

Pick a Vendor, Any Vendor

Question:

I am managing a large project, and I need to find a vendor to provide us with the hardware we need to get our project completed. My idea was to open the phone book, close my eyes, and use whichever company my finger lands on. Unfortunately, my organization has requested that I use some sort of process to find a vendor. I am at a complete loss here – please help me Samoht!

Brad

Answer:

Brad,

I am personally a big fan of the “Point and Choose” method. Are you sure your organization does not find this acceptable? Perhaps you didn’t explain it correctly. It is quick and efficient.

If you need to come up with a different method, I will describe a process that will make your managers happy. .

Step One – Gather and Rank Business Needs

The first step in my process for selecting a vendor is also the most fun – figure out exactly what you hope to receive from the vendor, and make a list. For example, are you looking for a vendor who you would like to hang out with? Maybe you would like to find a vendor who will woo you with box seats to see your favorite football team, or one who will provide you with a “monetary donation” if they are chosen. Don’t limit yourself when you are creating this list – it stifles the business process!

After you have created the list of everything you want from a vendor, rank them all on a high/medium/low scale based on how important they are. For instance, maybe you can live without a vendor who will let you use their lake house for the weekend. (You’re more of an ocean person, aren’t you Brad? I can tell these things.) You could rank this requirement as “low.” However, perhaps you would like the vendor to meet with you 2-3 times a week over a lunch of steak and lobster tail (on their company’s dime, of course). It would be hard to live without something so simple, so you would probably want to rank this requirement as “high.”

Step Two – Create Vendor Long List

Next, you will want to make a list of any vendor that might be able to meet your needs. Think about all of the possible places you could find qualified vendors. Do an internet search on “computer” and write down every company that comes up (don’t leave anyone out!). Read magazines and newspapers and write down the name of every company you see mentioned. Write down the names of friends and family members that you would like to hang out with during work hours. Don’t worry if the vendors on your list don’t seem “qualified” - this is the long list! At this point, you don’t want to rule anyone out.

Step Three – Create Vendor Short List

Now that you have an exhaustive list, you have to whittle your list down. Immediately remove companies that you know you will not select. For example, perhaps their company name is too long or difficult to spell – you don't want to be dealing with that throughout your project! Maybe they have a logo that you don't like. You could also cut out all companies that begin with a consonant. The remaining companies make up your short list.

You are ready to send out your Request for Proposal (RFP) to these companies.

Step Four – Evaluate Vendor Short List

Once you receive responses to your RFP, you can begin figuring out who will best meet your needs. Who is willing to go above and beyond to make you happy? Have any of the vendors mentioned steak and lobster tail? Has anyone given you an indication that they would be willing to let you use their corporate jet? Does one of the vendors have bad breath? Create a ranked list of the vendors from best to worst.

Step Five – Make Final Selection and Negotiate Contract

Now that you have a ranked list, you need to choose which vendor you would like to use. At this point, you could choose the vendor that you ranked first in your list. However, if you are anything like me, you are probably tired of dealing with this and no longer interested in steak and lobster tail lunches with vendors (all they want to talk about is business anyway – blah, blah, blah). Now is the time to implement the “Point and Choose” method. Just put the list in front of you, close, your eyes, and point! Now you have your vendor.