

Tools for quoting and proposals

Automating client proposals, quotes and engagement letters can be crucial to preventing scope creep from occurring. Here's what you need to know



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Rules of engagement

You take on a client and you undertake work for them. Over time, they begin to ask you for new things and you do them. Those things eventually build up and the role you perform has changed or expanded significantly, but the amount you are billing them has not. This is a common problem that proposal and quoting tools seek to address, and they can provide far wider benefits, too, especially around pricing.

1. Consistency

“One of the key things you should use proposals and quoting software for is consistency,” explains AAT licensed member and CompleteHQ founder Andy Sullivan. “This ensures you’re using the same pricing range for similar services for all clients. You should be open, honest and transparent about your pricing. If you have two like-for-like businesses, which for all intents and purposes are the same, they should pay the same price — unless they want very different services.”

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2. Value

Often proposal and quoting software offers a detailed breakdown of the price of services, which allows clients to see how the cost is apportioned, and this often helps users understand their value. Pamela Phillips, co-founder and managing director of de Jong Phillips, explains this process helped improve the firm’s relationship with its clients.



“Before we started using the software, we hadn’t really defined what a ‘set of accounts’ meant, and when we looked at it, we were doing more than a set of accounts,” she says. “We were finishing off incomplete bookkeeping, we were identifying issues with credit control and the number of debtor days. Adopting proposals and quoting software has helped us start thinking about what we’re actually delivering for our clients, the value it has and how we should be pricing for it.”

3. Customisation

While some may see customisation of proposals and the visuals as a secondary consideration, taking advantage of it can make a major difference, Sullivan says.

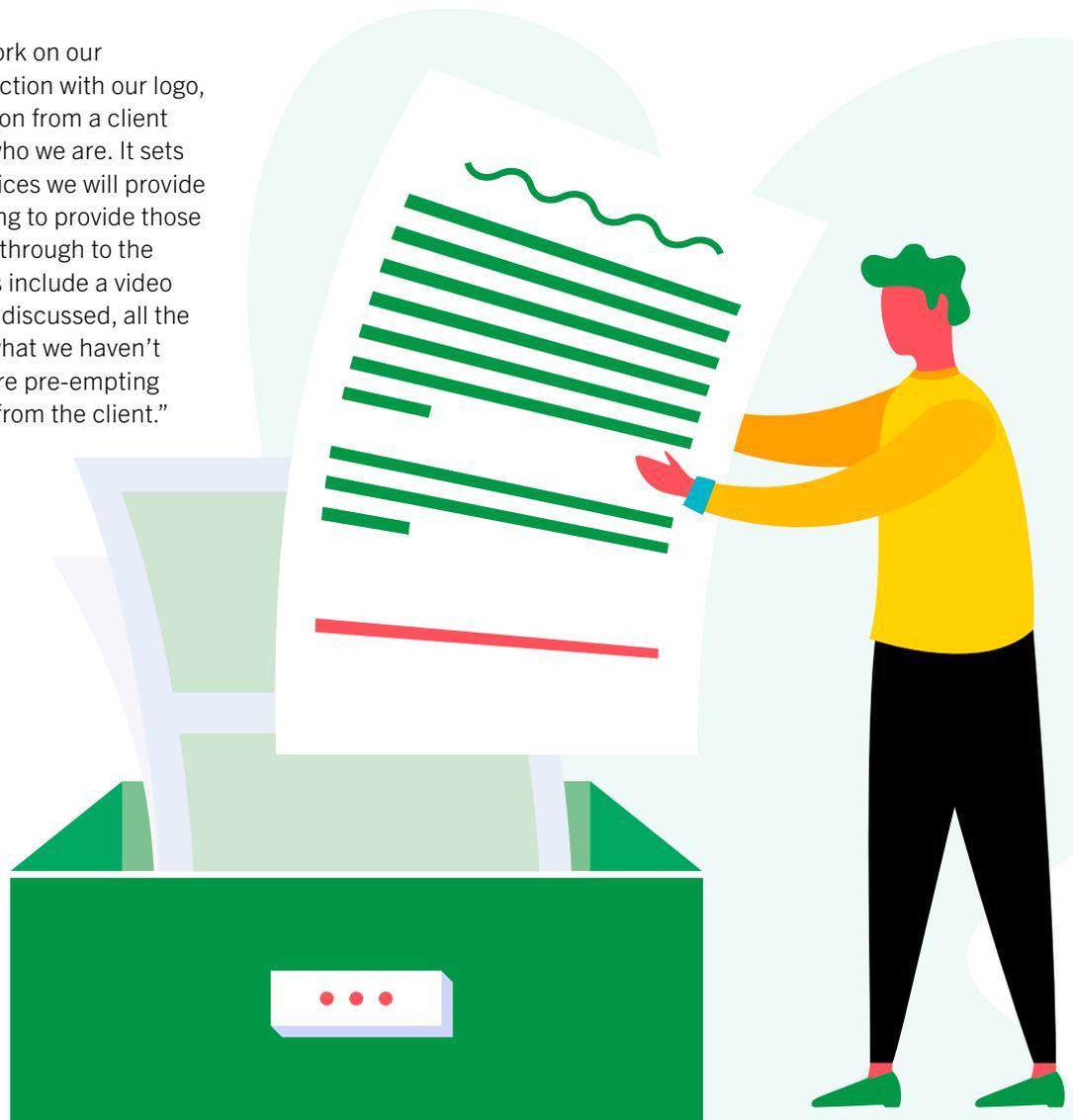
“We do quite a lot of design work on our proposals. We have an introduction with our logo, outlining who it’s for, a quotation from a client and some information about who we are. It sets the scene and details the services we will provide and the app stack we’ll be using to provide those services. The proposal comes through to the client in an email, and I always include a video just to recap everything we’ve discussed, all the services we’ve included and what we haven’t included. It saves time, as we’re pre-empting questions that might come in from the client.”

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4. Protection

Ultimately, going through proposals, quoting and generating engagement letters protects the accountant.

“All of this is just to provide yourself with some protection,” says Sullivan. “You don’t want to be in a position where you’re exposed to any potential costs due to not doing things properly. We will generate a standard engagement letter, detailing services and key dates. All of this is agreed in advance with the client, so if they come back and say ‘you told us we would get our payroll six days before payday’, and they had actually agreed four days, it’s clear that there is a difference in scope there.”



For your app stack

Having the right proposal and quoting tools can help a business maximise its value. Here are some of the most widely-used options on the market



GoProposal

GoProposal is one of the most popular options on the market, automatically producing proposals, engagement letters, renewals and invoices – all fully customisable to allow for branding and personalisation.

Requirements: QuickBooks Online, Xero

Price: From £60 per month



Practice Ignition

Practice Ignition automates client engagement letters and has in-built invoicing and payment processing. Like GoProposal, it allows users to create bespoke proposals and detailed pricing for clients, which are consistent across your client base.

Requirements: QuickBooks Online, Xero

Price: From £65 per month



Proposify

Proposify allows users to streamline their proposal process by offering proposal templates that include your branding, metrics for client performance and integrations with a wide range of other apps.

Requirements: Freshbooks, QuickBooks Online, Xero

Price: From \$49 (£35) per user per month



Quotient

Quotient is an online quoting tool that includes templates, a customer dashboard and customer messaging service. Services can be marked as recommended and optional extras, while proposals can be accepted or declined online.

Requirements: QuickBooks Online, Xero

Price: £19.99 per month for individuals, £35 per month for businesses

Clarity and details persuade clients to pay more

For Pamela Phillips and her firm, de Jong Phillips, adopting proposal and quoting software has been crucial for improving client relationships and boosting fee income from existing clients.

That's because their software itemises the work they undertake for clients in a granular way, which helps show clients where their fee goes, Phillips explains.

"The biggest benefit for us is transparent, consistent pricing," she says. "We can generate proposals quickly and anyone in the team can do it. Clients compliment us on it a lot and it gets the

relationship with them off to a good start, because they can see where it all comes from."

That, in turn, has seen clients willing to pay more, as they have a greater understanding of the value of the work undertaken, Phillips notes. But, more than that, it has helped Phillips and her colleagues understand that, too, and allowed them to change their approach.

"It got us thinking differently about the value we're giving our clients. It hasn't solved everything, but it got us into the right way of thinking about what we're delivering to our clients. It helped us see if we were giving services away for free, whether we should be charging for it, and, if we should, what that price should be."

Using the software also gives de Jong Phillips the chance to walk the walk when it comes to showcasing its technological credentials, Phillips says.

"As a firm, we talk a lot about technology and one of the things we do for clients is roll technology out to their businesses across their finance functions and more broadly. If the very first experience they have with us is that we're doing what we say we're doing, it gives them that confidence that we do understand technology, and can streamline processes and improve the customer experience."



Tips to get started

1. Know your value

When you don't clearly define the parameters of your work for clients, you can easily lose income through performing tasks ad hoc and for free. Make sure you know how much your services are worth and keep track of the work you perform.

2. Show your value

Without producing thorough proposals, it's very easy to provide services for free or for clients' expectations to be out of kilter with what you can provide. Setting it out in detail from the outset and regularly revisiting it can help demonstrate your value.

3. Be consistent

Pricing consistently for your services is vital, both for your income and forecasting ahead, but also for your relationship with clients. Proposals and quoting software can go a long way to ensuring you do this correctly.



Any questions?

We hope you've enjoyed our overview of proposal and quoting tools. Please get in touch if you have any questions or feedback.

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