

A BETTER WAY TO WRITE AN RFP

Lindsey Tanner of CoreXpand offers a new way to think about the vendor selection process.

SEPARATION: Every year, marketing departments go through the laborious process of finding new vendors, as they continually search for better products, lower prices and improved service. Often, the questions they ask in their RFP's center on technology issues: ordering process, e-pay options, approval & expense tracking systems, among others. According to Lindsey Tanner, founder and CEO of CoreXpand, this is a mistake.

“Whenever a marketer chooses a vendor based on the vendor’s technology, they’re making themselves dependent on that vendor for more than just supplies. If they ever need to replace a vendor, they’ll have to replace a good portion of their system as well, including their storefront.” Mr. Tanner suggests a system where the tools to run your supply channel are separate from your vendors. “If you love the products and services your vendors provide, but hate the tools they use to do it, you don’t have a good fit. What if you could have the best of both worlds? The only way to do that is by separating the two out.”

SMALL LOSS–GREAT GAINS: “The truth is, vendors *want* companies to be dependent on them, and companies want vendors to pay for their technology tools. But what if you were to come up with your own set of tools? Then vendors would lose their control over your business and have to become more competitive, which in turn would give you a better product, better price and better service. Even though your vendors would no longer be paying for your tools, what you would gain by being technologically independent of them would easily make it worth it.

“Another problem I see is how different departments require different things from a vendor, because they have different needs. The technology tools that work for sales & marketing may not work for purchasing, and vice versa. By separating your vendors from your purchasing technology, you free up your options so that you can select the vendors that work for each department, and bring them all together in one system that works for everybody. Now your RFP's can reflect what matters most: product, price and service. And when you need to change a vendor, you can do so without changing your system.”

EXPERIENCE BREEDS CONFIDENCE: The reason Mr. Tanner believes so strongly that this is the best way to solve the vendor selection problem is because he's been on the distribution side of the channel himself. For over a decade, he owned and operated a successful distributorship in the promotional and incentives merchandise industry. Then, in 1996, he began working on a transaction engine that would simplify the supply chain process. "The result led me to start a company that would provide the technology tools needed to run an entire supply channel—tools that could be incorporated into a company's present system, require no IT involvement and, most of all, give them control over their own supply chain. The difference this technology has made in the companies we've served is remarkable."

MORE THAN JUST TECHNOLOGY: Not only does Mr. Tanner believe that technology and experience are important; he also believes it's essential to have a network of vendors that can quickly and easily replace your present suppliers. "You may be happy with your current vendors. But, if you need to find new sources quickly, it will be a lot easier if you already have a network of suppliers in place, who offer products in all categories and who can give you deep savings—15-25% on your present supply spend. Plus, you'll want to be able to plug them right into your system. Most companies aren't in a position to leverage those kinds of savings, nor do they have a flexible enough system to be able just to plug new vendors in. To do that, you need to be part of a large buying group and, again, you need to have your own freestanding technology. That's where we can help you as well."

CoreXpand is an e-commerce solutions company, located in Atlanta, GA, whose main focus is providing clients with simple solutions that pay for themselves. To contact Mr. Tanner, to receiver a free sample RFP, or to set up a free Internet demo for you and your team, please call 678-220-2009 or e-mail ltanner@coreexpand.com.

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