



Brand Image Solutions™

White Paper

Branding in Proposals: Standing Out From the Competition

By Amy McManus, Director of Marketing,
GBC Document Finishing Group

August 2007





The Value of Brand in Proposal Development

At A Glance

This research study examines the value of brand in proposals and identifies the importance of different areas of brand in proposals for both proposal developers and their clients (the reviewers).

Among key observations are:

- The effect brand has on moving a proposal to the final reviewing stages
- Areas of consistency and inconsistency between developer and client perceptions
- Limitations faced in proposal development
- Ways to leverage brand effectively and efficiently

Who was Surveyed?

SMPS members and their clients

1,103 respondents

Proposal Developers in:

- Architecture
- Engineering
- Construction

Conducted in partnership between Society for Marketing Professional Services and GBC Document Finishing Group.

It is a common misconception, especially in technical or labor intensive environments, that a company's brand does not add value during the proposal process. A recent survey completed by the Society of Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) in partnership with GBC shows us that this simply is not true—branding and quality play a very significant part in proposal development and perception.

Methodology

Conducted in January 2007, the study was executed in two parts: the first focused on the perception of proposal developers and the second on proposal reviewers, or developers' clients.

The majority of developers were in the engineering, architecture and construction fields. All respondents were tasked with the development of both qualification and fee based proposals and all were in positions of authority.

The clients surveyed were most often serving as marketing directors, coordinators, project managers, account executives, engineering/construction facility managers or principals. Those that participated were involved in various stages of the proposal review process.

The survey, developed by GBC with the support of SMPS, focused on determining the importance and value of a company's brand in proposals, identifying how to better leverage a brand within proposals, revealing connections between developers and their clients, and finding ways to more effectively and efficiently draft proposals that garner results.

Branding as an Effective Tool for Proposal Developers

In general, respondents found branding to be an important component in the perceived value of their proposals, significantly more so within the architecture field versus engineering or construction. Almost all proposal developers think it's important that their proposals portray and represent their company's brand.

Those in the Architecture industry are significantly more likely than those in Engineering to say that it is important to portray and represent their company's brand in proposals.

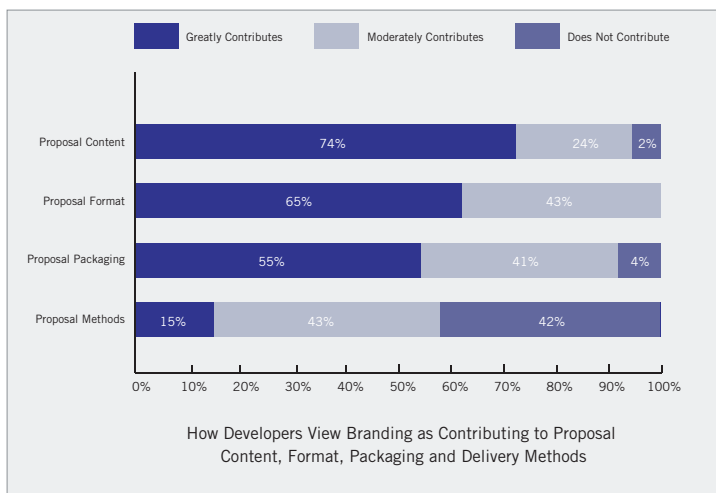
That said, the brand becomes an important tool in making a first impression. Proposal developers supported this in the survey by indicating they use branding to distinguish themselves from other companies by using their company name or logo, color scheme, and graphic design or layout.

In fact, a third of the respondents believe that their brand has a large effect on moving their proposal to the final stage of the review process. When asked why, responses included that their brand was the best way to communicate their company's ideals, signify a joint effort with the proposed company, and provide a more professional image. Many developers felt it was this initial impression of their company that helped facilitate a call back.

Developers indicated one of the easiest ways to emphasize a brand is by using the company logo on frequently used materials including letterhead and business cards, followed closely by envelopes, brochures, and the company's website. However, a majority

of the developers agree that a successful proposal has to focus on more than just logos and color scheme; the brand has to be infused into the content and format as well. Without a doubt it is essential to portray the key messages and the company image in both content and format. In fact, respondents in the construction field say they are significantly more likely to ensure that brand is represented in their content, while respondents in architecture are more likely to ensure that brand is represented in their format.

Following closely behind content and format, packaging is also considered as a means to effectively communicate a brand; however, the application is different within each industry.



Those in the Architecture industry are significantly more likely to think that format contributes to the branding of their proposal than those in Engineering and Construction.

Content

Despite differences in the application and perceived value of a brand in proposals, the results of this survey indicate there is broad consistency across proposals in the way they are sectioned and presented. A firm's overview, resumes, cover letter, relevant project experience, project approach, and references are selected by developers as being part of most proposals. The majority of developers also include services unique to their company and an organizational chart. Notably, only about a third of developers include a company mission statement or value proposition.

The content areas that developers generally customize with a focus on branding are: cover letter, project approach, relevant projects, organizational chart and resumes. However, those developers who see branding as important in moving their proposal to the final stages are more likely to customize their technical approach, executive summary, case studies, and company's mission statement. In contrast, content areas generally more

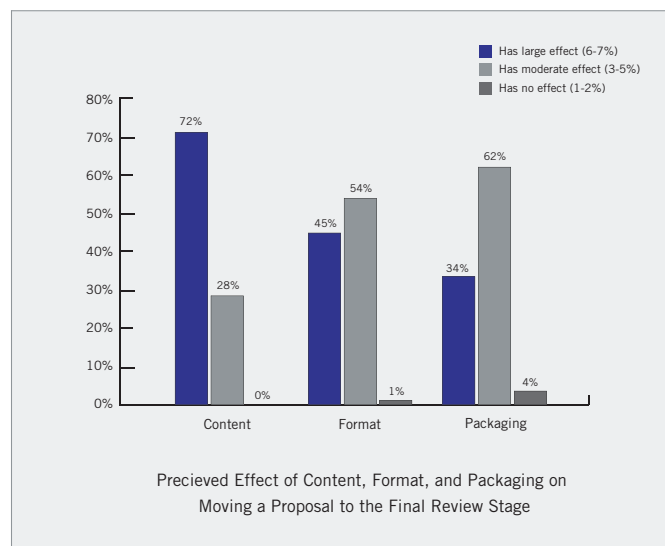
standardized are the company's key messages, unique services, corporate value proposition, and mission statement.

There are key differences between architecture, engineering, and construction in the way they apply branding to each section. Those in architecture were more likely to customize their cover letters and key messages; those in engineering more likely to customize the project experience and technical experience sections; and those in construction preferred to customize the timeline.

Format

Areas that developers noted as the most customized included charts and specific photos, graphics or illustrations. Those who deemed branding as important in moving their proposal to the final stages were significantly more likely to have standards for the amount of white space and type of charts used.

Engineering professionals are significantly more likely than those in Construction to think content has a large effect on moving a proposal to the final stages.



Those who see brand as important in moving a proposal to the final stages are significantly more likely to say content, format and packaging have a large effect.

Therefore, it is no surprise that nearly half of the developers see a proposal's format as having a large effect on moving it to its final stages. When deciding on format, RFP specifications, ease of understanding and client use were considered the most important factors. Also rated high were: consistency across the document, the need to stand out from the competition, and conveying brand image (two-thirds of respondents).

Packaging

According to the survey, packaging accounts for 8% of the time developers spend on any given proposal. Type of packaging is determined by RFP specifications, ease of client use and the need to impress. Overall, one third of the developers agree that packaging has a large effect on getting the proposal to the last stage of review and that cost plays a moderate role in the packaging of the proposals. The same amount of developers also differentiate packaging from client to client; especially those who feel brand is important.

Developers generally send hard copy proposals using an express service or delivery by hand. Most of the developers package their proposals in a bound document using coil, comb or wire binding. Few of those use customized binding elements and bind using equipment in their own department. Developers who place more importance on brand are slightly more likely to use their own in-house print shop for printing.

Those in the Engineering industry use comb binding significantly more than the other industries while those in Architecture use wire binding significantly more than the others.

Approximately half of the developers customize both the covers and backs of their proposals; those who found brand important were significantly more likely to customize both. Other areas that impact packaging style include customization of materials, consistency of materials, size requirements or the type of client.

Clearly, proposal developers and their clients are somewhat codependent on each other when it comes to determining what is important within any given proposal. The amount of time and effort put in to both developing and reviewing proposals is significant on both sides of the process. Developers reportedly spend much of their time focused on standing out in a sea of competition while at the same time deciding what elements their clients will respond to best.

So what are clients hoping to see and how does branding impact their judgement? Quite a bit according to the second part of the survey.

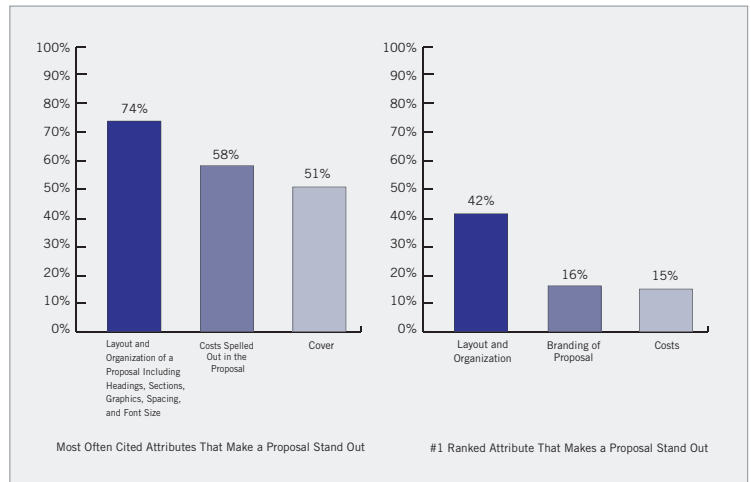
How Brand Impacts Clients

Clients generally send out between one and three RFPs a year, most of which are qualification-based as opposed to competitive in billing. Almost two thirds of the reviewers say the process has three or more stages and takes six or more days, which indicates this need for a deeper level of understanding and mutual connection within the proposal process.

Obviously for developers it is going to be advantageous to know what their clients value most when reviewing RFPs. Knowledge is the key to spending less time and money, while remaining consistent and targeted throughout the proposal writing process.

Creating an Impact

The top three attributes most often ranked as number one in terms of making a proposal stand out are: layout/organization, branding and cost. However the attributes most often cited – not necessarily ranked as number one - were layout and organization, detailed cost schedules and the proposal's cover design.



Clients found key themes and messages to be important within proposals they receive, and agree that branding is associated with a company's quality, history, performance stability and differentiation. In fact, a third of clients think that a company's brand is very important when deciding between proposals. A number of clients also indicated that brand has a large effect in moving a proposal to the final stage of the review process.

The study suggests that clients feel branding within the proposal helps communicate company values and qualities; they want to know that they will gain all of these qualities with their choice. Therefore, developers who emphasize their brand in their proposals are better able to reflect the care, diligence and attention to detail present within their work—all of which come in to play within a potential project.

Clients' Opinions on Content

Unique services offered by a company are most important for clients when reading a proposal followed by a company's key messages, corporate value proposition, and mission statement. Unique services and key messages were singled out by clients as more important than logos or colors. Specifically, four in five clients thought that project experience and project approach are

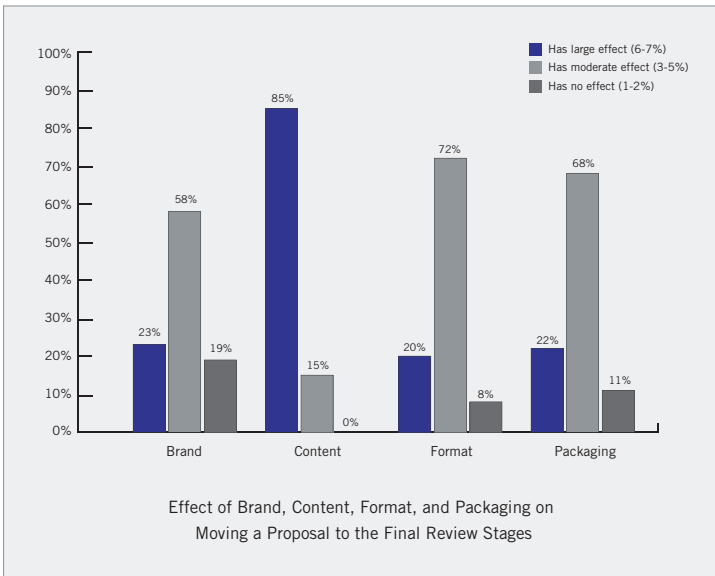
most important in moving the proposal to the next stage. According to clients, listed in order of importance, the highest rated content components of a proposal are:

- Relevant experience
- Project approach
- Timeline/schedule
- Technical approach
- Executive summary
- Unique services

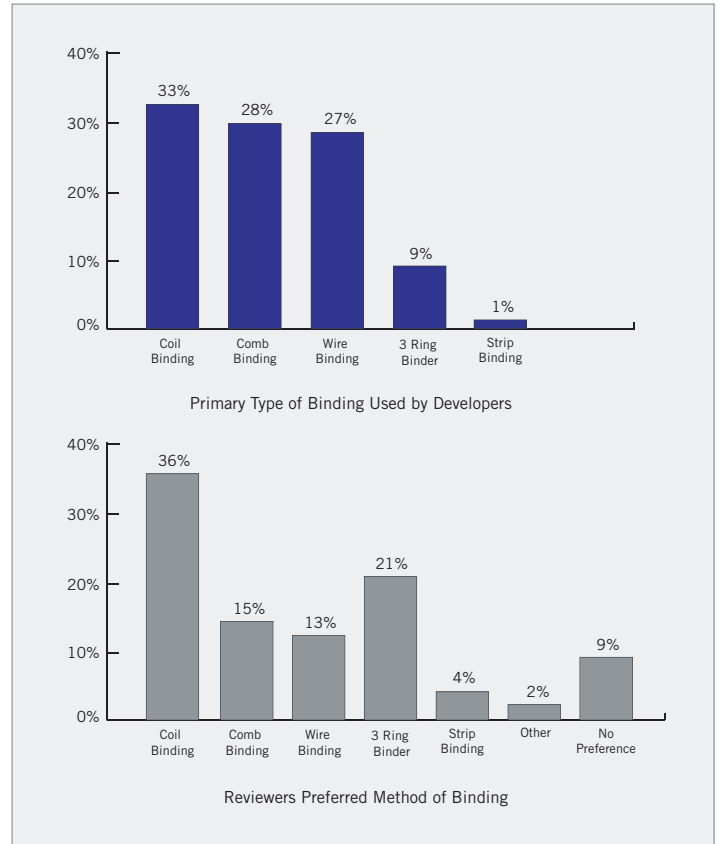
With this in mind, setting standard areas of content, including relevant experience, project and company values, as well as a clearly defined approach and mission statement should be included in every proposal.

Clients' Opinion on Format and Packaging

When it comes to branding, the most important format areas identified by clients are photos, graphics and/or illustrations, page layout, paper size and headings. Clients also said bound hard copy proposals are preferred. When delivered hard copy, clients cited that packaging creates a first impression, attracts attention, and better reflects how much the developing company cares, operates, and how creative they might be within the scope of the project.



Format and packaging received similar scores from developers and clients in terms of importance. Developers tend to customize specific photos, graphics and illustrations which were deemed, by clients, as most important in terms of format; packaging and delivery methods were seen at an equal level of importance by both clients and developers.

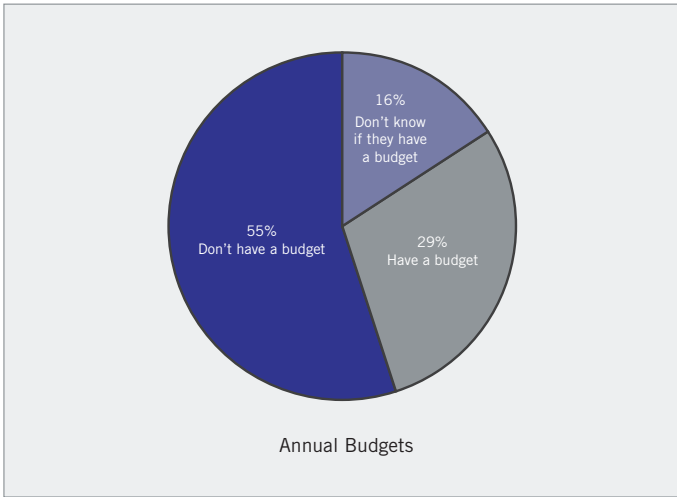


So where do these results leave proposal developers in determining how best to leverage their brand to capture the attention of clients? The study suggests that developers who include in their proposals content important to their prospective clients as well as focus on the similarly important aspects of packaging and content branding are more likely to stand out.

Branding Efficiency

Creating a budget for proposal development may not be a priority for many companies; approximately a quarter of developers indicated they had an annual budget set aside for proposal development. However, it was found that developers who place more importance on branding are significantly more likely to have a budget set aside for proposal development. Having a budget can be advantageous in leveraging available resources, controlling proposal development costs and determining a proposal's return on investment (ROI).

In addition to setting aside budgets, developers need to review all available resources and look for ways to save both time and material costs. Setting budgets and concentrating on effective branding is not enough. For instance, while those who placed the most importance on brand (and were most likely to set budgets) had the highest proposal acceptance rate, they also had the lowest ROI. By better leveraging resources, it can be concluded that they could maintain a high rate of acceptance while also increasing their ROI.



Time is the largest limitation when developing proposals. Compiling the necessary information for the proposals presents the biggest challenge for developers. It goes without saying that any successful effort to reduce backend time will minimize costs and maximize the effectiveness of proposal development.

By using economies of scale, pooling resources and creating an inventory of branded stock materials, developers can cut end time while saving on material, printing, binding and other associated development costs. While offering effective cost savings, an electronic library of common content and templates paired with stock packaging such as covers, bindings, and tabs can be used by multiple company sites and will ensure consistency of brand among different materials and different offices.

When branding your company within a proposal, branding it consistently and creating a clear and positive image is critical in influencing your client's decision from beginning to end. Knowing your budget, how to leverage resources, where to place emphasis and how to catch your client's attention will put you a step ahead of your competition and your bottom line.

For more information about GBC Brand Image Solutions® and how expert consultants can help strengthen your company's brand image, call 888-240-4219. For complete survey results go to www.gbconnect.com/brandimage.

About GBC

GBC, an ACCO Brands business has served a broad range of document communication needs for businesses worldwide for 60 years. Our products and services, including binding and laminating solutions, custom presentation solutions and technical service, are critical to our customers in helping them distinguish their printed materials and achieve a professional edge in today's competitive market. ACCO Brands Corporation is a world leader in select categories of branded office products, with annual revenues of nearly \$2 billion. Its industry-leading brands include Day-Timer®, Swingline®, Kensington®, Quartet®, GBC®, Rexel®, NOBO®, and Wilson Jones®, among others. Under the GBC brand, the company is also a leader in the professional print finishing market.

About SMPS

The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) was created in 1973 by small group of professional services firm leaders who recognized the need to sharpen skills, pool resources, and work together to create business opportunities. Today, the association has a membership of more than 5,600+ marketing and business development professionals from architectural, engineering, planning, interior design, construction, and specialty consulting firms located throughout the United States and Canada.

GBC® DOCUMENT FINISHING GROUP

800-723-4000

www.gbconnect.com

©2007, ACCO Brands Corporation.
All rights reserved.

AN ACCO BRANDS COMPANY



1670239 5M0807