Bid & Proposal Survey Report 2016

Challenges of Bid & Proposal Teams Around The World

A global snapshot of bid team preparedness, effectiveness and productivity

Content

Introduction

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our second annual State of Proposal Management survey report.

Bid teams are a hugely important market to Qorus. We have found time and again that these teams are over-worked and under-empowered. The findings of this report corroborate our understanding that, despite being a vital source of new business generation, Bid and Proposal professionals do not benefit from as much training, technological support, and career progression as their peers in Sales and Marketing.

The survey targeted only those working directly on bids, proposals and RFP responses. The goal was to produce a report that Bid professionals can refer to when considering investments in recruitment, training and technology.

We recently invited some of the best minds in the industry to join a webinar discussion on the topic. This report combines the results of our survey with the insights and opinions of these thought leaders.

We'd love to hear what you think of the results. If you'd like to learn more about how we're helping to empower Bid teams through our proposal content and project management solution, please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Meiring
CEO and Co-founder
Qorus Software

Contributors

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Tracie Bretecher, Sales Operations Manager, Long View Systems

Tracie has over 17 years' experience in marketing and proposal management. In 2008, she accepted a newly created role at Long View Systems where she developed a systematic approach to RFP responses, and created the Response Management Services (RMS) department.

Tracie currently manages the Sales Operations Department along with the Proposal Management department. She holds Practitioner level accreditation with APMP and is currently working on her professional accreditation.

Ray Meiring, CEO, Qorus Software

Ray is the CEO and co-founder of Qorus, the company that helps organizations be more efficient when creating business critical documents like pitches, proposals and RFPs.

Ray has taken the company from a start up to an established, multinational organization in just a few years, attracting clients such as Microsoft, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Long View Systems, Telstra and Kramer Levin.

Ray's passion for creating software that simplifies and accelerates business processes has led to his growing reputation in Seattle as a thought leader and digital influencer.

Lavanya Ram and Ben Hannon, Senior Consultants, Bid Solutions

Ben and Lavanya are both Senior Recruitment Consultants at Bid Solutions, the leading provider of bid and proposal professionals. They provide world-class consulting, benchmarking and marketing services that deliver tangible improvements in bid process, proposal quality and win rate.

Bid Solutions offers highly acclaimed and fully tailored training courses to transfer best practice and proposal tools in an informative, interactive and entertaining way.

The respondents

The largest percentage of this year's respondents work in Bid and Proposal teams. This is a great indicator that we reached our target audience, which means we can feel assured that their input and opinions are valid and relevant.

We see that the majority work for medium and large organizations that employ over 1,000 employees, with the largest percentage coming from companies of 10,000+ employees.

It is also encouraging to see that, from a pool of 375 respondents, such a large proportion are from organizations that see the value of having a separate department for bids and proposals.

"This is great to see," says Tracie Bretecher from Long View Systems. "I think it shows that this profession is growing in popularity and that businesses are starting to understand the value of these teams. Historically, we didn't see this. It would be fascinating to see what the response would have been just ten years ago - I bet most would have been classified as Admin or Support functions."

The largest percentage of respondents came from the IT industry, with Consulting Services, Contruction, Healthcare and Legal following. This certainly reflects Qorus' audience, which is more commercial than federal. "The IT and B2B legal industries are definitely becoming more competitive," confirms Bretecher.
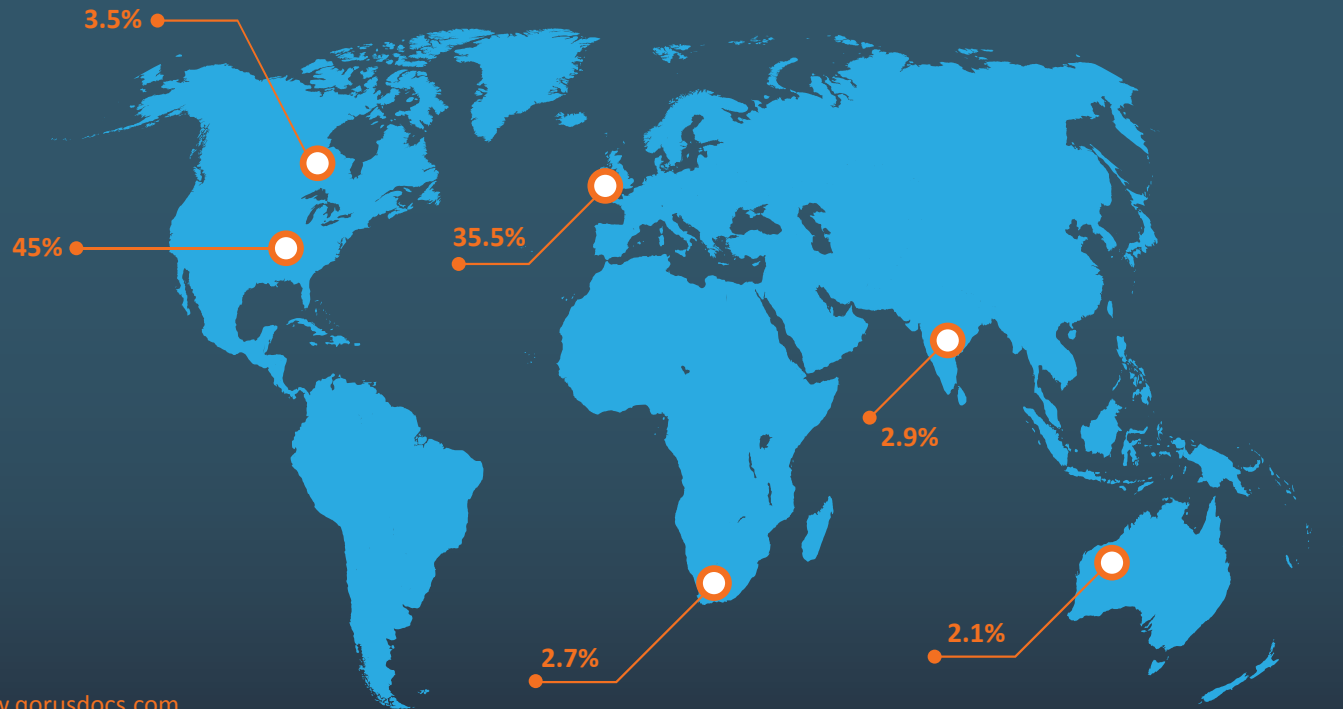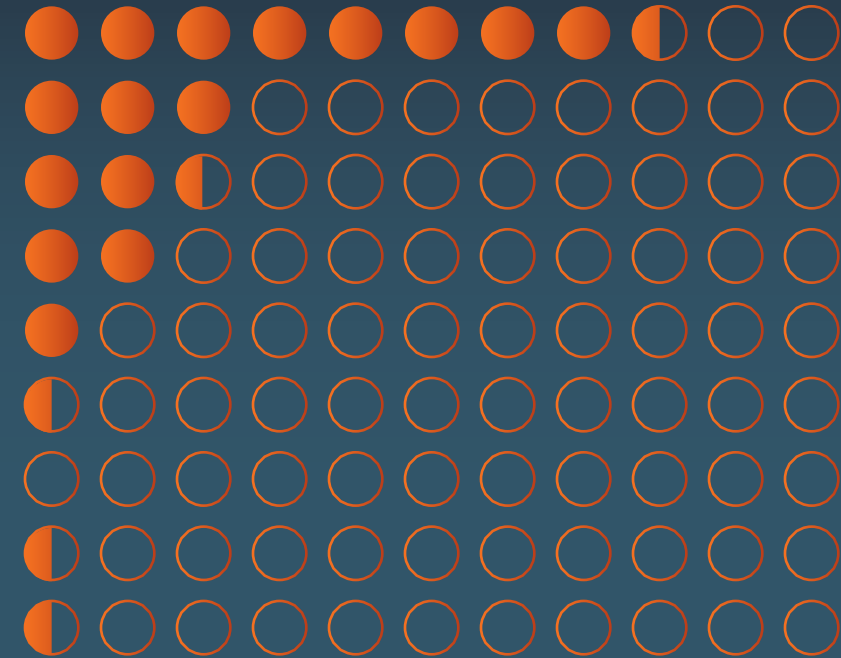
About the survey's respondents

86%

work in **Bid and Proposal** teams, followed by Business development, Finance and Marketing.

| Bids & Proposals |
| Sales/Business Development |
| Financial |
| Marketing |
| Administration |
| Creative |
| Human Resources |
| Technology |
| Executive |

3.5%

45%

35.5%

2.9%

2.7%

2.1%

45%

are from the USA, 35.5% from the UK and 3.5% from Canada. India, South Africa and Australia are also represented.

24%

work in companies that employ over 10, 000 people. The second biggest group comes from organizations of 1001 – 5000 employees.

Category	
10000+ Employees	
5001-10000 Employees	
1001-5000 Employees	
501-1000 Employees	
201-500 Employees	
51-200 Employees	
11-50 Employees	
1-10 Employees	

21%

work in the Information Technology industry.

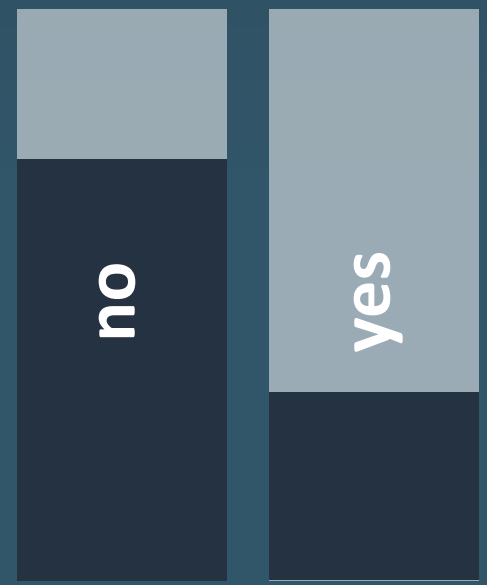| Industry |
|---|
| Accounting |
| Construction |
| Consulting |
| Consumer Goods |
| Defense & Space |
| Education & Training |
| Energy & Mining |
| Finance: Banking |
| Finance: Insurance |
| Finance: Investment |
| Finance: Other |
| Government |
| Health Care |
| Information Technology |
| Legal |
| Logistics |
| Manufacturing |
| Media/Marketing |
| Non-Profit |
| Pharmeceutical |
| Real Estate |
| Resource Management, HR & Recruiting |
| Retail |
| Telecommunications |
| Travel & Hospitality |
| Utility |
| Other |

Training & development -
the data

1

45% of respondents have over ten years' experience in bid and proposal related roles.
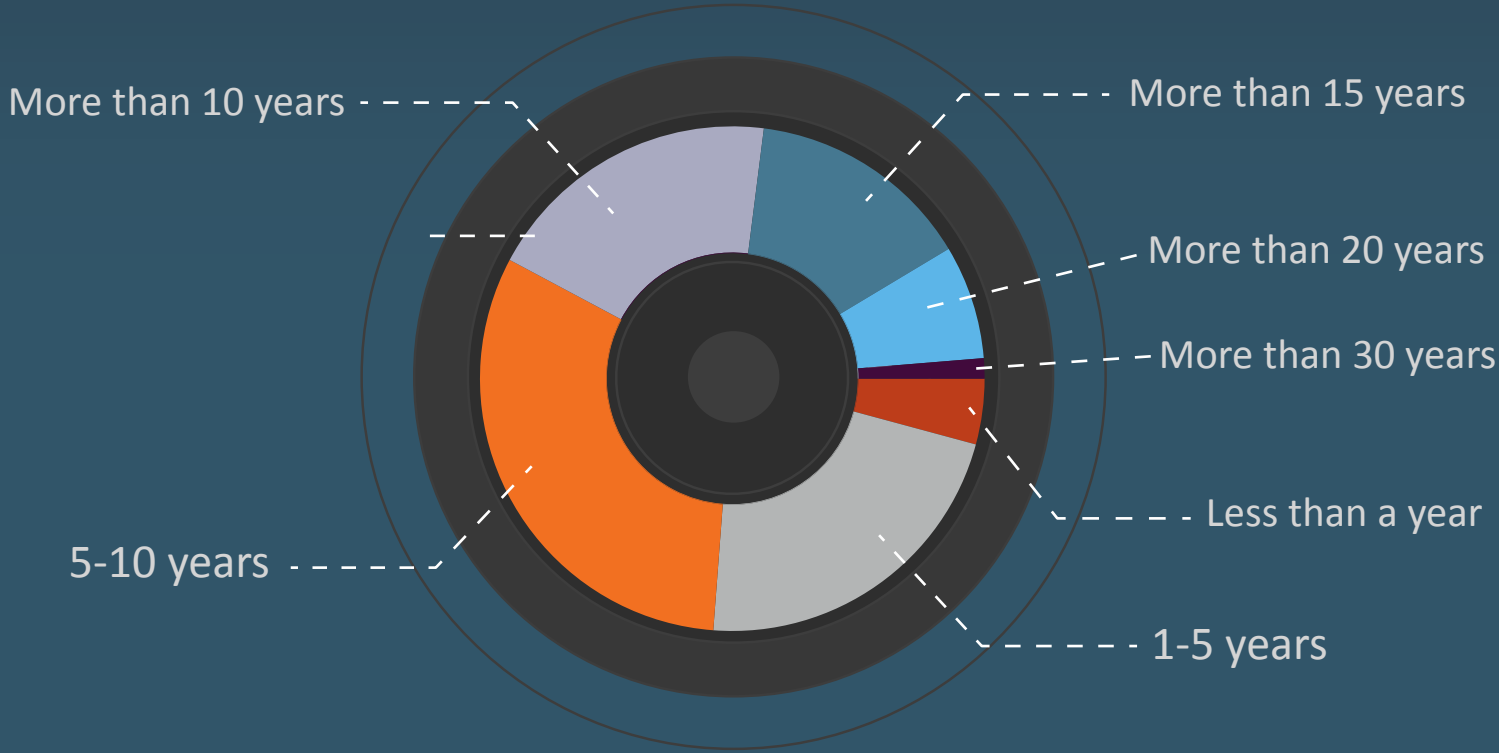
2

68% have no proposal management related qualifications

More than 10 years

More than 15 years

More than 20 years

More than 30 years

Less than a year

5-10 years

1-5 years

no

yes

3 The majority say that they have **NO CORPORATE BUDGET** for training. Only 23.6% have a budget and draw from it regularly.

Yes, but we never make use of it

Yes, but we don't make use of it often

I don't know

Yes, and we sometimes make use of it

Yes, and we regularly make use of it
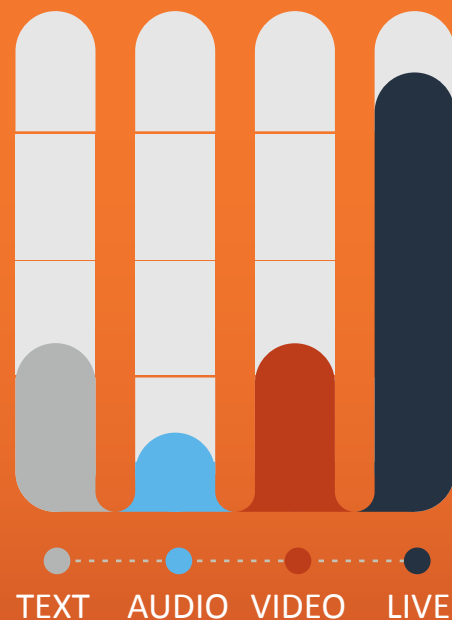
No, we don't have a training budget
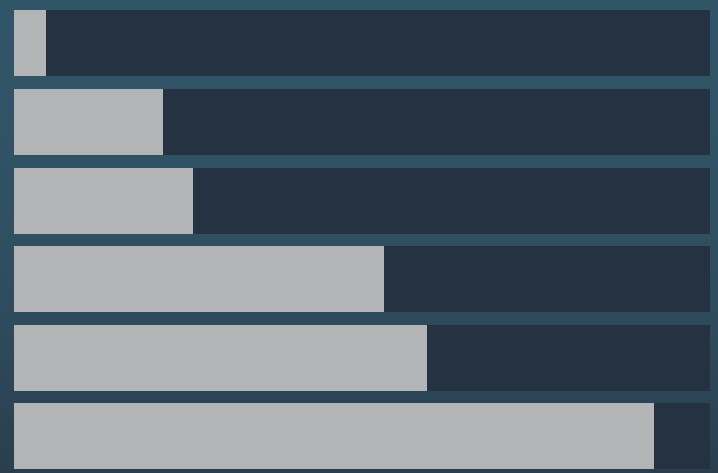
4

56%

have no form of in-house training. Those that do, host workshops and tutorials (40.4%) and informal mentorships.
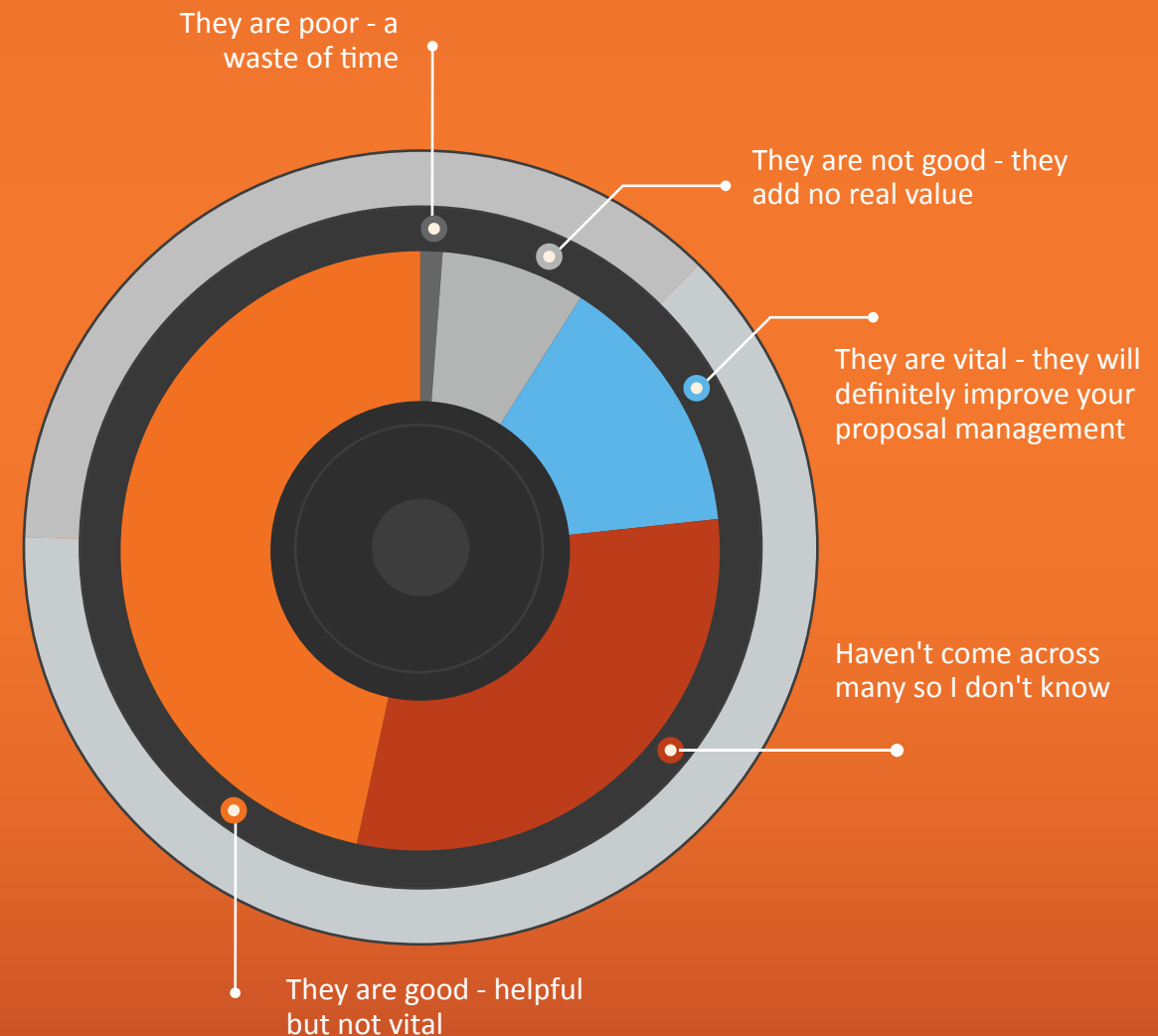
5

62%

say that live, in-person training is their preferred method of learning.

TEXT   AUDIO   VIDEO   LIVE

6 **Only 14% think this type of training is 'vital'. Most believe it is helpful but not vital. 30% have not come across any training programs at all.**

How would you rate the quality of the proposal management certifications that are available?

They are poor - a waste of time

They are not good - they add no real value

They are vital - they will definitely improve your proposal management

Haven't come across many so I don't know

They are good - helpful but not vital

Training & development

Even though 86% of respondents work in Bid and Proposal teams, and 45% have over ten years' experience in the industry, 68% hold no proposal-related qualifications. This may be because the profession is relatively young in the commercial world. Traditionally, Bid teams come from the federal world and were largely male-dominated.

30% of respondents hadn't come across the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) before, and only 14% described the proposal qualifications available as 'vital'. This is surprising, but it may be an indication of how few organizations have taken a purposeful approach. It seems that most are still reactive and learning through trial and error, rather than proactively building effective, best practice-based Bid departments.

When it comes to company-sponsored training, 37% said that they have no training budget. "This is too bad," says Bretecher. "I would venture to say that the organizations that don't provide budget for proposal management don't understand that it is a certified profession and not an administrative role." 56% said that their company does not offer any in-house training. Those companies that do offer training, most often offer it in the form of workshops and tutorials and informal mentorships.

Even though 62% of respondents said that they prefer to learn in a live, face-to-face environment, only 15% of respondents regularly attend industry events. "Luckily, there is a lot of helpful material available, including the Shipley book. You may not be able to get certified," says Bretecher, "but there's no reason you can't access information, read it, and start sharing that knowledge. This approach might help shift the thinking within those organizations who don't provide budget for training."

"The Proposal industry seems to be attracting younger people now. We're seeing a lot more women as well, so there's certainly a major shift happening now."

-- Tracie Bretecher, Long View Systems.

Training and development

Thoughts from a Bid Manager

Are Bid teams getting left behind?

Yes, they do seem slow to innovate. I believe it is related to the way Bid teams perceive themselves. Many don't see their jobs as professional roles. Rather, they see themselves merely as Support or Administrative staff. Bid Managers need to empower people and re-educate organizations. We do that by implementing best practices based on proven methods and backed up by metrics – and not just win rates. We should be talking about revenue, margins, themes, reasons for wins and losses, etc.

What's your opinion on the training available?

The training available today is better than it's ever been, but we need more. There are more best practices out there than we realize – we just need to hunt for them. And often, they need to be tailored to each organization, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

How do you train your team?

We have budget for training – in fact it's mandated that everyone take a minimum of two related courses per year. We require all Bid team members to have their foundation level APMP within the first year of joining the team. The rest is done through a combination of onsite training, webinars and discussions.

Thoughts from the recruitment pros

Which is more important, training or experience?

Training is certainly vital, but there needs to be a balance between experience and theory. Training on best practice is very useful and will give guidelines as to how people should react in certain situations but how many organizations can really say they follow 'best practice' process religiously on every deal?

That said, the likes of APMP and other training programmes provide a solid foundation on which to build. A lot of the best-in-class proposal teams that have very high win rates have gone through APMP certification and this is embedded in their team. Having the whole team on the same page as to what constitutes best practice is far more beneficial than having one or two who are constantly trying to get others on board.
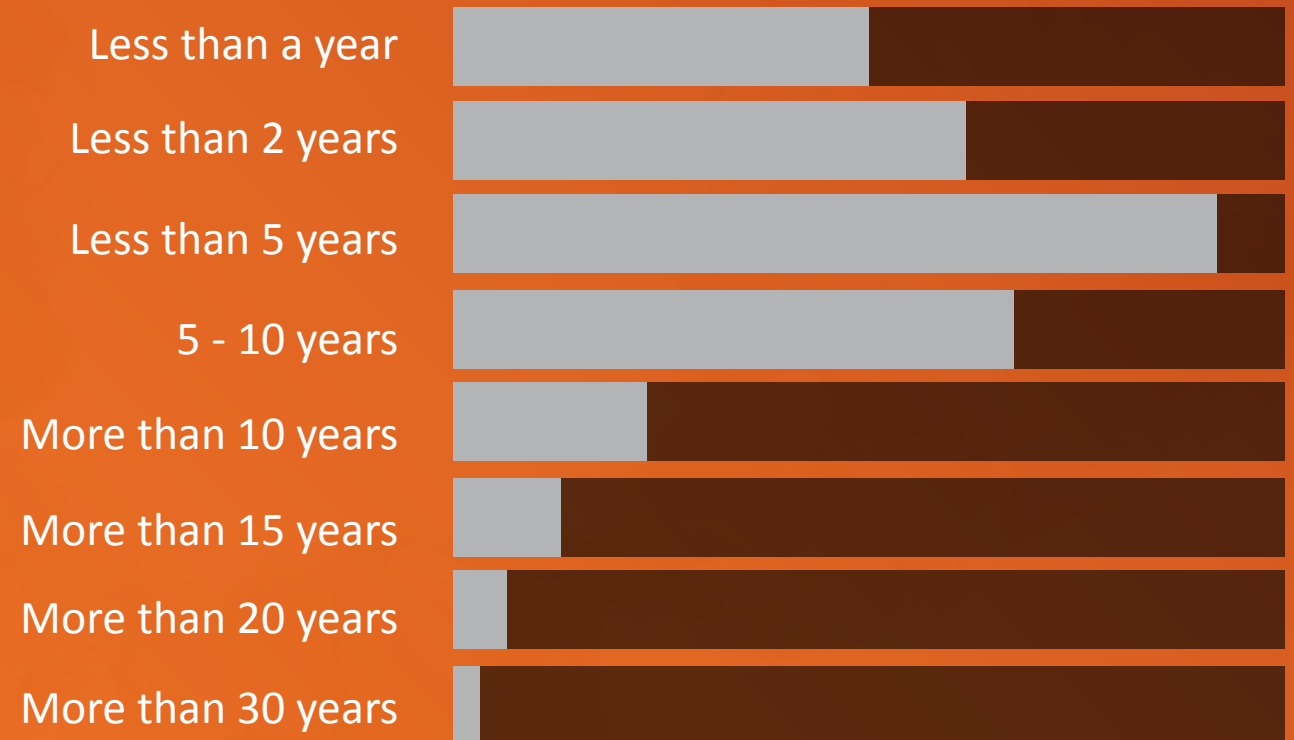
Are there enough young people entering the job market?

Yes, there are more young bidders entering the profession than ever before. This is down to the profession being more recognized as a specific skill set rather than an add-on to a Sales or Account Manager. There are also a growing number of apprenticeship programs (in the UK at least) that have encouraged young Bid professionals to get involved and develop their skills as an alternative to tertiary learning.

A big group of respondents have been in their current roles for less than 5 years. A relatively large percentage (21%) have been in their role for 5 – 10 years.

How long have you been in your current role?

Less than a year	
Less than 2 years	
Less than 5 years	
5 - 10 years	
More than 10 years	
More than 15 years	
More than 20 years	
More than 30 years	

Career planning & job satisfaction - the data

When asked whether they agree with positive statements about job satisfaction, most respondents rated each statement 7 out of 10 or higher. Until it came to whether they have a clear career path, here most respondents rated the statement 5 out of 10.

Quality, win rate and efficiency were the most common KPIs, coming in at 67%, 49% and 47% respectively.

What are you measured on?

Quality

Win rate

Efficiency

Other (please specify)

While most respondents reported that their businesses do measure win rates, a third said that they're only measured haphazardly.

Does your business monitor proposal win rates?

I don't know

No

Yes, but haphazardy

Yes, routinely
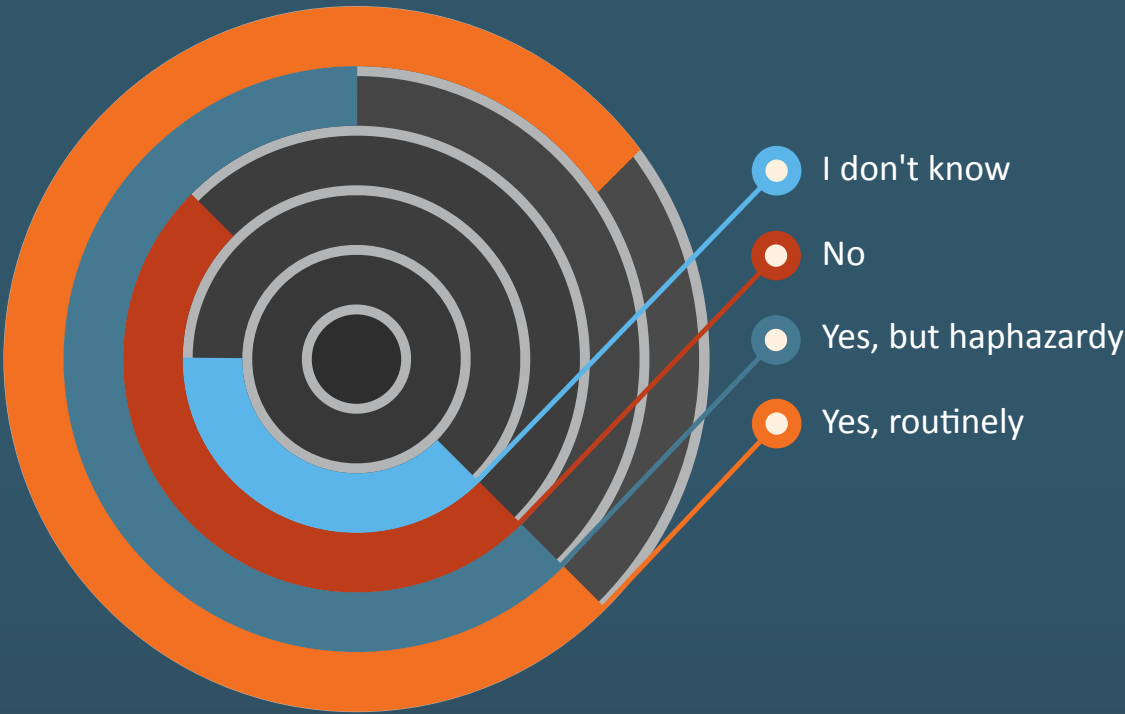
Career planning & job satisfaction

As we have already seen, 45% of respondents have over ten years' experience in the industry but 33% have been in their current role for less than 5 years. This is perhaps a result of the fact that, while positive statements about job satisfaction, appreciation and personal growth were rated 7 out of 10 and higher, most respondents rated the statement "I have a clear career path in my company" 5 out of 10.

"This is the most common cause we see of people looking for a new opportunity. They want somewhere they can progress and develop, they have hit a glass ceiling and they are looking for a fresh challenge in a new environment." **– Lavanya Ram, Bid Solutions**

Tight deadlines, huge workloads and the pain of trying to get input from stakeholders and reviewers are among the biggest causes of stress and burnout. But these are often offset by the variety and flexibility of the job.

"A heavy workload often comes with the territory. The best way to try and reduce it, is to have a robust go/no-go process that includes the Bid team." **– Tracie Bretecher**

Career planning and job satisfaction

Thoughts from the recruitment pros

How much churn do you see in the industry?

Typically, we see Bid professionals begin to show interest in new opportunities after they've been in their position for two years. Our 2015 Salary Survey confirmed that 52% of respondents had been in their current position for less than two years. Similarly, the total time in their current company mirrors their time in their current role, with 48% changing organization within the last two years. This suggests that very few people are promoted or change role within a company. If progession is not on offer, they will often for other opportunities.

Organisations that have the best retention rates tend to be those that keep their employees engaged and provide them with ample scope to develop and progress.

Thoughts from a Bid manager

How do you keep your team motivated?

I have found that you need to learn what works for each individual. Our team is so highly sought after and respected as solution development experts, that

they are constantly getting executive / c-level recognition – that's motivating.

We need to take our careers in our own hands and be empowered to make change – that's motivating. We can't just complain and hope someone does something about it – we need to do it. Even if it's just little steps... that's motivating.

Every year, we do a strategy session and review the year and determine what needs to be done in the next year. Just like any other department, we have a mission, values and best practices. Everyone participates and plays an active role – that's motivating.

How can businesses retain their Bid staff and help them grow?

It's important to measure the team's performance, but to measure it fairly. The only absolute measure you can put on them is whether deadlines are met. They have limited control over whether a bid is successful or not – they don't own the relationship with the client, they don't attend the shortlist presentations, and they don't do the negotiations – so they can't totally be measured on success of bids.

When it comes to encouraging growth, you need to allow them to become certified. Discuss career paths quarterly, take the time to understand what your employees want. Ultimately, however, they must be encouraged to take responsibility for building own their careers.
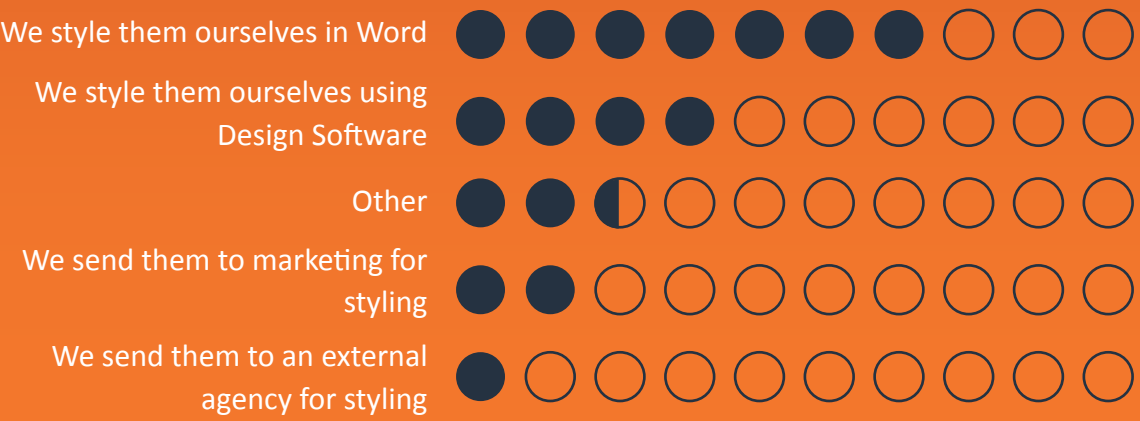
Tools & technology -
the data

1 **Most bid teams are responsible for styling their own documents, usually in Word.**
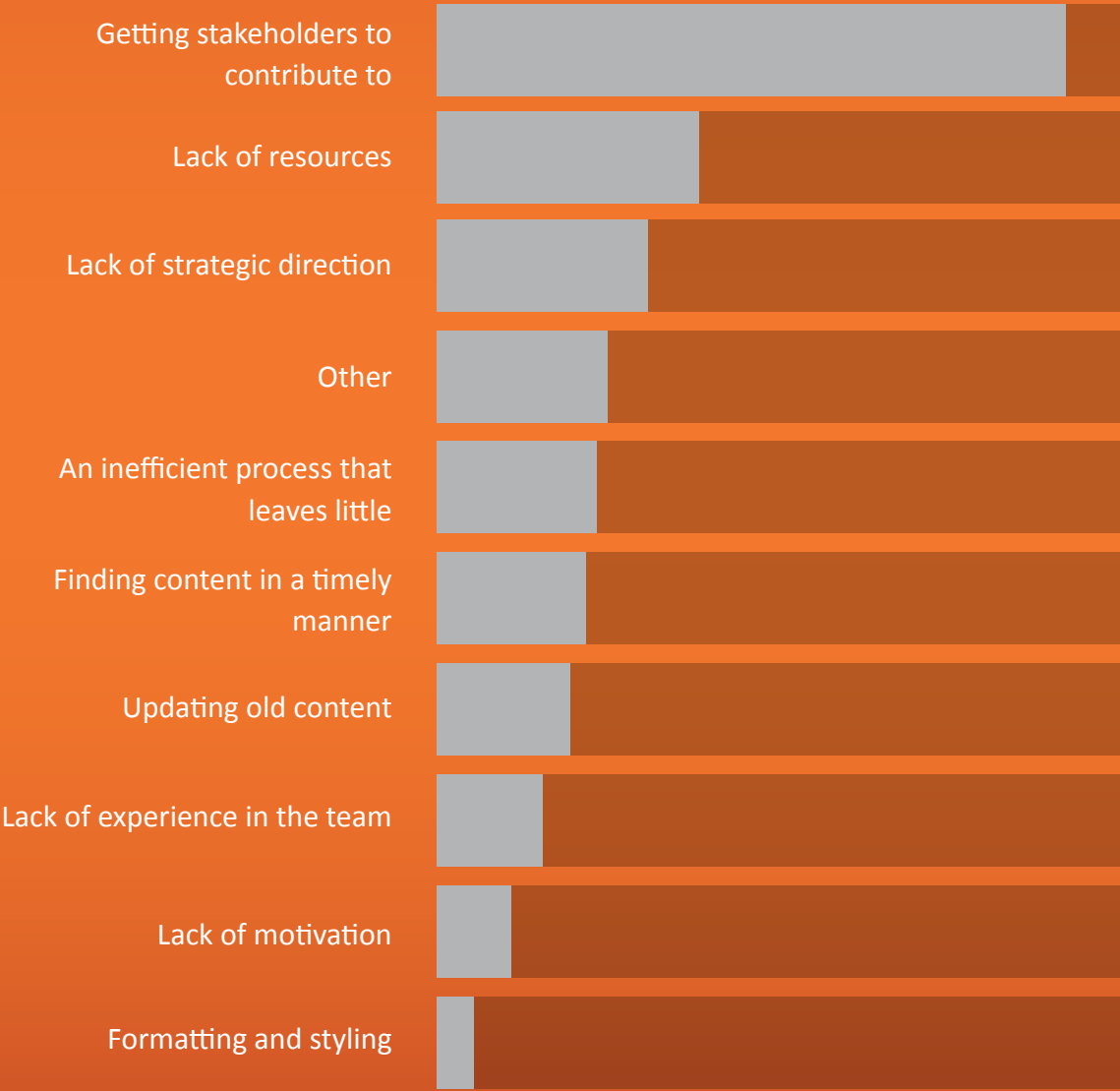
Who styles or designs your bid documents?

We style them ourselves in Word
● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

We style them ourselves using Design Software
● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Other
● ● ◑ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

We send them to marketing for styling
● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

We send them to an external agency for styling
● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

2 **The biggest challenges most Bid teams face involve collaboration, resource and strategy.**

What is your biggest challenge?

Getting stakeholders to contribute to

Lack of resources

Lack of strategic direction

Other

An inefficient process that leaves little

Finding content in a timely manner

Updating old content

Lack of experience in the team

Lack of motivation

Formatting and styling

3 **Surprisingly, only 23.5% of respondents use this type of software.**

23.5%

4 **Of those who do use it, only 3% say it does *not* make their job easier.**
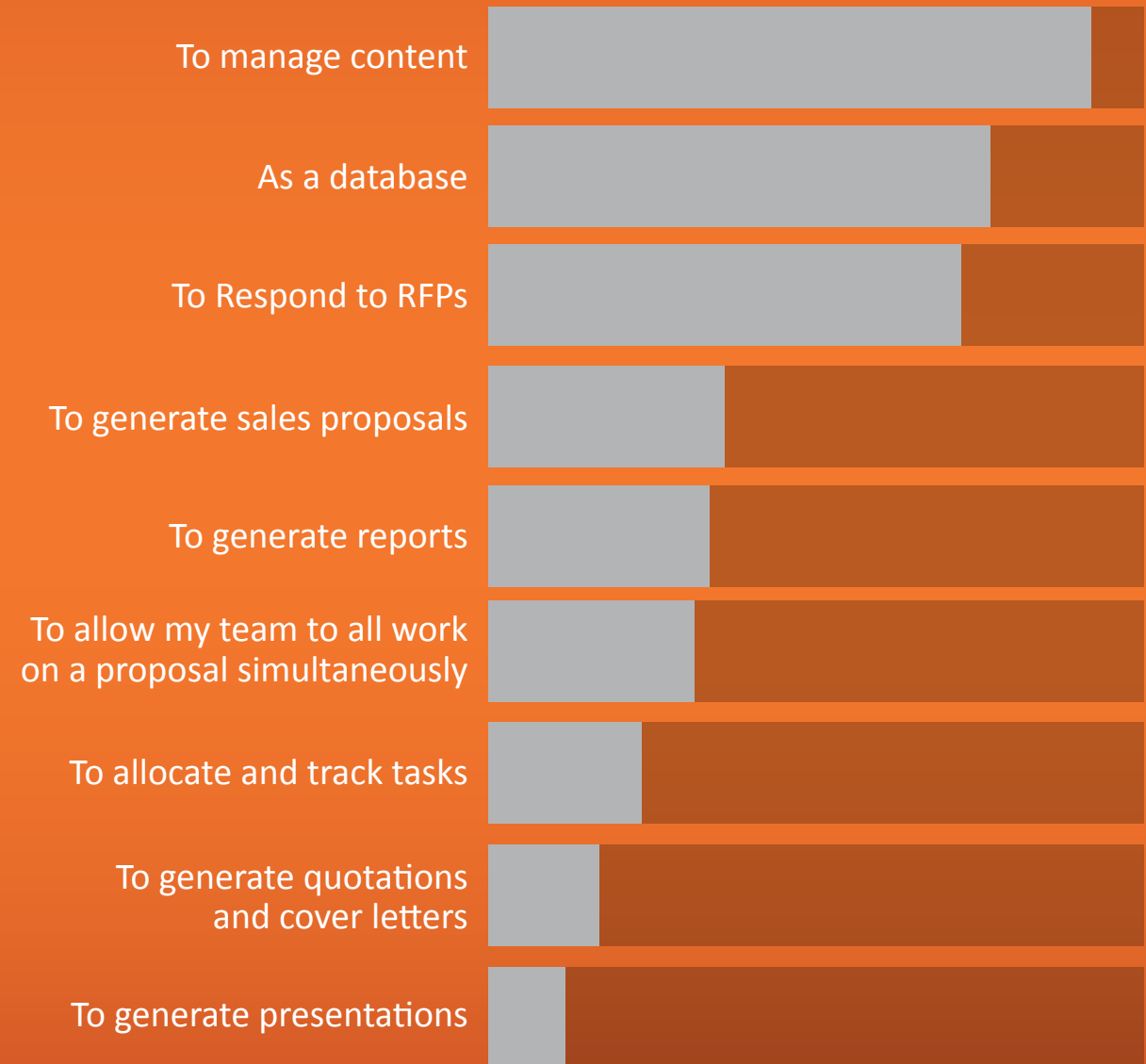
3%

6 **The majority use cloud-based solutions.**
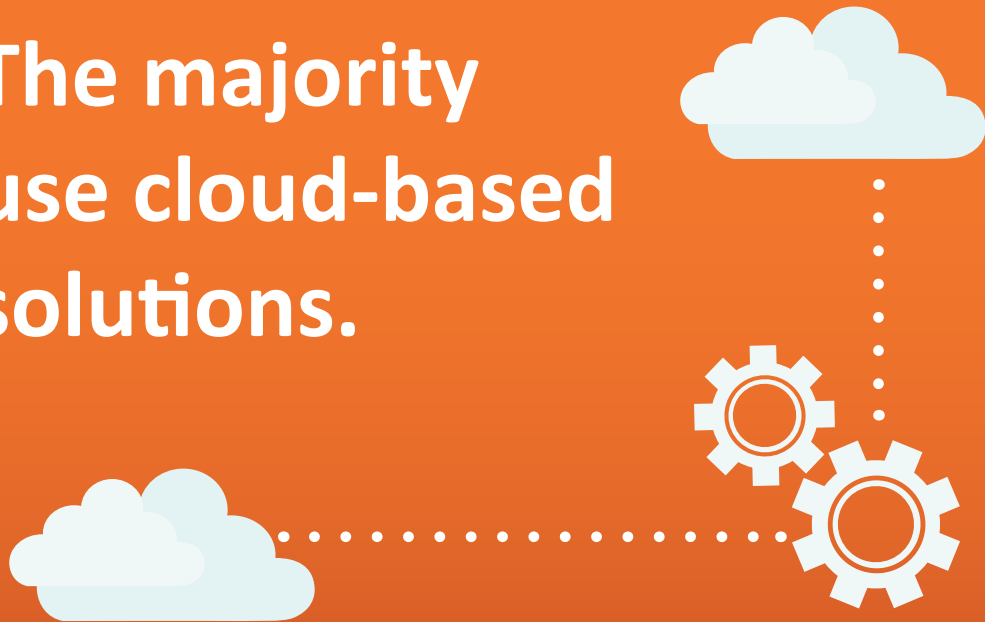
5 **It is most commonly used to store and manage content and to respond to RFPs.**

What do you use it for?

To manage content

As a database

To Respond to RFPs

To generate sales proposals

To generate reports

To allow my team to all work on a proposal simultaneously

To allocate and track tasks

To generate quotations and cover letters

To generate presentations

7 **The biggest challenge of such systems is maintaining the content stored in them.**

What are the biggest challenges when using the solution?

Other

Styling and formatting

Maintaining the content

Too difficult to use

8 **Most of the respondents who don't use proposal software say that it's because of a lack of buy-in.**

Why do you think your business has not yet invested in proposal software?

There is a lack of buy-in

Other

There is no need

There is no budget
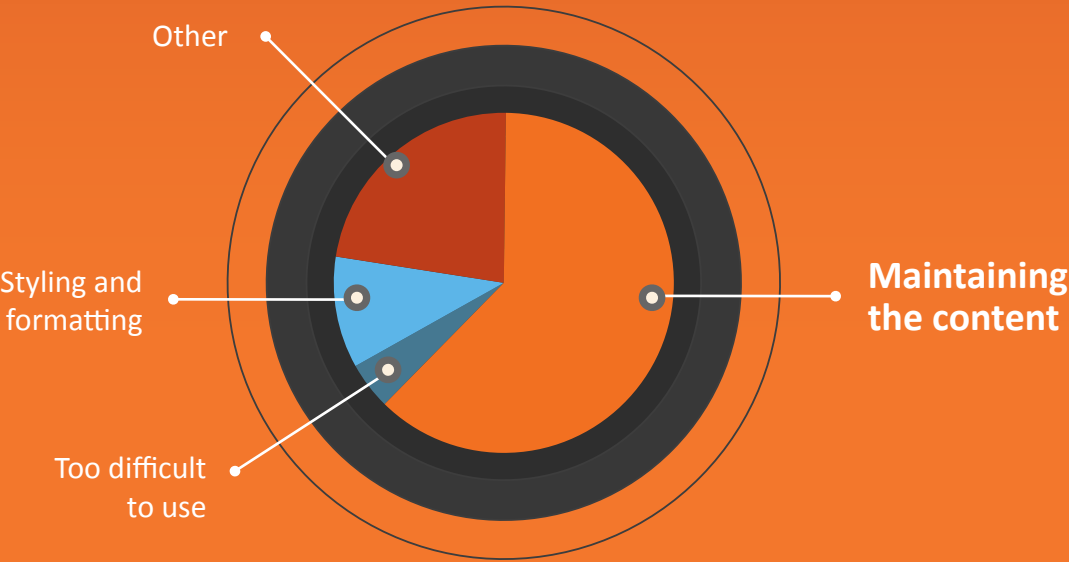
9 **The majority are unsure as to whether they'd like their company to invest in this type of software.**
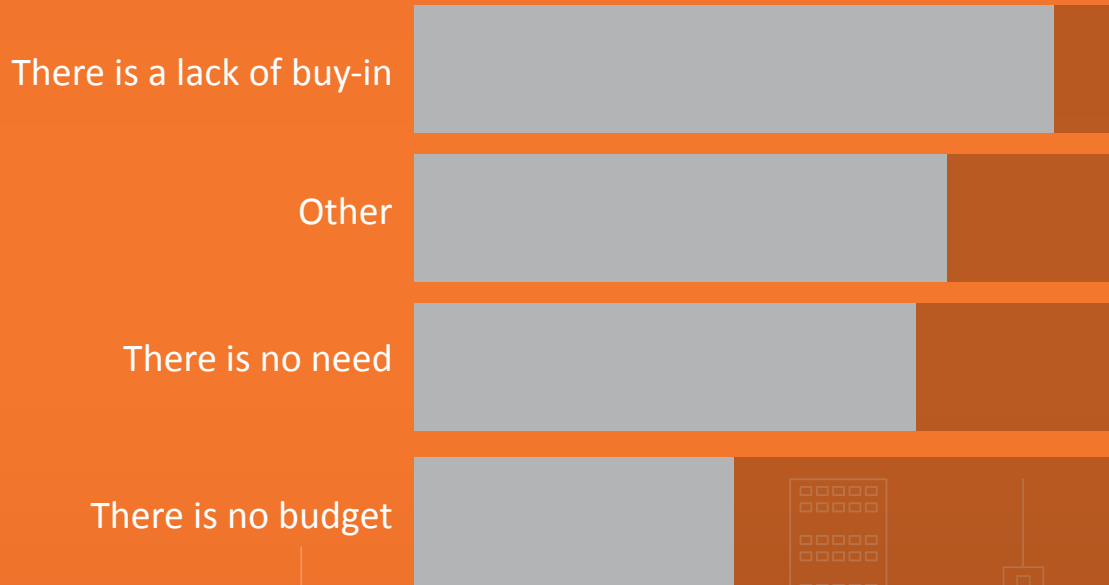
Tools & technology

Like Sales and Marketing, Bid teams are well positioned to benefit from content management and automation software. There are many proposal management tools on the market, all designed to simplify the bid process and reduce the time required to produce bid documents. These solutions house reusable content and automate parts of the proposal process – including templating and the allocation of questions to subject matter experts. They also enable real-time, in-document collaboration. These are challenges that respondents identified with.

77% of respondents said their teams are responsible for styling and formatting bid documents, with the majority doing so in Word. The two biggest challenges are getting stakeholders to contribute and working with a lack of resources.

Yet 76% of respondents do not use proposal software. This is not surprising, based on what we have seen about how companies view Bid teams, and how little value they place on them. When asked why, most (35%) feel that it is because there is a lack of buy-in from the business.

Of the respondents who do use proposal software, 88% are happy with the solution they use. In fact, only 3% report that it does not make their jobs easier. This probably indicates that the tool they're using is not the right fit. Those who use it, most commonly use it to manage and store content and respond to RFPs.

"It's about changing the mindset of the organization, getting people to see that bid software is just as important as an accounting system or a CRM. There is no quick fix though, it's a long journey for some Bid teams, but I can assure you if the business truly understood the value of this team, they would not have an issue purchasing the software that supports it." – **Tracie Bretecher**

Tools and Technology

Thoughts from a Bid Manager

What do you think of the quality of solutions available?

There are many solutions available, but I question if the people who designed them truly know about what it's like to be a proposal management professional. I have talked to several software developers at conferences and none have worked in the industry, so they cannot address all my concerns. The industry still has a long way to go, but Qorus is leading by far.

The fact is, it doesn't start with the software. You need to start by identifying what your business needs in terms of content management, collaboration, etc. First you need to make sure you have a well-defined strategy. Once you have that, you can start researching which software systems will best support your needs.

Remember that the technology is only as good as the people who use it and the content being put into it!

Thoughts from a proposal software solutions provider

What are the most important considerations for teams looking to purchase proposal software?

Firstly, you need to be honest about the state of your content and the robustness of your proposal processes. If your content is a mess and your processes non-existent, then chances are high that implementing a proposal management solution will be very painful and not very effective. It's important to remember that, while technology can accelerate business processes, those processes need to be in place first.

And then you need to make sure that you have accountability. You need to have at least one person who's responsible for managing the system and maintaining the content stored within it. This is also where training and change management become important. You should look for an intuitive solution, but always budget for some training – ideally something online that users can return to whenever they need to.

Conclusion

As we have seen, this profession is one of the most changing and challenging of our time. Many Bid professionals are still under-valued by their organizations. As a result, the industry has been slow to innovate. But now, as global competition and regulation continue to increase, so will the need for skilled, commercially-savvy Bid and Proposal managers.

Unfortunately, many teams still have a long way to go to prove their value and earn their place at the boardroom table. They must adopt proactive attitudes and educate themselves in best practices, ideally through recognized institutions such as the APMP.

Once they have proven their value to the business, however, Bid teams will go from strength to strength, earning the same level of respect as their peers and Sales and Marketing, and benefiting from increased training budgets and the support provided by proposal technology.

We predict that in five years' time, the picture will be more positive. We'll see more mature, established Bid teams and, like Sales and Marketing, the use of specialist technology will be commonplace.

About Qorus

Qorus helps organizations create business critical documents accurately and efficiently.

From pitches and proposals, to contracts, statements of work and RFP responses. Our document productivity solutions are incredibly powerful, but they plug right into Microsoft Office and Office 365, making them intuitive and easy to use.

Our award-winning Customer Success team ensures our customers across all industries get the most value from our software.

Qorus Software has offices in Seattle, London and Cape Town.

Schedule a demo today

www.qorusdocs.com/contact-us/request-a-demo.

To learn more visit: **www.qorusdocs.com**

Business critical documents at the heart of your success, and so is Qorus

80% Reduction in time to create pitches and proposals

50% Reduction in time spent searching for reusable content

60% Reduction in time to respond to RFPs

40% Reduction in time spent formatting documents

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