

**Executive Summaries** are the most important pages in a proposal. They set the tone for individual evaluators and are often the only pages read by the decision makers.

Three executive summaries are included in **MODEL DOCUMENTS**.

Because the executive summary is owned by the capture manager but often written by the proposal manager, this topic section is also included in the *Capture Guide*.

The draft executive summary should be developed early during capture planning. The capture manager should prepare the first draft and present it at the Preliminary Bid Decision Gate review to demonstrate understanding of the customer's hot button issues, vision, and the seller's baseline solution.

The initial draft is often only an outline with place-holders for the seller's solution. While the capture manager maintains executive summary ownership, the proposal manager often transforms the outline, mockup, or first draft into a draft acceptable for the proposal kickoff.

Readers of your executive summary must clearly understand your solution and its unique benefits and be able to justify recommending your solution over competing solutions.

**Effective executive summaries meet the following criteria:**

- Connect your solution to the customer's business vision
- Identify the customer's needs and make ownership of those needs explicit

- Connect your solution directly to the customer's needs
- Offer clear proof of your claims
- Show how you offer greater value than the competition
- Be brief but comprehensive by eliminating confusing technical details that are better explained in the body of the proposal
- Indicate the next step, usually by previewing how your proposal is organized

**Executive summaries are also powerful internal tools:**

- Help refine your bidding strategy
- Become a vehicle to gain senior management endorsement
- Communicate your strategy in-house to all contributors
- Drive proposal development
- Become a model for the complete proposal

### Executive Summary

1. Always include an executive summary.
2. Maintain a customer focus throughout.
3. Build on your existing sales process and strategy.
4. Organize the content to be clear and persuasive.
5. Expand the Four-Box Template into a single- or multiple-page draft.
6. Develop your executive summary based on proven best-in-class practices.
7. Follow sound writing guidelines.
8. Follow a defined process when preparing on short notice.

## 1

### Always include an executive summary.

If the customer asks for an executive summary, submit one. If not, do so anyway.

Call it whatever the customer calls it. Common alternatives are management summary and management overview.

Independent of what the customer calls it, understand the difference between a summary and an introduction. A summary summarizes the essential content of your proposal. An introduction indicates how your proposal is organized. Other terms for introduction are preview, road map, and informal table of contents.

To include an executive summary when the proposal outline is strictly defined in the bid request, you have several compliant alternatives. One is to include a separately bound executive summary. Place a copy in every volume submitted, either in a pocket in the front or in the binder. Note that in page-limited proposals, the executive summary is considered part of your technical proposal.

An alternative is to make the executive summary the first part of your volume summary in each volume of the proposal.

Summarize at all levels: proposal, volume, section, and question.

See **ORGANIZATION**.

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See CUSTOMER FOCUS.

Maintain a customer focus throughout.

Check the focus of your executive summaries against the following criteria:

• States the customer’s vision

• Connects the vision to the immediate purchase

• Cites the customer’s hot buttons in order of importance or the order listed in the bid request

• Makes the customer’s ownership of the hot buttons explicit

• Addresses each hot button in the order introduced

• Names the customer more than the seller

• Names the customer before the seller in the document, paragraphs, and sentences

• Cites benefits before features

3

See CAPTURE PLANNING and PROPOSAL MANAGEMENT PLAN.

Build on your existing sales process and strategy.

To maintain a consistent message with your customer and to save time, exploit your existing internal information sources as much as possible.

Many organizations have embraced a strategic and/or tactical sales process. Exploit it to develop your executive summary rather than starting over. With a little effort, you can map the information from existing sales templates into your executive summary.

When business development people are asked to draft the executive summary, too many still pull the last one they prepared, do a *search and replace* for customer and product names, add one or two sentences, and submit. They continue to tailor their last executive summary for subsequent opportunities until the executive summary completely unravels.

Most of the information needed to prepare the executive summary is contained in the capture plan and proposal management plan. The

three key worksheets summarized in figures 1, 2, and 3 are recommended to help assemble and organize the information needed for an executive summary. One example issue is completed to illustrate each worksheet.

The most frequently overlooked portion of strategy statements is how the strategy will be implemented. Note the *how* in the following example:

We will emphasize our ability to test full-scale components by including a photo of our Manchester test facility.

Using the information in the three worksheets shown as a source, prepare the Executive Summary Solution Worksheet shown in figure 4 with the same hot buttons/issues consolidated from the other three worksheets.

You now have the information needed to begin drafting your executive summary.

ShipleyAssociates Integrated Solution Worksheet								
Item No.	Customer Issues	Customer Requirements	Available Solution	Gap	Competitor Solution	Discriminators	Strategy	Action Required
1	System must be available.	8 hr. response time.	2 hr. response time	1 hr	3 hr. response time	Faster response but more expensive?	Emphasize no additional cost with cellular.	Show current response time. Show photo-service with cell phone.

**Figure 1. Integrated Solution Worksheet.** The primary focus of this template is to arrive at a competitive solution that is aligned with the customer’s issues and requirements. The strategic messages communicated in sales calls must also be communicated in the executive summary.

For additional uses of the *Integrated Customer Solution Worksheet* and *Bidder Comparison Matrix*, see **CAPTURE PLANNING**, **PROPOSAL STRATEGY**, and **TEAMING**, *Capture Guide*.

ISSUES	WEIGHT	US (SCORE)	COMPANY A	COMPANY B
Seller's service quality	30	25	20	15
TOTAL SCORE	100			

**Figure 2. Bidder Comparison Matrix.** The primary focus of this template is to discern how the customer organization perceives your team's solution versus your competitors' as it relates to the customer's issues. In this example, service quality is seen by the customer as a strength.

**STRATEGY STATEMENT WORKSHEET**

- We will emphasize our strengths in: delivering 2-hr. response  
by: including summaries of our actual service response in the prospect's area.
- We will mitigate our weaknesses in: \_\_\_\_\_  
by: \_\_\_\_\_
- We will highlight our competitors' weaknesses in: \_\_\_\_\_  
by: \_\_\_\_\_
- We will downplay our competitors' strengths in: \_\_\_\_\_  
by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 3. Proposal Strategy Statements.** The primary focus of proposal strategy statements is to identify ways you can implement or convey your strategy on paper in a written executive summary and proposal.

To use all features of form, enable macros. See Word Help for instructions.  
 For context-specific help, press F1 (Windows) or Help (Mac OS).  
 If there are more than 4 hot buttons, use additional worksheets.

*ShipleyAssociates*
Executive Summary

Solution Worksheet

**Plan Using the Solution Worksheet**

Hot Buttons				
#1	#2	#3	#4	
Improve system availability				
<b>Solution</b>				
2-hr. response				
<b>Alternative(s) Considered</b>				
3-hr. response				
<b>Discriminators</b>				
No additional cost, Greater availability				
<b>Proof</b>				
List area clients & equip #'s		Experience		
Quote records- use XYZ quote		Performance		

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**Figure 4. Executive Summary Solution Worksheet.** Either complete this worksheet by extracting information from the previous three templates or simply begin with this one.

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See **MODEL DOCUMENTS** for examples of executive summaries in the four-box organizational style.

See **ORGANIZATION**.

See **MODEL DOCUMENT 3** for an example.

Organize the content to be clear and persuasive.

Transfer the content that you developed and summarized in the Executive Summary Solution Worksheet into the Four-Box Template, shown in figure 5.

The Four-Box Template is based on fundamental principles of how to organize a persuasive document.

This four-box organizational approach is nearly always more customer focused than the narrative or mirror approach. The mirror approach is a mini-version of your proposal, most often used when the proposal is formally solicited, and the structure is rigidly defined in the bid request.

The Four-Box Template includes four primary boxes, organized around your customer's hot button issues:

**Box 1**  
**Summary:** Align with the customer's vision, summarize needs, preview your solution, and indicate compliance.

**Box 2**  
**Introduction:** Introduce the customer's hot buttons.

**Box 3**  
**Body:** Present your solution aligned with the customer's hot buttons, including substantiating detail as proof of your claims.

**Box 4**  
**Review:** Much like Box 1, summarize the needs and your solution, and state the next step.

Use the Four-Box Template to draft an executive summary in an organized, expandable structure. Also, use it to prepare other sales documents and presentations.

If you have developed a quantified value proposition, consider organizing your executive summary around components of the value proposition rather than hot button issues. State your quantified value proposition as the theme statement in Box 1. Introduce quantified components in Box 2, and then expand on each component in Box 3. Restate your value proposition in Box 4, and introduce the proposal.

CONTENT

**Box 1—SUMMARY:** Recognize customer's vision, challenges, and objectives, and introduce your solution.

**Box 2—INTRODUCTION:** Establish and prioritize customer's needs (current needs and desired status). This is a preview of what's to come—key points, customer issues, challenges, etc.

**Box 3—BODY:** Present solutions to the customer's needs, emphasizing benefits and results. Identify your proof. Maintain the same organizational scheme introduced in Box 2.

**Box 4—REVIEW:** State why the customer should select you. Summarize the unique contribution your solution makes to your customer's success. Indicate the next step.

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Four-Box Template

Box 1: Summary

Signal your purpose in a clear heading. Summarize the essence of your message. State what you want the reader to do, know or feel.

Theme  
Vision

Box 2: Introduction

Preview organization of the document. Organize around the points most likely to influence the reader.

Introduce Hot Buttons

Subordinate Topics

H0 # 1

H0 # 2

H0 # 3

Box 3: Body

Provide convincing details for the reader. Maintain the same organizational scheme introduced in Box 2. Consider visuals to help convey your message.

Topic:

H0 # 1

-Solution and benefit

-Proof

-Visual

H0 # 2

-Solution and benefit

-Proof

-Visual

H0 # 3

-Solution and benefit

-Proof

-Visual

Box 4: Review

Summarize the reasons the reader should do, know, or feel what you want. End by clearly stating the next realistically achievable step.

Summary: Preview Proposal, Next step  
(contact #, email, date to contact, etc.)

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PROCESS

1. Brainstorm a high-level strategic theme that encompasses the customer's strategic direction, this specific opportunity, and your overall strategy to address needs. Write the theme and introduction to the executive summary in Box 1.
2. Copy the customer's top hot buttons from the Executive Summary Solution Worksheet into Box 2. These customer hot buttons will be the basis for the bullet points.
3. Copy the hot buttons from Box 2 into Box 3 as subtitles.
4. Under each subtitle in Box 3, list the paragraphs that you plan to write to communicate your organization's solution, including:
  - The benefits and features of the solution, emphasizing any applicable discriminators.
  - The visuals of any type that will be included. Think of visuals before text.
  - Proof of claims to be included. Most should be visual.
  - Alternatives and justification of your approach.
5. Restate your overall strategy and summarize your solution and discriminators in Box 4. Suggest the next step as appropriate.

Figure 5. Using a Four-Box Template. The content of each "box" is summarized on the left. Follow the process steps on the right to map your winning sales strategy into your executive summary.

## 5

See **VALUE PROPOSITION, Capture Guide.**

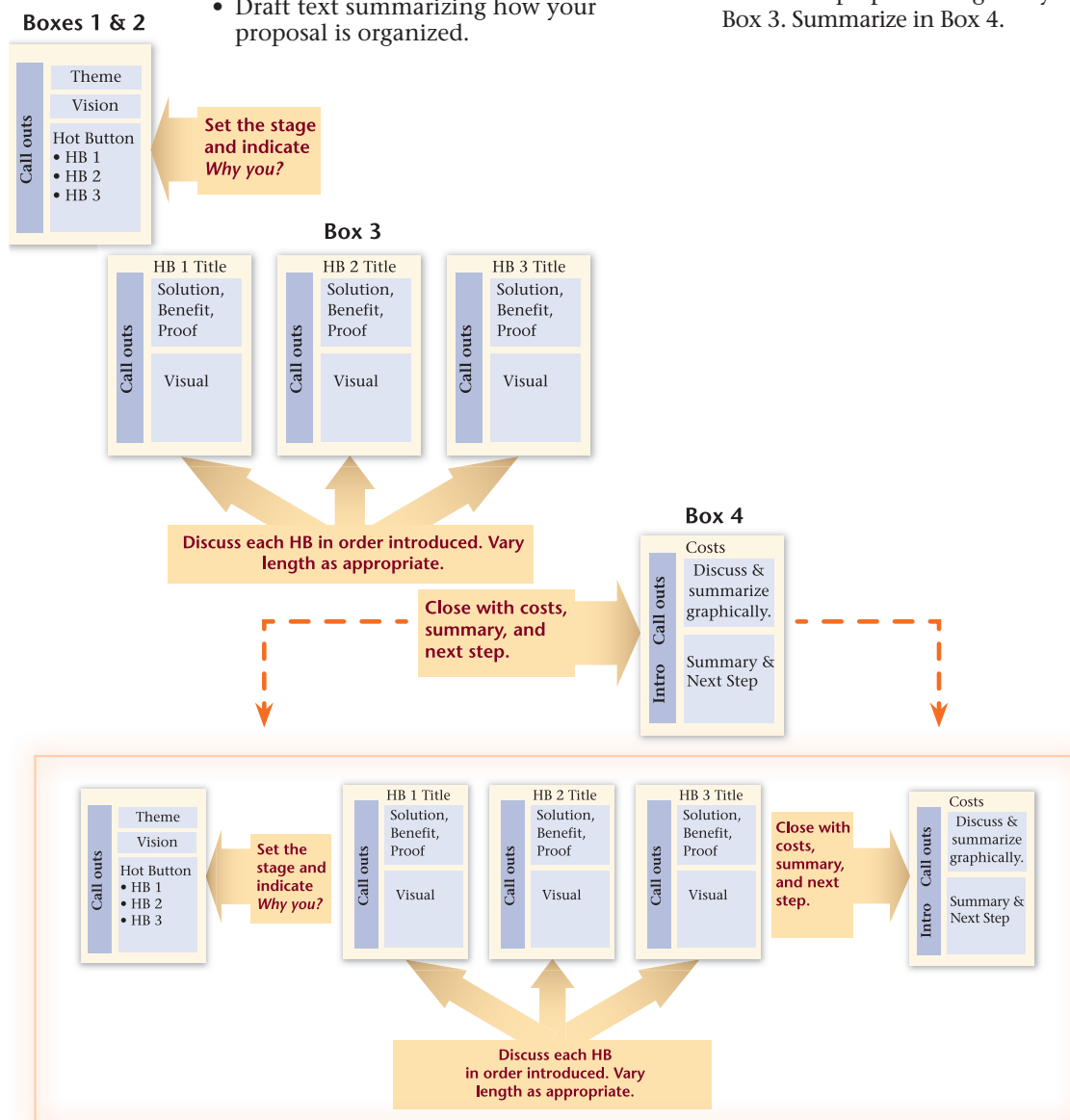
### Expand the Four-Box Template into a single- or multiple-page draft.

The Four-Box Template helps you identify key selling points within a customer-focused, clear framework. Expand the framework into a first draft:

- Develop the visuals.
- Draft action captions for the visuals.
- Draft text directing evaluators to the graphics.
- Draft text describing your solutions.
- Draft text describing your experience and proof of performance.
- Summarize your costs/pricing if permitted by purchasing rules.
- Draft text summarizing how your proposal is organized.

Figure 6 illustrates how the Four-Box Template is expanded into a 5-page executive summary. Allocate pages in the executive summary according to the relative importance of the topic to the customer, tempered somewhat by the relative competitive strength of this feature or aspect of your offer. Determining the total length of your executive summary is discussed in guideline 6.

If you develop value propositions as an integral part of your sales approach, summarize them in your executive summary. Present your summary value proposition in Box 1. Introduce individual value propositions in Box 2. Discuss each value proposition against your solution in Box 3. Summarize in Box 4.



**Figure 6. Expanding the Four-Box Template into a Multi-page Executive Summary.** In this example, Boxes 1 and 2 occupy the first page. Each of the three hot buttons is discussed on a single page, in the order introduced. Visuals are included if appropriate. The last page includes the costs and a brief summary before pointing the evaluator to the rest of the proposal.



## 6

**Develop your executive summary based on proven best-in-class practices.**

The following guidelines are based on years of consulting and observation of best practices in organizations with a proven ability to cost effectively win business.

See **PRESENTATIONS TO CUSTOMERS, Capture Guide.**

- Sales should complete the first draft of the executive summary prior to the proposal kickoff meeting.
- The proposal manager or sales support should review the draft, add detail on the solution, and complete it early enough to permit review by sales and management.
- Review your draft executive summary with your customer-coach if possible.
- Limit the total length to 5 to 10 percent of the page length of your proposal, tempered by how much you think this particular customer's managers will read.
- Make it more visual than the rest of the proposal.
- Use your executive summary as the basis for your finals briefing. Update it if needed and distribute copies to the customer at the end.
- Maintain your customer focus from start to finish.

## 7

**Follow sound writing guidelines.**

Follow these writing guidelines to consistently write effective executive summaries. As a manager, use it as a review checklist.

See **RELEVANT EXPERIENCE/PAST PERFORMANCE.**

- Except in small proposals (under 20 pages), write the executive summary as a stand-alone document.
- Write executive summaries for upper-level, non-technical decision makers.
- Make the executive summary brief but comprehensive.
- Include visuals throughout the executive summary.
- Do not assume that readers of the executive summary have been privy to information given during earlier sales calls.
- Organize the executive summary using a customer-focused framework.
- Clearly state what you are offering and how it benefits the customer.
- Offer clear proof of your claims.
- Tie major discriminators prominently and explicitly to a customer issue.

## 8

**Follow a defined process when preparing on short notice.**

Use this abbreviated procedure when you are out of time or called on to draft an executive summary on short notice.

See **PRESENTATIONS TO CUSTOMERS, Capture Guide.**

1. Define the customer's hot buttons, for Box 2. (Two to five hot buttons.)
2. Allocate all major requirements, high-level aspects of your solution, and your discriminators to at least one hot button, for Box 3. If you have help, assign the drafting of one or more of the hot button portions of Box 3 after completing this step.
3. Draft a paragraph connecting the customer's vision, the customer's immediate need, and the most unique aspect of your solution, for Box 1.
4. Summarize the price, your solution, *why you*, and indicate the next step, for Box 4.
5. Review the content as a team, then edit carefully. Be especially careful if you have multiple contributors.
6. Spend the rest of the time available polishing. Resist changing your solution.

If you have the opportunity to present your proposal to the customer, use your executive summary as the basis for the presentation. Prepare the slides using your graphics and text, presented in the same order, and leave a copy of the executive summary with your customer as a written summary of your presentation.