

Why Good Agencies Lose With Bad Proposals



Why Most Proposals Die Before Page 2

Could your sales proposals be a bit of a Frankenstein's monster?

We've reviewed hundreds of agency proposals, and most are stitched together from **old decks, dusty case studies, and inconsistent pricing**. The result? A **disjointed client experience** that kills trust fast.

Even strong proposals stumble here, too close to the content, agencies miss flow issues and fail to show **clear value or differentiation**. That's why a **fresh perspective** isn't optional. It's the difference between a proposal that dies in the inbox and one that closes the deal.

The 4 Things Every Proposal Must Nail



A strong proposal doesn't just win more deals; it **reframes your value from a cost to an investment**. That shift builds trust fast and sets expectations so clearly that delivery feels like a continuation, not a reset.

Before Value, Show You Understand

Clients don't buy when they feel sold to. They buy when they feel understood.

A proposal is your chance to prove you've listened, that you understand their goals, their pain points, and **why your solution is a better fit than anyone else's.**

Most agencies skip this step. They rush straight to the solution and the 'About Us' slide, and lose the client before they've built trust.

If you can't show you 'get it,' you'll never get the deal.

Showing That We 'Get It'

Clients don't disappear because they're busy. They disappear because **they don't believe you understand them.**

Your proposal is where you prove you were listening. Spell out their current situation and goals in their own language, not yours. When they see their reality mirrored back, two things happen: they feel heard, and they start trusting your price point.

Example:

Current Situation:

- Traffic, but **no leads.**
- **Zero visibility** on campaign performance.
- **Competitors** gaining ground.

Your Goals:

- Generate **35% more qualified leads in 6 months.**
- Connect marketing to revenue with seamless **reporting.**

Want to really drive it home? Add competitor insight. It shows you understand not just their business but their entire market. And it arms you with leverage; when you reveal where rivals stand, you turn your proposal from a nice-to-have into a must-act-now.

If rivals are ahead, it's a warning shot; catch up now or lose ground fast. If they're behind, it's your chance to press the advantage and widen the gap.



WIIFM? The Only Question That Matters

Every lead is asking one thing: What's in it for me? Miss that, and nothing else in your proposal matters.

You've already mirrored their current situation and goals. Now it's time to show **where the opportunity lies**. Not the "how", just the "what" and the "why." Give them the headlines, and you'll have both the **big-picture thinkers** and the **detail-hungry leads** leaning in.

Competitor insight makes this even stronger. If rivals are ahead, urgency kicks in. If rivals are behind, it's a chance to widen the gap. Either way, you've just **created momentum**.

Example:

Opportunities

- **Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO)**: Turn existing traffic into leads.
- **Pay-Per-Click (PPC)**: Capture buyers who are ready now.
- **Search Engine Optimisation & AI Visibility (SEO & AI)**: Lock in long-term visibility on Google and AI platforms.

Challenges & Answers

This is the moment your prospect starts asking themselves: “**Why won’t this work?**” If you don’t answer that question first, doubt will. Call out the **challenges** directly and show **you’ve already planned around them**. This is where you prove you’re not naïve to the risks; you’ve **anticipated** them.



This is where you quietly separate yourself from the pack. By naming the challenges, you expose the risks your competitors haven’t even acknowledged. That plants doubt in their credibility, and positions you as the safe option. You’re not just offering a solution; you’re showing the gap between their current reality and their desired future, and why you’re the only bridge that holds.

Once you’ve thoughtfully written up the Challenges, it’s time for your ‘**Why Us?**’ section. In your Why Us you’ll lean into the reasons you’re a **safe option**, each time linking it back to a direct need of theirs.



Tailor this to the decision-maker. What reassures a founder won’t be what convinces a CMO, speak to the person who feels the risk most.

Example: Challenges

- ◆ **CMS:** Your custom CMS is complex and needs specialist support. We’ll assign a senior developer with the credentials and experience to handle it without delays.
- ◆ **Ad Approvals:** Your products are high-risk for platform flags, which could get ads banned. We’ve already established a process to navigate these rules, ensuring campaigns run smoothly without disruption.

Why Us

- ◆ **25+ years of building sites that sell.** Our specialist team has solved every challenge from outdated CMSs to high-stakes rebuilds, and we know how to get it right the first time.
- ◆ **Our ads convert so well that other agencies train with us.** You’ll work directly with our medical products specialist, Jane Doe, who knows exactly how to drive performance in your market.

Once you've proved you were really listening, it's time to make your **recommendations**. And that doesn't always mean sticking to the brief. If you know a different path will deliver better results, say it now. **Better to push for the right plan upfront than spend the next year unwinding a bad one.**

This is your moment to connect the dots, explain what will happen and why it matters. Strong proposals don't just list activities; they tie every 'what' back to the client's bigger 'why.'

Here's the trap: you know how each activity ladders to the goal, but the client doesn't. If they can't see the link, they won't value the work.

And when it comes to pricing, three shifts make the difference between a small deal and a bigger one



- 1** Always frame price as an investment, never a cost. Train your team to speak that way, too. You're not asking clients to throw money into a black hole; you're showing them how it compounds into growth.
- 2** Anchor your pricing to the case you've already built. You've shown them their position, their competitors, and the opportunities ahead; now tie your recommendation to that reality. The size of the campaign should feel inevitable, not arbitrary.
- 3** Use a table with your recommended package, 1-2 smaller options, and one larger. It lets you pitch higher with a downsell in place, and it plants the seed for scaling up once ROI starts landing.



Don't call these 'options.' This isn't a menu. It's your recommendation, structured to balance their budget with the results they need.

Turn Proof Into a Preview

This is where you show the client **what happens when they say yes**. Case studies and testimonials aren't just proof points; they're your chance to let the client imagine their own transformation.

Most agencies stop at the numbers: traffic up, leads in, revenue gained. That's fine, but it's not enough. **Numbers show what happened. They don't show what it felt like.**

Take it further. Pair the results with testimonials that capture the relief, confidence, and momentum your client felt on the other side. Because when prospects see both the data and the emotion, **they don't just believe the work, they believe it will work for them.**

FOR EXAMPLE

Client B came to us worried their B2B product was too "boring" to market. Perspex leaflet holders don't exactly light up a boardroom, and they feared stakeholders would resist the bigger spend. That's exactly the kind of challenge we're built for. We helped them build the business case and show how even a "boring" product can become compelling to the right audience. Six months later, they weren't just seeing results, they were predicting leads with confidence and finally feeling excited about their campaigns.

Don't just drop case studies in as proof. **Use them to show your lead how their own campaign could play out.**

Frame it as: 'Here's an example of this in action', then walk them through the first step, the results it created, and how it built momentum. That way, **the case study isn't just history. It's a preview of their future.**

Next Steps

The close of your proposal should **drive momentum**, not drift into silence. Spell out clear, action-oriented next steps that move the deal forward. Too many agencies end with a whimper. **End with a confident call to action that makes saying “yes” the obvious move.**

Best Practices:

01

Set a clear **decision timeline**; it builds urgency without forcing pressure.

02

Use real **scarcity when it exists**; never fake it.

03

Keep the **next step** simple and crystal clear.

04

Frame the **follow-up** as a consultation, not a pitch, and set a clear date for confirmation.

Too many agencies end **proposals without clear next steps**, dumping the decision back on the client. That almost guarantees delays. Lead the process, try approaches like:



The research phase takes ~ 3 weeks. To hit your Q3 campaign goals, we need to start by [date]

Presenting

Present your proposal live whenever you can. If that's not possible, record a walkthrough and embed it with tools like ScreenPal. It cuts misunderstandings, boosts conversions, and makes you stand out from the agencies just sending PDFs.

About Unusual Group

Only 4% of agencies ever exit. We exist to change that.

We're a founder-built collective that takes minority stakes in agencies and gives you the operational firepower to break through growth ceilings.

Think of us as **your growth partner**, the systems and scale of a business 10x your size, without giving up control. We built the model we wish we'd had: one that makes success sustainable instead of sacrificial.

Our Track Record

We've built agencies from startup grind to successful exit, and lived every stage in between.

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What Our Partners Say

"Can't recommend Unusual Group enough. We've been working with them since late 2023, and they've already added tremendous value. Having that fresh perspective from experienced founders has been exactly what we needed for our marketing strategy."

Laura King-Berry Co-Founder, Altitude Marketing



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