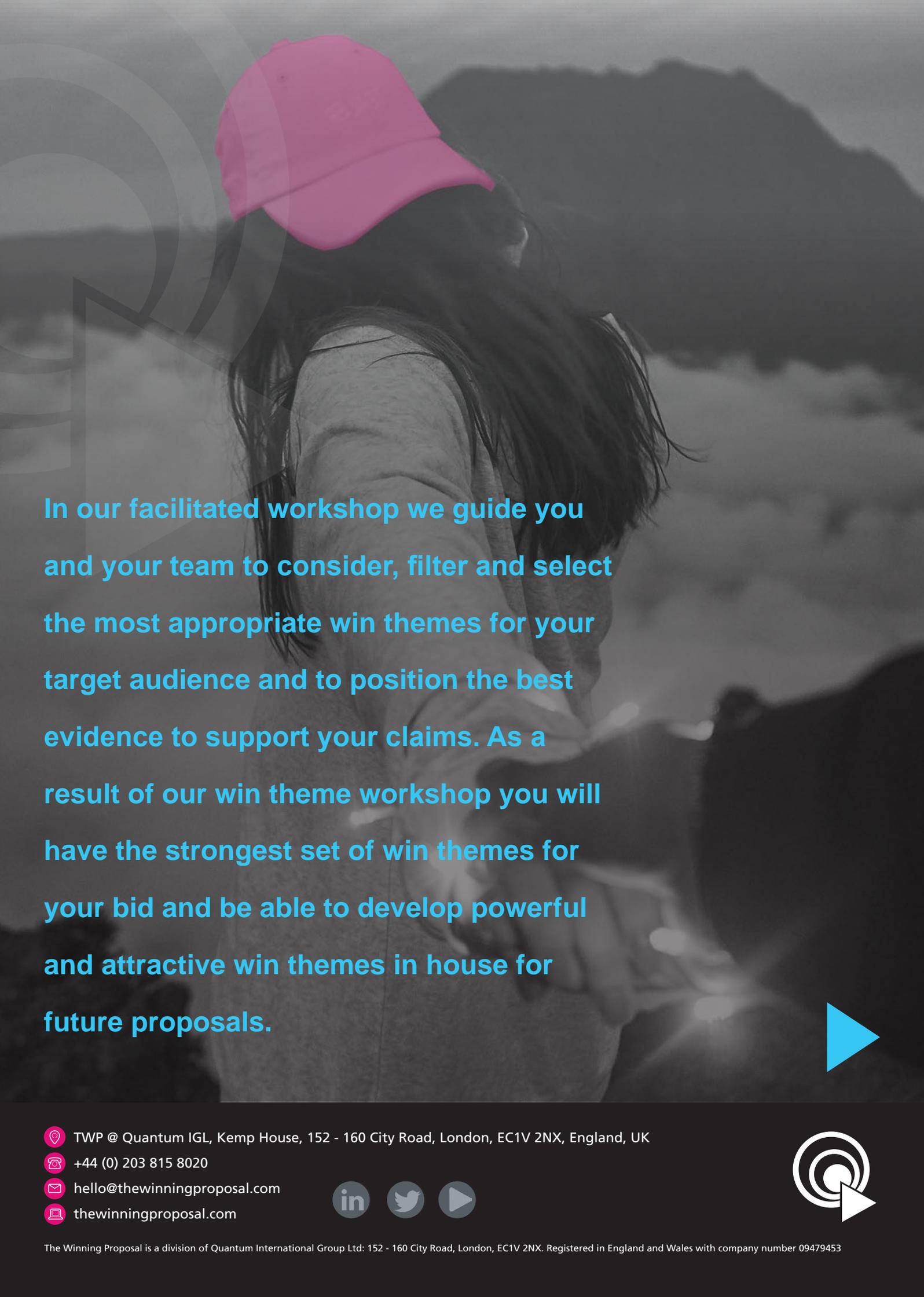
 castleoak



Duncan Cranmer [of the Winning Proposal] enabled CastleOak to formalise a structured process. His facilitated workshops worked well, encouraged positive collaboration and achieved a swift outcome. The process was swift, professional and got senior colleagues on the same page quickly.

Head of Marketing, CastleOak Group



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a bright pink baseball cap and a grey jacket, is looking at a laptop screen. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with mountains and a body of water. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image in a light blue color.

In our facilitated workshop we guide you and your team to consider, filter and select the most appropriate win themes for your target audience and to position the best evidence to support your claims. As a result of our win theme workshop you will have the strongest set of win themes for your bid and be able to develop powerful and attractive win themes in house for future proposals.



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