Top Ten Infuriating Color Review Comments

1. “This sounds awful” – Without a revision suggestion, this is just an insult, not a contribution to p(win)
2. “More proof points” – If the reviewer doesn’t detail a suggestion then they’ve added no value
3. “I don’t get it” – The reviewer has to explain the confusion; engineers don’t always write to the appropriate level
4. “Not what they want” – If they haven’t read the RFP and rely on hearsay, they aren’t qualified to review
5. “Replace this with this old proposal I wrote” – Ignore this person; they are in the past
6. “This graphic is too dense” – Ignore this person; they clearly lack vision
7. “Fix the colors” – Take pity, they may be visually impaired
8. “How?” – Useless without citing specific questions or circling back after review
9. “Too many trees!” – Took a deep dive on a particular section; you missed the forest
10. “Wall of text” – Winning proposals keep evaluators interested; good reviewers identify content to move to tables and graphs

A Blank Canvas
As we enter the teeth of what is already a very busy proposal season, it is a good time to reiterate the state of the art in proposal reviews. Since our September 2014 Practitioner Perspectives, Wolf Den’s clients have had great success progressively replacing gate reviews with a series of agile capture sprints. Each of these is rigorously time-boxed, with a weekly “wall walk” taking the place of the traditional litany of internal reviews. Under this new model, focus shifts on Day One from internal briefing slides to key capture and proposal artifacts – all visible so that progress is easily assessed, messages are shared, and conversation turns into content. Progressive quality checks and “independent” reviews of the evolving proposal (including Pink, Red, and Gold) emphasize compelling capabilities and win themes that promote a section’s score from green to blue.

Broad Strokes
This agile approach does not replace traditional color reviews, rather it shifts the emphasis from proposal process (which has become its own cottage industry) to content creation. This process takes compliance off the table by having a dedicated compliance assessment before each color review. Reviewers are now free to focus on a substantive review of strategy, solution, and graphics from the first review (usually Pink Team). Artifacts should articulate how sections tie to the win strategy, win themes, and solution. At this early stage, finished prose is discouraged, but there should be bulleted narratives and near-final graphics. Facilitators must steer reviewers away from grammatical comments and focus them on providing actionable strategic feedback. All comments should include recommendations for remediation, ideally mapped directly to customer needs or hot-buttons.

In the second review, emulate customer evaluation and critique content, presentation, and grammar with actions to raise the score

Final reviews ensure incorporation of prior feedback, validate homogeneity, and confirm the customer can easily evaluate the proposal

Winning teams focus their efforts on creating and iterating anchor artifacts, not polishing internal gate review slides

Colorblind Continuous Proposal Reviews

After nearly 30 years, Shipley-based color reviews are tired and bloated in a world of agile and innovative proposal best practices

Introduce an agile approach with progressive quality checks, including color reviews, into the proposal process to increase p(win)

The earliest review should provide a clear sense of how each section ties to the win strategy, win themes, and solution

In a representative sample of recent large proposals across a variety of customers, the number of actionable and non-actionable comments rose proportionately – adding reviewers increased quantity, not necessarily quality, of comments.

Source: Wolf Den Associates analysis

Detail Elements

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