

Pete Blunden is Harmonic's Head of Business Winning and leads Harmonic's growth function, which helps customers to drive growth and provides capability across strategy, capture, bids and sales transformation.

Pete's career in business development began in his early 20s, after plans to go to university and become an RAF officer were thrown off course when his father suddenly passed away. His first job in business development came about by chance, but he soon found it was a role he thrived in. He has gone on to amass over 15 years' experience in competitive bidding and leadership, including roles with defence primes in the UK and UAE.

Known for his passionate, committed and competitive approach, Pete focuses on driving accountability, empowerment and collaboration to enable high-quality outcomes. Here Pete reflects on the changing world of winning profitable business, the impact of Covid-19 and how Harmonic helps customers accelerate growth.



You've just celebrated your fifth anniversary at Harmonic – congratulations! What made you join the company?

Thank you! I first came across Harmonic when the defence company I was working for asked me to assess its business winning capability as part of a programme of work Harmonic was supporting to upskill the business development function. It was a measure of how impressed I was that when Harmonic approached me about a role a couple of months later I leapt at the chance! I'd already been working as a bid professional for 10 years and wanted to join a management consultancy that met my ambitions for growth, where I could learn and also be a fundamental part of its success.

What have been the key trends in the world of business winning over the past five years?

For high-performing businesses, there is a shift away from reactive bidding and solely focusing on the proposal to a greater emphasis on strategy, capture, competitive intelligence and strategic marketing, and I believe these will be prime focuses for future development and growth in business winning. Competitive intelligence is a particularly important area. Utilising data for strategic advantage is becoming a fundamental capability. Being able to intelligently gather, analyse and distribute market data to inform business leaders is allowing our customers to rapidly assess and adapt their next steps and build strategic advantage in increasingly competitive markets.

Reactive bidding has to stop. I have and always will be vocal about this subject with my customers and the industry. The consequences of reactive bidding have a massive impact on organisational culture, mental wellbeing and business and personal growth. Harmonic is working closely with our customers to drive proactive behaviours and accountability across business development and delivery. It's powerful and it's successful.



We're helping our customers to develop a stance of calmness in chaos. It takes courage and resilience, but it's definitely the right strategy. //

Producing compliant and compelling proposals is now normal practice within a lot of the industries we work in as a result of some outstanding work by the business winning community and our own Mel Smith, board member at the APMP International. As a result, the focus is shifting; Harmonic has adapted and our customers are adapting. A lot has changed over the past five years and I'm excited to be part of what's next.

How has Harmonic responded to these trends? How has your business winning practice changed?

We are constantly evolving. A customer told me last week that we are an unrecognisable company from their first engagement with us three years ago. We are higher up the value chain and are seen as a trusted advisor, working intimately with our customers to realise their growth aspirations.

We have reshaped our business winning capabilities through recruitment and internal training to allow us to focus on the areas that have the biggest impact on growth.

We are working on go to market strategy, deal shaping and developing disruptive propositions using a blend of solution architects, business development leads and industry experts to support our customers, years ahead of any formal competitive procurement. We are using technology with our new partners to optimise process inputs and outputs, and providing industry and operational insight. Utilising technology is high on our agenda and is an important part of our strategy as we evolve to meet the demands of an exciting future. Everything we do as a business is focused on giving our customers the edge.

Applying agile methodology to bid winning has also had an extraordinarily powerful effect in recent years. We've been able to reduce bid team size while improving productivity and outcomes. Overall, the cost of bidding has reduced by 20–30% and teams are able to focus on the most important aspects of a bid, instead of being reactive.

You've mentioned Harmonic's digital tools. What key digital advances has Harmonic made?

One of my focuses over the past two years has been to utilise technology to drive better and quicker outcomes for our customers.

Thanks to artificial intelligence, we can identify competitor trends, monitor tender wins, target customers much more precisely and manage bids virtually. Bid management software such as Bidhive has increased productivity by over 30%.

The pandemic has forced us to change our approach to customer engagement. Our leadership team quickly established a Covid-19 taskforce focused on driving valuable outcomes and improving our customers' experience within a new digital environment.

We have worked with our customers to develop highly interactive digital interventions; from strategy to action, market strategy, win strategy and pursuit readiness workshops. To ensure maximum ROI for our customers we have utilised our own operational, strategic and historic customer insight to develop our digital capability, allowing us to measure, automate, collate and redefine our customers' business growth approaches.

One of the main focuses has been to optimise the user experience through technology. We engaged with our customers to understand the challenges they were facing and built capability to meet their evolving needs. Rather than shifting to solutions that make our lives easier, we have focused on customer value. We want our sessions to be the most memorable, engaging and valuable of our customers' week, and this has driven a lot of our design thinking.

We have managed to reduce workshop duration and fatigue while increasing value. We have also, thanks to our P3M practice, implemented agile scrum sessions across our business and with our customers to reduce meeting times and focus on outcomes.



We focus on outcomes, consistently delivering clear, sustainable benefits to our customers.



Business winning was largely on hold during lockdown. What's the current state of play?

It is an interesting one. Companies need to make sure they refocus and assess long-term prospects and the changing requirements of their customers and their own businesses as a result of Covid-19. If you panic and rush around trying to recover lost revenue, there's a risk of biting off more than you can chew and being a busy fool. We're helping our customers to develop a stance of calmness in chaos. It takes courage and resilience, but it's definitely the right strategy. Our ValueSeek and Pursuit Readiness Tools have been a real advantage for our customers in assessing their abilities to succeed in the current environment.

During any crisis, we all tend to shift from a growth to a fixed mindset, just waiting for everything to fall back into place again. To win business, it's essential to move your thinking on from 'Our pipeline has gone!' to 'How can we leverage this situation and add value to our customers in new ways?' A growth mindset is even more important than usual at the moment and underpins all of the interventions we use in business winning at Harmonic. We help our customers break free of old ways of thinking and focus on the reality.

What are your key strengths? How do these help you make a difference for customers?

I truly care about our customers and want to help them achieve success. There's a strong culture of accountability at Harmonic and, like all team leaders here, I thrive on responsibility. I see it as my job to take away customers' problems and provide them with the best possible solution. There are no hidden agendas and I'm never afraid to do the right thing for a customer, even when it's tough. Winning business, having fun, building trusted relationships and growing together with customers is what business is all about for me, and I think my customers see that in me and my team.

We are a business and a team built on trust. We're entirely customer focused, constantly look ahead and intervene to solve problems before they arise.

What do you believe differentiates Harmonic from the competition?

We're small, specialist and one of the only companies in Europe that offers end-to-end capability, spanning sales transformation, business winning transformation and project transformation. When it comes to bidding, we are specialists who focus on outcomes, not theory.

Our level of expertise is exceptional across all these areas. We're able to provide a depth of insight based on actual experience and activity in the market that customers can't get anywhere else. We focus on outcomes rather than outputs, consistently delivering clear, sustainable benefits to our customers.

As a result of all of this, we build long-lasting relationships with our customers founded on trust. We're consistently honest, dedicated, professional and insightful.

What are you most excited about for the business winning practice over the next five years?

Everyone that knows me knows I'm unhealthily competitive! Seeing both Harmonic and our customers continue to grow is hugely satisfying for me.

I've thoroughly enjoyed the journey we've been on over the past five years – our move higher up the value chain with customers, the immense value that is bringing, and the unrivalled career paths opening up to our team. Now I'm excited to see how the practice develops and further establishes itself as the partner of choice for organisations seeking rapid growth.

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE HARMONIC BUSINESS WINNING TEAM

Email: enquiries@harmonic.co.uk

Website: harmonic.co.uk

Winning business, having fun, building trusted relationships and growing together with customers is what business is all about for me, and I think my customers see that in me and my team. "