

Contract communications to help your rebid

Ideas for communications during the contract which will help win the rebid





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For contract leads, communicating with the customer is a day to day activity. But when we work with contract and rebid teams during the rebid we often see there are some small changes to communications during the contract period which could have helped the business when it's time to rebid. This paper includes some of those areas we see most often.

Of course, you're communicating with your customer all the time when you're running and delivering the contract. You'll have formal reports to deliver, regular set meetings and probably day to day informal chats. You might even have built the sort of relationship with your customer where you are talking to them on a more social basis. And of course if there are issues on the contract, the customer will be communicating with you a lot!

When we run workshops with contract teams as part of their rebid preparation however, we are looking for something slightly different. We're looking for the sort of communication which has built a good relationship with the customer. Communication that helps tell a clear story about the contract, and makes sure the customer knows what we want them to know prior to the rebid submission going in.

This paper sets out some of the reasons why we look for slightly different things; how your team can use them in the rebid; and what you can be doing now on the contract to help your rebid no matter how far away it is (and help your customer relationships now!).

We'll cover the following headings;

- Surprises in the rebid don't always help;
- Help the customer see the bigger picture;
- Which 'customer' are you communicating with?
- Communicating what really matters;
- Have the right sort of meetings;
- Surveys and other communication from your stakeholders.

You may already be doing some of these things. But even if you only add one element to your communication with your customer it will help you throughout the contract, and help win your rebid.

Surprises in the rebid don't always help

One of the lessons we impress on rebid teams is not to surprise the customer about the existing contract in the rebid.

Of course, in your rebid you should be offering plenty of new things in your new solution which will be innovative. Things fitted to the customer's needs for the future contract, showing how you have learned from the existing contract. And a solution better and /or less costly than the customer is already receiving (no matter how well you are doing on the existing contract).

Some aspects of your new solution and the level of benefits it delivers may be a pleasant surprise to the customer. Though if they are surprised you are being innovative and offering



a great new solution, that might not reflect well on their perception of you going into the rebid.

The point we press is slightly different: wherever possible you shouldn't be telling the customer something in the rebid about your performance on the **existing** contract that surprises them. There are two main reasons for this:

- The sort of information you will be putting into the rebid will be good news: how much you have improved performance over the contract, how much you have saved the customer money etc. If this is a surprise to your customer it may mean they have gone into the rebid and evaluation with a less positive view of you and your performance than you would want.
No matter how strict the evaluation criteria are for the rebid or how objective evaluators are supposed to be, there are always ways for a positive customer to give you a slight advantage. If they are not positive towards you as they go into the rebid you might not get this edge.
- If the information you put in the rebid is very different to the perception the customer has of your performance, they might treat it with scepticism and perhaps even not believe it. If you are using the information to support your future solution (as you should be) your solution could lose credibility in the customer's eyes (and marking).

You should always make sure the customer knows the good news about your performance **before** you go into the rebid. If that means during your rebid preparation you are ensuring the customer knows, understands, and believes the information, you should focus on that. Ideally of course you should be communicating this good news throughout the contract period.

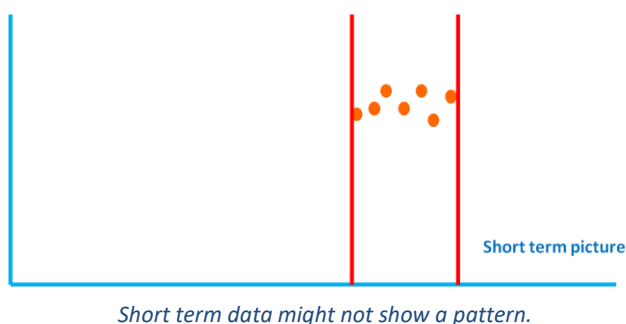
One of the respondents to our survey on procurement professionals' views and experiences of incumbents at rebid summed this up nicely:

"During the term of their existing contract they need to communicate constantly what it is they are doing and also show the value they are providing. It is too late at the recompete to then tell everyone what you have been doing for the last 12 or 24 months"

Help the customer see the bigger picture

As we've said, you are already communicating with your customer throughout your contract. But is the information you are communicating giving the right message?

One of the things we get rebid teams to do as part of their rebid preparations is to pull together cumulative information from throughout the contract period. You're most likely reporting back to the customer on monthly statistics (sometimes weekly or even daily statistics). But does this lead to a focus on the short term picture rather





than the bigger, long term view? Does the customer have a clear understanding of how much in total you have improved performance (or delivered increased volumes, reduced costs etc) since the start of your contract?

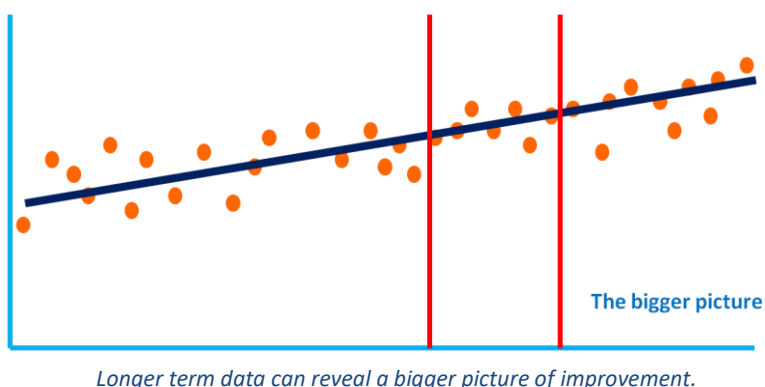
We often find when rebid teams pull out the data for the whole contract period ready for the rebid the cumulative improvement delivered since the start of the contract is a real surprise. As we've said above it shouldn't be, especially for your customer.

Annual Reviews

One of our recommendations to contract teams is to produce an Annual Review of the contract for the customer. This is usually a short document which summarises the year, including cumulative data on key areas, such as the total improvement in performance for the year. It can also include any other good work you delivered during the year. For instance if you completed any added value initiatives during the year you can list all these.

If there have been any issues during the year you should include these – with of course how you have resolved the issue and put in place safeguards to make sure the problem won't reoccur.

If you received any commendations or compliments from end users or other stakeholders these can also be included. If you are confident of your plans for the coming year you could also include these.



The Annual Review gives you the chance to give the customer the bigger picture.

Often customers will be focussed on the short term, so whilst its contents may be a surprise to them it is a surprise at the right time. Over the period of the contract, as customers get more Annual

Reviews from you it will be less of a surprise and will give an appreciation of just how much you really are delivering – hopefully helping improve their perception of you and helping your relationship with them.

Producing and communicating your Annual Review has other advantages:

- As a summary of the year, your immediate customer may well pass your Annual Review on to other more senior stakeholders in your customer organisation (if it shows positive information it reflects well on them as well as you). Or you can use it as a reason to communicate with these senior people who you may not normally have reason to communicate with day-to-day;
- You can use the Annual Review internally to show your staff what they have helped achieve during the year;



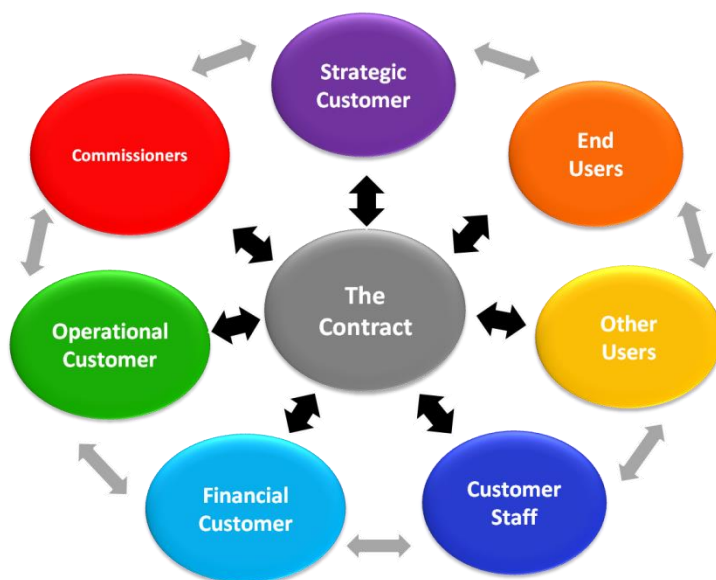
- It's much easier at the end of the contract for the rebid team to capture key information from these Annual Reviews rather than have to collate monthly data and put it into a cumulative format – saving time when time may be short;
- Giving the customer this cumulative information can lead to a more strategic set of conversations. Getting out of the day-to-day issues to look at the longer term can help you have conversations about new initiatives, strategic customer requirements, rather than whether you met this week's KPIs or SLA targets.
- Of course you can also use it with your own boss to show how much you've achieved during the year...

Which 'Customer' are you communicating with?

When the customer is preparing for the rebid and deciding on what the scope of your next contract will be, they will be looking at a range of potential changes. For instance:

- Will it include more or fewer services;
- a broader or narrower geography;
- what the specification will be;
- what the priorities are for delivery and how will success be measured (and paid for);
- what the price vs quality mix will be in the evaluation.

These decisions will involve a wider range of customer stakeholders than you are likely to be dealing with regularly during your contract delivery phase. And the evaluation and marking of your rebid will also be likely to include a range of people – for instance potentially representatives of your end users.



Whilst your direct operational customer will usually have some involvement in the rebid, it may not be as the final decision maker. They may even have limited or no influence on some key areas.

Ideally you want all of these stakeholders to have a similarly positive view towards you as your direct customer should. That means, as with your direct customer, communicating with them throughout the contract. Your aim is to ensure they're aware of the positive work you're

doing and are positive towards you during the contract and particularly as they make decisions about the rebid.

To work out who the wider stakeholder group is, you may need to look back at the bid which won you this contract period to see who was involved then. It is usually a reasonable indication of the type of people who may be involved in the rebid.



Check if and how you are presently communicating with these stakeholders. Your Annual Review might be a route to some. For others you may need to find different methods to keep them in touch with how you're helping them and their organisation.

Communicating what really matters

You can pass on information as much and as often as you like, to as many people as you can. But for you to be communicating the recipients have to be listening and understanding what you are telling them. In many cases that starts with getting their attention and interest.

Your direct customer will naturally be interested in the compliance elements of your contract: are you meeting the performance measures and the service levels set by them as part of your contract.

Other stakeholders may not be so interested in this. They will be interested in how the contract is impacting directly on them and their ability to achieve their goals. Understanding what these goals are, and how your work impacts on them, is the key to engaging these wider groups and individuals.

The higher up the customer organisation these stakeholders are, the more they will be interested in how you are contributing to the customer organisation's strategic aims and goals.

Spend time and effort in understanding these goals, linking your own contract's delivery and services to these goals (if not directly then via customer programmes which are aimed at contributing to these aims). Being able to show how you are impacting at this strategic level (even if only as a minor element of the overall customer effort) will be much more likely to get the attention of these senior stakeholders – who are likely to be influential in the rebid decision-making process.

This might mean you need to add new measures to your contract, or adapt existing ones, to illustrate your contribution. Again this is worth the time and effort. The added benefit is that if you can engage senior stakeholders in the work you are delivering they will have a motivation to see you improve this contribution. This will help you focus your improvement efforts (supported – potentially financially – by these senior stakeholders) on these important areas.

By the rebid you will not only have these stakeholders on your side, but you will also have a history of delivering service and improvement in areas which have real resonance with the organisation. Potentially you'll even be able to show the benefits your work has delivered to the customer's most important corporate aims.

Have the right sort of meetings

Communication isn't just about reports. It is also about conversations and meetings with the customer. No doubt you have many regular meetings with your customer. These are probably set in the requirements of your contract. Typically they will include monthly performance reviews, usually based on a review of performance over the month, specific actions to rectify any issues or underperformance and potentially an element about performance improvement.



What we look for when helping contracts prepare for the rebid are good examples of communication with the customer beyond just reports. Often rebid and contract teams quote these types of monthly meetings as examples of good communication. They are – to an extent.

However, when we challenge the teams about what these meetings achieved, they often find it difficult to give examples of positive improvements or initiatives that have resulted from them. The meetings tend to be focussed on reporting compliance and short term issues, rather than development of the service the team is delivering over the longer term of the contract.

As part of your original bid you will probably have told the customer about the continuous improvement and quality improvement you will deliver over the length of the contract. You (or your bid team) will perhaps have included diagrams or flow charts of how these processes function.

But unless you have a regular forum to discuss, test and validate more significant, longer-term improvements, innovations or changes to your delivery, it's quite possible that by the end of the contract you won't be able to point back to these processes to illustrate what they delivered.

That creates a problem for you at the rebid. As the incumbent you're in a great position to illustrate to the customer everything you have achieved for them over the existing contract as evidence of how well you will deliver the next contract. Competitor's can talk about their other contracts but only you have the hard evidence for the customer, and their own experience of how good you really are.

But. If you haven't got this evidence and haven't performed and improved, the customer also has the hard evidence and experience of that.

It will be very difficult in your rebid to quote your commitment to continuous quality and performance improvement (together with the diagrams and flow charts) for the next contract if the customer knows you haven't delivered for the past 3, 5 or however many years you have been delivering the existing contract.

Suddenly your incumbency becomes a disadvantage. Whilst the customer may not know whether your competitors' assertions of their commitment to and processes for improvement are true, they do 'know', from their own experience, that yours are not.

We always recommend to contract teams that they work hard to set up meetings with the customer which go beyond the day-to-day (or month-to-month) performance review. Adding meetings which go beyond short term compliance issues to focus on the wider, longer term needs of the customer and how you can work to improve, change or expand your delivery and services to help meet these needs will pay dividends.

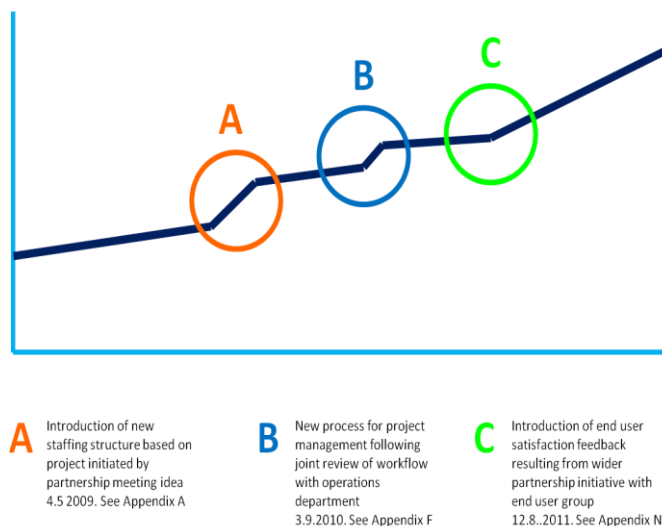
You may try starting this longer term type of conversation as an agenda item in your usual monthly meetings. Sometimes this will work. Often however it can be difficult to move mindset when you get to this agenda item from the immediate and pressing issues and actions already discussed regarding this month's compliance priorities.



The best solution is to set up separate meetings to specifically focus on improvement, innovation, the customer's needs, how these are changing and what you can do to help. These are the type of meetings which set off initiatives and projects leading to major improvements in your service. They work especially well when you can invite a wider set of stakeholders beyond your direct customer contact to give their perspectives and ideas.

As you go through the contract (and in your Annual Reviews) you can then point to these meetings and the initiatives they have produced. You can also start to tell a story about the cumulative improvements we have spoken about in the section above.

You can show not only that you have improved, but that this improvement was deliberate and pre-planned on your part. And you can trace back the improvement and the benefits the customer has gained to your meetings and your continuous improvement processes.



Example chart showing improvement during the contract, with your actions which led to specific changes.

Now you have a positive and convincing story for your rebid – with hard evidence and the customer's own experience to back it up to prove do have a commitment to continuous improvement, quality and innovation.

You can confidently write about the processes you will use in the next contract, and the improvement you delivered in the existing contract using these processes. You can evidence the meetings with the customer you set up as part of your processes to initiate communication and ideas, and the projects resulting from the meetings. You can point to the data showing the level of improvement and benefits these projects delivered.

That's the sort of narrative for your rebid few if any of your competitors will be able to match.

Surveys and other communication from your stakeholders

So far we've focused mainly on how you can communicate 'to' your customer and customer stakeholders. But as we all know, communication is a two way process. To be properly communicating with your customer you need to maximise their opportunities to communicate 'to' you.

One of the ways you can do this is to make sure you are proactively surveying different stakeholder groups which may not individually be able to tell you how you are doing or what they need from your service. This typically includes end user groups, but it can also mean customer staff of other groups of stakeholders depending on the particulars of your contract.



Running regular surveys to find out the level of satisfaction of stakeholders, what they need and want from your service and how you can improve can be a powerful driver for improvements focussed on things the customer sees as important – and is more likely to support and appreciate. Finding out any positive impact your service has had for the end user is even more powerful.

Even encouraging routes for complaints can be useful. If over time you can show you are going beyond just responding to individual complaints. If you can show you have analysed the complaints you are receiving, identified key areas for improvement, and delivered this improvement - and can then evidence the reduction in complaints in this area – you will have another powerful story of your proactive drive to deliver improvement. As you go through your contract you can include this type of narrative in your Annual Reviews and eventually your rebid.



On a more ad hoc basis you should also proactively collect any compliments you receive from end users or the customer. These might be anything from letters, to emails from end users or others who you deal with on your contract. These will be of use again in your Annual Review and rebid. Whilst they won't add up to a statistical analysis of the service quality or improvement you have delivered, they may be good markers for other aspects of your service. Here are some examples we have seen used to good effect in the past:

- Official letter of thanks from Government Minister for support during emergency;
- Christmas cards to vehicles drivers from elderly passengers;
- Customer emails;
- Quotes from customers (always with written permission from customer to use);
- Letters of thanks from end users for helpful approach of frontline staff (always shared by management team at the time of receipt with those being thanked, together with commendation for their work);
- Newspaper cuttings;
- Customer internal newsletter featuring joint participation of customer and contract staff in fundraising event.

These ad hoc examples won't win the rebid by themselves, but they support, and bring to life your proposal and assertions of being focussed on the customer, and provide part of your 'story' of how you run the contract. Keeping copies of all this type of commendation you receive will be extremely useful for the rebid. Often they can be lost, filed in different places or forgotten, especially examples from earlier in the contract. Don't lose the opportunity to show how your customer and stakeholders have been communicating positively with you when you need them in the rebid.



All the ideas we refer to in the paper are more fully described in the Rebid Guide, together with step-by-step guidance of how to put them into action on your contract and rebid. To buy the Guide go to www.rebidding.co.uk



Rebidding Solutions helps incumbents win their rebids. As well as providing articles, advice and processes for incumbents we have also published the Rebid Guide which contains 60 ideas for incumbents to put into practice from day one of their contract to improve their chances of winning their rebid.

We also provide consultancy and bespoke training for incumbent companies and contracts, helping them put together the processes and actions that lead to rebid success.

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