

Persuasive Website Proposals

How to Write Persuasive
Website Proposals

How to Write Persuasive Website Proposals

You may be in web development, but you probably didn't get into it because you love to write proposals. In fact, if you're like most website developers, writing proposals is your least favorite part of the job. Unfortunately, they come with the territory and if you want to generate leads and convert potential clients into projects, you'll have to master the art of writing them.

Proposals are one of the most important tools you have available to you because they convert prospects into clients. Your dream clients – the ones with the high budgets, high traffic, and popular sites that will get you noticed – all demand proposals.

Your ability to get new work may depend on proposals, but that doesn't mean you're good at, or enjoy, writing them.

While not writing and submitting proposals would mean losing potential clients, you don't want to spend hours writing each one either. Proposals don't have to take up half the day, and they shouldn't have to.

Instead, you can take the time to learn how to improve your proposal writing process. By using a proposal writing system you can save time, energy, and improve the quality of your proposals at the same

time. You can streamline the process to reduce the amount of labor involved with writing a proposal, while improving rather than sacrificing quality.

Creating a proposal system will allow you to create persuasive proposals with less effort, and get back to the web development you love.

Ready? Let's cover that now.

The Anatomy of a Persuasive Proposal

5 Essential Elements Every Proposal Should Have

Any website proposal is going to require research, creativity, and time, but you can minimize the amounts of each required by the project. You can use a structure to create a basic proposal template and then use that to create your final product.

Your proposals will vary in size, length, and complexity, but should always follow the same basic structure. The following include the five basic elements that should be in any of your proposals.

1. The Problem Statement

The first section of your development proposals should cover one of the most important topics, the problem. This statement gives you the opportunity to tell the client that you understand their problem, not just what they are asking for. Because the problem statement is the first part of your proposal, it's also your opportunity to catch the client's attention.

The best problem statements dig deeper into the client's surface needs to show the problems behind their project.

A problem statement that outlines actual issues rather than the client's surface needs will stand out. It shows him or her that you are on the same page. This automatically makes your proposal seem more attractive because you understand the issue, and therefore the client.

If the client is asking for a completely new website designed from the ground up, then they already know that they need a website. They don't need the problem statement to tell them that. You and they both know what they need. What you have to figure out is *why* they need it.

Businesses all have one major thing in common and that is that they want to make money. You do to. If they just wanted a website, then they could use a free one without investing anything, or use their old one. Something is driving them to pay someone to build them a new website.

Your problem statement has to answer this question. **Why does the client need a website?**

If you can address the client's core problems rather than their needs, then you're on the right track. Highlighting actual issues at the start of your profile is the best way to tell the client that you know how to fix their issues, because you understand them.

Let's take a look at a few quick examples:

ABC Company needs a new website for their restaurant. The page should include custom menus, map location, and various easy to navigate pages.

If you read this problem statement, you'll notice one very major flaw. It doesn't explain the real problem. In fact, it mostly just reiterates whatever the client may have already told you via a post or advertisement.

This problem statement doesn't stand out to the client because it doesn't tell them anything. You're just repeating what they've already told you, and that means that it won't distinguish you from your competitors. It's not a good problem statement.

This problem statement doesn't highlight the actual issues.

Now, let's say that you'd taken a few minutes to figure out why the client needed a website.

ABC Company recently opened and currently has no web presence other than a social page. The company is not showing up in search, which severely hinders their ability to gain new customers online.

ABC Company should launch a new, search friendly website to remedy this problem and capture new customers.

The website should include a custom menu system, easy to navigate pages, and map based instructions that work on mobile devices and phones.

Do you notice the difference? The web developer took the time to find out why the company needs a website and suddenly their problem statement is a lot more persuasive. It doesn't state what the client needs, it gets to the heart of the issue and outlines why the client needs development services.

By outlining the clients actual issues rather than their project requirements, you take the time to tell the client that you understand their issues. While you will have to spend time on this section, you can use your research throughout your proposal.

The issues behind the project might not be easy to find. You will have to spend a few minutes researching the company but it will

improve your proposal. Most clients won't just come out and tell you their issues but finding them on your own can help your proposal a great deal.

Taking the time to figure out why the client needs your services is important because it stands out to the client. Creating a custom problem statement allows you to tailor the rest of your proposal specifically to their needs, and it grabs the client's interest right from the start of your proposal.

Why does this company need a web developer?

If you can answer that at the start of your proposal, you'll also be distinguishing your proposal from your competitors and ensuring that the client keeps reading.

Let's move on to part two.

2. Your Proposed Solution

The proposed solution is the second part of your proposal, and it follows up on your problem statement. Here, you tell the client how you can solve their issues using your development skills.

How can you solve your clients actual issues?

Almost every business has a website. A web presence is an extremely important part of being a business, especially in today's day and age. However, anyone can create a website. There are even dozens of

companies that create flash websites based on templates for free or nearly so. The client doesn't have to hire a web developer. If they just wanted a website, they could look anywhere.

Your web development skills are less important than your ability to create custom solutions for your clients.

The client may need a website but that's not why they plan on making a hire. If they just wanted a website they could use Wordpress. If they're hiring a website developer then they want something unique, something special. You have to tell your clients how your services stand out by offering them solutions to their problems, not a website. Of course, you'll also be providing a website, but remember that isn't why they need you.

Use your proposed solution section to do just that. Offer solutions *not* skills.

Here's a look at the language involved:

ABC Company should launch a website for their new restaurant. The website should include custom menus, an easy to use interface, and a mobile friendly, responsive design.

Do you notice what this example doesn't do? It doesn't offer solutions. This proposed solution is pretty much the opposite of what you want to aim for because it doesn't tell the client anything that isn't already in your problem statement. They already know that you can develop websites or you wouldn't be sending a proposal.

It's less of a solution and more of a list of skills.

This solution doesn't tell the clients what you can do for them, or why they should hire you. It also won't convert clients unless they have no other pitches.

Here's a better example:

In order for ABC Company to capture web and mobile traffic, they should launch a new website. The website should be SEO friendly to come up in search, and include location based tags and HTML to help mobile users find the restaurant.

The website itself should include a custom web menu to allow visitors to view food options from mobile devices and computers, an integrated maps system for directions, and an easy to use interface. Large-scale graphics would also be integrated to enhance the appeal of the food and the website to users.

Notice the difference? **By taking a few minutes to highlight how the services solve the client's problem, you make your proposal more persuasive.**

You might notice that the second proposed solution looks like it's a lot more difficult to write. It also makes your services sound a lot more valuable. Because it's also more persuasive, it makes you more likely

to get the project, because you're impressing the client. Most importantly, you're also using the research you already did for your problem statement.

By telling the client the solutions you have to offer, you tell them why they should hire you. Outlining how your services help the client will make your proposal a great deal more persuasive.

3. Benefits

After spending time outlining the solutions your services offer, you might think you've done enough. After all, you've already told the client how you can help them, they don't need to know anything else right?

If that's what you're thinking then you may want to think again. A problem statement and solution make up parts of a proposal, but they don't make up a convincing proposal. If you want to really wow the client, you have to take the time to tell them how your services benefit them as a business.

While you could stop your proposal right here and not bother to spend any more time convincing the client to hire you, it would be a waste of your time and research to do so. Not including a benefits section hurts your chances of success.

The client knows what you can offer, but now you have to tell them why you're better than your competitors. Why do they want to hire you specifically?

Keep in mind that your client is no website professional. If they were, they would be making their own website. They wouldn't have to hire you.

While the benefits of your services are glaringly obvious to you, they might not be to the client. **Most clients aren't experts in web development.** They need you to point out how your services can help them.

Your benefits section gives you the opportunity to tell the client how your services can help their business. The client needs to know that investing in a website will help them, and you can tell them that here. You'll want to outline your unique services and how they benefit the client.

Why should this client hire you?

Here's an example:

We'll talk with you and get an idea of how you want to present your website to the public. We'll go over style ideas, and create a preliminary mockup of the site so you can approve or edit the design as needed.

Then we'll get started building your custom website from the ground up. We'll make sure it's unique, fast, and responsive to different mobile devices and screen sizes so that it looks good on any device, and performs well in search.

We'll design both the front and back ends of the site with usability and style in mind. A custom CMS will help you with adding content and editing your site on your own, while the front end will impress visitors and get you customers. We'll design a custom menu app and integrate it right into your website so that visitors can see exactly what they're getting. We'll also set it up for you, so all you have to worry about is content.

Spending the time to outline the benefits of your services tells the client that you can actually help them. It adds interest and perceived value to your proposal, and it doesn't actually require that you do any more work. A good benefits section [separates you from your competitors](#) and helps you convert your clients.

4. Pricing Information

If the rest of your proposal is as convincing as it should be, then you probably have to answer just one more important question.

How much will all of this cost?

A high price tag on your websites isn't a turn off to good clients. What is a turn off is a difficult to read pricing section. Putting a sloppy,

confusing, or overly detailed pricing section at the end of a killer proposal can quite literally ruin the effect.

Most clients aren't math experts. You have to make it easy for them to see how much your services cost. Even if you're including several services in the same website package, you'll want to offer one price. Higher price breakdown makes the pricing easier to digest, which means clients are more likely to understand it.

Keep your proposal simple and to the point. A great pricing section lets the client know what they're getting and how much it costs at one glance.

Here's an example:

Customized web development	\$5,470
-----------------------------------	----------------

Initial Meetup—We'll meet with you to discuss your design ideas, style preferences, and needs, so that we can create a more customized website.

Design— We'll talk with our graphics team and create a customized mockup of your site. We'll run it by you to ensure that it's what you want, and then get to work bringing it to live.

Customized Website— We'll work with you every step of the way to create a fully functioning website with the maps, menus, and CMS functions that you need.

Final Product – We'll launch your website for you so that you don't have to, teach you the basics of using your custom CMS, and get your website ready for the world wide web.

Project Total \$5,470

Notice that this pricing schedule doesn't break pricing down at every level? While you're providing a couple of different services, you don't have to list pricing for each option. **Break pricing down at a high level so that it's easier to understand at a glance.**

Most of your prospective clients will have an idea of what they want to spend but you don't necessarily have to be within those limits to get the job. There are a number of [psychological price hacks](#) that can help you win the bid, even if your pricing is higher than what the client wants to pay.

A basic pricing summary is great for smaller projects with one or two included services, and no real milestone payments. Many of your web development projects will work with this sort of pricing section.

If the project is longer, more involved, or requires milestone payments, then you may need a slightly longer pricing section. A budget schedule or fee schedule outlines when and for what each payment is due.

In either case, you'll want to use a grid format to keep your budget section organized, easy to read, and easy to digest.

5. Call to Action

Now that you've spent so much time convincing the client that you are the website developer for the job, you wouldn't want to let them walk away. Many website developers create winning proposals and then finish off with a crucial mistake. They don't *ask* the client to act.

While you might not think that you have to ask the client to move forward with the proposal, you have to keep in mind that most clients are business owners. That means they are just as busy, stressed, and short of time as you. If you leave them to go their own way they might *plan* to get back to you, but it might never happen.

Even if you've written a killer proposal, you can still lose the client. They might quite simply forget to respond. You can nip the problem in the bud by including a call to action.

Urging your potential client into action will increase your turnover rate, and it's something most of your competitors won't do.

Your potential clients are busy, often facing multiple proposals, and probably multi-tasking. They don't have the time or the energy to chase down your contact information. The last thing you want to do is make the client work to hire you. If you want them to hire you, you have to make it easy to do so.

By including a call to action, you are asking the client to move forward with the project, and making it easy. A good call to action includes everything they need to move forward with your project.

Here's what that looks like:

ABC Company can utilize the following steps to proceed with the proposal:

- 1. Call us at (xxx-xxx-xxxx) to accept the proposal as is or discuss desired changes to the website, or contract details.*
- 2. Finalize and sign contract.*
- 3. Submit initial payment of 50% of the final budget.*

Once the contract has been finalized, we'll get started with a meeting to discuss timelines, needs, and the look and feel of your dream website.

Your call to action is more than a plea to accept your bid. It tells the client everything they need to know to move forward with the project. In this case, call or contact to accept, sign and finalize the contract, and then a quick jump to the future where you're having a meeting about the website design.

A call to action is an important part of any website proposal.

Putting It All Together

Structuring a Persuasive Proposal

Once you've mastered the basics of writing a proposal, you have to learn how to create an attractive format and design. You can use the five basic elements discussed in the last chapter to create a basic proposal structure for your templates.

The structure looks like this:

1. Problem Statement

2. Proposed Solution

3. Benefits

4. Pricing Information

5. Call to Action

Your proposal doesn't have to use these specific element titles. Most of the sections fit under a couple of different names and you can choose the ones you want based on personal preference, or the project at hand.

“Problem Statement” can also go by “Client Needs,” “Company Goals,” “Client Objectives,” or “Goals and Objectives.”

“Proposed Solution” can also go by “Recommended Solution”, “Recommended Strategy”, or “Recommended Action”

“**Pricing Information**” can also go by “Budget Summary” (for shorter projects), “Budget Schedule” (for longer projects), or “Project Pricing.”

Making Proposal Writing a Repeatable Process

Turning It into a System

While you may dread writing proposals, you still have to write them. Not sending proposals is a sure way to hurt your business. Most of the high-end clients that you really want only hire website developers who send proposals. That means that writing proposals will improve your client base, and actually give you a chance of winning the bid.

A good proposal will tell the client that you can do the job. **A great proposal will tell them that you're the best option for the job.**

Avoiding proposals may not be on the table, but you don't have to suffer. You can leverage the basic proposal structure into a writing system that helps you write more quickly. Because you're also using a system, and the persuasion techniques you've already learned, you'll be writing more quickly without losing quality.

If you want to save the most time, then [proposal software](#) is the best way to go. Software automates the entire process, removes most

manual steps, and offers content prompts, layouts, and themes that you can use to create a better proposal. It's the best way to go if you're looking for the easiest way to create a proposal.

If the Bidsketch proposal software isn't for you then templates are the next best thing.

Creating Your Own Proposal Templates

A Manual Alternative to Proposal Software

Templates are a great way to speed up the proposal writing process without software. While they don't offer quite the same advantages, you can still benefit from them because they help to streamline the process and remove some of the manual steps from writing proposals.

Microsoft Word is the best program for creating templates, but [OpenOffice](#) is a free alternative. Most web developers can get away with creating two templates, one for large proposals and one for small ones.

Let's get started.

Small Proposal Templates

A small template is perfect for writing proposals for short or small development projects. While many of your competitors may just submit a bid or budget for these types of projects, you can single yourself out as a true professional by submitting a full proposal.

A short proposal doesn't have to be very long. This template is ideal for around two to three pages of content. That's perfect for telling the client how you can help them with the project, introducing pricing, and setting client expectations.

If you're not familiar with creating a template in Microsoft Word, check these [basic instructions](#). If you're using OpenOffice, you can check their Wiki [here](#).

Here's the basic structure for the small proposal template:

- **Client Needs** (problem statement)
- **Recommended Solution** (proposed solution)
- **Benefits**
- **Fee Summary** (pricing information)
- **Next Steps** (call to action)

Large Proposal Templates

Many web development projects will require a slightly more detailed proposal, and that means using a large proposal template. Because you'll be using this one a little more often than the smaller template, you can think of it as your standard structure.

Here's a general layout for the large proposal template:

- **Goals and Objectives** (problem statement)
- **Recommended Solution** (proposed solution)
- **Benefits**
- **Fee Summary** (pricing information)
- **Fee Schedule:** outlines different points where you'll receive partial payments or milestones of the total cost of the website.
- **Estimated Project Schedule:** Gives clients an idea of when to expect deliverables, such as an initial mockup or first version of the website.

Here is an example project timeline from the [free web development proposal template](#):

Project Timeline

We offer the following timeline for the development of an original corporate identity and marketing package:

Phase	Activities	Completion
Discovery	Analysis of Highwire Snowboards Inc.'s design needs and preferences.	09/30/XX
Logo Development	Three concepts in rough draft, one concept in two color schemes and the final logo.	10/19/XX
Business Card Development	You will receive the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two concepts in rough draft• One concept in two color schemes• Final business card design	10/30/XX
Brochure Design	Three concepts in rough draft, one concept in two color schemes and the final brochure.	11/07/XX

- **Next Steps** (call to action)
- **Terms and Conditions:** Terms and conditions are important for setting client expectations, and ensuring that there are no issues if legal problems arise.

Here is a sample Terms and Conditions from the website proposal template below:

Terms and Conditions

- Once project fee is paid in full to Bidsketch any elements of text, graphics, photos, contents, trademarks, or other artwork furnished to Highwire Snowboards Inc. for inclusion in website are owned by Highwire Snowboards Inc..
- Bidsketch assumes Highwire Snowboards Inc. has permission from the rightful owner to use any images or design elements that are provided by Highwire Snowboards Inc. for inclusion in the website, and will hold harmless, protect, and defend Bidsketch from any claim or suit arising from the use of such elements.
- Bidsketch retains the right to display graphics and other Web content elements as examples of their work in their portfolio and as content features in other projects. Bidsketch also retains the right to place a text link on the bottom of every page.
- This agreement becomes effective only when signed by agents of Highwire Snowboards Inc. and Bidsketch. Regardless of the place of signing of this agreement, Highwire Snowboards Inc. agrees that for purposes of venue, this contract was entered into in WA and any dispute will be litigated or arbitrated in WA.
- The agreement contained in this contract constitutes the sole agreement between Highwire Snowboards Inc. and the Bidsketch regarding all items included in this agreement.

Note: It is important to create your own Terms and Conditions for each project. You'll want to include project specifics and client specific information in each proposal. If you're unsure about the language, try running it by your lawyer.

A long proposal doesn't have to be more than a few pages longer than the short one. Four or five pages is about perfect for setting client information, covering deliverables, and persuading the client. Anything over that might be a waste of time unless it's an unusually complex project. Your best bet is to keep the proposal short and relevant.

Making It Look Professional

First Impression Is Everything

Presentation is an important part of any proposal because it is the first thing that the client will see. Appearances are everything, especially if you're also doing the graphic design for the client's website. If they are going to put you in charge of their website, then you have to present yourself as a professional.

Your proposal is your one chance to tell the client how creative, professional, and stylish you are. Adding a subtle design to the header and footer of your proposal will help you towards that goal.

Your client will make a first impression based on your proposal. Because it's a proposal, they won't look any further if they aren't impressed. A great first impression will help to solidify your pitch and make your proposal more attractive, and will help win you the bid.

If you send out a proposal then it has to represent your creativity and style. If it looks less than professional then the readers perception will be that you are less than professional. Creating a layout, using a unique design, and taking the time to make the font and text look good will help you to create a better proposal.

If you're using the Bidsketch proposal software then you won't have to worry about creating your own design because you can use templates. If not, layout and design are up to you.

1. Elegant Design

Elegance is the best way to say professional and creative. The right design will enhance your proposal without detracting from the content and subtlety is the best way to get there.

Because you're a website developer, the design on your proposal will affect the client's first impression. Using a minimalistic design gives you the opportunity to create the right impression without overwhelming the proposal itself.

Unless you also happen to do your own design work, you may want to purchase a design for your header and footer. Look for something that is elegant but creative, and go for understated rather than obvious. If you do your own graphic design then you can go ahead and create something for the header and footer. If not, consider having your usual designer make something for you, or use a theme for your template. It's not always easy, but that's the downside of doing it yourself.

Choose the right design– Create or pick a design that enhances your content. You want subtlety, creativity, and most importantly, elegance.

2. Helper Text

If you aren't using the Bidsketch proposal software then you should include helper text in your proposal template. Helper text is a sort of guide that will help you figure out what to write in different sections. It's placeholder text that you can use to structure your own creative proposal around.

Over time you'll develop a natural feel for what content should go under each section. Until then, helper text will help to ensure that you include all of the right information.

You can copy and paste from the Anatomy of a Persuasive Proposal section for your helper text.

Watch out! Don't forget to take out your helper text before you send the proposal in to the client. Including random unrelated text is a sure way to kill your proposal and any chance you have of getting the job. Make sure you proofread the proposal and remove any helper text just before sending it in.

Rereading will also give you the opportunity to rethink some of the content you've used in your proposal. Try to make sure that all of the content in the proposal is specifically about the client. While generalized content or jargon might sound professional, it detracts from the impact of your proposal.

Bottom Line - If it doesn't talk about the client's problems in some way, it doesn't belong in your proposal.

Removing general text and filler from your proposal will keep them short, focused on the client, and to the point. The result is that your proposal will be more unique, and a great deal more relevant to the client.

3. Should I Say Something about My Company?

Writing about your company may seem like the obvious thing to do, especially if you're used to submitting bids. Many website developers think that listing former clients, the websites they've worked with or developed, or company info is going to improve their chances.

Unfortunately, proposals don't work like that.

Most of the kind of clients who will be reading your proposals don't want to hear about you. They already know that you're a web developer, that's why you're sending a proposal. What they want to know about is how you can solve their problems.

You can convert clients using nothing more than the general proposal structure(problem statement, proposed solution, pricing information, etc.)

On the other hand, a [website or portfolio designed to attract and convert clients](#) is a great include. Clients who are interested in you can follow the link, interact, and learn about you from there.

If a “Company” or “Clients” section is a must, then make sure you include it after the benefits section. Including information about your company is up to you, but placement is crucial to success.

Because most of your clients aren’t interested in your information, placing it at the beginning or in the middle of your proposal will interrupt your flow. You want to place it after the benefits section, near the end of the proposal, so that you can create your pitch without interrupting your proposal.

Inserting a “Company” section near the end of your proposal gives interested clients the opportunity to learn more about you without imposing on anyone who isn’t interested.

Tools, Resources, and Next Steps

Hopefully you have a better understanding by now of: 1) what a compelling website proposal looks like; 2) how to create one that will separate you from your competitors; and 3) how to make proposal writing as painless and efficient as possible by turning it into a system.

You’ll have to keep writing and submitting proposals—that’s just the name of the game—but you can make it easy to get them out to clients quickly and save you time and trouble.

The easiest way to do this is to use [Bidsketch proposal software](#). This gives you the structure and presentation you need to get your proposals out quickly and effectively.

You could also follow the directions above to create your own proposal templates manually. It'll take a time investment, but you'll set yourself up for more free time to focus on clients going forward.

If you are going the template route and don't quite know where to get started, we've made a [free website development proposal template](#) available. You can model it or use it for a little inspiration to get started.

Another thing you can do to help grow your website business is to check out [the Bidsketch blog](#). There's a ton of free, actionable content available—whether it's about negotiating higher rates with clients, being more productive, or marketing your website services—and we update it often.

Finally, if you haven't done so already, hop on to the Bidsketch email list. You'll receive a free eBook about marketing strategies to get more clients, along with fresh new content delivered straight to your inbox as soon as it's released.

Best of luck in creating winning website proposals!