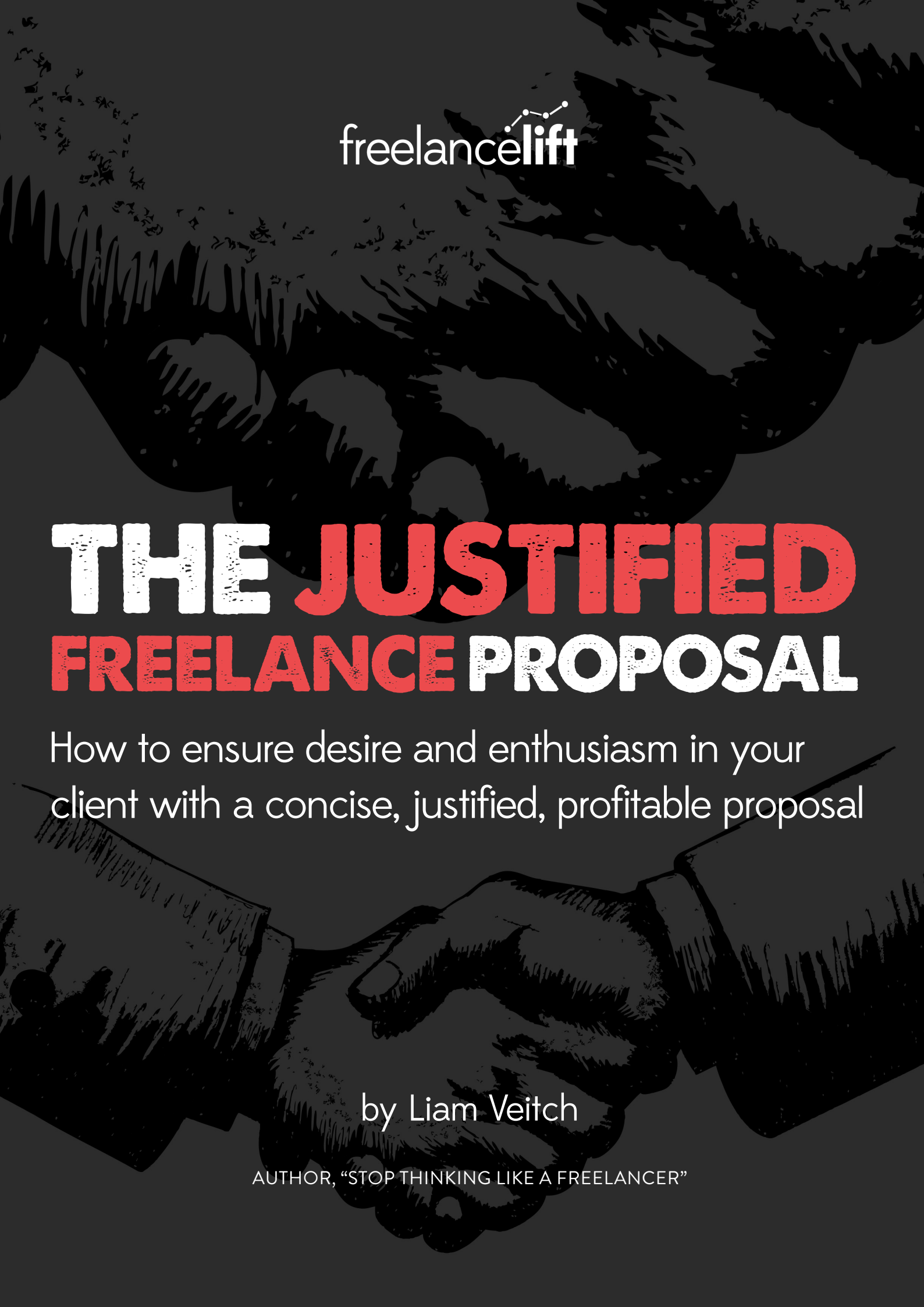




freelancelift



THE JUSTIFIED FREELANCE PROPOSAL

How to ensure desire and enthusiasm in your client with a concise, justified, profitable proposal

by Liam Veitch

AUTHOR, "STOP THINKING LIKE A FREELANCER"



About the author

I've grown my freelance business into something I am truly proud of, yet I know the feeling of battling as a freelancer all-to-well. Following an initial failure I tried again with a renewed mindset and I teach everything I know at freancelift.com.

It took me one failure at the freelance game and a 2 year sentence as a zombie-herd employee at a corporate to figure it out, now I want to give you the benefit of my experience as well as inviting you into the world of the people who have been there and broken the freelance boundaries themselves.

In this workbook I wanted to tackle a key topic. How to pull together a proposal which maximizes the chances of winning the gig. More specifically, how to pull together everything that has come before (your specific client profiling, web rework, attention-getting and desire building) into one succinct proposal which ensures you get the best possible return while ensuring the client is happy too.

I'm a keen student of the salesmanship space.
But it's a sprawling, extensive world with plenty
of conflicting information.

If I could teach you one thing, it would be this: when you can explain something clearly enough to an uninformed third party - from knowledge gathered from aggregated, proven sources - you know enough about the topic to **get out there and implement it yourself**.

What we're all looking for is the secret formula, turnkey solution or 'done for you' system. More often than not this quest for perfect information takes us away from real learning, which generally comes from practical experiments, experience and good old trial and error.

Pricing (and how you put that price that to a client) is one of these topics.

I understand how attractive it is to listen to TED Talks on buying psychology, watch video lessons on crafting the perfect proposal or read post upon post about how to handle negotiations, but the fact is - no learning of this type is an adequate replacement for **first-hand experience**.

It's the same reason University graduates struggle to compete for jobs against their peers who have no formal education but 8 years experience on the board.

Put simply, **know enough to explain the topic to an uninformed third party then start implementing.** You'll learn from experience and be able to fine tune over time into a system or process that works for your particular service and personality.

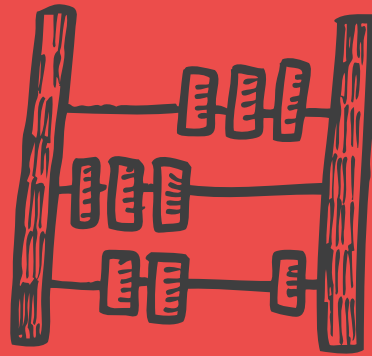
Using the methods I've taught I've seen a proposal rebuilt and repackaged from a \$2,000 quote to an \$8,000 client win but the defining factor was that student **actually taking the information and pushing ahead with it**, rather than waiting for the perfect pieces of the jigsaw to be handed to them.

Mostly, extensive 'over-learning' is procrastination dressed as 'work'. It feels as though we're getting value from our time by stacking 3 pages of notes.

What really matters however is the implementation.

I'm not talking about blind implementation though, so once you can ensure a source is credible, based on experience and feels right... You should listen, gather enough to understand it fully, then go for it.

So that's what we'll aim to do in this book and the course that corresponds with it, so let's get to it.



WHAT INFLUENCES A PRICE?

Where we're going, there is no 'market rate'

As we covered in the previous module, with enough desire there are no obstacles to winning a new client.

It's desire that makes us stretch 50% beyond our budget and it's desire - coupled with the inner psyche - which does the final phase of selling.

When you're in a low/no pressure sales situation it's much easier to first consider, then talk yourself out of making a purchase. Only desire can prevent that.

In high pressure situations (buying a car from a pushy salesman, taking a travel agent up on a one time offer in person) a salesperson and their skills could be the defining factor but when your only line of communication is email (inherently passive) and the prospective client is hundreds, or even thousands of miles away from you with no real emotional attachment, it's desire that does the legwork.

Desire too is intrinsically linked to value. **The amount you desire something is directly related to the value you feel you'll get from it, tangible or not.**

Then guess what, for service sales it's perceived value which dictates price (in the client's mind).



At this point you might be shaking your head at these words, persistent in your mindset that it's actually **the market** which dictates a 'fair price'. This is entirely true with like-for-like, mass produced items like pencils, brushes and paint.

What these items facilitate though is **the production of unique work by a skilled operator**. A craft, creative output; which varies wildly in price and perceived value.

That's what we sell, production of a valued service from a skilled operator (whatever the skill) so where we're going there is no like-for-like.

Exchange mindset

If you're struggling to reconcile this type of thinking with your current situation you're probably struggling with something I call 'Exchange mindset' and it goes something like this:

"But if I'm 10x more expensive than other bids I'll just never be considered so I need to stay close to the averages"

-Or-

“But how do I work that into an hourly rate, won’t the client realize that I’m asking \$200 an hour?”

-Or-

“I’m just not really able to establish the value I can bring I don’t get close enough to the client before sending my proposal, so this can’t work”

I receive regular rebuttals when it comes to pricing, in particular the concept that all prices will at some level be reduced to an hourly rate calculation. This is force-fed to us by freelancer exchanges such as oDesk and Elance; indeed this fear of competition and being adrift from the herd on price is purposely enforced by these exchanges.

There is no room for individuality, relationships and non-commercial pre-sale dialogue on platforms like this either; hence the two mindsets are incompatible.

I would never say that your cost shouldn’t **at least consider** the time aspect, but it should do so only as a cursory measure to ensure that what you’re asking for covers your operating costs.

If a value calculation takes you to a fair price of \$10k for the project but it’ll take you a year at 20 days per month to deliver then sure,

you need to consider time... But in the main you should go no deeper than cost per day, Ideally a mix between figuring out your minimum reimbursement for a week or day you'll dedicate to the work.

If the number you end up with works, then great; but the compensation per block of time invested should be no more than a 'lower limit' glance.

You'll establish the lower limit, then as we'll go on to explore there are no ceilings with enough desire, that's the fundamental difference.

It's why Apple make so much profit they don't know where to store the cash, why their handsets are consistently 50-100% more expensive than their competitors and why they can even sell wholesale at 100% markup, which is unprecedented for mass market goods.

With enough desire there are no competitors. With enough value established, price negotiations are rare.

This is what we're aiming for, so let's look at desire again, first.



BUILDING DESIRE

Very brief **recap**

In the last module we dove deep on desire so I'll hold back on a full-scale recap but probably the most relevant knowledge to carry from that is the subconscious checklist:

- [] The provider understands my unique situation, and my business I care about the positive change [buying your service] will make The uplift has some intrinsic value to me, the outcome will be fulfilling
- [] The change also has some real use, it'll empower me to do/not do something tangible
- [] This isn't going to be a(nother) distraction for me
- [] I understand how quickly my desired results might be met
- [] I'm clear enough about the technical fundamentals the provider works to
- [] I'll probably get recognition for the changes I'll make [by buying your service] from peers, significant others
- [] I have enough time to dedicate to the provider, to give them the support they need
- [] I have the resources [money/time] to cover the cost
- [] I am confident in the likelihood of having that repaid [monetarily/ by freeing up time]
- [] I take comfort in the fact that this provider is already doing this for others like me
- [] I'm happy that I have ultimate control over this project

You'll recall – from within the last module – that you should ensure the client will check off as many of theses statements as possible **before** sending your proposal. You'll do this in all pre-sale dialogue you have with the prospect.

The touchpoints in your ‘pre-sale slalom’ as I refer to them (check out the book ‘Build Rapport & Maximize Desire’ and video course to go through that again).

If you’re doing this already then you’re on course to ensure any proposal has the highest possible chance of success.

A note on RFP opportunities

If you’ve only been able to achieve minimal contact with a prospect and the sales cycle doesn’t allow for much pre-sale dialogue (for example with RFP opportunities) then you should aim to cover most of this checklist within your proposal, hence we’ll be bringing flavors of this checklist into this module too.

Given that these statements are subconscious you’ll need to remind a prospective client of their assertions in your proposal in any case.

So let’s first talk about the document itself, before figuring out what will go in at and what your cost should be.



DOES DESIGN MATTER?

How to approach the document itself

Within the Building out your Website build module we asked the question, ‘does design matter?’ The answer was an inconclusive ‘it depends’.

My response basically asserted that **good design practice** does matter, is essential even, while ‘design vehicles’ (blue vs red, image vs no image) don’t matter.

Or more accurately, these elements only matter in the context of ensuring the best possible experience for your unique type of visitor. If your visitor won’t care (or even notice) whether your headline font is red or blue then it doesn’t matter.

So I ask this question consistently when it comes to proposals and the answer is actually definitive this time. **That it really, really does.**

Real world uplift

At Tone we build out World-class websites for market leaders. It’s what defines us. So 10-11 months ago we invested time and energy in completely reimagining the look of our proposal documents.

The content was to stay the same; it was tried, tested and served us pretty well - yet the original design was fairly ordinary. Not bad. To be expected.

This was okay as the businesses we were competing against also had ordinary (not bad, to be expected) proposals and our content was

consistently better so it didn't really cause us too much pain and we had a 1 in 6 win rate.

So we went ahead and reworked the design entirely, approached it more as an engaging, interesting piece of content, in line with a slight brand reposition and all measurable metrics went through the roof.

From response rates, to anecdotal verbal feedback, to win rates and proposal values. In most cases 50-100% uplift. Our win rate has since increased to 1 in 3 for every proposal we send out.

Put simply, we were doing something radically different.

You can see the clear difference in the examples below, the thing reads more like a magazine than a technical proposal, and for bigger opportunities we even printed and sent hard copies which again multiplied response / acceptance rates.



I've had multiple conversations with major players in the proposal software space including Ruben Gamez and Nathan Powell of Bidsketch and Nusii respectively about the quandary I have.

I struggle to reconcile experience of real-world improvements (creating very creative proposals) with evident speed of execution and efficiency delivered by platforms like [Bidsketch](#) and [Nusii](#).

These platforms are content-first, and while I consider content equally important (indeed, this book is almost all about the content you'll use) to design, the templates I've recommended below have heavy design focus and will need to be produced in an environment like Adobe InDesign.

But does hefty design mean hefty time commitment or InDesign skill?

In a word, no. At last check there were over 400 InDesign brochure templates on [Graphicriver.net](#) which could be repurposed as proposals, a cost of around \$20.

Here are a few recommendations:

- › [Highlight Brochure template](#)
- › [Portfolio Brochure template](#)
- › [Modern Brochure template](#)

From there you could make an arrangement with a graphic designer who could fbw your words and imagery into a document like this for less than \$50.

Yes, there is a financial investment to consider for every proposal you send but if you could uplift your response / acceptance rate by even 10-20% wouldn't that be worth trying?

For me it's a no brainer, so we'll work with the assumption that you agree with my logic.

Within this book however we'll focus on content structure, so please follow it through even if you're not comfortable migrating to a more creative proposal approach at this stage.

Deeper does not mean longer

Before the 'service provider' space had online methods of sharing and distributing our messaging, the in-person sales pitch was king.

Indeed, it was to foster the growth of an entire industry of sales training and methodology which was the only methodology through the entire 20th Century.

Even then however, when a desktop PC cost the same (and shared dimensions with) a small car it was **crucial to get your point across quickly.**

That is to say, it was widely accepted that a good, succinct pitch was over and done within 20 minutes. After this point concentration is hard to keep and the resistance to engagement becomes harder to overcome.

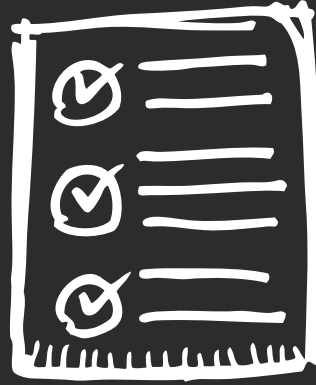
Taking a sales pitch (proposal) online however still has these limitations; in 2015 attention is a scarcer commodity than it has ever been.

So how do you account for that? How do you prevent your recipient scrolling immediately down to the pricing table and then only scrolling back up if that doesn't make them fall off their seat?

You need to go deeper, but deeper does not mean longer - just that it covers the **key areas a client cares about**; and does so quickly, in an engaging way, building enough intrigue and desire to make them say yes.

You can go deep enough within 1,000 words (excepting any technical / specification aspect) so it really doesn't require a lengthy, tiresome investment in time.

Moreover, you should have done most of the heavy lifting building that desire within your pre-sale (and in particular discovery) phase.



PROPOSAL FUNDAMENTALS

6 fundamental differentiators *you need to know*

Before we go into the structure you should consider, let's talk fundamentals.

We've outlined a proposal structure in the next section, which will give you a more actionable flow but for this section, the idea is to absorb the ideas to understand why content appears where it does.

Indeed, you have the license to read and re-read this fundamentals section until it becomes clear how a justified, well-constructed proposal builds desire and enables a client to say YES to your offer.

1. So what's the big idea?

About a year ago I came across an excellent book on sales, which I highly recommend. The book was '[Pitch Anything](#)' by author Oren Klaff. We've taken a lot of the principles into our processes at Tone, indeed the ones we've proven to work I now teach at Freelancelift.

Probably the most effective of these ideas is that of the **"Big idea" and how you'll build intrigue**. We're all pre-disposed to ignoring or screening out things we've heard before, especially in a time when attention levels are depleted.

What a prospective client **expects** when they receive your proposal is to have a lukewarm intro with buzzwords, a template-driven format, a woolly assertion about how the project might go, some obvious copy/paste content and then a price.

With the Big Idea concept, you're proposing something they have **never** heard before, that makes them sit up in their chair, re-read the section and feel a sense of excitement and alignment with the project.

You should introduce an idea, a meme, a name, which is unique to your proposal. It should tie together the vision and the main principles of the project into a strong central concept.

Real-world example: Cornerstone Project

Last year I built a site for a prominent entrepreneur who had lots of disparate sites dotted around the web, each with a different name and different branding. I felt this might have been a cause for some concern, so in our discovery I asked “what would constitute success for you with this project”. To which the prospect replied “I just want a well designed site with everything in one place, as a reference point to my other work”.

In my proposal I therefore referred to this project as the ‘Cornerstone Project: Building a central web presence for your varied brands’. I could quite as easily have called it ‘Proposal for Web Design & Development of xyzauthor.com’ but this one, simple idea ensured that the prospect knew I understood them, their goals and they could connect themselves to the vision I put forward for the project.

If you're a marketer offering services on a monthly basis, why not refer to the project as ‘Project Leapfrog’ as you're looking to help them leapfrog a fierce competitor?

What we're looking to do is focus on the outcome, then frame the service as the journey to that outcome. By giving it a name, making it unique and relative to the client's situation **you'll support decision-making and ensure a cheerleading effect.**

Take the primary ideas, vision, goals for the project and give the project a name, funneling it into a central concept a client can hook on to.

2. Why now?

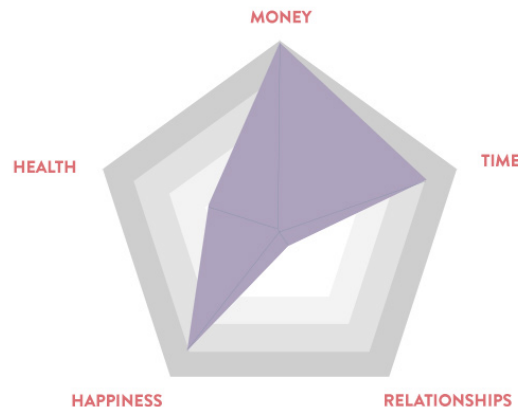
One of the most common objections you'll receive is that 'the timing is not right' or 'we do want to proceed, just not at this moment in time'. To counter this, I recommend including a short series of statements as to why the timing is right, right now.

- › Does the client have a conference coming up?
- › Does a new year represent new opportunities?
- › When the project is complete, is it entering a peak period?
- › Is the client suffering in a 'snowball' way, and could you service r remove that ongoing pain?
- › Does new technology / trends represent an opportunity to move now?

If you can deliver some reassurance the now is the time to move, you'll ensure vague time-related objections are minimized.

3. What's the upside?

We covered in the last module the 5 reasons any of us buy anything; it normally comes down to an increase in the success or reduction/elimination of a burden/lack of success in any of these areas.



The most common mistake I see however is not being specific enough about what that upside actually is. What's the victory point driving the decision to buy your service? How can we descriptively lay it out to ensure enough desire is built? When scoping out a client and project, it's vital to have clear areas you can make an impact on.

When you spell out the upside, specifically, and get the client's buy-in that you will make that difference, it makes justifying a cost infinitely easier. If you have a clear objective the client believes you can achieve, you have the freedom to build a fee that's weighted against this upside.

Example:

The client understands that a new website would give them the ability increase conversion levels for widget sales by a factor of 10%-50%, potentially unlocking revenues currently being left on the table.

We'll look a little later at how you anchor your price to this upside (both tangible and intangible upsides) but for the purpose of this section, understand that you're going to need to cover this descriptively within your proposal as early as possible.

Your big idea and your proposed upside are the two areas you'll continually refer to, to ensure a consistent, meaningful proposal.

4. Where discovery and your proposal overlaps

If you recall, within your discovery phase you asked key questions such as:

- › What does success look like to you with [this project]?
- › What do you feel is holding you back from realizing that now?
- › Are there particular, regular blockers you're coming up against that got you thinking you may need support from someone like me?
- › I want to really get a handle on the positive impact we can make here, would you be comfortable sharing the details of what a customer is worth to you?

- › What would you say you're really looking for [my service] to solve?
 - › i.e. Getting more customers / more revenue
 - › Widening your exposure
 - › Establishing a market leader presence
 - › Saving time

It's crucial to reword and weave these client responses back into your proposal, it'll enable you to speak their language and match their worldview, this will ensure they resonate with the words you're putting forward.

5. Diligent copy/paste techniques

At this point you'd be forgiven for thinking I was recommending a completely bespoke proposal for every client opportunity.

Good news is that I'm not, indeed in the majority of cases you can reuse content from previous proposals. When you're describing the way you do what you do the underlying message will be similar, likewise how you've done it in the past.

You just need to adapt it each time for the specific worldview (and situation) of the client you're pitching.

A lot of freelancers get this wrong, leaving blocks from previous proposals which worked for one client and doing a simple find/replace on client name. It sometimes just takes slightly different wording or tone of voice to customize it to the client (without going through a full rewrite).

My general philosophy is to reuse as much as you can, but do so by using the written equivalent of 'tracing'. As a child you might remember using tracing paper to make fairly detailed copies of other drawings. That's our aim here, make something which has a genuinely custom feel but uses 90% of pre-created work.

6. Consistency from the pre-sale slalom

Within the pre-sale dialogue phase we've taken our prospect through (ideally) our four key phases of:

- Education
- Differentiaton
- Transition
- Discovery

It's crucial to remember though, that while it was clear to you what was happening phase by phase, all the client saw was a series of interactions.

There was no series of phases for them, no structured movement of information. Just a mass of communication which made them feel good, and confident enough to accept a proposal from you.

That is to say, you'll need to remind them of the elements that really piqued their interest, repeating in most cases some of the assertions you made before the proposal was sent.

This provides a powerful layer of consistency, which carries the momentum of your dialogue right into the sales cycle.



DEVELOPING A FAIR PRICE

We sell tangible improvements, not time

Whether you know it or not, pricing is almost always value-led. The price you are comfortable paying for something is directly related to the value you feel you're going to get from it.

If everyone bought on price alone without appreciation of value there would be no luxury vehicle market, Apple would not be the most valuable company in the world and Rolex would not be No. 57 in the world's most powerful brands list.

Therefore if your price is deemed too high, in your clients' eyes your value is deemed too low for your price point. The amazing paradox here is that you control the value your client perceives; hence it is you who dictates whether a price is too high.

We've talked primarily so far about the content that'll appear within your proposal. Specifically by overcoming the key factors that undermine your perceived value and cause clients to say no. But how do you put a price on that?

It's a question I get a lot, and something I'm looking to answer conclusively within this book.

There is no formula though, so stop looking for one. There are far too many variables and anybody purporting to offer killer formulas has not tried them out in the real world.

The closest I can get is a combination of a few differing reference points.

In the main, we're talking here about pricing maximums, we'll go on to discuss what your price floor should be but we need to talk about real-term pricing estimates:

Method 1 - Client revenue vs lifetime of deliverable

This one you'll be able to relate to in your own business, and it's something we spoke about in the 'Define your Dream Client' module.

It's essentially a calculation based on two metrics:

1. Life cycle of your service
2. Revenue a client will receive over that period

To start, ask this question:

Once implemented, how long is your service good for?

A website can remain in place for 2-3 years. A monthly marketing contract will need to be renewed every month. A logo will be relevant for 3-4 years. If you provide administrative support again you'll likely be renewing monthly.

Based on fair assumptions, your ceiling will be somewhere around 5% of the client's revenue over the lifetime of your service output.

- › A \$10k website will require around \$100k revenue per year for 2 years
- › A \$500 p/m marketing contract will require \$10k per month in client revenue

More often than not you'll not be privy to client profit indications, hence we're using an estimation based on revenue here (easier to locate or estimate) but if you do have insights on profit levels you should aim to do the same calculations based on 15-25% of profit as your ceiling.

Method 2. Client frame of reference

This is very different to market rate expectations, but follows a similar concept.

In your discovery you should look to unearth what they have invested in the past in work like this, and how they feel it went. In addition, you could seek to understand whether they have received other quotes, and what area those quotes generally came back at.

Another idea is to seek to understand whether their industry colleagues have been through a similar project and what their consensus was on price.

For example

- If they paid \$3k the last time this project was completed
- Have received quotes in the area of \$3-4k
- Their industry colleague had a similar project completed for \$5k

... their 'frame of reference' you can estimate at \$3-5k.

Unless you are doing an exceptional job in all justification areas you'll probably not be able to get a client to beyond 2x their frame of reference.

That is to say you'll be working very hard to justify a cost of over \$8-10k without a significant amount of assurances, there is just too much friction in the opposite direction.

A more realistic ceiling is 50-70% over their expectations, in that example around \$5-7k would be acceptable for justification.

You can ask for a frame of reference politely and in a non-intrusive way:

'The last time you had this [project] completed was when? Do you feel you saw a return on that investment? What was that investment, so we can ensure a better return this time?'

Also 'what range of quotes have you seen for this [project]'

I appreciate that this may seem alien, since we've already established there is no market comparison, however I want to inject some realism and let you know about some of the opposing forces you might come up against when justifying price.

The client will still have expectations (from various sources) so although there is no comparisons to be made – you still need to understand what an acceptable range might be, based on client expectations.

Method 3. Bill to the upside

This one you'll have probably have heard before (and maybe tried to implement): putting together a price, which is founded in the value you're bringing to the table.

It can be difficult to quantify in a lot of cases (how do you really put a number on the uplift a regular, ongoing piece of admin work provides?) but you should look to at least explore whether a natural, tangible uplift exists.

A potential uplift can be broken down into three areas:

Monetary gain

- › Increase in average customer value: What would this do to revenue?
- › Increase in volume of customers: At an arbitrary percentage uplift how much additional revenue would this bring?
- › Increase in volume of leads: All things being equal, what would it mean for the client to get a realistic amount of additional leads?

Opportunity cost removed

An 'opportunity cost' is something you'll take away from a client, if you enable them to spend more time in another area. For example:

- › By me doing [activity], I relieve you of the duty to ensure you can do [that]
- › My working on this, ensures your team members regain the opportunity to do [that]

Time saved (and monetary equivalent)

Obviously a little more simple to understand, and equate based on a fair hourly rate.

“This will take around 5 hours from your weekly workload. If you’re billing \$50 an hour that gives you the opportunity to generate an additional \$1,000 per month.”

Word of caution

At this point most mistakenly figure “Hey, if I’m making this client an extra \$50k I can bill \$49k for my service!”

This is incorrect, and really drives some of the misplaced thinking and disappointment felt when looking to implement value/upside based pricing.

Remember, there are two parties in this negotiation, each looking to maximize gain from this investment in time/money. Look at it objectively, is it worth the risk of \$49k real-life monetary investment for a potential \$1k real-terms gain?

Of course not, which is why I recommend a range of 10-20% of any upside you can quantify.

In the middle of that range you’d be asking \$5-10k for a net \$35-45k upside which is a reasonable range to be attractive to the client.

Bringing your price together

My recommendation is to use these ceiling estimates as confidence indicators and combine them. **When you're not confident in the price you've put forward it shows**, and you'll be almost too eager to reduce it.

So when you have some clear reference points to justify cost against, your confidence will increase as will your resilience in the face of price objections and negotiation.

In addition, you shouldn't aim to run before you can walk. When I went back to the world of freelancing it wasn't unusual for me to bill in the region of £300 (\$500) for a website build.

Our biggest win to date at the agency is £31,500 (circa \$50k) for one web design project.

I can assure you that my product is not 100x better (it was pretty good to start with!), it certainly didn't take us 100x longer to build and both clients were delighted with the end result so there wasn't 100x difference in client satisfaction.

So what changed?

Simply put, my ability to locate a better calibre of client, attract then with diligent attention-getting then build desire and justify cost - all of these factors (especially the value proposition) contributed to that growth, and that's what I want to inspire in you.

It doesn't need to be a 100x increase, I'm sure 2-3x your current rate would be a great return. The point being, it pays to get all of these moving parts flowing in tandem and to start with small increases, enhancing your confidence every time.

Always give pricing options

It has long been considered fact, that a well-positioned range of 2-3 pricing options gives the best outcome in terms of customer engagement with a cost.

You can look to make the elements of your service as modular as you can, by feature or depth of result, grouping these 'modules' together into a small / medium / large style range of price options.

Indeed, you'll do this to serve two purposes:

- › Provides an extra layer of justification as to cost – as the client can see how the price is being built out
- › Provides an anchor point to your highest price, ensuring the lowest cost is rarely taken

With pricing tiers you're also ensuring that you can add one price within the client's frame of reference, with the others building from there based on potential upside and cost vs project lifecycle.

A great point to takeaway also is within the \$51k project win mentioned; the three options were \$25k - \$40k and \$51k. It is common for a client to take the largest option available, when the price is justified.

A note on pricing floors

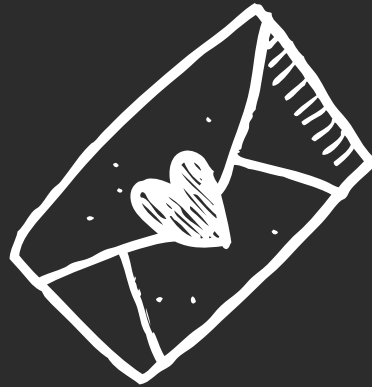
It's easy to get too tied up in calculations as to the topside we forget to estimate the time it might take us to actually deliver this project.

I recommend estimating a project based on the weeks or days of dedicated work it may take to complete.

From there you should divide the earnings goals you have with the number of weeks / days you'll be working that month.

Moving forward

In the next section we'll look at the structure, key sections to consider with the questions that'll help drive inspiration for your written content. Don't try and reinvent the wheel though, if you've already sent a killer email and had a great response use similar language and content, retain the consistency and ensure engagement with your offering.



MAKING IT WORK

Proposal structure and content flow

Here's where the rubber meets the road, how to pull together everything that has come before, into a concise, justified proposal.

To be clear, each one of these sections doesn't need to be horrendously long, nor does it need to add anything more to your current sales process. Often proposals are put together more for the benefit of the freelancer than the client. The objective of a value stacked proposal like the one I've laid out above **is to reverse that**.

I would encourage you to try and add at least 100-150 words for each sub-point of every section (don't necessarily number them as such), with the exception of 'the details' section which may need to cover more content this will give you around 1,000 words of content which you can structure into an engaging proposal.

Section 1 - Building value

1.1 Reiterate the problem and pain

Does your prospect have a problem getting new customers? Are they suffering from a lack of time? Whatever their main pain is here you need to cover it descriptively; ensure you're showing them you understand their problem. What impact is that having on their business right now? What does this pain cause them not to do?

- › Why are they in this situation?
- › What have you already told them (something they didn't know) about this scenario?

1.2 Echo desires, beliefs & fears

When you're looking at reasons a client would opt not to buy your service, often it's simply because you're not addressing their primary concerns. What beliefs do they have about how you can help, what are their fears for getting this decision wrong? You should build empathy in this section by making it clear you're fully on board with what they're trying to achieve and have a counter-argument for each potential objection spelled out.

- › What will the outcome give them?
- › What will it empower them to do / save them from doing that they haven't considered?
- › Is there a fear that might otherwise hold them back from making the decision? How do you overcome that in the way you work?
- › Which fears have brought them to your door and how might you overcome them together?
- › Does your content address the challenges the prospect believes they have?

1.3 Make them believe you

In this section you want to leave no doubt in the prospect's mind that you can walk the walk as well as you talk the talk. Here is where you'd talk about successes you've had on similar projects, your reputation within the space and how this directly relates to the work you're pitching to win for the prospect.

- › How have you done this for others like them?
- › Why do they need you, specifically to carry out this service?
- › Why should they trust you and what assurances are you giving?

1.4 Make them value you

It's amazing how few freelancers actually give their own story some airtime. Stories often are the best way to put points across; moreover it builds trust and empathy that is difficult to replicate by other means. You should ensure you relate any story about your background to the prospect and their particular problem. Your objective here is to make the prospect value the impact you specifically would have to this project.

- › What does working with you look & feel like?
- › Why should they care about the way you do things vs others?
- › Does your proposal address the benefits they believe someone of your skillset can provide?

Section 2 - Justify the investment & upside

2.1 What does victory look like?

If your prospect cannot clearly visualize the successful finish of the project you're going to find it difficult to keep them engaged with your pitch. At this point we're building up to the price reveal, so it's important to ramp up the excitement.

Ultimately a prospect has a subconscious eye on 'what difference will this make to me?' 'Why will this make my life better?'.

Your job here is to answer that, respond strongly and begin to justify the investment.

- › How is your service relevant to my future identity?
- › Could you explain my improved situation in the future?
- › Tell me why this won't be a distraction to me.

2.2 What is the upside?

Now we're getting into specifics. Sure, quality of life is an important factor but we need to enable a rational decision making process by spelling out the financial upside. You can look as far into the future as you need to here; dependent on the service you're carrying out.

You may express the upside as a month-to-month figure i.e. "By doing XYZ you'll be saving around \$1k per month in saved productivity" or you might want to justify your investment as a longer-term play i.e. "By redeveloping the site, and upping the conversion rate to 3% you'll be in a position to generate an additional \$100k over the next 12 months".

Pick whichever suits your payment structure and the natural longevity of the investment. If you really don't feel comfortable picking precise figures, or you just haven't been able to gather specific enough information you should be spelling out the beneficial factors here in terms of business growth, brand awareness, allowing your prospect to join the dots in terms of what the value is to them.

You will have a 'sense' of what this upside is yourself but if you don't feel comfortable putting it down you can leave it out, just ensure this forms the basis of your pricing.

- › What would you this project will deliver tangibly?
 - Getting more customers / more revenue
 - Widening exposure or brand awareness
 - Establishing a market leader presence
 - Saving time

Section 3 – The details

3.1 Provide the details

It wouldn't be a proposal without some finer points. At this point if you're in web it'll be the technical aspects, otherwise you're just being clear about what the prospect will get in return.

It's important at this stage to understand that most client issues are caused at this stage, if you're not being clear enough about what you'll deliver and how you'll deliver it you leave yourself open to scope creep and potential bad apple clients.

Section 4 – Asking for the sale

4.1 What are the pricing options?

Here is where you'll be pitch your cost or range; if you've done everything right to this point you should be very confident in the price options you'll put forward.

Providing you have fully justified the value you are bringing to the table and the investment is proportionally fair to the upside (or client's frame of reference) you have a very good chance of making the deal.

Lay out the pricing options as simply as you can, make sure it's very clear what your price (or what each price tier) contains.

4.2 Make it easy to say yes

We talked about building no brainer opportunities in the website module of Freelancelift Pro and this is something you can build into a proposal too.

Sure, you'll probably need to have a project initiation meeting, sure you may need to get content or more information before you start and to be set up with an email address or whatever but mention it here at your peril.

By adding unnecessary complexity to 'saying yes' you add distractions. "Oh shoot, John from tech is on holiday for two weeks, if you need that email address maybe we'll need to hold off til he's back".

Just get the commitment first, deal with the obligatory onboarding bits later, my advice is to add an electronic signature option and supply links to your terms & conditions if you have them (rather than have the terms within the proposal).

4.3 Assume the sale and be clear about next steps

This is sales 101 stuff, but its high on sales training lists because it works. If you can lead your prospect so far down a path that psychologically they've committed you control the closing process.

By adding dates in for a next stage, or clear indications of what happens after they sign you can ensure momentum from proposal into sale.

Summary

In summary then, your proposal should be the embodiment of everything the client has seen or heard from you so far. It should echo the feelings the client already has, along with the desire they feel for the uplift your service can provide.

If you're putting together a proposal which bills on the value you provide time is no longer a factor either. You should bill for the successful completion of a project, in line with the tangible uplift, the client's frame of reference and the lifecycle of your project.

Remember, the price a client is comfortable paying is directly related to the value they feel they're going to get from it. You control this perceived value within the pre-sale slalom and every touch point the client has experienced from you.

Often for web-based freelancers your pitch is going to be delivered in a PDF format so its crucial you create an engaging document, which retains the client's attention and makes the likelihood of the sale significantly greater.

In the video course, which complements this book we fill in the blanks, along with looking to put these ideas into practice.

THE JUSTIFIED FREELANCE PROPOSAL

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This was short book for
Freelancelift Pro members.

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