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The Dreaded RFP has Met its Match: ProfitComm's AI Makes Order Out of RFP Chaos

Time is money for business owners. And [Denis O'Donovan](#) is doing something about one of the biggest time-drags there is: the traditional request for proposals.

O'Donovan and his company, [Timonium, Maryland-based ProfitComm](#), have developed an alternative that gets their customers RFP-style results in a fraction of the time it used to take.

"RFPs bury a customer's resources," O'Donovan says. "They're so time-consuming. And technology RFPs are even more difficult. With the evolution of technology, the goalpost is constantly moving so the customer [and the RFP] has to be on the cutting edge, and they end up writing an RFP that's obsolete even before anyone responds to it."

O'Donovan, 52, started ProfitComm in 1999 under the umbrella of Richmond, Virginia-based Comtel Communications (now Telarus). O'Donovan said he had eight to 10 vendors and four or five different products to offer back then.

Over the last 23 years, ProfitComm has continually streamlined and improved the approach to the traditional RFP. The company now uses artificial intelligence to winnow its list of approximately 300 vendors so that customers get five or six qualified responses to their RFPs instead of 25 or 35 responses.

"The customer still makes the decision but we help them get there faster, and at a lower cost with fewer headaches," says O'Donovan, who grew up in Clinton, Maryland, and went to Towson University.

He adds that ProfitComm's approach is always evolving.

"We've been doing the multi-vendor, 'vendor-agnostic' approach for 20+ years," O'Donovan says. "So we'll take something and say, 'OK, this is good, we'll take this and modify it,' or 'now we don't want to do it this way. The name RFP Alternative came from his work in the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program in 2019."

O'Donovan says ProfitComm has built "an ecosystem of staying on the cutting edge of technology."

He makes sure the firm stays on top of these technologies, understanding them and knowing how to apply them where it makes sense for one of his customers. All of ProfitComm's employees hold industry certifications and continue to train to stay ahead of the technology curve.

The result, he says, is an RFP process that takes a fraction of the time — and is a fraction of the cost.

"That's the one thing about time," says O'Donovan, who has two children — a Calvert Hall junior and a Towson University sophomore — with his wife of 21 years, Dawn. "It's the one thing that you can't buy, right? So if I can help you get through the process in six to nine weeks instead of six to nine months, what else can you do with that time?"

"And I would argue that our results are better because we are the bid process. So we're driving the cost down. If I can complete the project two months faster, how much do you save in IT payroll alone before we even negotiate with the vendors?"

"I mean, you can imagine if you've got 20 vendors vying to get hours and hours with you on Zoom meetings? We can streamline that process significantly."

ProfitComm works with subject matter experts who don't have ties to specific vendors ("vendor-agnostic" as O'Donovan calls them) who spend their days studying the needs of different industries.

"All they do all day, every day, is understand who's doing what," he says. "What are the differentiators? This customer needs A, B, C, and D — who's the right fit for that based on what's going on."

"So it's an ecosystem of staying on the cutting edge of technology and making sure that we're at the forefront of the evolution of these technologies and understanding them and being able to apply them where it makes sense for our customer."

Even though it's only 20 percent of ProfitComm's business, O'Donovan is so passionate about his proprietary system for finding and vetting technology vendors that he's written a book on the subject, ["The RFP Alternative: Technology Purchasing Redefined."](#)

“The book is kind of fun,” he says. “It’s not all stuffy tech talk. I tell some fun stories about wild things I did when I was cutting my teeth in sales. It also points out specific technology purchasing GOTCHAs to avoid that he has learned through years of experience.”