

DISRUPT TO WIN – A NEW LENS ON BIDDING

In a world where bidding competence has become a commodity and compliant, compelling bids the norm, how do you stand out from the crowd?

Not so long ago, bidding was a relatively unpredictable process. Clients were often unclear about their requirements, introducing an element of Russian roulette to the outcome. Bids themselves tended to be impenetrable and unappealing, written by subject matter experts and with little graphic content.

This has all changed in recent years. Clients improved the way they detail their requirements, making it far easier to produce a compliant bid. Companies started to use specialist bid writers and graphic designers and, for a while, if you had a slicker bidding process than your competitors it followed that your win rate was better.

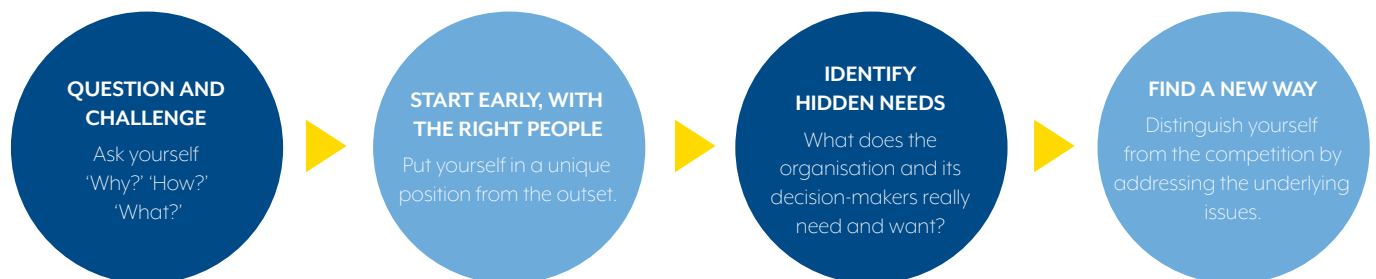
But what do you do once everyone has raised their game and compliant, aesthetically pleasing bids have become the norm? When clients are faced with a homogeneous set of bids that are all beautifully written, presented and compliant, how do they differentiate apart from on price?

DISRUPT THE GAME!

Our experience of helping clients win bids at Harmonic has shown that the focus needs to shift from the bidding process and surface elements to underlying thinking. The challenge is to make your competitors' bid seem old – possibly even irrelevant – through disruptive thinking. It's time to stop playing the same game and break out of the 'me too' mentality when it comes to bidding.

This may seem like a daunting, even risky strategy. Bidding is a sunk cost; it's expensive and binary. With Sales Directors and Heads of Bids under huge time and resource pressure, it's all too easy for bids to get backloaded. This is fine if you're just turning the handle, but if you're trying to do something different or increase your win rate, backloading will backfire.

Committing to a smart, disruptive approach to bidding from the outset saves time and resource in the long run, increasing win rate and return on investment.



Disrupt the game and
stand out from the crowd

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Start early, with the right people

Clients are becoming increasingly proficient at providing clear, detailed requirements in their ITTs. As a result, if you wait for the ITT before trying to understand their problem, a ‘me too’ response and race to the bottom is highly likely.

Once procedures are prescribed and compliance is key, the potential for disruption is limited. The constraints of the bidding process are in direct opposition to a disruptive approach – you don’t want to have to play by the rules that keep your competition in place.

The creative spark has to come before the ITT drops. It is at the capture phase that there’s room to manoeuvre and differentiate your bid. Act early and frontload effort to get your finger on the pulse of what really matters, test out ideas and solve the client’s problem.

To do this effectively, you need the right team around you. At the bid phase, you want people who are effective, good communicators and listeners, diligent, procedural and technically competent. At the capture stage, you need people with qualities that make them good disruptors.

Get the right team in place and then encourage an open, creative, risk-taking approach throughout the capture phase of the bid. Give people the freedom and confidence to innovate, imagine and defy expectations.

This is your opportunity to engage in joint value discovery with the customer; involve them in the process and test your thinking with them as much as possible.



A GOOD DISRUPTOR IS...

- FLEXIBLE**
Ready to adapt to new information, learn from mistakes and change direction.
- CURIOUS**
Keen to understand what makes people and processes tick.
- CHALLENGING**
Constantly questioning assumptions, testing ideas and asking why.
- PERCEPTIVE**
Able to pick up on people’s feelings, motivations and uncertainties.
- CONFIDENT**
Decisive and not afraid to tell people that something isn’t working.
- DETERMINED**
Single-minded in their resolution to get under the skin of a problem.
- A RULE BREAKER**
With a healthy scepticism for the usual ways of doing things.

“ Get the right team in place and then encourage an open, creative, risk-taking approach throughout the capture phase of the bid. **”**

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Identify hidden needs

Every bid comes with clearly stated organisational needs, from reducing costs and increasing productivity to developing brand communication and improving customer relations.

This is the public face of the bid – the overt needs that everyone is comfortable talking about. It is the stated prescription for the solution to the problem.

But the reality is that these stated needs often disguise the real, systemic problem that a company faces. Behind almost every bid lie complex, hidden needs that are either implied, misinterpreted or omitted when the requirement is written down. And these hidden needs invariably hold considerable sway when it comes to deciding how to award a piece of work. In fact, they can even prevent the prescribed solution from working if the people who wrote the ITT are actually part of the problem.

A recent project saw one of our clients invest considerable time and resources in trying to work out what a customer wanted before the ITT dropped. When the bid was released and they read the 'hot buttons' – the stated priorities – they were delighted to have correctly predicted 95%. However, as we pointed out, their hard work at the capture phase had given them little advantage. Without asking the right questions and discovering the customer's hidden needs, it was just another case of 'me too'.

Disruptive thinking in this context involves seeing a customer's needs through a different lens. Don't just believe what the organisation and its people tell you about themselves. Ask questions, challenge assumptions and make your own mind up about what will influence the success of a bid.

GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF THE ORGANISATION AND ITS DECISION-MAKERS IS VITAL

From an organisational perspective, how will solving this problem move the business forward? What is its next problem likely to be? What are the company's true values? How do these influence the choices it makes?

From an individual perspective, what is the decision-makers' personal motivation? Do they want to be seen as creative and innovative? Are they looking to make a splash and achieve promotion? How risk averse are they?

At Harmonic we use a Shifting Perceptions approach – a disruptive bid strategy model inspired by behavioural science – to reframe the needs and problems that underlie a bid.

Through a challenging analysis based on this starting point, we help our clients reach a new understanding of hidden needs that has a transformative effect on bid quality and success.



SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS...

Stated requirements and priorities

Open discussion

The ITT

Published material



Unstated requirements and priorities

Hidden motivations

Underlying needs

Unknown perceptions of joint value

Get in touch to find out more about the Shifting Perceptions model and how Harmonic uses it to illuminate bidding and give our clients a competitive edge

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Question and challenge

As this suggests, disruptive bidding demands intellectual curiosity and challenge: a determination to think differently and the confidence to take risks. Never allow groupthink – the practice of thinking as a group and, as a result, not challenging decisions – to creep into the bid process. It's easy to convince ourselves collectively that our solutions are good enough, particularly when we're under pressure.

Creative enquiry lies at the heart of disruptive bidding. Through asking probing questions, you can intentionally and creatively disturb and improve the systems that are holding a client's problems in place. As Albert Einstein said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

You need to explore new possibilities and bring a new level of thinking to the problem.

We find Agile thinking particularly helpful as a way to move around a problem and see what is holding it in place. Sometimes simply by removing some of the foundations, it is possible to make a problem irrelevant. If you can do this at the right time, your competitors don't have time to recover or regroup.

The faster and less predictable your actions during the capture phase, the more you disrupt your competitors. Their experience is worth less, they have less time to take in information and they don't know how to act. Let go a little, allow some chaos and use it to your advantage by creating more chaos and confusion for your competitors.

TRANSFERRABLE THINKING

In the spirit of creative enquiry, it can be helpful to look beyond the world of bidding for inspirational ways to outwit the competition through disruptive thinking.



Whatever you think of the Vote Leave campaign and the eventual outcome of the referendum, there is no doubt that it is a prime example of disruptive thinking in action. While the Remain campaign played by the long-established rules of electoral politics and a 'fair fight', Vote Leave opted for what would work rather than the accepted process. It got to know its market with the help of technology, identified people's fears and prejudices and focused on their hidden 'needs'. It connected with hearts and minds, used data analytics in new ways and found a unique channel to speak to the decision-makers. Because no one had ever run a campaign in this way before, there were no rules. Vote Leave was entirely results-focused – and it succeeded.



The film Moneyball tells the true story of Oakland Athletics baseball team's 2002 season. Unable to compete with bigger teams on budget, the management opted for a completely new approach to scouting, hiring players solely on the basis of statistics rather than collective wisdom and gut instinct. The result? A competitive team was put together for a fraction of the price and the opposition never saw them coming. Long term, Oakland's radical thinking – based on Sabermetric principles – has shaped the increasingly data-driven approach to recruitment across professional sport. The first baseball team founded on Sabermetrics to go on to become World Series Champions was Boston Red Sox. Interestingly, its parent company also owns a Premier League club – Liverpool FC...

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Find a new way

The product of all this questioning, challenge and creativity?
A new way of seeing things.

For example, a distribution company client was looking for a new supplier of containers on the grounds that it needed a better price point and greater robustness in the supply chain. Creative enquiry on site during the capture phase revealed that the company still relied on manual container handling and that its prime motivation for reducing costs was the need to employ more people to move containers. The supplier's solution? A bid based on robotic loading and unloading, with a charge for robots built into the container price over a 20-year period. While competitors were bidding on price, supply chain and stock, the company proposed a radically different, more expensive solution and won the deal.

Disruptive thinking at the capture phase of a bid is your chance to make the client realise that although they may think they want a widget, what they really need is business transformation!

Start with a blank sheet of paper and throw out the normal rules of engagement. Challenge not just the client's requirements, but also the needs behind them. Dig to the root of the problem and take a creative look at solutions that make the competition's traditional response irrelevant. By the time the ITT lands, you will have stolen a march on the opposition and put yourself in a winning position.



HOW CAN HARMONIC HELP?

Establishing disruptive thinking in bidding takes time and the right people.

Our consultants at Harmonic are distinguished by their ability to think differently. We have the tools and techniques to see behind the curtain and develop uniquely compelling propositions that will leave the competition confused and lamenting the drop in their win rate. These include interventions like CaptureCAT, which is proven to increase win rate through disruptive thinking.

So if you want to make disruptive thinking a natural part of your sales and bid culture and transform your business winning permanently, get in touch with our business winning team today.



GET IN TOUCH TODAY

If you've got an opportunity and know that you're going to need something different to win it, get in touch with Matt Hatson or any other member of the Harmonic business winning team today.

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MANAGING
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