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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Strategic Lead Generation and Competitive Positioning for Bid Writing Consultancy Firms [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

Hajar Fatorachian , Ben Mitchell, Kate Smith , Filip Kisely, Cech Natalie, Maisey Jones, Ellie Pattison

Leeds Beckett University Business School, Leeds, England, UK

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Abstract

Background

The consultancy industry, valued at £18.6 billion, faces evolving challenges and opportunities in the post-COVID era. Consultancy and bid writing firms play a critical role in helping businesses secure contracts and funding, particularly through the preparation of Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) and Invitations to Tender (ITTs). Despite the importance of bid writing, there is limited literature on how it can be leveraged for lead generation and business growth.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach was employed in this study, combining qualitative and quantitative research. Secondary research involved the review of existing literature and data from government databases, internal company records, and published reports. Primary research included surveys and semi-structured interviews with professionals from the Facilities Management and Logistics sectors. A case study of a UK-based bid-writing consultancy was also used to support the analysis.

Results

The findings highlighted significant knowledge gaps in bid writing among businesses, with only 12.5% of survey respondents expressing confidence in their bid-writing abilities. Despite this, 83.1% showed interest in receiving bid-writing training. The study also revealed that

expertise, relationships, and past work are prioritized by businesses when selecting consultancy firms. Additionally, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in business operations was identified as a key factor for enhancing efficiency and maintaining competitiveness.

Conclusions

There is a clear opportunity for consultancy and bid-writing firms to address the knowledge gaps in bid writing by offering targeted training programs. Effective networking and a robust social media presence are essential for generating new business leads and maintaining client relationships. Furthermore, integrating AI technologies into business operations can provide consultancy firms with a competitive edge. This study provides actionable insights for consultancy and bid-writing firms to enhance their lead generation strategies and improve their market positioning.

Keywords

Consultancy industry, bid writing, lead generation, competitive positioning, AI integration, networking, social media

Corresponding author: Hajar Fatorachian (h.fatorachian@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)

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1. Introduction

The consultancy industry is a significant economic contributor, valued at approximately £18.6 billion and predicted to continue growing (Management Consultancies Association [MCA], 2024). With over 235,800 management consultants in the UK, the market is dominated by large firms such as KPMG, PwC, and Deloitte (Statista, 2024; Consultancy.uk, 2020). Despite this robust growth, the industry faces challenges, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic. Financial constraints and global restrictions have impacted businesses and their consultancy partners (Gartner, 2022). To mitigate these risks, consultancy firms must diversify their clientele across multiple sectors, spreading risk and seizing growth opportunities.

Bid writing is a critical aspect of consultancy services, essential for securing contracts and funding. Bid writers play a crucial role in helping companies complete essential documents such as Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) and Invitations to Tender (ITTs). Their success hinges on establishing strong relationships with business development and sales teams, effectively understanding customer requirements, and articulating compelling business propositions (Crawford, 2022). Expertise in the tendering process, comprehension of contract specifications, and superior communication skills are vital to the bid-writing process (Lowe, 2023). Successful bids can significantly enhance revenue and reputation, opening new avenues for growth, while poorly executed bids can result in missed opportunities and harm a company's image (Crawford, 2022).

Despite the vital role of bid writing in both the private and public sectors, it remains underexplored in current literature, with limited understanding of how bid writing can be leveraged to generate new business leads (Swanson et al., 2019; McMahon, 2013; Noonan & Healy, 2010). The public sector emphasizes regulatory compliance and transparency in bid writing (Lewis, 2015), while the private sector offers more flexibility and discretion in evaluating submissions (Forshaw, 2017). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for consultancy firms aiming to enhance their bid writing processes and lead generation strategies.

By integrating bid writing expertise with broader consultancy services, firms can better navigate the complexities of securing contracts, thereby fostering business opportunities and growth. This dual approach not only mitigates risks associated with economic downturns but also positions consultancy firms to attract a diverse client base across various sectors.

1.1. Gap in knowledge and significance of the study

The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of consultancy firms relying on a narrow client base. Diversification is essential, but it presents challenges such as resource allocation, staff satisfaction, and increased costs. This study aims to address these challenges by exploring strategies for organic expansion into new sectors while maintaining high standards. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide actionable insights for consultancy and bid writing firms, helping them navigate the post-pandemic landscape, attract new clients, and enhance their competitive positioning.

1.2. Aim and objectives

The aim of the paper is to identify strategies for consultancy and bid writing firms to generate new business leads. Specifically, the study intends to encompass industry best practices, competitive positioning, new client identification, and ways to strengthen existing client relationships while providing strategic directions for future improvement. The objectives are:

1. To assess the most effective ways to approach and develop potential clients.
2. To develop an operational framework for consultancy and bid writing firms to improve current lead generation and marketing strategies.

This paper aims to make significant contributions by outlining effective methods for consultancy firms to procure clients. Competitor analysis literature was reviewed to determine how consultancy and bid writing firms could differentiate from competitors.

2. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to critically examine existing literature surrounding bid writing, consultancy, B2B lead generation, and competitor analysis.

2.1. Bid writing

Bid writers are crucial to helping companies secure contracts or funding by completing essential documents such as PQQs and ITTs. Their success centers on establishing strong relationships with business development and sales teams to

effectively grasp customer requirements (Crawford, 2022). Bid writing serves as a persuasive sales pitch, promoting why a particular business is the optimal choice for a contract, with the potential to significantly enhance revenue and reputation while unlocking new avenues for growth. Conversely, poorly executed bids can result in missed opportunities, wasted resources, and damage to a company's image (Crawford, 2022). Lowe (2023) highlighted that expertise in the tendering process, comprehension of contract specifications, and expert communication skills are very important to the bid-writing process. For example, bid-writing consultancies offer specialized knowledge and experience to navigate bid details, assisting organizations in securing vital contracts that help them reach their full potential.

Despite the importance of bid writing in both private and public sectors, it has not been sufficiently explored, and current literature provides limited understanding of how bid writing could generate new business leads (Swanson et al., 2019; McMahon, 2013; Noonan & Healy, 2010). Public bid writing entails the thorough preparation of proposals for government contracts, following strict regulations and standardized evaluation processes. Lewis (2015) emphasizes the significance of transparency and adherence to procurement rules within EU member states. In contrast, private bid writing for commercial contracts lacks extensive literature, creating challenges for analysis. Nevertheless, public bid writing emphasizes regulatory compliance and transparency, while private sector bids offer greater flexibility, allowing buyers to evaluate submissions based on their preferences and criteria (Forshaw, 2017).

Therefore, understanding the principles and challenges of bid writing in both public and private sectors is key for consultancy firms to develop effective lead generation strategies. By aligning with bid writers' needs, prioritizing relationship-building, and offering specialized support in navigating bid complexities, consultancy firms can enhance their value proposition and attract clients seeking assistance in securing contracts and funding. Leveraging expertise to address knowledge management weaknesses and streamline bid processes, consultancy firms can position themselves as trusted partners for organizations seeking a competitive advantage and sustainable success through efficient bid management.

2.2. Consultancy

The Management Consultancies Association (MCA) defines consultancy as 'the practice of creating value for organizations through improved performance, achieved by providing objective advice and implementing solutions' (MCA, 2019). This resonates with the mission of many consultancy firms, including those specializing in bid writing, which aim to deliver business success (Consultancy/bid writing businesses, 2024). While consultancy has been regarded as a catalyst for organizational change, helping to create and sustain improvement by building and maintaining relationships, the concrete definition of successful consultancy remains debatable due to the subjectivity of success and often the struggle to quantify results (Hodges, 2017).

The evolution of consultancy as a business sector has been influenced by globalization and the increasing responsibilities of senior executives (Hodges, 2017). This has led to extensive literature on management consultancy. However, there is a need to expand consultancy literature within specific organizational contexts. Some academics and authors have attempted to bridge this gap (O'Mahoney & Markham, 2013). Nonetheless, the rise of consultancy firms offering specialist services across all business functions has exceeded the rate at which consultancy literature is developing, highlighting the need to explore how bid-writing consultancy practices may or may not differ from traditional management consultancy.

Hawkins and Smith (2013) identify two main areas of consultancy: technical and facilitative. They argue that the former provides clients with skills and competencies to increase overall performance, while the latter focuses on facilitating client development through education and workshops, enabling clients to realize unfulfilled potential within their companies. Therefore, for consultancy and bid writing firms to capitalize on potential clients successfully, it is important to distinguish between their roles as both technical and facilitative consultants, positioning both appropriately to clients.

A study by Williams and van Triest (2023) analyzes the notion that consultancy firms in the private sector should conduct their activities in ways that enable innovation through knowledge exchange (Bessant & Rush, 1995; Howells, 2006). Their research concludes that previous literature often generalizes consultants into a homogeneous category, which they believe is outdated due to rapid technological advancements and the diversity in approaches to innovation from private sector clients. This research suggests that the needs of private sector clients are evolving rapidly, bearing great significance for consultancy and bid writing firms to understand, adapt, and respond to challenging environments. To provide successful bid-writing consultancy and business development services, firms need to be well-versed in their clients' goals for innovation and understand how technological advancements can be integrated within their service offerings.

By integrating these insights, consultancy and bid writing firms can better navigate the complexities of their clients' needs, offering tailored solutions that drive business growth and foster long-term success.

2.3. B2B lead generation

B2B lead generation is crucial for businesses seeking to expand their client base and increase profitability. Effective lead generation relies on continuous refinement and improvement of business processes (Stevens, 2011). Traditionally, lead generation involves engaging and capturing interest in a product, service, or company with the goal of increasing sales or acquiring new clients (Lukowski & Swieczak, 2016).

In the context of SMEs, where resources are often limited compared to larger corporations, the emphasis on creating value for potential clients becomes paramount. Unlike larger firms, SMEs must prioritize the quality of lead generation over quantity (Perez & Cambra-Fierro, 2015). The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized the lead generation landscape. AI algorithms can now predict the likelihood of a lead resulting in a successful sale, enabling firms to concentrate their efforts on leads with higher conversion potential (Peddireddy & Peddireddy, 2023). This shift towards predictive analytics and data-driven decision-making allows businesses, including consultancy and bid writing firms, to optimize their lead generation strategies, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness.

B2B lead generation serves as a critical mechanism for businesses to identify and attract potential clients, thereby increasing growth and driving profits. As technology advances, particularly with AI integration, businesses have increasingly powerful tools at their disposal to modernize and enhance their lead generation processes, maximizing their revenue-generating potential (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013).

Despite the current literature providing a foundation on lead generation and marketing strategies within the B2B domain, there remains a considerable research gap regarding how bid-writing consultancy firms adapt their lead generation strategies to maintain competitiveness in this specialized niche. Value creation involving segmentation, targeting, positioning, and differentiation is crucial for any organization, including consultancy and bid writing firms (Kotler et al., 2023). Given the specialized nature of bid-writing consultancy services, understanding and effectively implementing these principles can significantly enhance their ability to attract and convert potential clients.

Segmentation allows consultancy firms to identify specific market segments with distinct needs and preferences, facilitating tailored marketing efforts. Targeting ensures efficient allocation of resources towards reaching the most promising prospects within these segments. Positioning helps consultancy firms establish a unique and favorable perception among their target audience, setting them apart from competitors. Differentiation allows these firms to emphasize their unique value proposition and capabilities, highlighting why potential clients should choose their services over others in the market. By applying established theories and concepts in lead generation, consultancy firms can strengthen the credibility and relevance of their marketing efforts, driving business growth and success.

The literature by Rėklaitis & Pilelienė (2019) highlights the essential differences between B2B and B2C marketing communication processes, offering invaluable insights for consultancy firms. B2B marketing strategies predominantly revolve around logical appeals tailored to businesses, contrasting with B2C strategies that emphasize emotional appeals directed at individual consumers. These distinctions necessitate tailored approaches, with B2B emphasizing personalized engagements and secondary objectives like brand loyalty, unlike the direct sales focus of B2C. Moreover, B2B decision-making involves multiple stakeholders, differing from the more individual-centric decisions in B2C.

Kumar & Raheja (2012) focus on the unique characteristics of B2B and B2C e-commerce transactions, incorporating negotiation complexity, platform structures, and payment options. Understanding these distinctions is necessary for consultancy firms to shape their client interactions and marketing strategies effectively. Consultants can align their messaging and services with the professional and logical appeals of B2B engagements while acknowledging the emotional drivers in B2C interactions. By leveraging this understanding, consultancy firms can adeptly tailor lead generation strategies to meet the distinct needs of each market segment, thereby strengthening client acquisition and retention efforts.

This comprehension empowers consultancy firms to tailor their client interactions and marketing strategies accordingly. With B2B engagements prioritizing logical appeals and personalized interactions, consultancy firms can focus on establishing professional relationships and addressing the multifaceted needs of stakeholders. At the same time, recognizing the emotional drivers in B2C interactions enables consultancy firms to refine their messaging and services to resonate with individual consumers. Leveraging these insights, consultancy firms can effectively shape their lead generation strategies, optimizing client acquisition and retention efforts across diverse market segments.

Overall, the significance of B2B lead generation in driving business growth, particularly with advancements in technology like AI, and the discussion on value creation principles alongside the distinctions between B2B and B2C marketing communication processes, offers valuable guidance for consultancy and bid writing firms in shaping effective lead generation strategies. However, while the existing literature provides a foundation, there remains a notable research gap regarding how bid-writing consultancy firms specifically adapt their lead generation approaches. Further targeted research is necessary to address the unique challenges and opportunities within this specialized niche comprehensively. Such research efforts would not only enrich our understanding of bid-writing consultancy but also provide actionable insights to optimize lead generation efforts effectively for these firms.

2.4. Competitor analysis

Michael Porter's work in 1980 was pivotal in helping businesses understand their competitive landscape and position themselves to achieve a competitive advantage. He identified five forces that assess the competitiveness of an industry:

1. Bargaining power of buyers
2. Bargaining power of suppliers
3. Threat of new entrants
4. Threat of substitutes
5. Rivalry among current competitors

Porter's framework suggests that competition extends beyond existing rivals. This insight is crucial for consultancy and bid-writing businesses, indicating that their strategic positioning should consider all industry factors rather than focusing solely on competitors' behaviors. While Porter's forces provide a strong starting point, they offer limited guidance on developing a competitive strategy (Dobbs, 2014). Additionally, the methods for assessing competition have evolved, with technology enabling quantifiable analysis. However, Porter did not address the quantification and relative importance of each force (Isabelle, Horak, McKinnon, & Palumbo, 2020).

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has dramatically shifted the definition of competitiveness. Iansiti and Lakhani (2020) argue that in the modern world, competitive advantage is defined by an organization's ability to integrate, control, and shape digital networks and data. Companies that leverage data analytics and AI to extract value and gain insights will thrive in a digitalized environment (Zhu & Iansiti, 2019). The value of a digitally integrated firm increases exponentially with more users, as data analytics become more powerful. In contrast, traditional business models may struggle to organize and understand large amounts of data (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

This literature is highly relevant for consultancy and bid-writing businesses. Utilizing digital networks to showcase their capabilities and integrating digital and AI technologies can provide insightful data on potential clients, offering a competitive edge.

Furthermore, to remain competitive, service-providing firms must focus not only on establishing a competitive advantage but also on sustaining it through service integration and continuous innovation (Matthyssens & Vandenbempt, 1998). Suciu and Borza (2010) emphasize the critical role of employee development in the service industry. Companies must enable their employees to effectively communicate with, understand, and develop potential clients, which enhances existing relationships. The development of employees can lead to increased financial performance, creating a cycle of reinvestment in recruitment and motivation of new employees (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021).

Therefore, for consultancy and bid-writing businesses to impact their clients more effectively than competitors, they should focus on two key areas that drive innovation: the integration of digital systems and data, and the continuous development of employee competencies. Combining these factors should enable a high degree of competitiveness, as other aspects like price and service waiting time can be easily matched by competitors (Allon & Federgruen, 2007).

Recognizing the evolving dynamics of consultancy services within specific organizational contexts, particularly the emphasis on digital integration and employee development, allows consultancy and bid writing businesses to adapt their approach, fostering innovation and competitiveness. Furthermore, insights from competitor analysis, including the application of Michael Porter's Five Forces framework, highlight the significance of digital integration and continuous

employee development. These factors empower consultancy and bid writing businesses to strategically position themselves in the market, utilizing their strengths, addressing weaknesses, and capitalizing on growth opportunities.

3. Method

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This approach provided a broader understanding for the researchers, allowing for deeper insights throughout the collective process (Yin, 2006). By integrating multiple methods including survey and interviews, the study aimed to increase the validity and integrity of the findings (Campbell, Goodman, Feeney & Fehler, 2018).

The chosen methods aimed to generate ideas for new business leads and gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge gaps in bid writing within the chosen sectors. Addressing these gaps could improve the lead generation capacity for consultancy and bid writing businesses. By using a combination of questions that balance convenience with detail, the study aimed to increase both the likelihood and speed of responses compared to other methods (Campbell et al., 2018).

Before commencing the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Leeds Business School on February 2, 2024. By providing a detailed project information sheet and a consent form, all participants were thoroughly informed about the nature, purpose, and procedures of the study. Participants were required to voluntarily agree to participate, either by providing written consent or, in the case of online interviews, verbal consent.

3.1. Secondary research

Secondary research involved the use of data previously collected for other purposes. This included information from government databases, the internet, discussion groups, internal company records, published reports, magazines, and data shared by professional bodies and trade associations (Baines, Fill, Rosengren & Antonetti, 2017). The secondary materials used in this study, including articles from journals, websites, and books, informed the design of the primary research and the market and environmental analysis.

3.2. Primary research

To effectively meet the primary aims and objectives of the study, a mixed-method approach to primary research was undertaken. This decision was driven by the recognition that both quantitative and qualitative data were invaluable in achieving the desired outcome. The mixed-method approach was deemed crucial, as it provided a comprehensive view, with quantitative data captured through surveys allowing for numerical representation, and deeper insights obtained through qualitative semi-structured interviews.

3.2.1. Quantitative research

Quantitative research was conducted using surveys and questionnaires (Appendix A), collecting information through descriptive statistics, percentages, and frequencies (Baines et al., 2017). This structured approach added value to the research by organizing both descriptive and causal market data.

The research process began with the creation and distribution of an online survey tailored to business professionals, primarily in the sectors of facilities management and logistics, once ethical approval was granted. LinkedIn was chosen as the distribution method due to its global reach and accessibility to professionals within the targeted fields.

Google Forms was used to create, distribute, and collect survey results, facilitating seamless collaboration among researchers and participants. This application ensured simplicity of use and allowed for real-time generation of spreadsheets, charts, and graphs directly from survey data, reducing the margin of error (Melo, 2023). The survey included mixed-method questions to gather both statistical and descriptive data. For instance, questions like “What qualities would you prioritize in a consultancy firm?” aimed to provide insights into consumer preferences, significantly helping meet the objective of understanding how consultancy and bid writing businesses can impact potential clients differently than competitors.

3.2.2. Qualitative research

Qualitative research involved semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights and comparisons. This method allowed for flexibility and depth, providing a richer understanding of the context and perspectives of the participants. The semi-structured format facilitated detailed responses while allowing the interviewer to probe further into interesting or unexpected areas, thereby increasing the overall richness of the data collected.

In summary, the mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem, enhancing the study’s validity and offering actionable insights for consultancy and bid writing businesses.

3.3. Population

Simple random sampling involves selecting a sample at random from the population elements (Baines et al., 2017). For this study, professionals within the Facilities Management and Logistics sectors were initially chosen at random using LinkedIn, irrespective of demographics such as age, gender, or geographical location. This method was supplemented with snowball sampling, which uses social networks to establish connections with hard-to-reach populations, thereby increasing the chain of participants (Hewson, 2006). The study focused on UK-based participants to ensure relevance and validity.

Existing LinkedIn connections provided accessibility to a wider audience and facilitated contact with business professionals in the specific sectors of Facilities Management and Logistics. The aim was to explore how consultancy and bid writing businesses could generate new business leads by expanding into these sectors Tobias, 2023. These sampling techniques were chosen to reduce the risk of systematic errors and sampling biases, providing a more representative sample. However, it is acknowledged that this process is time-consuming and that other techniques could have been selected to avoid potential misrepresentation under a time-constrained study (Alvi, 2016).

3.3.1. Sample size

A sample size is defined as “a group or number of people selected from a population for the purpose of an investigation” (Alvi, 2016). For this study, seventy-five individuals from each sector (Facilities Management and Logistics) were selected, drawn from LinkedIn connections. Limiting the distribution to a total sample size of 150 helped reduce the risk of theoretical saturation, as only three respondents per sector were required to participate in a short semi-structured interview. The study was guided by S.M.A.R.T targets, aiming to provide consultancy and bid writing businesses with substantial findings that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound, while also avoiding sampling bias (Alvi, 2016).

- Quantitative Response Rate

Given that a combined sample size of 150 from the Facilities Management and Logistics sectors were asked to participate in a brief survey, only three from each sector responded, resulting in a very low response rate of 4%. Figure 1 indicates that there were in fact 16 survey respondents overall in total.

Following the distribution of surveys to the population of relevant LinkedIn connections, participants willing to assist in our investigation on how Consultancy/bid writing businesses can generate new business leads were asked to participate in a 30-minute semi structured interview (see Appendix B).

Which sector does your business operate in?

15 responses

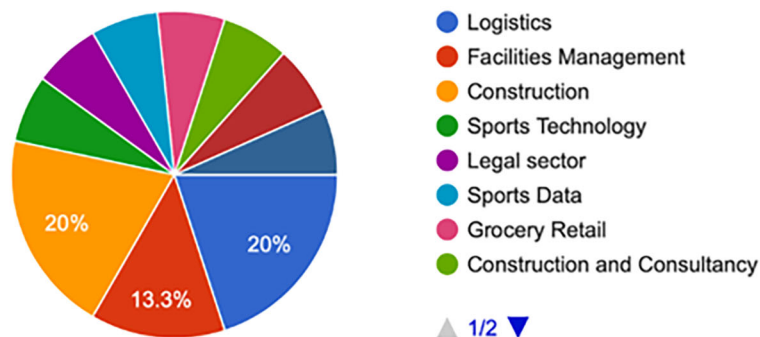


Figure 1. Survey responses.

- Sample Size and Response rate of Interviews

To ensure credibility and reliability amongst results the sample size of one hundred and fifty individuals within the sectors of Facilities Management and Logistics was kept the same. The sample size was drawn from the same population of LinkedIn connections used for the survey, with the aim of capturing diverse perspectives relating to the research objectives. It was initially anticipated that three interviews per sector were to be conducted and analysed to meet specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic targets, whilst trying to avoid sampling bias (Alvi, 2016). However, we were only able to secure and conduct 5 interviews.

4. Evaluation and discussion section

The following section analyses the findings of the research study from both the surveys and interviews.

4.1. Survey data analysis

The survey distributed to participants included 15 questions (see Appendix C-L). The data collected provides comprehensive insights into viewpoints on bid writing, consultancy, relationships, and lead generation. These insights also form the basis for more in-depth interviews, where the survey responses are explored in greater depth. Despite 87.5% of respondents stating their companies use bid writing at some point (Appendix D), only 12.5% felt confident in their bid writing abilities (Appendix E). This highlights a significant knowledge or confidence gap. Additionally, no respondents indicated that their company offers frequent bid writing training, with half stating their firm never provided any training (Appendix G). This neglected knowledge gap is expected to grow if the trend continues. However, 83.1% of respondents expressed interest in bid writing training in the future (Appendix H), representing a potential opportunity for consultancy and bid writing businesses.

Only 31.3% of respondents had never used consultancy firms, raising questions about why this is the case and what would make such services appealing (Appendix J). When asked about the qualities they prioritize in a consultancy firm, 56.3% of respondents highlighted expertise, while 25% valued past work and quality (Appendix K). Previous partners accounted for 46.2% of preferred procurement methods, and word of mouth/recommendations was the second highest at 38.5% (Appendix L), emphasizing the importance of relationships and networking.

Additionally, 81.3% of respondents stated they submit tenders to both the public and private sectors (Appendix I), with one respondent submitting only to the private sector. This served as a basis for further understanding during the interview process. In terms of new business generation, most respondents identified bids/invitations to tenders and business development via a sales team as their preferred methods (Appendix F). As consultancy and bid writing businesses offer both services, these findings are beneficial for potential clients.

Table 1 provides the key themes emerged from the survey.

Table 1. Themes emerged from survey data.

Theme	Details
Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing	Many respondents highlighted a significant lack of knowledge and expertise in bid writing, indicating it is often a neglected practice within their organizations.
Interest in Bid Writing Training	The majority of participants expressed eagerness to learn more about bid writing, showcasing a strong demand for training and educational resources.
Sector Application	Most respondents are involved in both public and private sector bidding, reflecting the need for versatile bid writing skills applicable across different types of contracts.
Prioritization of Expertise	When selecting consultancy firms, 60% of respondents prioritize expertise, underscoring the importance of professional knowledge and experience in the bid writing process.
Client Retention and Recommendations	50% of respondents continue to work with previous clients, and 33.3% rely on recommendations, highlighting the value of trust and established relationships in consultancy services.

4.2. Interview data analysis

The following analysis presents findings from five interviews conducted with survey participants. Each analysis references key findings discussed during the interviews, aligning with the study's aims and objectives.

4.2.1. Interview 1 - logistics company

The Managing Director of a logistics company, which specializes in transport, warehousing, and shipping, emphasized that bid writing is not required due to the nature of their business activities. This finding aligns with the theme of Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing, as the company recognizes the importance of bid writing but does not actively engage in it due to its operational focus.

The logistics company operates in a fast-paced environment that is highly sensitive to changes in the macro-environment (Drew, 2017). Instead of relying on bid writing, the company generates new business leads through strong B2B and B2C relationships, as well as long-term loyal customers. This aligns with the theme of Importance of Relationships and Experience, highlighting the critical role of maintaining strong business relationships and communication to stay competitive and reliable.

The interviewee mentioned that winning contracts can be challenging in a highly saturated and competitive industry (Allon & Federgruen, 2007). They prefer maintaining close relationships with competitors for comparative pricing during busy periods (Doyle, 1998). For consultancy outreach, the company favors professional and personalized communication via email or telephone, further emphasizing the importance of tailored and direct communication strategies (Jin et al., 2019).

4.2.2. Interview 2 – sports data company

The Vice President of Regulatory Services at a sports data company provided insights into the company's operations and strategies. The interview focused on how the company stays informed about competitors' strategies to maintain a competitive edge, aligning with the theme of Competitor and Market Analysis. This insight underscores the need for consultancy and bid writing businesses to understand and differentiate themselves from competitors.

The interviewee discussed the importance of securing large contracts and the preferred methods of new business generation. This discussion aligns with the theme of Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing, as the interviewee emphasized the complex nature and importance of bid writing in securing significant contracts, such as sports data rights. The need for proficiency in bid writing was highlighted, reinforcing the value of experience, product/service awareness, and cross-team collaboration (Lowe, 2023).

Additionally, the interview highlighted the value of proper training and the need for consultancy businesses to adapt to clients' changing demands (Williams & van Triest, 2023). This aligns with the theme of Willingness to Invest in Training, as the interviewee recognized the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in maintaining competitiveness.

4.2.3. Interview 3 – facilities management company

The CEO of a facilities management company highlighted that bid writing constitutes a small portion of their lead generation due to a lack of knowledge and expertise. This finding aligns with the theme of Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing. Despite this, the company submits bids solely to the private sector, showing a clear preference for working with small to medium-sized organizations.

The interviewee emphasized the importance of experience and trust when selecting consultancy firms, aligning with the theme of Importance of Relationships and Experience. This preference for trust and reliability is supported by the idea that businesses with strong, trustworthy relationships are more likely to succeed (Barnett, 2021).

To remain competitive, the company routinely reviews competitors and the external market through social media and website analysis. This aligns with the theme of Competitor and Market Analysis, highlighting the importance of staying informed about market dynamics to maintain a competitive edge. The company also expressed interest in external training programs, further supporting the theme of Willingness to Invest in Training.

4.2.4. Interview 4 – local manufacturing consultancy

The Managing Director of a consultancy firm in the local manufacturing sector expressed a clear need for bid-writing services and training. This aligns with the theme of Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing. The interviewee emphasized the importance of trust and personalized outreach in their business operations, supporting the theme of Importance of Relationships and Experience.

The interviewee highlighted that integrating AI technology has proven beneficial in their practices, suggesting that consultancy and bid writing businesses should consider similar integration to improve efficiency. This aligns with the theme of Adoption of AI Technologies, emphasizing the role of technology in enhancing business operations and competitiveness (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

Furthermore, the interviewee indicated that the firm has attempted bid writing in the past but was unsuccessful due to a lack of resources and low return on investment. This underscores the need for external consultancy assistance in bid writing, highlighting a potential market opportunity for consultancy and bid writing businesses.

4.2.5. Interview 5 – Automation, logistics, and supply chain consultancy

An Automation, Logistics, and Supply Chain consulting specialist emphasized the importance of honesty, integrity, and trust in building B2B and B2C relationships. This aligns with the theme of Importance of Relationships and Experience, reinforcing the value of trust in successful business relationships (Crawford, 2022).

The interviewee also highlighted the significance of AI practices for future business growth, supporting the theme of Adoption of AI Technologies. They revealed plans to fully integrate AI practices into bid writing and procurement processes within the next two years, aligning with the literature on the transformative impact of AI on business practices (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

Transparency in consultancy capabilities was seen as critical for maintaining credibility, with the belief that "good value services will win out" when transparency is maintained. This aligns with the theme of Competitor and Market Analysis, emphasizing the importance of transparency and credibility in maintaining a competitive edge.

4.3. Discussion of interview responses

The interviews revealed several common themes among respondents. Two out of five interviewees indicated a need for bid-writing expertise, particularly in the facilities management and local manufacturing sectors. This finding highlights the importance of targeting these sectors with specialized bid-writing services.

The value of trust and relationships in a B2B context was a consistent theme across all interviews, regardless of the sector. This underscores the importance of building and maintaining strong business relationships to achieve long-term success.

Additionally, two respondents highlighted the benefits of integrating AI technologies into their business operations. This finding suggests that consultancy and bid writing businesses should consider adopting AI technologies to enhance efficiency and competitiveness, staying ahead in a rapidly evolving market.

4.4. Comparison and discussion of interview and survey responses

Both survey and interview respondents identified significant knowledge gaps in bid writing. The low confidence rate of 12.5% in bid writing and the high interest rate of 83.1% in bid writing training indicate a strong demand for educational resources and training programs.

The preference for previous partners and word-of-mouth recommendations was evident in both survey and interview responses. This finding underscores the importance of trust and established relationships in successful business operations.

The interviews also emphasized the growing opportunities in AI-enhanced services. Respondents favoured businesses that adopt innovative technologies, suggesting that consultancy and bid writing businesses should integrate AI to remain competitive and attract new clients.

Table 2 presents the key themes emerged from the interviews.

Table 2. Themes emerged from interview data.

Theme	Details
Knowledge Gaps in Bid Writing	Many interviewees identified a significant lack of knowledge and expertise in bid writing within their organizations.
Lead Generation through Digital Channels	Social media, Google Ads, and emails were highlighted as effective methods for generating new leads.
Importance of Relationships and Experience	Relationships and past experience were favored over price and perceived expertise when choosing consultancy firms.
Competitor and Market Analysis	Regularly reviewing competitors and the market was seen as crucial for maintaining a competitive edge.
Willingness to Invest in Training	Interviewees expressed a willingness to pay for informative bid writing training programs.
Adoption of AI Technologies	Interviewees noted the importance of integrating AI technologies into business operations for improved efficiency and competitiveness.

By addressing these themes and integrating insights from both surveys and interviews, consultancy and bid writing businesses can refine their strategies to enhance lead generation and client acquisition effectively. This approach will help them stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market and meet the needs of their clients more effectively.

5. Operationalization framework

This section presents a strategic action plan for Consultancy/bid writing businesses, based on key findings from the survey and interview data. The proposed operationalization framework (Figure 2) focuses on four main areas: bid writing training, networking, social media presence, and AI integration.

By implementing this framework, Consultancy/bid writing businesses can effectively operationalize their strategic action plan, enhancing lead generation, client acquisition, and overall competitiveness in the market. The framework is explained in the following section.

5.1. Bid writing training operationalization

A recurring theme from the findings was the need for bid writing training within businesses. Interviewees consistently expressed that such training would significantly enhance their business practices but were often unaware that such training existed. Consultancy/bid writing businesses already offer this service, so further enhancements can be made to optimize its reach.

In the short term, the focus should be on increasing visibility through social media platforms. Regularly sharing engaging content related to bid writing training, highlighting its benefits and success stories, can help raise awareness. Social media has proven effective for increasing brand visibility and engaging with potential clients (Thornton & Lowe, 2024).

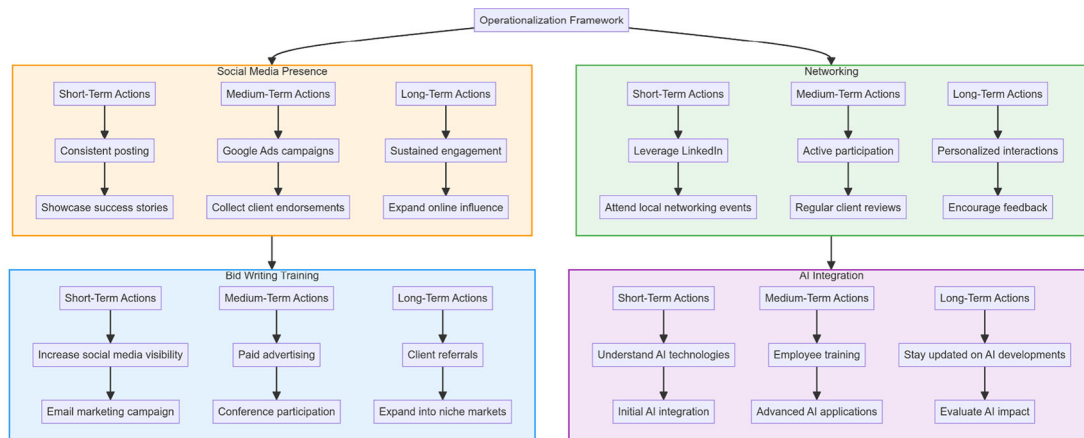


Figure 2. Operationalization Framework Overview.

Additionally, leveraging current contacts to launch an email marketing campaign can emphasize the value of bid writing training. Informative newsletters and updates on the available training programs can highlight their benefits to businesses (Stevens, 2011).

For the medium term, investing in targeted paid advertisements on social media and search engines can help reach demographics interested in business development and tender processes. Tailored ad content addressing common business needs can showcase how Consultancy/bid writing businesses' solutions meet those needs (Peddireddy & Peddireddy, 2023). Furthermore, participating in relevant conferences and networking events within the business development and procurement sectors can showcase expertise and form connections with potential clients (Baines et al., 2017).

In the long term, encouraging satisfied clients to refer other businesses to Consultancy/bid writing businesses' training programs can be beneficial. Promoting this referral process by offering incentives or rewards for successful referrals can increase participation (Crawford, 2022). Expanding into niche markets by identifying specific industries where bid writing training is particularly valuable, such as government contracting or healthcare, and customizing marketing efforts to address their unique needs can further enhance outreach (Kotler et al., 2023).

These strategies align with the goal of generating leads and acquiring new clients by enhancing visibility, targeting specific demographics, and leveraging client referrals and niche market opportunities.

5.2. Networking operationalization

Given that key findings from primary research highlighted honesty, integrity, and trust as crucial for long-term success, Consultancy/bid writing businesses should integrate strategies to improve networking practices among repeat and new clients.

In the short term, leveraging the networking potential of LinkedIn can greatly benefit the company. Despite Consultancy/bid writing businesses' vision to become the UK's go-to bid and business development consultancy, the company's current LinkedIn presence is modest. Actively engaging in LinkedIn groups can increase the potential reach to a larger audience and highlight the benefits of bid writing consultancy in niche markets (LinkedIn, 2024). The platform also provides opportunities to identify potential leads by initiating contact with sectors or individuals interested in services similar to those offered by Consultancy/bid writing businesses (Alvi, 2016). This strategic use of LinkedIn can help in generating new leads and acquiring new clients by broadening the reach and making valuable connections.

In the medium term, attending networking events in local and surrounding communities can increase Consultancy/bid writing businesses' overall brand visibility within specific targeted industries. Actively participating and presenting at these events has proven to provide a significant return on investment, laying the foundation for lead generation and new business opportunities. Face-to-face interactions build trust and credibility by demonstrating traits of honesty and integrity, which were highlighted as essential in increasing the likelihood of prospects (Crawford, 2022).

In the long term, building strong relationships is crucial. Regular communication with clients to assist with queries related to bid writing, regular client reviews, training refreshers, and ongoing support can show commitment (Barnett, 2021). Personalization in all interactions based on the companies' individual needs and aims can make clients feel valued and more likely to recommend Consultancy/bid writing businesses' services. Encouraging both positive and negative client feedback and using it to improve service delivery can demonstrate a commitment to client satisfaction and continuous improvement, thereby enhancing the company's competitive edge (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021).

These strategies focus on building and maintaining strong business relationships, leveraging social media, and participating in industry events to enhance networking efforts.

5.3. Social media presence operationalization

Survey and interview data indicated that past work and relationships play a significant role in deciding whether to work with a consultancy firm. To solidify established and blossoming relationships, Consultancy/bid writing businesses should use social media to create a stronger media presence.

In the short term, Consultancy/bid writing businesses should curate weekly posts on platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or blogs on the company website. Regularly updating business milestones or opinions on relevant topics, like new legislation impacting the industry, can keep followers and stakeholders engaged (Eckstein, 2024). This approach can help the company remain relevant and showcase past works, building stronger relationships through social media strategies (Abed et al., 2015).

In the medium term, exploring the potential of Google Ads can be beneficial. Initial ad campaigns can offer insights into the expansion possibilities offered by Google Ads. Although differences in sectors and target audiences need to be considered, these small initial campaigns can help determine the value of this investment.

For long-term goals, sustained engagement on social media platforms is crucial. Proper use of LinkedIn can allow Consultancy/bid writing businesses to connect with professionals and potential target markets. Collecting client endorsements upon the completion of consultancy jobs can further verify professional history and increase appeal. While there are no financial costs associated with social media posts, Google Ads do require investment for marketing campaigns, which can be personalized to suit specific budgets and timeframes (Melo, 2023).

These strategies aim to solidify relationships through an enhanced social media presence, leveraging consistent engagement and client testimonials.

5.4. AI integration operationalization

Data collected from consultancy firms operating within logistics and local manufacturing underlined the relevance of AI integration into business operations. These firms highlighted the benefits of AI in performing everyday tasks such as writing emails, organizing data, and compiling presentations. Consultancy/bid writing businesses should follow in these footsteps and consider integrating AI into their business model.

AI integration into a modern business model can offer several benefits:

Process Automation: Automating many administrative tasks, such as database logging, notifications on missing data, and customized templates, can enhance efficiency. **Cognitive Insight:** Using algorithms to analyze data can identify gaps or predict outcomes, aiding in financial planning and resource allocation. **Cognitive Engagement:** Implementing language models for chatbots can provide 24/7 service lines, improving client interaction and engagement (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

In the short term, Consultancy/bid writing businesses should focus on understanding AI technologies and deciding which types would be beneficial. Starting with simple tools like chatbots for writing emails or creating presentations can be a useful entry point (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

In the medium term, ensuring staff are well-trained and familiar with any AI technologies integrated into the business is essential. Gradually incorporating more advanced AI applications can further enhance operations (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

In the long term, continuously monitoring AI advancements and regularly assessing the impact of AI on business operations and client relationships will help in staying competitive. While integrating the latest AI technologies may involve financial costs, these come with the opportunity cost of saving time and resources, which can be redirected to other areas such as developing long-lasting relationships (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study embarked on a journey to uncover strategic approaches for Consultancy/bid writing businesses to enhance lead generation and competitive positioning in the post-Covid consultancy landscape. By employing a mixed-methods approach that incorporated surveys and interviews, the research delved deeply into bid writing practices, networking, social media presence, and AI integration. The findings from this study offer a rich tapestry of insights and actionable recommendations that can drive significant improvements in these areas.

One of the most striking revelations from this study was the identification of significant knowledge gaps in bid writing within organisations. Despite the recognition of its critical importance, many businesses lack confidence and expertise in bid writing. This underscores a pressing need for targeted training programmes. The enthusiasm for bid writing training was palpable, as evidenced by the strong demand among respondents who expressed eagerness to learn more about the practice. This presents a clear opportunity for Consultancy/bid writing businesses to expand their training services, catering to this evident demand and filling the existing knowledge void.

Networking emerged as another pivotal theme, with honesty, integrity, and trust identified as essential components for long-term business success. Effective networking strategies, particularly leveraging social media platforms like LinkedIn, were highlighted as crucial for generating new leads and maintaining client relationships. The role of social media cannot be overstated; a robust online presence is vital for building and maintaining business relationships. Regular updates, engaging content, and client endorsements were noted as key strategies for enhancing visibility and credibility.

Moreover, the integration of AI technologies stood out as a significant factor in modern business practices. AI's potential to enhance efficiency through process automation, cognitive insight, and cognitive engagement provides a competitive edge in the consultancy market. This aligns with the industry's shift towards more data-driven and technology-enabled solutions, making it imperative for Consultancy/bid writing businesses to consider AI integration seriously.

6.1. Novelty and contribution to theory and practice

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic approach to understanding the bid writing consultancy landscape. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this research offers a multifaceted view of the challenges and opportunities within the industry. This study makes significant contributions to existing literature by highlighting specific knowledge gaps and training needs in bid writing, providing a foundation for developing targeted educational programmes.

Furthermore, it underscores the importance of networking and relationship-building in the consultancy sector, which is often overlooked in traditional competitive analysis frameworks. The study also demonstrates the value of a strong social media presence for consultancy firms, offering practical strategies for enhancing online engagement. Additionally, it explores the potential of AI integration in consultancy practices, presenting a forward-looking perspective on technological advancements in the industry.

For practical application, the study offers actionable recommendations for Consultancy/bid writing businesses, including strategies for enhancing bid writing training, improving networking efforts, leveraging social media, and integrating AI technologies. These recommendations are designed to help the firm increase lead generation, acquire new clients, and maintain a competitive position in the market.

6.2. Future research directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens avenues for future research. One promising area is conducting longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of bid writing training programmes. Such studies would provide deeper insights into how training impacts business outcomes over time, allowing for the refinement and optimisation of these programmes.

Comparative studies across different sectors could also yield valuable insights. By examining sector-specific challenges and opportunities in bid writing and consultancy services, future research can help develop more tailored strategies for different industries. Additionally, investigating the impact of AI on consultancy practices could explore how specific AI tools and technologies affect efficiency, client relationships, and competitive advantage. This would help consultancy firms better understand and leverage AI's potential.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT in order to improve the readability and flow. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Leeds Business School, on February 2, 2024. The study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (<https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/>). All participants were fully informed about the study's nature, purpose, and procedures through a detailed project information sheet. Consent was obtained from all participants, either in written form for in-person participation or verbal form for online interviews. Verbal consent was used due to the logistical challenges of obtaining written consent in an online setting, and this approach was explicitly approved by the Ethics Committee. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate after understanding all relevant information.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are openly available in the Leeds Beckett Thesis and Research Data Repository at <https://figshare.com/s/04b3e5a35182b549ee2d>, reference number <https://doi.org/10.25448/lbu.26250131.v2>

The dataset is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY4.0) license.

Underlying data

The data is now publicly available under the FigShare: Competitive Positioning for Bid Writing Consultancy Firms

This project contains the following underlying data:

Fatorachian Research (Responses)

Competitive Positioning for Bid Writing Consultancy Firms

Data is available under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license \(CC-BY 4.0\)](#).

Extended data

The data is now publicly available under the FigShare: Competitive Positioning for Bid Writing Consultancy Firms

<https://doi.org/10.25448/ibu.26250131.v2>

This project contains the following underlying data:

Fatorachian CP2 data

Data is available under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license \(CC-BY 4.0\)](#).

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