

Your Competition is Better Than You: Creating Demand Before the RFP

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For too long, many Clinical Research Organizations (CROs) have settled for a reactive approach—relying on the sponsor RFP process rather than shaping the conversation. The truth is, when you constantly play catch-up, your competition gets to define the terms of engagement. Instead of scrambling to respond to the RFP event, why not reframe your mindset and start responding to your sponsors' problems before they're even aware of them?

Know What Your Competition is Doing Right

The leaders in the industry have mastered the art of early value creation. They leverage innovative technologies, predictive analytics, and strategic account intelligence to anticipate sponsor challenges long before an RFP is issued. By offering risk mitigation strategies, market insights, and tailored advisories, these organizations create a strong, proactive bond with their clients.

Understanding how your competition creates value is the first step toward refining your own approach. Rather than hoping for a spot on the RFP list, ask yourself: What have you given your clients that truly matters before the process even begins? At Match Vertical Partners, we often say, "**be the first to give.**" This mantra is not just a catchy phrase—it represents a transformative business development strategy that drives revenue generation by delivering value before your sponsors even recognize the need.

Identify What They're Missing—and Where You Can Excel

Even top performers have blind spots. While many competitors excel in technology or data analytics, they often overlook integrated customer success and personalized solution development. Many companies might deliver excellent thought leadership and market intelligence, but sometimes fall short in offering truly hands-on, high-level execution that adapts to each sponsor's unique operational challenges.

By benchmarking your performance against theirs, you can identify areas of opportunity and innovation. Perhaps there's a chance to build more agile solutions, embed continuous customer success practices, or even combine strategic insights with actionable implementation plans. The goal is to re-position your value proposition so that you're not just another vendor—you're the trusted partner who is always the first to give.

The insight here is twofold:

- **Benchmark and learn:** Analyze what makes their approach successful both in the short term generating immediate results and long term helping their sponsors achieve strategic objectives.
- **Innovate where they hesitate:** Identify areas where you can innovate and ultimately elevate your value proposition.

Proactive Strategies to be More Competitive

When you position yourself as a proactive partner rather than a reactive bidder, you redefine your market standing. The key is not to simply ask, *"What have I given my clients before the RFP?"* but rather to boldly state, *"I've built strong relationships, gathered insightful feedback, and positioned my organization as the trusted advisor long before the formal process begins."*

1. Strengthen Relationships and Build Continuous Communication

A strong relationship with key stakeholders is the foundation of proactive engagement. Implement structured feedback loops where you routinely ask for input on your service and engagement. Inquire not only about your performance but also about what other providers are doing well and how they create value from the sponsor's perspective. This ongoing dialogue establishes trust, informs your strategies, and keeps your organization top of mind long before an RFP is issued.

ASK YOURSELF:

Do I know what **value a stakeholder would gain** by meeting with me?

Am I **engaging in open, regular communication** with stakeholders to uncover the problems they are looking to solve?

Have I **shared relevant use cases** or demonstrated tangible value?

Have I **developed and presented solutions** that will help them achieve their strategic objectives or solve their most pressing problems?

2. Conduct a Competitive Landscape Analysis

Understanding and addressing the gaps in your offerings compared to what is important to your sponsors is vital. Develop a gap analysis framework that evaluates:

- **Services Provided:** How comprehensive and innovative are your solutions compared to competitors?
- **Relationship Status:** Have you identified and established relationships with all relevant stakeholders?
- **Brand and Reputation:** Is your brand viewed as a forward-thinking, reliable partner in clinical research?

- **Past Performance:** Do your references and outcomes demonstrate a track record that consistently exceeds client expectations?
- **Holistic vs. Unique Differentiators:** Clearly articulate what sets your solution apart from the competition. Focus on the value you bring rather than just the features of your product or service.

A detailed analysis reveals opportunities where you can refine your value proposition and improve your overall positioning in the existing vendor population.

3. Harness Predictive Analytics for Strategic Positioning

Advanced data analytics can serve as your crystal ball. By assessing historical trial data, regulatory trends, and emerging therapeutic areas, you position your organization to foresee challenges before they fully materialize. This predictive approach not only mitigates risk—it also reinforces your reputation as a proactive problem-solver and trusted advisor.

If an RFP is inevitable, don't just wait for it—shape it in your favor. Engage with sponsors early to frame the criteria around your strengths, ensuring they recognize the unique value your organization brings.

4. Innovate with Customized, Preemptive Solutions

Never wait for a sponsor to articulate their challenges; be ready with solutions that anticipate their needs. For instance, develop a nuanced, country-by-country strategy to improve patient access, craft effective clinical trial designs that address the unique demands of rare diseases, forge partnerships with technology experts offering strategic advantages and cost efficiencies, and implement adaptive compliance strategies that keep pace with evolving regulations. By delivering these initiatives preemptively, you underscore your commitment to being the first to

give—transforming your organization from a reactive bidder into a pioneering force in the industry.

5. Leverage the Sales Leader Voice in Thought Leadership

Position yourself at the forefront of industry innovation by embracing thought leadership. Share your unique insights through compelling white papers, webinars, and panel discussions. Ensure that your content features the voice of your sales leaders; their real-world, front-line perspectives add authenticity and actionable value. This strategic blend of thought leadership and practical insights bolsters your market influence and sparks proactive conversations in business development.

Influence the RFP Criteria

If an RFP is inevitable, don't just wait for it—**shape it in your favor**. Engage with sponsors early to frame the criteria around **your strengths**, ensuring they recognize the unique value your organization brings. Ask yourself:

- **Am I already embedded in strategic discussions before the RFP process starts?**
- **Have I influenced sponsor priorities by highlighting how our approach solves their key challenges?**
- **Have you asked the trap setting questions that help your clients understand the value of your unique differentiators that separate you from your peers?**

By guiding the narrative **before** formal evaluations begin, you gain a significant **competitive advantage** and position yourself as the front-runner—far ahead of the bid stage. This transformative approach redefines revenue generation. By being the first to give—by offering strategic know-how and preemptive problem-solving—you're not just competing, you're setting a new standard. Your competitors may be good, but with an approach centered on continuous value creation, you will be better.

The Time to Act is Now

While responding to RFPs remains a standard part of the CRO sponsor selection process, true competitive advantage is forged through **proactive positioning, early strategic investment, and creative problem-solving** resulting in transformation of the buying process. Your competitors may currently hold a stronger position, but by **rethinking and refining your approach—grounded in foresight, innovation, and deep customer understanding—you can reshape the playing field** and position yourself as the indispensable partner long before an RFP is even issued.

Embrace a forward-thinking mindset, invest in the strategies that address client problems proactively, and reposition your organization to be the trusted partner they need. In doing so, you don't just compete with the best—you become the best.

Who is Match Vertical Partners?

MATCH VERTICAL PARTNERS is a sales transformation organization led by industry experts, dedicated to creating sustainable growth for our clients. We empower sales leaders to build high-performing teams rooted in integrity, value, and service, through a holistic, bottom-up approach. We provide business development and sales consulting, technology solutions and vertically aligned sales strategies designed to accelerate your revenue growth.

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