

## WHAT COUNTS MOST IN A PRESENTATION? Credibility is the Key

Three firms were ranked and short-listed for a 380-bed institutional facility with a 20-million dollar budget. Each 15-minute presentation was followed by 30 minutes of Q + A. The identification of the firms has been changed, but all other aspects remain factual.

**The TRM team, ranked #1**, had been working on the planning phase of the project for two years. This gave them the advantage to discuss project issues and user groups, then highlight their planning studies, ending with a hard-lined site layout. That was the easy part.

The Q + A session found that the PM did not have project-related experience. The firm claimed to have made an “independent study” of modular units. The clients had already seen the study, which came from a well-known local contractor. *Credibility Lost.*

**EDS, the # 2 ranked firm**, began with a short video describing a job they did in the same county, where they had saved lots of money for the same client. Then they went directly to the Q + A without any additional formal presentation.

A question from the review board about life-cycle costs prompted a spontaneous, but pre-planned presentation using the video monitor. It outlined the firm’s conceptual thinking behind the design of a typical institution, with diagrammatic options of how it could be expanded in the future, backed by photos of completed projects utilizing the different schemes. *Credibility Gained.*

**STO’s presentation, the #3 firm**, was handled entirely by the principal. He began with his “Project Approach, and Action Events.” The “Team” board featured himself in nearly every role; “who you see, is who you’ll get.” The mechanical engineer was from out of the state, and wasn’t convincing that he knew all local codes, which could affect future operating costs. *Credibility Questioned.*

**The major difference** in the firms could be found in their responses to the client’s questions, posed equally to all three. Questions such as:

### Have you heard of the Murry Report?

**TRM:** “Murry?.....I’ve heard about it, but I haven’t seen it.”

**STO:** Vaguely;..... I’ve been told what it says.”

**EDS:** “Yes. Murry has had lots of reports. You mean the one about modular construction? It’s probably this one,” as he pulls it out from under a yellow pad.

*Credibility established!*

### In the jury deliberations, four clients outline their concerns.

“**TRM** knows a lot about us already, but the modular study they said they generated wasn’t theirs.”

“**TRM**’s figures were old, and 25% off. We didn’t even sit down with them, and they’re already telling us what they’re going to give us. I checked every reference from all three firms, and the only negative letter I received had to do with the same complaint. ‘TRM architects often did not want to deviate from their original designs.’ We’ve already experienced that problem.”

“**TRM**’s presentation was only a recitation of their involvement in our program, and not a forward thinking vision for the future.”

“**EDS** had better marketing skills, but we should look beyond that. Their answers were the best, they have good people. They offered the Sr. VP as one of their ‘guaranteed people,’ we need to get him for sure.

“**EDS** anticipated our future needs for expansion. They showed us how they can cut costs, save us money, and yet maintain quality.”

“**EDS** gave a fine presentation, with all the answers and in-depth coverage. They knew all the technology; they had all the diagrams ready. They had the Murry Report. Their answers were not to appease us, but based on fact.”

“**STO**’s mechanical engineer is their weakest link, and that’s very critical for this project.”

“**STO** understands operations, but they emphasized TQM, which is not used much anymore.”

“**STO** gave a dry presentation, and was shallow on a lot of the issues, but they are a solid firm. He is the firm. What happens if he breaks a leg? Will the project be delayed as long as it takes the leg to heal?”

**The final tally:**

**EDS took over as #1**

**TRM slipped to #2**

**STO stayed #3**

**OTHER LESSONS LEARNED:**

- \* Don't get complacent just because you're working on the project.
- \* Don't just recite what is in the RFP.
- \* Don't waste time rehashing material already in the proposal.
- \* Don't claim materials not of your own making.
- \* Don't bumrap your competitors.
- \* Do your homework; (e.g. read the trade reports).
- \* Know the client's operations.

**The Q + A is where your credibility is most critically on the line; it's where you will live or die. Prepare for it, rehearse for it, go right to it.**