

E-Commerce IS&M - Module Assessment

Format: Request For Proposal (RFP)

Request for Proposal (RFP) is an invitation document. The purpose of the RFP is to invite proposals in order to survey vendors and compare competitive bids on products and services.

The RFP may vary somewhat across industries but it is part of a standard process. Writing an RFP demands knowledge and analytical skills, as well as imagination in adapting general good practice to a specific context.

Sometimes the client will not have any idea what they want, or need. Alternatively the client might have a clear vision but not know what is possible. The client might be over confident and seduced by the latest technology, or wary of even established technology. Meanwhile, as ever, software vendors tend to oversell their products with claims that are really pie in the sky! An experienced e-commerce consultant will have knowledge of the whole picture including benefits and barriers to e-commerce, e-commerce models and trends, as well as risks and integration issues.

A competent RFP should attract viable proposals. No proposal will be perfect; the e-commerce world is about balancing tradeoffs, identifying priorities and managing constraints. The RFP should attract proposals that will address specific questions relating to a specific business, and **elicit differences among competing companies**. At the same time the RFP should be the basis for a working relationship through a sometimes complicated and risky development process.

Writing an RFP for an e-commerce project is demanding. It is difficult to specify the details and possibilities of e-commerce before you have a good idea of what you need and how it is all going to come together. Frequently companies use an e-commerce consultant to help visualize and define what their projects should include and help to produce the RFP.

What do I do?

You have been approached by a business (of your choice) to act as an external consultant to research and write an RFP for an e-business critical system incorporating a consumer e-shop front-end. As part of your assignment, you are required to:

1. Produce a first draft of the RFP:
 - a) Include the major requirements for the system including the target audience, business rationale, system architecture and functionality.
 - b) Include screen shots from a prototype developed using the Birkbeck E-Mall to demonstrate the key features of the proposed system.
2. Produce a checklist for the next client meeting that will focus on identifying risks and integration issues that need to be incorporated in the second draft of the RFP.

Consultants work on tight deadlines. So that you will be encouraged to brevity, limit your submission to a maximum of 6 A4 sides *excluding* screen shots from the prototype e-commerce site.

To limit the amount of work you need to do, you may refer to the following as items that need to be addressed with your client but please DO NOT tackle:

- Detailed costing of the project.
- Detailed physical technical specification of hardware and software.
- Graphic design of the front end.

Your RFP should include; overview and context information about the business, and should be fit for purpose.

What is 'Fit for Purpose'?

The aim in writing a RFP is to ensure that the developers:

1. Tell you how they will meet the requirements that you specify in the RFP.
2. Show they understand all the issues and questions you raise, and explain how each will be addressed.

Notes

Suitable for comparison

Before you create your RFP, take time to think of how you plan to evaluate the responses. Specify how proposals will be arranged so that they can be compared easily.

Design of questions

Think hard about how you will get truthful, accurate and rich responses. Question types should include both "Yes/No" type responses as well as open-ended text questions, and request for evidence. You may also ask for schematic or diagrammatic representations.

Schedule and Relationship Issues

Consider including a schedule for the proposal and development process. The RFP should include details of how the company will relate to the development company during the development process.

Confidentiality

Many development companies use freelance and part-time help. Consider mentioning that the RFP is a private, copyright document that may not be shown to others.