



## The Art Of The RFP

**E**veryone loves original IP, but let's face the facts. We live in an industry where publisher-controlled and -licensed intellectual properties comprise the bulk of available work. **So if you aren't out there hustling opportunities to bid on these requests for proposal, you are not maximizing the value of your studio.**

To keep yourself in contention for these opportunities, you must maintain presence of mind with potential publishing partners. Presence of mind comes from physical presence -- that means being at the shows, pressing the flesh, and keeping your talents uppermost in the minds of the buyers -- but also from a strong virtual presence. E-mail may or may not be enough; you have to know the person and their preferences. Reaching out by phone periodically is good; it's more personal, provided you don't waste the buyer's time in the process. You don't have to dive right to the point when you first get the person on the phone, **but if you haven't gotten to that point after a couple of minutes of pleasantries, you may be crossing a line.** Again, it depends on how well you have developed your relationship with this buyer.

And what is your point? "Do you have any current projects you might need support on, anything that suits our skill set for which we might submit a proposal?" If the answer is "no," then thank them for their time and ask them when would be a good time to check back. **Whatever they tell you, put it in your Outlook calendar reminders right then.** Don't trust yourself to remember, or them either. This way, you will be able to remind them at the appropriate time that they invited the followup. Do this correctly and respectfully a few times and buyers psychologically begin feeling an obligation to find you a project to bid on. You still have to win the business, but your chances of being included in the bidding process are increased.

OK, so now you have an RFP and a deadline for responding to it. What are some of the things you can do to make your proposal stand out from those of your competitors? First, to get off on the right footing, make sure you ...

... immediately read the RFP fully and completely at least twice, and involve your creative and technical leads in this process. Do you have all the information you need to properly scope and resource the project? Is the publisher making assumptions in the document? Are you in your thinking about your response? **This is the right time to make sure there is alignment of expectations so that you don't inadvertently overbid or underbid the project.** Compose one list of questions and clarifications you are seeking and get that list back to the publisher within 24 hours of receiving the RFP. This shows that you are: (1) fully thinking through the implications of the project, (2) capable of raising and addressing potential issues in a timely manner, (3) organized because you aren't hitting them with five staggered e-mails with different questions, (4) that you are professional and responsive, which is what any publisher wants any developer they eventually select to be.

Now it is time to turn your creative team loose. What you say? That you can't pull your guys off paying development projects to generate art and design assets for this RFP. And so, instead, Mr. CEO, you are going to just submit a response yourself. **I remind you of the line from Clint Eastwood: "A man has got to know his limitations."** Creative is the deciding factor in more than 75% of RFP submissions, not pricing. If you think price is the only concern, ask the publisher right up front what budget they are trying to work within and, if you don't like the answer, don't spend the time and resources bidding for the project. But know this ... even when they give you an answer you don't like, based on our experience, they are willing to spend up to 50%

more than what they quote at this early stage for the right creative, for a proposal response that really jazzes them. As such, good creative is the number one thing you can do to win projects. By that, I don't just mean words on paper either. Those are important, and more complete explanations of the features and levels you envision in the game are better than superficial descriptions full of meaningless hype words, like "best, stunning, and cutting edge." But we live in a *visual* industry. Just think that all publishers are from Missouri (the so-called "show-me" state) and do as many mockups of the screens and menus you envision for the game as possible in the time allotted. We said that 75% of selections are based on creative. That is true, but 95% of those are based on visuals within the creative.

So now you have some great design ideas and mockups to work with. What's next? Well, in the world of game acquisition psychology, more is better. Larger, more comprehensive proposals generally are selected more often than superficial executive summaries. **The rule of thumb is that the more work you are willing to put into landing the job, the more work you will put into the game itself.** But it doesn't have to be as much work as it appears. If you have taken the time to develop a good RFP template that gives your studio's background, technical overview, softology (which can be edited each time to showcase titles on the targeted platform for the given RFP), ratings, references, team overview, and a template resource and production schedule, the time it takes you to plug in the creative (which you should always lead with at the beginning of the document) and the numbers underlying that creative (on the milestone and resource allocation schedules at the end of the document) can be as little as a couple of hours. But when you slap that 20-30-page digital document in their inbox, it will feel like you have spent a week on it, and buyers like motivated sellers.

The template approach works in your favor in other ways as well. The developer who responds to an RFP first, with a complete and competitive proposal as described above, also has first mover advantage in opening the next level of discussions with the publisher. Very, very often, if the publisher likes the first response they get, they will open a dialogue and you can be waaaaay down the road with them in their thinking before the other bids even come in for consideration. **They have already mentally invested in your proposal and it will be much harder for competing proposals to overcome it.**

That's all the space I have right now, but I hope this helps you to refine your own process and win more work. [eddille@fogstudios.com](mailto:eddille@fogstudios.com) Let me know if you got something out of this; it's always nice to hear from you.

Next month, some tips on pricing your services. Until then, be well, see you at GDC, and ... **Good Hunting!**