

Perfect Pitch

*How To Get Your Business
Proposals Heard And Approved*



STUART CROSS



Stuart Cross of Morgan Cross Consulting helps some of the world's top companies find new ways to drive substantial, profitable growth. His clients include Alliance Boots, Avon and Groupe Aeroplan.

We know that great results don't just happen. That is why lasting performance improvement at our clients is how we measure our own success.

Visit www.morgancross.co.uk to find out more about Stuart Cross and Morgan Cross Consulting.

Contact Information

Stuart Cross
Director, Morgan Cross Consulting
PO Box 9210
Newark-on-Trent
Nottinghamshire
United Kingdom
NG24 9EG

01636-526111

stuart@morgancross.co.uk

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Increasing Your Chances Of Obtaining Approval

It is not sensible to give a single pro-forma document for a business proposal, and I am not offering you one in this document. There are simply too many different types of proposal, different types of emphasis required, and different decision-maker needs and preferences for this to make sense.

However, you can stack the cards in your favour by following a simple structure for your proposal.

The five elements to the proposal I am sharing enable you to tell a story to your audience. Coupled with the more detailed checklist attached in this briefing, my approach gives you a much better chance of getting your ideas heard and approved.

Before I share the structure with you, there are some important factors for you to consider:

1. **Dump Powerpoint®.** Do not start your proposal by immediately opening up your Powerpoint or similar application! That will merely serve to confuse you and give you a sense of control that does not match reality. You may eventually wish to create a presentation for your proposal, but this should be the last, not the first thing, that you should do.
2. **Think of your proposal as a story.** People relate to stories far more than they relate to facts. The structure I am sharing with you provides the basis of your story, but think through the situation and why it's relevant to your decision-maker, and consider the provocative questions that your proposal is seeking to answer.
3. **Use an inductive approach.** There are two basic ways to writing the proposal. One is deductive, and involves sharing all the salient facts up-front before providing your conclusion and recommendations at the end of the report. The problem with this approach is that it creates too much hard work for the decision-maker. Like a detective story, they need to piece together all the clues before they can understand what it is you want to do. Instead, use an inductive approach and set out your proposal up-front and then support with compelling reasons to believe.

4. **Develop a trusting relationship with your decision-maker.** It's not just your idea that counts when it comes down to the final decision. Your track record and your relationship with the decision-maker are also vitally important. Spend time getting to know the decision-maker, understand their needs, preferences and their objectives, and seek to create a trusting relationship of peers.
5. **Follow-up.** Do not think of your pitch as some sort of cup final or one-off event. Instead, think of it as part of an ongoing conversation. That way you will feel free to follow-up with your decision-maker, get feedback and have the opportunity to deal with any concerns. Even if your proposal is rejected does not mean that you should give up. Entrepreneurs often have to make 20, 30 or more pitches to potential funders before receiving the finance they are after. Feedback from each of these "failed" proposals enables the entrepreneur to change the pitch, the idea and their relationship with the decision maker until the proposal is sufficiently compelling.

The Five Elements To A Successful Proposal

Here are the five key statements you should make in your pitch. You can then build the proposal around these headings, enabling you to create a story that best suits your situation. The appendix then includes a checklist for each section so that you can ensure you have all the key angles covered.

Good luck!

1. We have a big idea that meets your objectives.

By starting with your decision-maker's objectives you are demonstrating that you understand what's important to them and that your idea will help them become more successful. You can then gain more interest by showing that your idea is not only relevant but is big enough to have a major impact.

2. The idea is compelling and credible.

The second stage is to flesh out the idea, demonstrate the size of the prize and support it with relevant and compelling reasons to believe. These may be customer, financial or operational insights that give confidence that the idea is built on firm foundations.

Highlighting and briefly reviewing other alternative solutions that you have considered demonstrates that you have been transparent and thorough in your approach.

3. We know how to make it happen.

In stage 3 you will show that you know how you will take the idea forward and what will happen next. Emphasising the idea's technical and operational feasibility will settle concerns many decision-makers have, as will showing that it will fit with your organisation's culture and capabilities.

4. We can manage the downside risks.

All new ventures have risks. Don't ignore them but tackle them head on. State what the risks are, what you will do to minimise them occurring and what you will do should the worst case happen. The key here is to be as open and objective as possible.

5. This is what we need from you.

Be specific in what you are asking from your decision-maker. Is it money, is it time, is it key people or some combination of all three? The more specific you are with your request, the better the chance you have of obtaining a clear decision. At this point you should also highlight how you will stay in touch with the decision maker and when you will seek to come back to update them.

See overleaf, for more details on the structure of the proposal.

Appendix: Proposal Checklist

We have a big idea that meets your key objectives	
1.I have demonstrated a clear understanding of the decision maker's wider objectives	
2.I have recognised the performance improvement required to meet these goals	
3.I can show that the idea will make a meaningful contribution to these goals	
The idea is compelling and credible	
4.I have set out how the idea will offer dramatic and lasting benefits, and deliver a strong ROI	
5.I have supported the idea with a pithy set of grounded financial, customer and operational insights	
6.I have identified, evaluated and discounted other alternative solutions	
We know how to make it happen	
7.I have set out how the idea is both technically and operationally feasible	
8.I have demonstrated how the idea fits with our internal organisation and capabilities	
9.I have shown how we can sustain the solution's benefits over the next few years	
We can manage the downside risks	
10.We can manage the up-front investment and can avoid funding everything immediately	
11.We will develop low-cost prototypes, trials and pilots before full implementation	
12.I have set out objective performance criteria, and if we fail to hit them we should not implement	
This is what we need from you	
13.I have clarified what decision I am after and what will happen as a result of a "yes" answer	
14.I have specified when we will come back to the decision maker with an update on progress	
15.I have set out the ongoing support and leadership we need to turn this idea into ongoing success	