S&B Automotive Academy: Writing a successful funding bid; S&B/Jisc RSC South West win major learning award

Summary

Through direct bid writing support provided by David Rowe e-Learning Advisor for the Jisc RSC South West, S&B Automotive Academy have won a bronze award at the IMS Global Learning Impact Awards. The excellent communication and advice provided by Jisc RSC South West have opened up opportunities for S&B that they would not have been aware of without this support. This case study aims to give practical advice and examples of bid writing practice in support for all sectors who want to write a succinct, informative application to win hearts and minds.

About S&B Automotive Academy

S&B Automotive Academy is based in Bristol specialising in training apprentices for the motor industry.

It offers a wide range of apprenticeships reflecting many varied career paths within the industry. S&B has developed a strong internal ethos focused on the proactive use of technology by lecturers and support staff. This ethos is also the basis for cooperation between S&B and its project partners.

S&B are the lead provider in a consortium of 5 supporting partners, who are all part of the Net Cam's Jericho project. The other supporting partners are:

- Reflections Training Academy
- KTS Training (2002) Ltd
- Paragon Skills for Industry
- Rapido Training
- S&B Automotive Academy Ltd

The challenge

The real challenge for S&B and David was primarily the bid writing process itself. This is because to write a successful bid the content and language used to support the bid is a vital element as is providing a succinct and well written summary. In fact the summary is perhaps the most important aspect of the bid writing process as it is this initial précis that will either break or make a successful bid, as David Rowe sums up:
“You have got to get the language right and grab people’s attention in the early stages of the bid, because you really have to hit them between the eyes with the main objectives of what the bid is about. You have also got to make sure that the language hits the criteria in a clear and unambiguous fashion. You have got to provide whoever is reading the bid with a hook to keep them interested enough to read the rest of it.”

Jon Winter agrees;

“It’s got to flow like a story, I think David is correct because the first hook is important, you normally have 50 words to sum up your project, the first bit is really there to tantalise the taste buds. You want the reader to think ‘I want to know more’, because they have to look through a lot of bids.”

It is also important to have a title or name that can inspire. S&B choose the name ‘Jericho’ as it is a reference to biblical times related to the walls falling down, hence ‘breaking down the boundaries of work-based assessment’ and then Jericho in the schools was ‘breaking down the myths associated with apprenticeships’.

So the major challenge is to be able to write a solid bid, which has been well researched and backed up by quantitative evidence as well demonstrate clearly how the objectives will be achieved through excellent organisation and planning.

The activity

In order for David and S&B to develop a winning bid there had to be a process, with clearly defined timescales, objectives, costs and responsibilities.

The development stages of the bid were as follows:

1. Jon provided an idea to enhance e-learning at S&B
2. David put the idea into words and sends a draft back to Jon
3. The members of the WTPN, meet to discuss the proposed draft
4. The draft is sent back and forth from David to Jon and then finally approved by Jon
5. Research is conducted regarding the idea, for example in the case of the netcams S&B investigated and trialled 25 different cameras before selecting the one that suited their needs
6. More detailed research and quantitative evidence is provided by the Jisc RSC South West to backup the project
7. David completes the fully written bid and sends it to Jon to sign off, before it is submitted for funding.

Practical tips

In terms of the content and writing style David has some useful practical advice, particularly for the important summary of the bid writing process:

“There are certain techniques that you can employ for example if you have several words to describe a particular phrase you can put a back slash character to join two words together.” The summary is a vital part of the bid writing process, it must be a clear and concise overview of the entire project, but also offer a genuine proposal for something that will captivate and inspire.

Following on from the summary into the main body of the bid itself, Jon highlights other additional content that they embed within the bid.
“We also add additional content like gant charts, which clearly defines the objectives in great detail, for example, what is going to be done and who is going to do it”
David adds

“It is a careful process and a balance between getting down the correct content, but not condensing it so much that you lose the flow of the bid”

An important part of the activity for developing a successful bid must also be the research conducted to not only put forward a good case or need for the project, but also to help validate the need in terms of the viability for the organisation itself – much the same as a business plan.

Jon conducted extensive research into their organisation’s carbon footprint, looking specifically at the effect of their assessors having to travel long distances. This research identified the potential savings in terms of time and costs, but also the environmental impact. This information was embedded within the bid process.

The Jisc RSC South West worked closely with the WTPN to provide them with research to help backup the bid and make it a really tangible proposal. This encompassed:

- Identifying no similar projects already in existence
- Guidance on the length of interactive sessions
- Quantitative evidence from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey from 2007, where 60 of the 268 respondents or 22.4% stated that the reason for leaving their course was ‘wrong course for me’

Poignantly the evidence from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey really demonstrated the need to provide potential apprentices with the ability to make much better informed choices by being able to gather information from other apprentices, employers, managers and other professionals already at the workplace. So it is this kind of fine detail that was very important in terms of the evidence to back-up the proposal for the project.

Jon also wanted to investigate young offenders and the reasons why they re-offend. He wanted to show that the S&B Automotive Academy had a genuine interest in adopting young offenders and helping to change lives through the proposed project.

The outcomes

The key outcome of the bid writing process has been the collaboration and working relationship between the Jisc RSC South West, WTPN and S&B. Without this partnership the bids from S&B may not have been successful at all.

With such a solid partnership S&B have really been able to excel their projects and realise their ambitions to enhance their organisation and improve teaching and learning.
S&B have also been recognised internationally by winning a bronze award at the IMS Global Learning Impact Awards, held at Long Beach California, USA. These awards are designed to recognize those initiatives which have the greatest impact on the use of technology worldwide in support of ICT.

The fact that S&B have gone on to win an award of such high esteem really shows how important the bid writing process is and just what can be achieved through a well-researched and supported process.

S&B have also recognised the support provided by David and have also awarded him the duplicate award normally given to the sponsor. Jon feels that this was a great opportunity to recognise the input from David and the Jisc RSC South West as a whole.

“I think it’s great because it gives the RSC a kudos, because the concept was awarded bronze, but the people involved in the concept were the RSC and S&B – so I think it is important to recognise the work behind the scenes as well”

**The impact**

At the heart of the whole process behind every successful funding bid awarded to S&B has been the advice and support from Jisc RSC South West e-Learning Advisor David Rowe. It is this direct support that has paved the way for S&B to be at the forefront technology in the workplace and highlights the value of sharing and collaborating, to captivate a collective and progressive spirit.

S&B are visiting schools regularly to demonstrate their technology, offering potential apprentices to actually see the workplace and to get a real-life flavour of the kind of activities and work they might be involved with. Jon also visits many providers and events giving presentations on the netcam technology to share their vision and open up the technology.
They have also been visited by the Chief Executive of the Skills Funding Agency, Geoff Russell and in the one hour they had Jon conducted a live netcam to demonstrate the technology. The feedback was very positive, with comments like:

“Inspiring, incredible, fantastic”

In terms of the quantitative savings for the Jericho project, the image below highlights this very well.

![NetCam Cost & Savings August 2011 - July 2012](image)

**The kind of savings that are being made through using the technology**

Without the well written bid and the successful implementation of the netcams Jericho projects S&B would still have 10 assessors having to cover 300,000 miles to assess 450 candidates all across the UK. In fact last year before the netcams project assessors were spending over 10,000 hours travelling to assessments.

S&B also identified 85,000 other employers spread out in 130,000 locations across the UK and Jon thinks that their model could really benefit these employers as it has done so for S&B. Jon would really like the government to look at this model as he feels that it could be extremely beneficial to help cut carbon emissions and streamline assessment on a national level.

**Lessons Learned**

Jon Winter “I think that bidding for funding will help a great deal. If you are successful with the funding then it gives you a badge that says that it is endorsed – I think nowadays it’s all about collaboration as well. To do it on your own is very difficult, I think that if you do create
a project and do it alone that is narrow-minded. It’s about sharing and collaborating and benefiting the whole country. And benefiting people like ourselves by using technology.”

David backs this up “You can accelerate concepts and ideas much quicker by working in collaboration and with funding.”

“I think that our WTPN network for example is an excellent way to find out about what is around, because the WTPN is so well used and supported by providers, we have had more providers and schools interested in joining the hive recently. So they are now becoming a partner of the Jericho netcam revolution as well.” – Jon Winter

Jon adds “It’s definitely working with partnerships such as the Jisc RSC South West that really works very well to help replicate what we do because they are a part of what we do. I think that these networks act as a conduit for sharing. We certainly would not have known about so many things available without these kind of partnerships, I think everyone can benefit from a single model.”

Regarding the sustainability of the projects Jon says;

“The sustainability is in every project we have done and has been economical or cost-wise. The sustainability is that we are using technology that anyone can use.”

“You’re doing something that can be easily replicated by any organisation with reasonable costs, in terms of the netcams project.”

Seek the support of your local RSC for further information on bid writing, or directly contact the Jisc RSC South West if your WBL provider is based in the South West and you need help with bid writing.
Useful links

S&B Automotive Academy

Jisc RSC South West

A Guide to Bid Writing Publication

Western Training Provider Network

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