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Makers of the Award-Winning Cascade Server content management software

Advice from a Vendor when creating your RFP

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There was an interesting blog post on [CMS Watch](#) yesterday, which offers [suggestions for writing a Content Management RFP \(Request for Proposal\)](#). From the vendor prospective, I agree with what Tony Byrne says about not using buzzwords like “Integrate,” “Intuitive,” “Robust,” and “Compliant,” to avoid giving real information, and that How a CMS accomplishes certain tasks really is the biggest differentiator.

There are things you can do as a buyer, however, that can help us out as vendors, and in turn, help you get the information you really need to make your decision.

- Organization is key. The more organized your RFP is, the easier it is to read and respond to. RFPs that ask and then re-ask the same question in different sections are very frustrating and may lead to questions not being thoroughly answered.
- A vendor “summit” conference call is rarely productive. I realize these calls are supposed to benefit us as vendors – giving us a chance to ask for clarification on the RFP before submitting our response. The problem is, most vendors have not yet reviewed your RFP, since the due date is typically weeks away. So questions often get asked just for the sake of being asked. I find it easier if questions are allowed to be submitted by a certain date, and then after that date, all of the questions and answers are simply e-mailed back out to vendors.
- If you want a specific vendor to respond to your RFP, contact them BEFORE the RFP is released. We receive a huge number of RFPs, making it nearly impossible to answer every one that we receive. If you have time, verbally contact the vendor, and set up a demo. This shows that you have genuine interest, which means they’re more likely to respond.
- If time permits, preclude your RFP with a more simplified Request For Information. An RFI will allow you to sift quickly through a larger number of potential vendors. You can then specifically invite the closest matches to respond to your RFP. Typical RFIs are a couple of pages long and identify the main requirements.

The best thing to remember is that, even though we’re vendors, we’re still human. The organizations that take the time to put together a well-organized and well-researched

RFP will get the most responses. And organizations that know how to ask good questions will get the most meaningful responses.

Some other ideas that might be helpful:

- Tell us what format you want your responses in. We try to follow the original format as much as possible with our responses, but we're happy to comply with any specific requests you have— even certain colors, fonts, and styles, if it makes wading through those responses easier.
- Ask for a table of contents. This ensures that the vendors that are responding will take a few moments to think about their own organization – and that no one forgets to include page numbers!
- Ask for screen shots. If you are going to share the responses with co-workers, this may be their first (and only) exposure to seeing the CMS and its UI.
- Don't ask questions that can be answered Yes or No. Instead of asking "Does the CMS...?" ask "How does the CMS...?" I have to admit, these questions are a little harder on us vendors, but it also indicates to us that you are doing your research – which translates into a happy customer.
- If you are looking for suggestions on what to include on your RFP, vendors are always willing to provide you suggestions (why wouldn't we?) J. Have a look at the Functionality Checklist on pages 18-23 of our [Buyer's Guide](#) for ideas.

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