A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a person's hands typing on a silver laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt. The background is blurred, showing an office environment with another laptop and a window. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# World-class proposals: Techniques that increase the probability of winning

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Hitachi | July 4, 2025

**David Gray CP APMP**

Bid Excellence Director, Mitie & Past Chair, APMP

# Agenda



Introductions & Context



The importance of customer-focus in winning proposals



What are customer 'hot buttons' and how do we identify them?



Developing win themes and value propositions



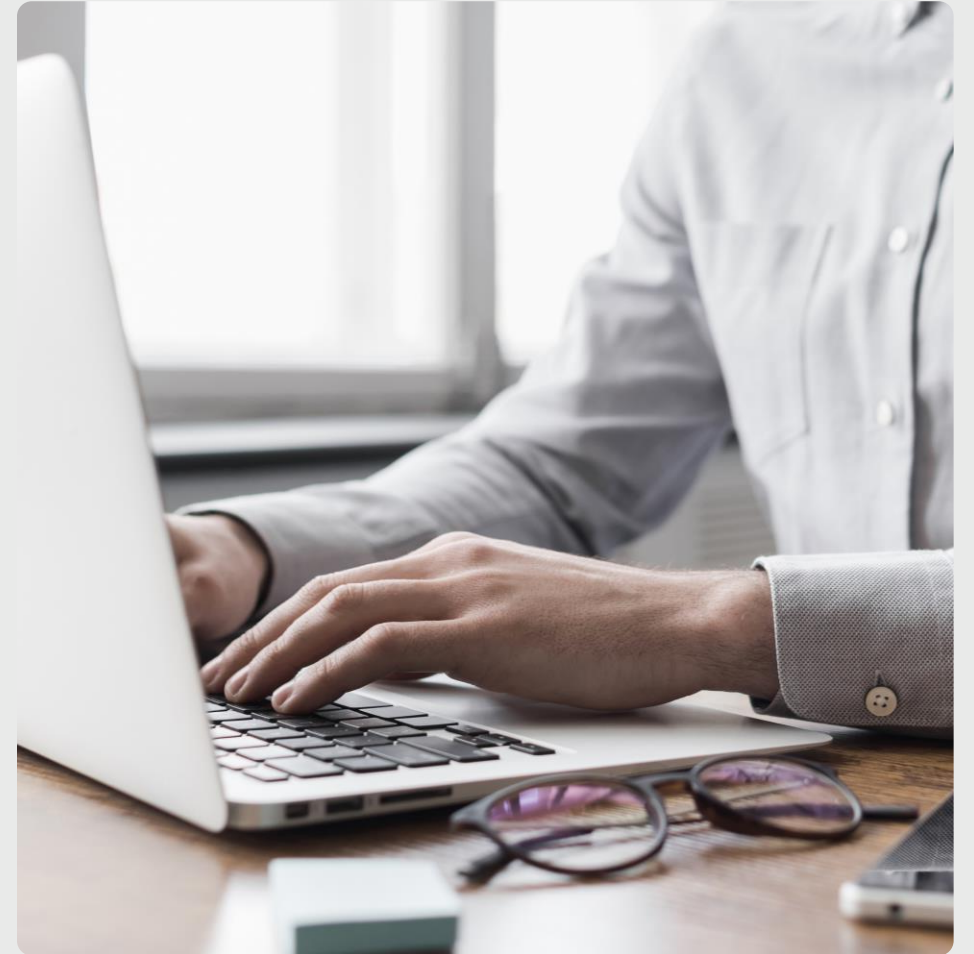
Unique Selling Propositions (USPs) and 'discriminators'



Leading with benefits



Wrap-up / Q & A



# INTRODUCTIONS & CONTEXT

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# Introductions



**David Gray**  
Bid Excellence Director &  
APMP Past Chair

20 years' experience in proposals and strategic work-winning

In-house (Mitie, EDF) and consultancy experience (BT, Vattenfall, Clancy)

Led successful bids and proposals worth over £4bn (JP¥ 800bn)

APMP Practitioner Certified (CP APMP)

APMP International Board Past Chair (2025), Chair (2024) & Director (2021-Present)

Experienced Proposal Coach & Trainer

Speaker at international events, conferences and seminars

Winner of the APMP UK Outstanding Leadership Award 2020

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER- FOCUS IN WINNING PROPOSALS

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# SUPPLIER FOCUS



Hitachi, Ltd. is a Japanese multinational conglomerate founded in 1910 and headquartered in Tokyo.

We are active in various industries, including digital systems, power and renewable energy, railway systems, healthcare products, and financial systems.

# CUSTOMER FOCUS



**ACME** will benefit from enhanced operational efficiency through data-driven **insights** across **your EMEA estate**. This will **optimize** your machine performance, **reduce** downtime and **lower** your life-cycle **costs**.

**Your** customers will benefit from **enhanced experiences** and services **they can rely on**, which will make them **more loyal to you**.

# WHAT ARE CUSTOMER 'HOT BUTTONS' AND HOW DO WE IDENTIFY THEM?

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## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights



# N-O-S-E Structure

## **Nneeds:**

Demonstrate that we understand the customer's business and their key issues or problems

## **Outcomes:**

Focus on the results they want to achieve by addressing their needs or solving their problems

## **Solution:**

Recommend a solution that will solve their problems and deliver their desired results

## **Evidence:**

Provide proof that we can deliver that solution on time and within budget

\* From *Persuasive Business Proposals*, by Tom Sant

# DEVELOPING WIN THEMES AND VALUE PROPOSITIONS

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## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

“Your customers’ experience will drive loyalty, growth, increased market share and competitive advantage”

## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

“You will benefit from a scalable and adaptable service, trusted and proven to deliver at scale for other clients such as...”



## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

"We guarantee 99.99% system uptime, with 24/7 support and service level commitments unmatched in the industry."

## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

"Our solution automates 80% of manual tasks, delivering proven savings of up to 30% in operating costs."

## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

"Proven performance with zero service interruptions over the past 5 years ensures - backed by guaranteed service levels and a dedicated risk management team."

## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

"Our cloud-based platform can be fully implemented in 30 days - twice as fast as competitors."

## Example Hot Buttons

Enhanced customer experience

Lack of capacity to deliver in-house

Underperformance by current supplier

Need to deliver cost savings

Risk reduction

Increased efficiency

Need for data-driven insights

## Example Win Themes

“Our analytics transforms your raw data into strategic insight and actionable intelligence - informing faster, smarter decisions that drive measurable outcomes.”



# UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITIONS (USPs) AND 'DISCRIMINATORS'

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### Differentiator

A feature about your company, service or product that is different to that offered by the competition.

VS

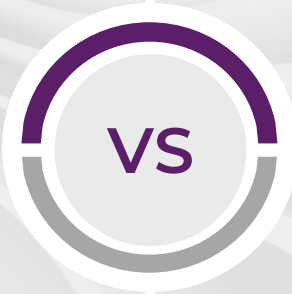
### Discriminator

A feature about your company, service or product that is different to that offered by the competition...  
**and you know is valued by the customer.**

## Examples

### Differentiator

“We are the market-leading and largest energy company in the Asia Pacific region.”



### Discriminator

“We are the only energy company in the Asia Pacific region with a proprietary data analytics platform that can provide the actionable insights you require.”

# LEADING WITH CUSTOMER BENEFITS

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## Leading with the benefit

**Put the benefit in the first line** to grab the customer's attention

***“To ensure consistent high-quality we will manage the contract using our ISO 9001 accredited Quality Management System”***

**Focus on what the customer** will get from your service or product



***“You will benefit from our expert Quality Management Team who have managed 10 similar projects in the last two years”***

**Show the customer the quantifiable and tangible outcomes** they will achieve by choosing you

***“To maximise product life and reduce maintenance costs we will use our accredited testing process”***



# Identifying benefits

 Feature	 Benefit(s)	 Result for Customer
ISO 9001 Accredited System	Proven methodology for high-quality	Confidence and assurance
Dedicated Quality Management Team	Expert staff with experience of similar projects	In safe hands
Inspection and testing process to maximise product life	Consistent performance. Low maintenance costs. Low risk of defects	Confidence in product. Reduced maintenance costs

If a benefit is unclear, ask “so what?” until a compelling benefit is found

## Ask the ‘So What...?’ question

*“We have operations and infrastructure across Japan”*

So what?

*“We have engineering teams living and working close to your sites across the country”*

So what?

*“We can quickly get operatives on site with the materials they need  
to cover absences or increased demand”*

So what?

*“We will ensure your uptime, safety and quality standards are maintained at all times”*  
**= Client Benefit!**

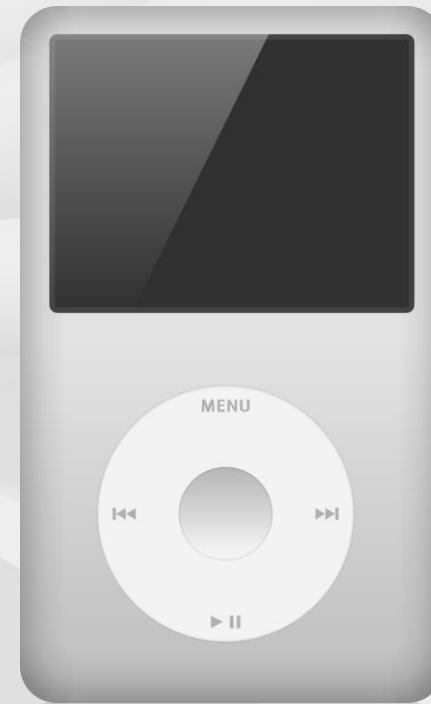
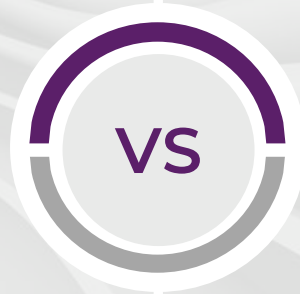
# The power of the benefit

## Feature:

1gb of storage capacity for mp3 files

## Benefit:

1,000 songs in your pocket



## The best proposals '*BLUFF*'...

*B L U F F*

Bottom Line Up Front First

Start with the end result for the customer – what benefit will they get?

# WRAP UP

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# Wrap Up



## Customer-Focus and 'Hot Buttons'

- Put the customer at the centre of the proposal – the story should be about them, not you!
- Identify what is motivating them to buy – what do they need done?
- What is causing them pain or problems?



## Developing Win Themes

- Tailored to respond to customer hot buttons
- Emphasising results and outcomes for the customer, not just features
- Reinforced consistently throughout the proposal, like the chorus of a song, or a golden thread



## USPs and Discriminators

- What makes your company, product or service different from the competition?
- The differences the customer really values are your key discriminators
- Discriminators are your 'secret sauce'!



## Leading with benefits

- Focus on articulating benefits, not just features of your product or service
- Ask “So what..?” to drill down and identify your customer benefits
- Lead with these benefits to maximise impact and win probability.

# Q&A

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