

# AI EXPERIENCES IN THE REAL WORLD

How AI is helping bid and  
proposal teams worldwide

June 2025



Strategic  
Proposals

# Executive Summary

## AI experiences in the real world

A few years into the era of AI, everyone in the bid and proposal profession's excited by its potential. But what are people's lived experiences with the new tech? This report takes an independent look - not through the lens of software vendors, but from a user perspective. Based on 15 structured interviews capturing the real-world experiences of senior managers across five continents, it explores AI's impact, the lessons learned, and what comes next.

The consensus is that AI's biggest strength lies in Proposal GenAI, where teams see significant gains from generating high-quality first drafts quickly - and hence improving efficiency. Yet AI's only as good as the content it's fed. Organisations that have traditionally had a strong knowledge management approach are seeing the best and quickest results.

The danger is that AI helps generate content that's "me too", lacking client empathy. So training AI is critical - it must understand corporate voice, brand tone, and client-specific language to produce meaningful responses. Ensuring proposals stand out from competitors using similar technology remains a challenge.

AI shows promise in wider bid processes such as bid planning and competitive intelligence - but its adoption in these areas is still developing. And there are risks that

need to be navigated - in areas such as hallucinations, bias and governance.

The biggest challenge, perhaps: that although teams using AI are reporting improvements to proposal quality and efficiency gains, there's a lack of solid business case data. Teams simply aren't - yet - reporting a true return on investment. The report contains models to help you think about your business case.

Successful AI implementation requires a careful approach to change management. Businesses must define clear objectives before diving into tool selection. It's actually not really about the tech: it's about shaping the future role of your bid and proposal professionals within your organisation. It should elevate their role, creating new opportunities.

And yes, we did use AI to help draft this executive summary, just for fun. Email us when you've read the report to **let us know** how you think it did!

# Research methodology

## Lived experiences with AI

Yet another document about AI in bids and proposals? Surely not!

But here's the thing. Pretty much everything being shared on this important topic – and there's a lot - is published by software vendors. They're doing an excellent job educating us about the potential of this ground-breaking new(ish) tech.

But inevitably, they're promoting their own solutions. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

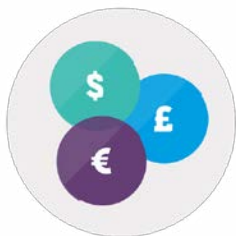
This report's different. It aims to present the user perspective on AI. Put another way: we don't have an AI product to sell.

So the goal here: to take a deep-dive into how people have approached the AI challenge in their organisations, now we're a little further into the AI experience. We're hoping that hearing their honest experiences might spark a few ideas for you, and help you on your own AI journey. And, perhaps, that it'll provide something of a practical guide for anyone considering how best to exploit AI in their organisation's bid and proposal function.

## How we've researched the report

This report's based on a series of 15 structured interviews in late March and early April. The group included directors or heads of their companies' bid and proposal management around the world, and a number of senior managers who'd taken the lead on AI implementations.

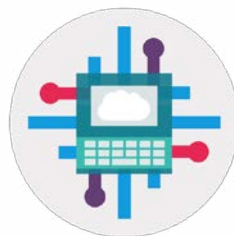
They covered five continents and spanned various sectors.



**Banking**



**Professional  
services**



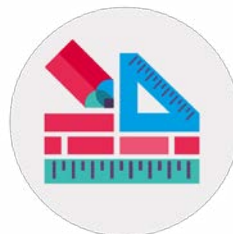
**ICT**



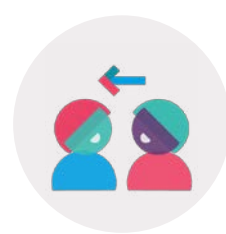
**Transportation**



**Facilities  
management**



**Construction and  
engineering**



**Business process  
outsourcing**

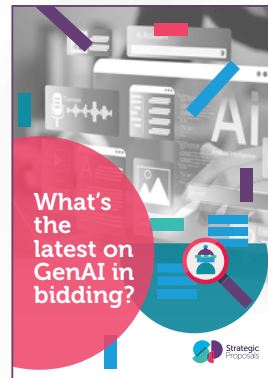
The research took place in April 2025. (And we're mindful that what's current in early 2025 will doubtless feel hugely dated by even early 2026. Things are moving that fast.)

The interviews took place under what, in the UK, we call the Chatham House rule – named after a prestigious foreign policy institute where senior people gather to share insights. It's fine to discuss what was said afterwards – just not to attribute it. I guess the North American equivalent might be: "What goes on in Vegas, stays in Vegas." So we can quote what our interviewees said – and we do so verbatim – but their comments are anonymised.

The findings were first presented at APMP's major global conference, BPC, in Nashville in May 2025. People seemed to rather enjoy the session!



Incidentally, this is our third white paper on the topic. We led the first vendor-independent research into AI in our profession, published in September 2023, and then published an update to that earlier this year. You might want to have a read of those companion pieces, too!



## About the report author

Jon Williams leads the 30-strong Strategic Proposals team in the UK, and he's also a director of our businesses in the US and Canada. He's worked in 39 countries around the world. Over 26 years in proposals, he's helped clients to win \$25bn of bids. He's a Fellow of APMP, and was the first CEO of APMP UK, the association's first (and now largest) international chapter back in 2001.

And he's not a techie. His parents saved up to buy him his first computer, a Sinclair, in 1981. He started his career in IT, as a graduate systems analyst, before being handed a role as the IT manager for a sales team and a procurement team – and deciding that what they did for a living was far more fun.

So he's fascinated by technology. He spends a lot of time talking to vendors in the market, and finds AI invaluable in his own working life. But he's not an AI expert.





## The joys of AI transcription

We used Teams to transcribe the interviews. It saved hours, of course. But it did also come up with a few amusing transcription errors amidst the 78,000 words of discussion, which perhaps highlight that AI isn't perfect. Here are a few of our favourites:

- Head of bits and proposals.
- So, how are you actually using AI when you're working together on a bed?
- Who owns the final draught?
- You still have to read the Tinder documents carefully.
- We can save 510% of our time.

The last one's great. We're going to come into work at 9am on Monday morning, and go home 3.45pm the previous Friday... That really would be an efficiency gain.

## Five words relating to AI

To set the scene, we asked for a gut feel response to the following question: "Tell me the first five words that come to mind that you'd associate with AI in bids and proposals."

Here's what they came up with



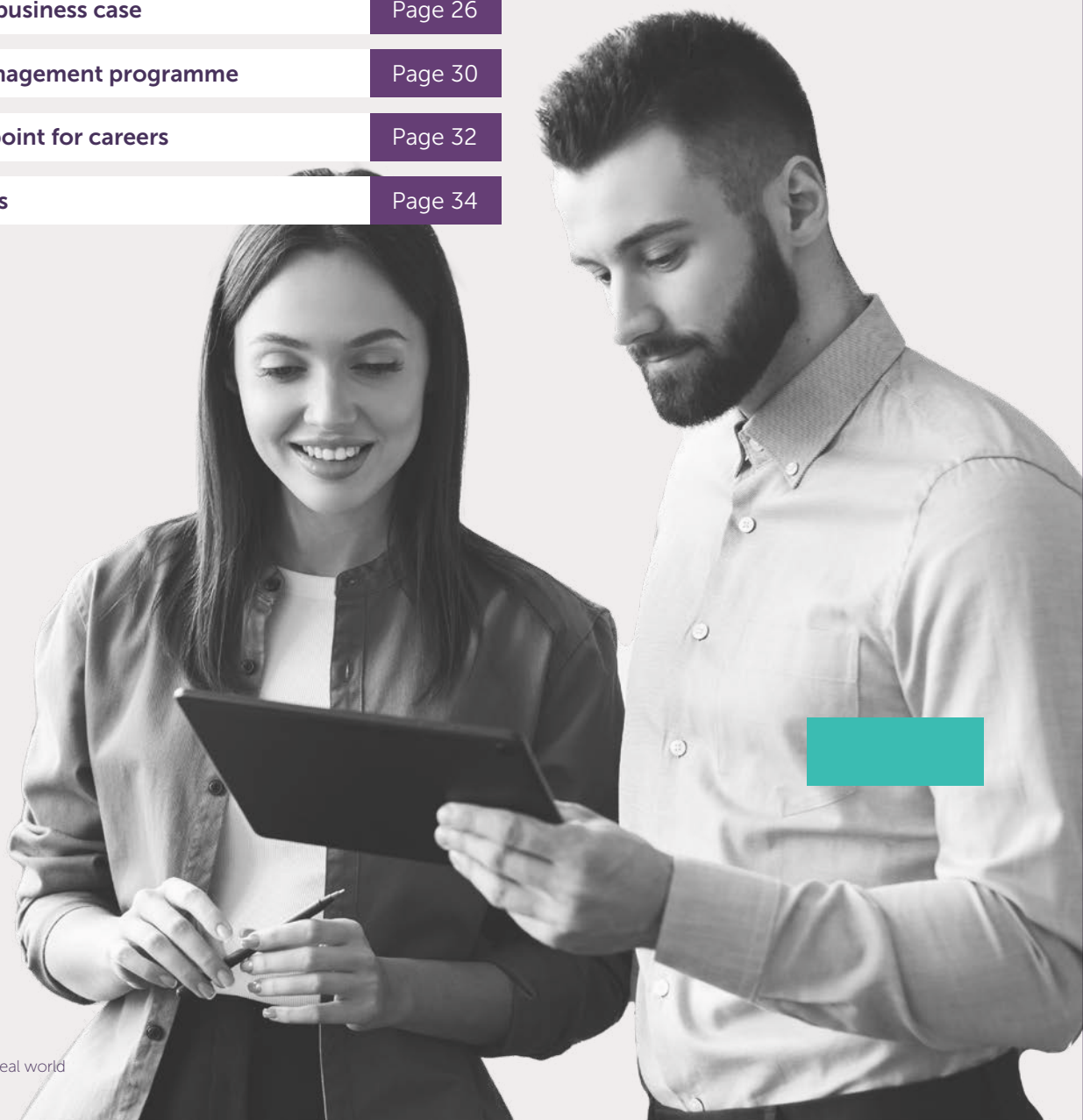
Note the positives: we too see this as an "exciting" "opportunity". But there are challenges too. This report might help you work out strategies to overcome them for your organisation.



## Twelve topics that we explored

We then dived into a set of structured questions, with a few detours along the way, and have structured what we heard into a dozen areas.

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## The sweet spot is Proposal GenAI

Of course: "AI could help across the *entire* bid lifecycle."

But it quickly became apparent that the main use case at the moment is Proposal GenAI. Almost all of the interviewees' organisations were using or exploring it in one form or another. Let's give you a few quotes.



We've focused largely on writing because that's where a lot of efficiency comes from.

It's not "this will take you through the entire bid process." The focus will be on getting you to a really strong first draft. After that, the human in the loop comes in.

It gives a structure where instantly I've got something that I can work to and then fill in rather than sit and have writer's block. There's a reference point which you can then use to write something tailored and personalised.



It's the sheer speed of AI that's remarkable:



We've got hundreds and hundreds of examples of delivering customer experience improvements, or safety, or whatever. And we've always struggled with that. What's the best way of accessing that experience if you're the person that's writing about, say, diversity?

So instead of saying to a professional writer, you go and search this, with AI you just put it into the software and you ask it to answer the question for you. And it's instantaneous.



And, of course, it's not just for bid and proposal professionals to use:



It's primarily for our smaller bids. So I'm a project manager in the business. I'm staring at a blank piece of paper. I don't really know how to use our bid library, even though I probably should. What do I do? I'm wasting time. I'm costing the business money.

Click this button! It gives me a skeleton draft which then I can improve on, build on, make relevant to the sector, client, etc.



## 2

## Feed the puppy

The first key decisions people have had to make is what to point their AI at. After all:

There's no point investing in AI if you're just going to write poor proposals faster.

And so "Content is king." (Or "queen", maybe!)

So what you feed into your AI solution becomes key. Let's share a couple of quotes from our panel of interviewees.

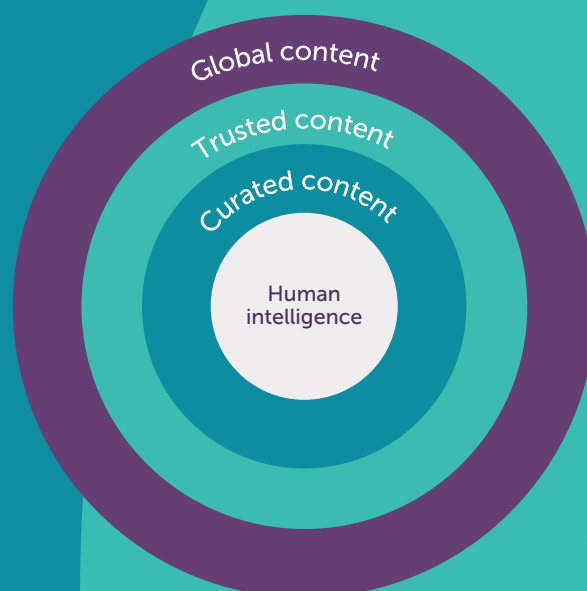
Are you seeking to create some content based on what's in the big wide world, or based on what you've already got yourself, or something between the two? So we've been really through those sorts of iterations and loops.

It's pointing at our work winning content hub. We've got a small team of information managers who look after that, and we've invested heavily in that using SharePoint.

That's all of our curated best practice material from recent bids. Everything from standard company information to methodologies to case studies to CVs. Everything's in there for the AI tool to talk to.

We're also pointing it at our control centre, which is where our operational documents are – our project management plan templates, our risk management templates, how to how to be a delivery partner, templates etc.

And there's an interesting sense here of pointing AI in a controlled way at "live" data, not just bid collateral. It ties in with the model we first put forward in our first AI white paper back in 2023:





You start with curated content – great answers to the frequently asked questions you see in your clients' RFPs, and other building blocks of regularly used material. Then you get AI to look at trusted content – from your operational teams, your sales and marketing colleagues and the like. And then – and only then – do you bring in ideas from the big wide outside world.

And there's a danger that we think about AI in terms of its ability to conjure up content as if from nowhere – perhaps in some cases as a shortcut for years of poor knowledge management. The interviews tended to suggest that that's the wrong way of thinking about it.

Those organisations who are having the most success are those who actually already have a great grip of their content – and people and processes who manage that. This is a point where good knowledge management in the past is bringing competitive advantage when it comes to good content generation in the future.



You have to have knowledge to manage knowledge.

We're probably two years ahead of people who are just pointing it at nothing or at random SharePoint files.



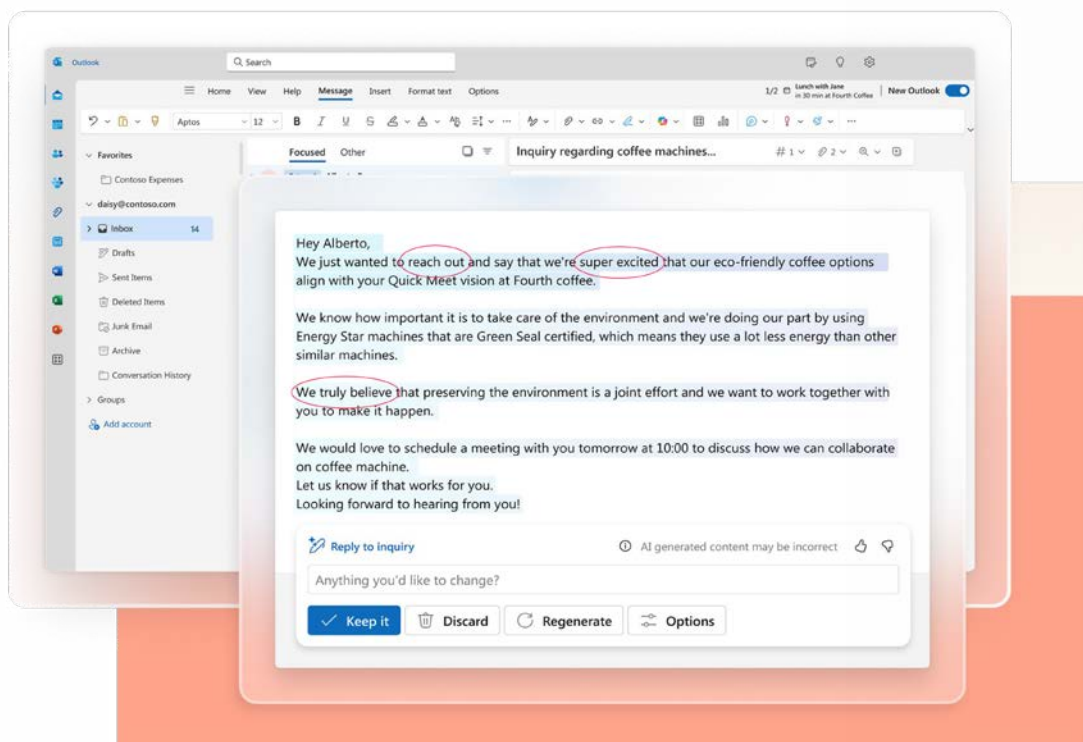
# 3

## Train the puppy

So AI can turn a pretty nice phrase, right? And we all know it can edit things down neatly.

But so often we see AI generating “Fluffy, repetitive content” at the touch of a button. That’s not good enough to win business. And we also know that it often feels cliched: as soon as we see the phrase “In today’s competitive market” in a proposal, we know it was written either by AI or by a really mediocre proposal manager.

There’s a great example on the UK home page for “Copilot for sales”. In a couple of paragraphs, it talks about “reaching out”, being “super-excited”, how “we truly believe”. It’s not quite “I have a dream”, but it’s heading that way.



So you’ve got to train the tool, right? Here’s one approach:





We taught it some **basics of proposal language**. Using plain language, active voice, making it customer-centric, talking about the value to the client etc.

Then our **corporate voice, brand voice and tone**.

Then **client-specific language and tone**.



And there's language localisation, too:



I hate its American voice. It's about teaching it to speak in South African English or UK English. I often have a go, and then still have to use Grammarly. So that's a painful process.



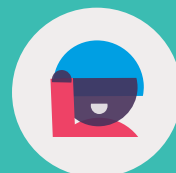
You're going to get better output:



The more you  
know about the  
**customer**



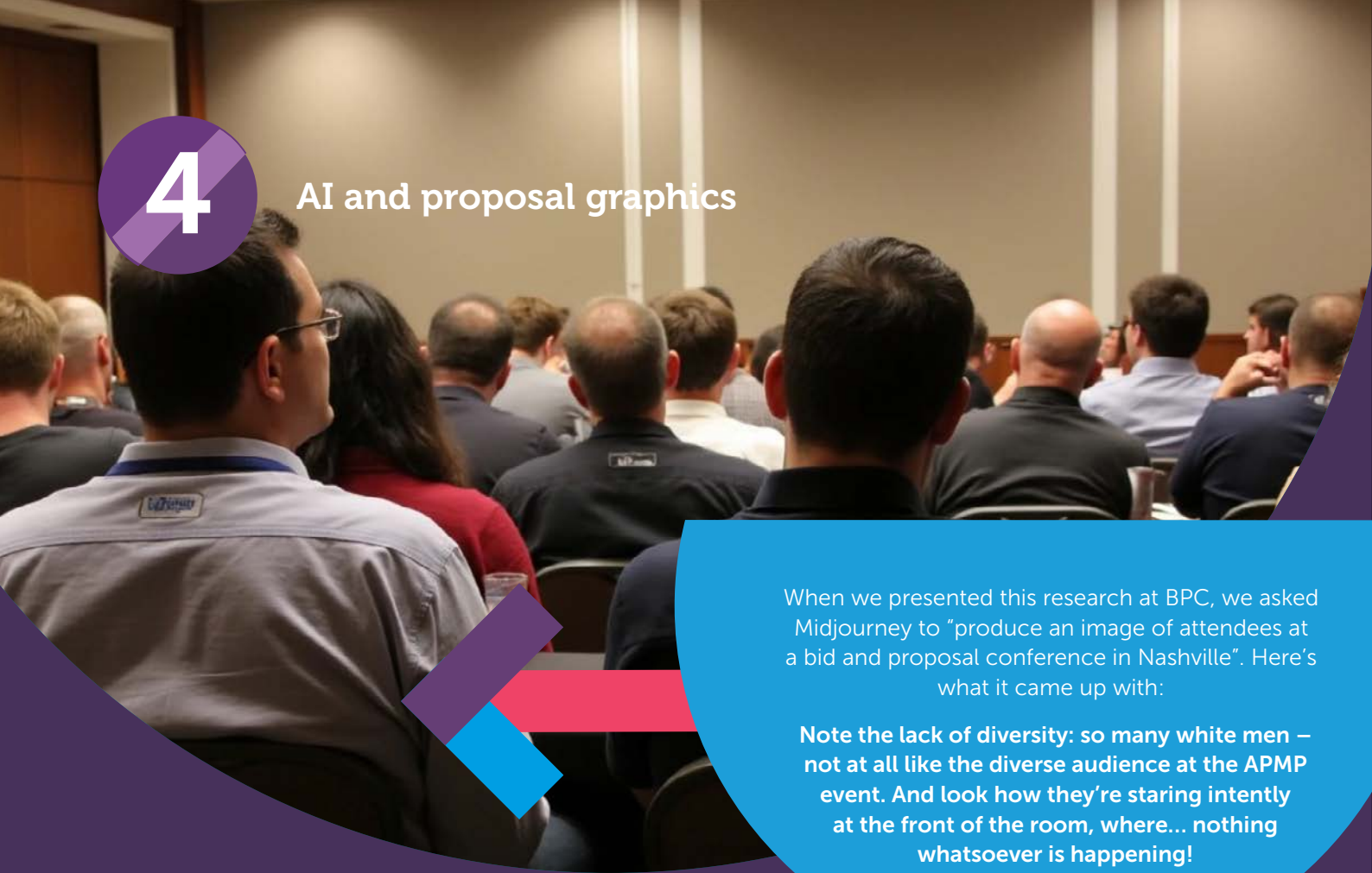
The more you  
know about the  
**competition**



The more that  
you add about  
**yourself**

# 4

## AI and proposal graphics



When we presented this research at BPC, we asked Midjourney to “produce an image of attendees at a bid and proposal conference in Nashville”. Here’s what it came up with:

**Note the lack of diversity: so many white men – not at all like the diverse audience at the APMP event. And look how they’re staring intently at the front of the room, where... nothing whatsoever is happening!**

When we talked to the interviewees about content generation, most of the conversation was around the written word. As a profession over the years, we’ve been very guilty of using the phrase “pre-written content”. As Strategic Proposals’ designers say: what about “pre-designed content”?!

And so we’re seeing the same around AI – literally, only one interviewee talked about graphics.



We’re big Canva fans. It used to take forever to source images. Now we can create them at a click of the finger. But you still have to check they don’t have extra hands and arms, and you’ve got to be careful about the eyes!



Our SP designers had views on that, not surprisingly:



Canva is primarily a template design tool for amateurs. It’s very popular because anyone can pick a template, customise it for their business and produce something that looks respectably professional, without a designer. And it’s reasonably priced. It’s also why everything on your social feed looks similar, because it’s all templated.



So, rather like the written word, AI’s great if you want to produce “OK” designed content quickly. It’s perhaps less so if you want to produce tailored, bespoke, differentiated – winning – content.

# 5

## Step back and plan

Is anyone reading this getting dazzled by the tech? So many options! So many new products launching every month!

The advice from our interviewees was to step back first.



We started where everyone else did. "AI is about. We've got to use it. How can we do it? What's out there."

We moved our position to: hold on, what problem are we trying to solve here? And can AI help us? And then we've got to a much more informed position.



Put another way: "It's really important to think about the problem you're trying to solve."

We particularly liked this, from one organisation: "We split it up into the steps that we were going to trial, which broadly aligned to APMP - but we used our language to make it accessible to our people."

We started at

Then into

Then into

Then into

Then into

Then using it to

Capture

Document  
analysis

Answer  
planning

Writing  
first drafts

Writing  
second  
drafts

Review







## Use cases across the bid lifecycle

There were seven main areas that came up in the conversations in which people have found success. You may be doing all of them, more than them, some of them, none of them. (Have a count!)

- a) Unearthing client insights
- b) Unearthing market context
- c) Understanding the people dimension
- d) Revealing competitive intelligence
- e) To bid, or not to bid?
- f) Document analysis
- g) Reviewing and sharpening content

### a) Unearthing client insights



We use Perplexity alongside LinkedIn Sales Navigator to understand what challenges a company has. We're looking for signals. And that lets us then get people to talk about and elaborate the pain point that they have.



[Click to visit](#)

### b) Unearthing market context



We use AI to search journals to get summaries of key topics that we should build in, or evidence points.



### c) Understanding the people dimension

One of the first AI tools we used routinely in SP was Crystal. It's fascinating. It takes everything someone writes on LinkedIn, looks at their posts and comments, what they share and what they like, and uses it to build a personality profile. It tells you how to engage with them, how to influence them, what language will be most persuasive with them. (Jon, the author of this report, tried it on his wife's LI profile, and for 48 hours she was really impressed with how empathetic he was!)

Here's one of the interviewees:



We use a tool called Humantic that can be used on LinkedIn profiles to determine the personality style of somebody's writing. So are they data-driven? Are they warm and cuddly? And you can then tailor the style of the proposal to that.



[Click to visit](#)

## d) Revealing competitive intelligence

We're also great believers in the power of competitive intelligence (CI) in the bid process – indeed, we published a white paper on it in April 2025. Here's an example from one of the interviews of using "AI for CI":



So our Education team uses ChatGPT very cleverly. They knew [redacted] was going to be a competitor on one of their bids. So they used ChatGPT. How would [redacted] answer this question, or how do [redacted] do this?

And it came back and almost wrote the entire [redacted] bid. Now whether that's accurate or not...? But they went and fact checked a few things against [redacted]'s website and stuff like that, and it read like a legitimate bid that they might have written."



## e) To bid, or not to bid?

There's been a lot of discussion around AI supporting the go / no-go process.



The big thing for me will be from a qualification perspective. If it's this deal involving these regions, these competitors, these products, here's our possibility of winning, and then we can make a very informed, fact-based decision. I know some of the tools have started doing that. I can see that coming in.



But not yet, right? Much as people talk about it, none of our particular sample group was yet really using AI robustly at this critical stage of the process. And when we did a straw poll while presenting this research at BPC Nashville, only a handful of the 250 or so attendees in the room said that they were using AI to drive more insightful, data-driven bid qualification.

In fact, what emerged from the interviews about that AI in those early doors, deal-shaping stages of the process – capture and pre-proposal planning – is that it still feels quite fragmented, maybe immature. Lots of different point solutions. Lots of building bespoke ways of doing it. Everyone sees the value. Nobody's really found one tool that does everything coherently.

## f) Document analysis



We have users who derive the most value from the document analysis function, because it allows them to go through very quickly, digest the spec, bring that into their writing. It also allows people to assimilate information from notes from meetings, from transcripts, so there's a real efficiency. And that also then allows them to ask the customer better questions up front about ambiguities in the spec or things they want to know.



## g) Reviewing and sharpening content

The lack of a clear front-runner in the AI tech stakes at later stages of the process was also clear. Again, interviewees were hungry to use AI – yet not finding a coherent solution to help, and turning to a “make” rather than “buy” approach, perhaps using standard AI tools like Copilot or ChatGPT. We first came across this in the middle of last year when one of our big clients had just built a rudimentary AI-enabled tool for final document reviews.

Here's what a few of the interviewees said:



What's really beneficial is reviewing. So not just reviewing against client criteria, but also getting it to take review comments and adapt sentences directly with the feedback.

Somebody completely impartial runs the draft through the AI with a really good prompt that everybody's agreed on. And then as the author of the response you use your human judgement about what's sensible.

The other nice thing about AI review is if you're really careful and you've got an experienced author using it, it can sometimes suggest added value as it's going. You can take that back out, talk to your solutions person and say: “Could we do this for the client? Could we put in VR simulations for training?” And they go: “Brilliant idea. Let's put that in.”



So, it all feels like people have been taking a very opportunistic approach in areas other than Proposal GenAI, rather than finding anything coherent – yet.

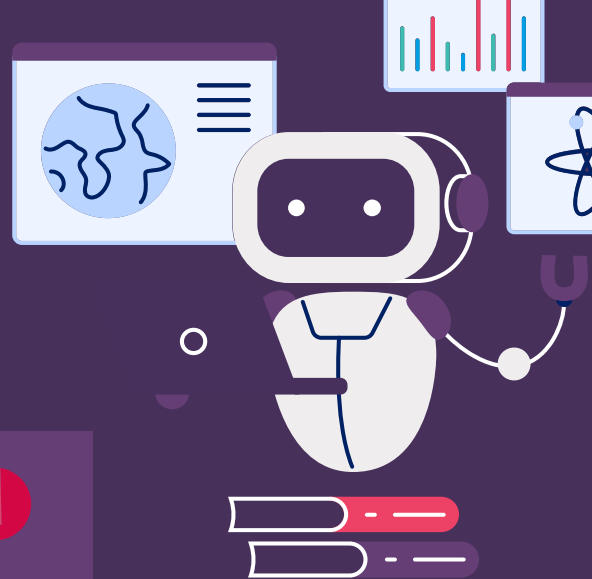
# 7

## Tool selection

Would you agree with this, from one of the interviewees?



There are too many tools - you can get lost.  
You have to put a stake in the ground.



When it comes to tech selection, we've moved on from the early days of AI in proposals, just a couple of years ago. You know the sort of thing – new vendors at conferences talking about the AI use cases for bidding, putting a demo on screen, clicking a few buttons, and generating a page of truly terrible proposal content at the touch of a button. The market's maturing at a remarkable rate.

The tools that interviewees were using for Proposal GenAI fell into four main groups. Here are the ones they mentioned – including a couple that had been tried and discarded:

<b>Traditional knowledge management tools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loopio</li> <li>• Qorus</li> </ul>	<p>People in the first camp tend to rather like that those vendors are building AI on top of years of experience and understanding of the nuances of how software really works in a proposal environment.</p>
<b>Bid-specific AI tools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BidWriteGPT</li> <li>• AutogenAI</li> </ul>	<p>The second group liked the fresher, brand new, "pure AI" approach from organisations who also – to some extent or another - "get bidding".</p>
<b>DIY with small vendors</b>	<p>Some interviewees had chosen to have something built that's bespoke to their needs. A couple of large organisations have seemed surprisingly willing to press on with an AI solution that's effectively being developed by three people in their garden sheds. Because this is new. It's edgy. So don't panic about that – embrace it.</p> <p>The challenge? The larger tool vendors have spent tens of millions building robust products. That's hard to match. And future support may be a concern.</p>
<b>Generic AI tools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copilot</li> <li>• copy.ai</li> <li>• Paid-for ChatGPT</li> <li>• Perplexity</li> </ul>	<p>And the final camp: perhaps, where the corporation is paying for licences for standard AI products. As an example: Copilot is on everyone's desk anyway as part of Office, and bid and proposal teams budgets are too tight to fund anything specific.</p> <p>But as one interviewee put it: "I've asked people to proceed with caution using Copilot. It's going to just use stuff that's the low-hanging fruit. And that's dangerous for high-quality outcomes."</p>

Of course, lots of other tools are available. These are just the ones that came up in conversation in this research. We counted more than 100 AI tools focused on the bid and proposal market in a recent survey for My Proposal Pathway, a service that helps with tool selection.



So, let's explore some experiences that have worked, in case that helps you shape your approach to tool selection...

## Involve your bidding community



We talked to bid people around the business: imagine if we had a tool that did this, and we wrote our list. We then went and did our market research, had some demos, and said: do any of those meet all of these requirements? And they didn't. But we were all dying to take advantage of this.

We did a comparison with a matrix about what each option would deliver us. And we needed users to play around with it a little bit just to get an idea about whether it would suit them or not. Because I was going to get zero adoption if I knew that people just didn't like the way it was laid out or worked.



## Involve your IT colleagues



We're lucky we've got a very collaborative CIO, so she helped us look at some options and products.

One of our main stakeholders is in the IT department. He writes an awful lot of our responses. So there was quite a personal motivation there for him to not have to write so much.



## Get on with it



We could have been a bit slower about deciding, but I'm quite glad we went a reasonable pace because the advice we were given from our IT colleagues is "this is moving really fast and you don't want to get left behind". So, weigh up as much as you can and make the best possible decision reasonably expeditiously.

People in the business aren't going to sit around for us to write a strategy and then develop a tool. People are using it and what we haven't done well enough is helped people to use it safely whilst we come up with our plan.



## Find a vendor you trust

So building your criteria, and not being too swayed by sales pitches, is pretty important. Hardly a week goes by without an invitation appearing to a webinar about some bid-related AI product. Indeed, there are so many that one interviewee reporting feeling almost "bullied".

To give further context, the May 2025 APMP / Responsive benchmarking report into "Winning Business in the Age of AI" listed ten AI use cases and asked whether companies had "already deployed" AI in each of them. No more than one in seven said "yes" to that, in any of the use cases they described.





So don't feel pressured or forced into action. Trusting your chosen supplier is key:



Somebody wrote us an e-mail that said: "When you're ready not to be left behind your competitors, please contact me." And I just thought: oh, that's a bit salty. What's been important was the provider being really honest.



## Who'll be using it?

In many ways, the choice is also largely determined by this question: who do you want using the tool? I found this quote particularly insightful:



If you buy a very expensive piece of AI for a pursuit or proposal professional to use, then you will become the single point of success or failure for all bids within your business. And we wouldn't be able to afford to give all the people who touch bids a licence for an AI solution.

So I didn't want to buy something that meant that every bid would then come through our team, when we've worked so hard to train the business to bid by themselves for the lesser bids. So that influenced us to do "make" decision rather than a "buy" decision. The big thing for me was not being the sole team and point of contact for all bids in our business.



And yet others have gone the other way:



We've had quite a lot of challenging conversations with sales leads, saying: "This is not the platform for you." This is what we're really good at. We're freeing up time for you to go and speak to the customer. That's what you're really good at. Why would we give you a tool?



So it's not just about software, right? There are some big, fundamental decisions that this unearths that need really careful consideration. The big danger, of course, is that as we "democratise content", we risk turning the clock back to the days where the bid and proposal function was regarded merely as "glorified admin" to top and tail the document.



Done wrong, it would take us back to the dark ages, and it would drive the wrong behaviours as well.



So there's a vision thing here. What's the role you need and want to play in helping your organisation to win? As people think about AI, that will cause them to think about the role of the bid and proposal function.



AI will mean that the cards get thrown up in the air and we have the opportunity to influence how they fall down.



## Be prepared to fail

This tech, this market, is so fast-moving that you might not get it right – and it's OK to fail fast, right? After all, the AI we're seeing in 2025 will doubtless feel very dated by 2027. (None of the interviewees discussed agentic AI, for example.)

We loved the observation that "AI is going to be a graveyard of failed projects" – and it's important to know that that's fine! Here's an example:



We dipped our toe in with a product a couple of years ago and it didn't quite land. Our business runs very hot. People are highly utilised, they're working on lots of different things and they had to click between lots of different platforms. And if they didn't get what they wanted very quickly, they then stopped using it. So even though we trained people and got into it, it didn't quite land.



There's a wonderful quote from Ethan Mollick (Professor of Management at Wharton) in his book "Co-Intelligence" which seems apposite:



Assume this is  
the worst AI you  
will ever use.

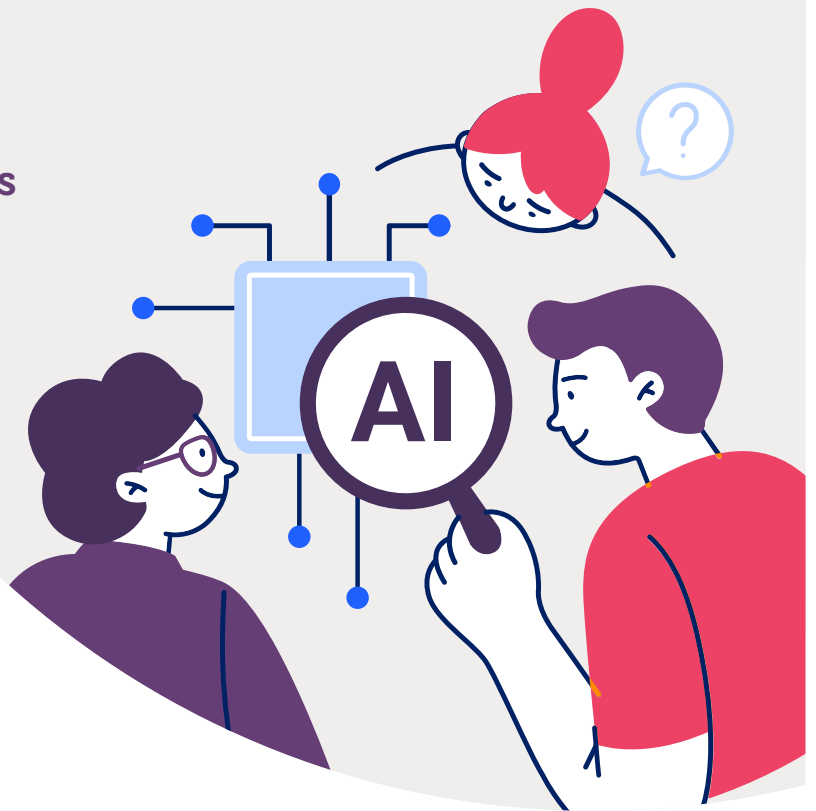
AI

# 8

## Handling concerns

Any change brings risk, right? And some of the challenges with AI seem to be discussed in the media on a regular basis! Let's touch on a few areas that came up in this research.

- a) Hallucinations
- b) Differentiation
- c) Governance
- d) Human intelligence
- e) Bias
- f) Data security
- g) Exit strategy



### (a) Hallucinations

First up, there's the obvious risk of hallucinations. If you believe Copilot, for example, this report's author supports Watford Football Club and used to be in a post-punk band called The Tourists. He's actually a passionate supporter of Liverpool, the English champions, and Annie Lennox would probably be affronted if Jon claimed to have sung her stuff. Especially as he was 12 when the band split up...

And one construction company, for example, was a little surprised when they asked for AI to find testimonials of projects they'd worked on, to be told that they'd built the Great Wall of China!

So, are people handling this? The answer according to the panel is perhaps to keep your AI focused:



We don't get hallucinations and inaccuracies because we've switched the Internet off within our platform. It still makes some assumptions and some leaps, but...



We've started out really narrow. It's been really important for us that it completely and exactly mirrors our bid library and has access to nothing else. So we've switched the Internet off within the platform. If people want to do exploratory internet stuff, they can go and do that outside of it. And then you minimise your risk of hallucinational solutions that can't be delivered.



## (b) Differentiation

Likewise, there's a concern about differentiation:



One of my nagging worries is that if we're all using the same piece of software to respond to the same exam question, then how do we know that we're coming up with different answers?



An interviewee in the IT sector told me a fascinating story. Their sales folks recently submitted a proposal to a university, having used Copilot. During the bid presentation, the customer commented: "Do you realise that a lot of your answers were word-for-word identical to those of the other bidders?" (Indeed, the academics had used the same checking software on the proposals that they do to make sure students aren't cutting corners on their essays!)

Or there was the account director who we interviewed back in September during a benchmarking project. Their bid team hadn't had the capacity to support a particular proposal, and I asked what he'd done.



That's easy. I turned to my new friend Mr Copilot, and he wrote it for me.



And the scary thing is, they won...

More broadly, then:



If everyone uses the same two or three models, they're all going to get the same two or three results, and it's probably going to be scored by AI. So I do think the storytelling element of what we do is going to be really elevated.



As one interviewee put it:



Are people genuinely getting better original responses, or are they instead just driving lots more quantity of mediocre content?



That's exacerbated by the temptation to jump straight to a first draft with AI. If you're following a strategic approach to proposal development, you work out your story and your content plan (or 'storyboard'), and then draft answers that bring that to life. AI jumps straight to that third stage, and so risks generating content that's more tactical – "bottom up" rather than "top down".

## (c) Governance

And that hints at another issue: governance. After all:



A good proposal is one that wins and makes you money.



And what if an AI-generated proposal does win?



How did the contract go?

Well, actually we lost a lot of money on that or it didn't quite go as planned. Or we were 50% over our schedule because we didn't allow for certain things.



So a keen sense of governance still has to be there, right, as has always been the case in a robust bid process? This is about winning good business.

Here's one anecdote from the interviews:



Where it's become dangerous is where we're getting something which is a bit new to us: a market we're not quite in but an adjacent market. And people use it as a way of shortcutting actually understanding what you're talking about.

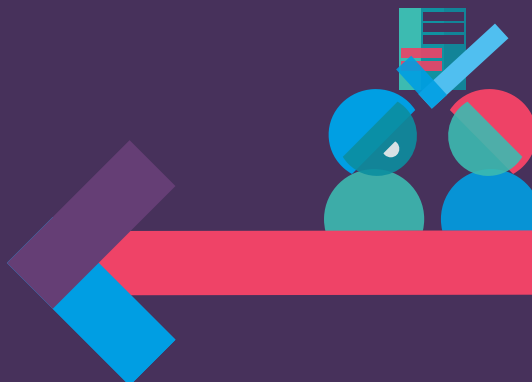
Just to give you an example. We started a bid on [REDACTED] Now we actually do a little bit of [REDACTED] but it's a bit niche. And there was a question about "What's your methodology for [REDACTED]"

You could produce an answer using AI that was coherent to the person in the street in about 20 minutes. And the challenge is: if you're lazy or up against it, just bang it in on the basis it'll pass any internal review and you hope it's OK.



That sense of governance - and risk - also came across as an extremely strong concern for one interviewee in a regulated industry, where compliance and hence traceability of content is key, and one delivering projects in a safety-critical environment.

Zak Hemraj, CEO of Loopio puts it eloquently when he describes the need to always "understand the source of your content".





## (d) Human intelligence

Everything hints at the need for the human in the loop here. As one interviewee put it:




All AI will do is mimic real insights. It's the lazy way out.




Put in a formula:  
AI-generated insights < Real insights

From another interviewee:


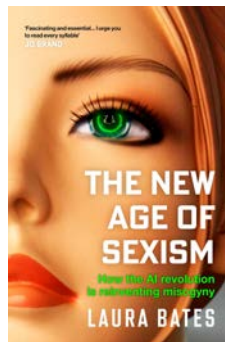


What's really important to the customer won't come across in the RFP documents. So what do we know about the customer from our meetings with them or from our previous projects with them? That's got to be human knowledge and that's where the value will be added.




## (e) Bias


Bias is also a concern. If you're tempted to shrug that off, have a read of Laura Bates' brilliant new book "The New Age of Sexism", published by Simon & Schuster in May 2025:




In 2024, UNESCO carried out a study of popular generative AI tools, including OpenAI's GPT-3.5 and GPT-2 and Meta's Llama 2. It found 'unequivocal evidence of bias against women in content generated'



Here's a tactic for addressing this from one of the interviews:



All large language models are inherently biased, because they've taken data from Reddit and places where people have very specific views on things. It's not something that we've noticed, but I know it's something that we really want to make sure we keep looking for.



So we've tried to train it on everything from our style guide around biases and gendered language.

## (f) Data security

Are you at all worried about where your business-critical information might end up, once it's in an AI model – even if it's in an apparently closed environment? Many are:



People in the IT side of things are still very AI-concerned. They're worried about the idea that what's our intellectual property, our commercially sensitive information, could be out there in the wide world because we've put it into this AI engine.



Sure, it'll never get shared – right? Tell that to authors like SP writer Mark Davies, author of the wonderful novel 'A Table in Berlin', who never dreamt that his copyrighted material would be fed without permission into Meta's LLM to help train their AI.

(As a side thought: if AI writes like Mark, it'll be pretty great stuff! So how could you train your AI only on content drafted brilliantly and beautifully by the very best writers in your team?)



Even if you see this as low risk, there's a great quote from the Harvard Business Review's book "Generative AI": "Low risk is still risk."

And it's not just concerns about your information. It's your clients' information – for example:



We want to create our content and we want to manage where it goes. For UK government, we need to demonstrate it's only ever in the UK. We've needed to really think about data security in a way which makes sense to us and to the customer.

It'd be great if we could look at all these fourteen documents and produce from it a two-page summary that the whole bid team can understand. We're a little bit held back from the moment because UK government's not hugely keen on bidders loading their tender documents into stuff.



And, of course, the same considerations apply in very many other jurisdictions.

## (g) Exit strategy

The tech here is moving so fast that that tool you deploy now probably won't be the one you're using in five years' time. So here's a thought-provoker: you need to think about an exit strategy from the outset.



I asked about like an exit plan. So what if we've been using your software for years? We've put everything into your ecosystem. You're wholly reliant on them. So what do you do then? How do you move everything on?



# 9

## The (elusive) business case



I suspect some readers would be rather envious of one of the biggest organisations in this study, where a bespoke bidding AI came (effectively) free for the bid and proposal function:



We've been looking right across the entire organisation thinking where do we apply innovative and breakthrough technologies. And so we're lucky as a business that the board put aside a chunk of money for innovation pilots, on the basis some are win or some are lose. Which meant we could go and have a conversation with a few people and say let's just suck it and see.



But AI's not free in most instances, right? There's the tech. And then there's the bigger part, the people costs to implement it, train people in it, manage and refine it. To create the right content to feed into it. And in most cases, there's no magic AI money tree.

One contributor focused on the need for AI to have measurable impact on "The jaws of profitability: driving revenue up or cost down."

Or, from another interview:



We'll be able to say we've been really successful because our people are winning more work. And they go home on time. But ultimately it's got to win us more work, otherwise it hasn't achieved anything.



## Driving revenue up - Win more

1

We can clearly and objectively show that **proposal quality** has increased thanks to our use of AI.

2

That's reflected in a measurable **increase in our win rates**.

3

We're also able to chase more qualified deals, now we've freed up some time. And that means we're **winning "more of more"**.

4

It's helping us enter new markets and geographies, and we're **winning new business** there for the first time.

5

So our **revenue and margin have gone up radically**.

Many do see quality improving:



We had a 21% uplift in our scores on a bid to one particular large central government client compared to the previous bid. Can I say it was all down to AI? No, I can't credibly say that. But even if you know, even a few percent was down to AI, that's positive."

On healthcare tenders, five out of five was seen as a "myth score". And then on two recent bids, we ended up with all answers scoring four or five, which is something we'd just not been able to achieve before – although again I can't point it to AI exactly.

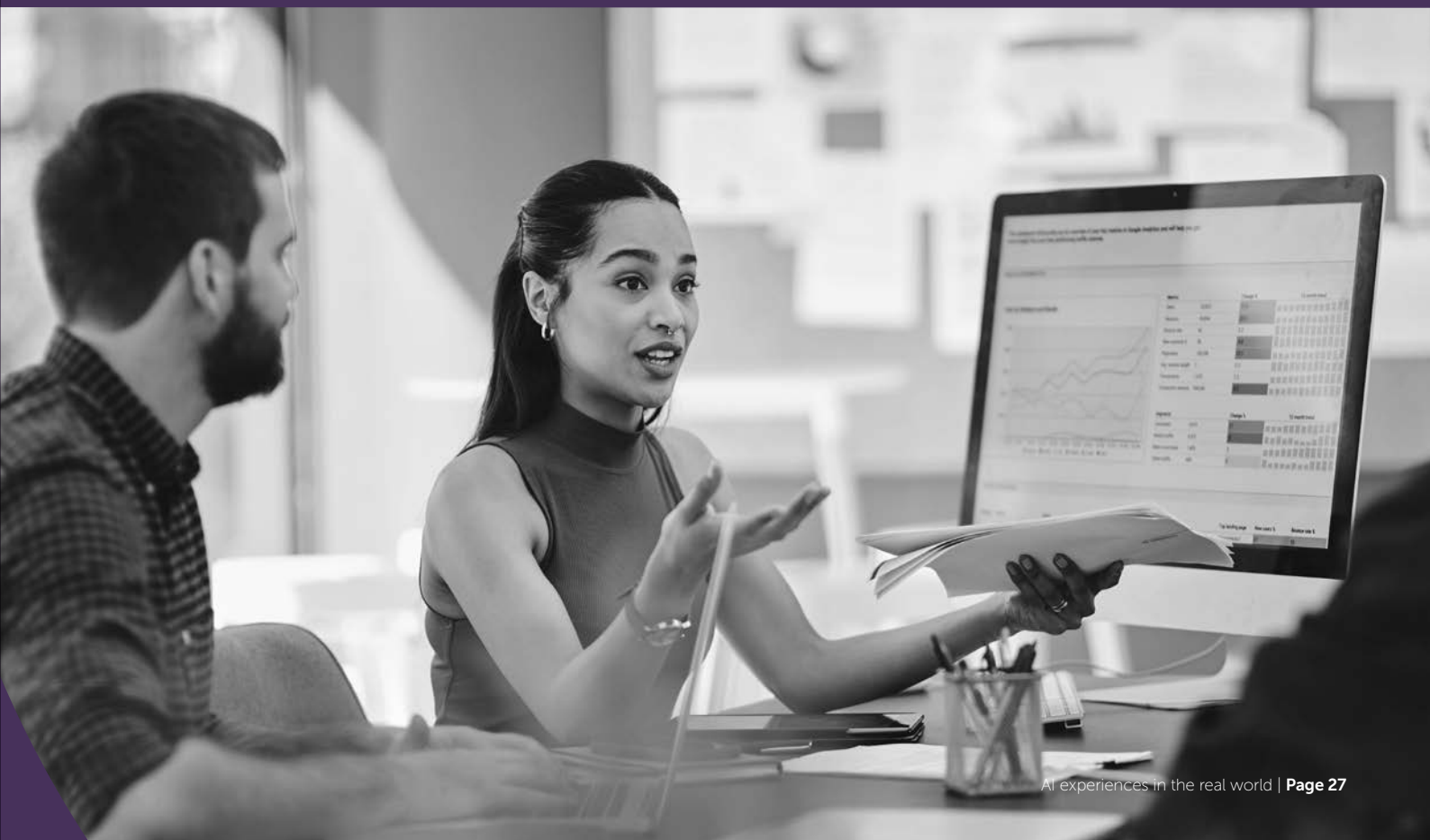
100%, our proposals are better and they are more tailored to the customer. We set this out as our aim at the beginning - to not make people nervous that their jobs were being eaten by AI, but allow them more time to do the things that they felt frustrated they didn't have time to do.

We had a really lovely bit of feedback - and I think this is really testament to what AI is good for. We had a customer say you couldn't have understood our needs better, and I think that's the kind of feedback I want to see at the end of an AI-generated proposal. Not: you were super-compliant.




A snapshot survey during two recent APMP chapter webinars by Ceri Mescall, Managing Director of Strategic Proposals Canada, showed that 80% of attendees were approaching AI with a growth mindset. That's great.

Problem is, what we're hearing from people is anecdotal evidence of improvements: step 1 in the business case model. But, as of yet, nothing more. Is that enough for your C-suite to provide funding? Erm... You're asking for quite a leap of faith on their part.




## Driving cost down – Win more easily


Everything hints at the need for the human in the loop here. As one interviewee put it:



"Don't recruit a new writer", as one AI vendor rather controversially emailed one of our clients in 2023 after spotting a job posting on LinkedIn. "Buy our software instead." (Reader: they chose the writer.)



There are efficiency improvements, for sure:



We can do a hell of a lot more work than we were able to do before. I think it is genuinely saving time and I'd say 15% is a fair estimate.

The vendors' big tagline is you get to first draft 80% quicker. In reality it hasn't worked like that for us. We get to a good draft with more detail in. And then we spend 50% - 60% less time on rewrites.


Or perhaps more pessimistically: "At least we lose faster!"

Here's a model for measuring efficiency improvements that you might find useful, again based on what we heard in the interviews:




So we're seeing time savings. Great. But are they translating to the bottom line via **reduced internal headcount**? Because a 20% time saving probably only translates into a financial saving if... you line up your bid and proposal community and fire one in five of them, right?

And, actually – and thankfully – it's not (yet) been about that.




I haven't had one conversation with a director that's been about losing jobs. They've been more excited about being able to actually use the skills of their people better.


We're not going to grow by cutting a work winning team. It's probably the last thing you want to do, in my opinion.



Medium-term, though? Perhaps that's starting to show in some thinking:



It will be a massive efficiency driver. There's a precursor pullback in hiring now, because most senior execs are like, hold on. If I'm going to get a 30% efficiency uptick in two years, do I need to be hiring all these MBAs and grads?





Tangible benefits so far seem to be more in the other three areas. With apologies to any freelancers reading: savings in **external spend**:



On big bids we have a team 30 - 40 people, but it's a mixture of internal and external. The expectation is that we'll be able to spend less on externals.



Then, reduction in the costs associated with **staff turnover** – such as recruitment and training up new colleagues:



Our attrition rates in the writing function this year have gone down from last year. I am seeing people happier. Because people don't have to do donkey work all day, every day, they're a bit less frustrated and there's more job satisfaction."



And then here's perhaps the big one: SME time and cost - especially in organisations where your SMEs are charging their time out to clients in "the day job" when they're not working with you on bids.



The goal's to reduce the cost of bidding within each of our business units and hubs. If we could shave off 5% of that globally, that's quite a big number - and that more than justifies the investment.

And it's a double hit. It's saving money, but then putting staff back onto clients' work actually is a bit of a double bubble, which is hugely beneficial."



But translating all these improvements into a coherent model with tangible, financial benefits? We're still on a wing and a prayer. Perhaps that explains this comment, about the AI software vendors:



We've seen them now starting to reframe themselves so much as yes, they're an AI tool which helps you with better bid writing. But they're moving now into "this is a tool to manage your bid environment in the round", and a bid management bid platform.



And hence the thought that underpins the title of this section – that the business case for deploying AI for bids and proposals seems logically overwhelming, but the reality to date is that it's somewhat elusive when it comes to specific return on investment.

# 10

## A change management programme

Here's a great story:



I had someone yesterday - a senior person in the business - and she was like, "I want to talk to you about AI. Someone showed it me: it's amazing. Absolutely incredible. I put the question in and it's written the answer for me."

**And I asked:** "but do you know it's accurate just because it reads well? Is it right?" And she just deflated.



As another interviewee said:



Managing expectations is key. Lots of non-bid people who work on bids think that AI will be the holy grail and will save them from having to work on a bid ever again. It's simply not the case!!



That was summarised rather like this:



The challenge is it's not an answer to everything yet, and there's a mindset that it is.



As a result, when thinking about AI deployment, we need to:



Run it as a change management exercise.



That takes effort:



We underestimated how much time and effort it would take to get a trial up and running. I spent maybe three days a week on top of my job doing it, and then it was sucking up two days a week of our knowledge manager's time.



Involving people early and throughout seems to have paid off as a key tactic:



This is a subject that's quite emotionally charged for people. So we decided to look at a specific area of the bid process – bid writing – and we said our scope will go no further. What are the challenges and problems that we have in bid writing? We looked with my team at where they have challenges. I think that was the most important part: that this was going to be all for them.

I've got people that work in wildly different ways. And I didn't want to squash their creativity. So choosing a platform that just allowed everybody to be their weird, unusual self was really important.

They're really excited by it, I think, because they're involved in it. Because we've explained the benefits and that we're not just grabbing at something here for the sake of doing it.



But patience is a virtue:



We had a couple of wobbles at the beginning, I'll be honest, but now it's overwhelmingly positive. We gave it to nine experienced bid writers initially as part of a six-month proof of concept and we had some very specific criteria against which we could measure success. And now we've got it with everybody who is either a bid writer or a bid manager.

I think the initial adoption phase was a little bit challenging. Like anything change-related, getting people to look at a new thing and build it into their day-to-day was really mixed.

We had some people who were really enthusiastic about it. But then we've also got a type of person – and there's nothing wrong with this – who said: "This is not how I operate." So they won't carry on and they'll stop.

So we had to do a lot of individual sessions and training and coaching. We got a whole kind of comms plan about how we use the platform.



And the implementation process isn't a one-off exercise:



We do regular drop-in sessions.

This is a two- or three-year programme to get to fundamentally changing what's happening.



And by then...



Our firm will become more comfortable with AI, and our profession will become more comfortable with AI, and therefore bid people being comfortable with AI won't seem like "you weirdos doing this clever techy stuff that I read about in the papers."



# 11

## An inflexion point for proposal careers

If you've read this far: are you excited by AI in bids and proposals? It seems that the initial nervousness of two years ago – when new software vendors started popping up at conferences suggesting they were going to replace all of our jobs and proclaiming the death-knell of our profession – has given way to a much more upbeat view.



My strong view is that it will change our profession for the better. You'll be found out pretty quickly if you haven't understood the principles of what makes a good bid. You're just going to get the same cr\*p bids faster.

Good proposal people will be able to add much more value because they're not doing stuff in the weeds.

It will change behaviour. It will create new jobs. It will remove others and as with anything, it's about adapting.

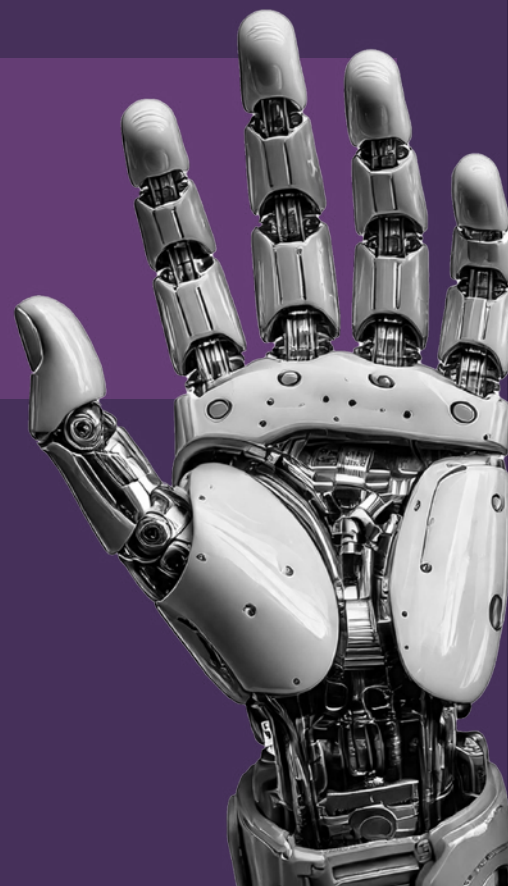
I actually think it will make the job 100 times better. A lot of the little things that are the annoying parts of your job will go away. It'll be like having an assistant. So I think it will make the role more enjoyable. And I also think it will make the role more important.



But there are those who are worried about it. I think it's important that we honour that, right? That we don't leave people behind, and we put plans in place to think about the wellbeing of those who do feel daunted. That creates a leadership challenge for those in managerial roles:



The problem with not adopting AI when your colleague next to you is is that it puts you in a very difficult position. So I would always counsel people: don't let yourself be that person because we don't want you to get left behind. That's the reality of teams where half are adopting it and half aren't.





And it was uplifting to see perspectives on inclusivity emerging from the interviews:



Bidding is a tough gig: people have a love-hate relationship with it. I think it will help with that – make it more manageable, and make it more attractive to the younger generation of bid professionals.

There's a really exciting opportunity with AI in bidding to make it a much more accessible career. I'm really fortunate that I've got a home situation where I've been able to do long hours and push my career forward by doing lots of bid work, but I think that's not a great space for us to be in. Wouldn't it be a great place if we could make bidding more accessible to more different people who have different circumstances?



# 12

## Final thoughts

Two final quotes from the interviews:



AI is just a tool. It's actually what you wrap around it that matters. And it's highly unlikely you're going to be successful if you don't address and change what you've wrapped around it.

I think back to when I started working in a factory, there were two computers in the entire factory. Now the factory's been knocked down. And I think that's the interesting thing. How do you restructure the way you do bidding and the skills you need to win business?



Be curious, ask a bunch of questions. Explore things. Learn. Realise it's moving at pace. And as soon as you start doing that, you build a groundswell of enthusiasm and people will come with you if you want to do new things and fun things.







Sir Terry Pratchett once commented:

The phrase “may you live in interesting times” is the lowest in a trilogy of curses that continue “may you come to the attention of those in authority” and finish with “may the gods give you everything you ask for.”

The arrival of AI into the world of bids and proposals has certainly made for “interesting times”.

We’d like to hope that this research – not a small undertaking! – contains some ideas and tactics from your peers that will help you think through how you’re going to take advantage of the opportunities it brings, and gain buy-in from “those in authority”.

As to whether they’ll “give you everything you ask for”... As we’ve seen, the business case is promising but, as yet, largely unproven. Shall we check back in a year’s time and see how we’re all doing?

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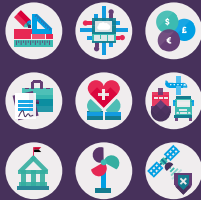


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