



‘Good things often come in small packages!’

Caroline Demoulied, Managing Director of APP UK, explains why SMEs have an important role to play in your choice of cleaning contractor.

“What’s the issue?...”



In the current climate, cleaning and the science behind it have become a focal point of our attention. It has an essential role to play in maintaining hygienic environments within our workplaces and protecting all of us.

Very often, the decision to appoint a cleaning contractor will focus on just two issues: the size of the contractor and price.

This approach loses sight of the service offering, the benefits that the tenderer can deliver and how that company will become a valuable contributor to and an integral part of your business.

Adopting this approach can and will have a detrimental effect on the cleaning marketplace, leading to dominance by a few large companies that will ultimately reduce competition and could eventually lead to market stagnation.

“SME businesses ...have a valuable role to play.”



As one of these SMEs, we have often heard the comment “you might talk like a big cleaning company, but you are actually only a small business.”

We always question why this comparison and distinction needs to be made. Surely, a contractor should be judged on their ability, offering and credentials, not by an unfair and subjective viewpoint?

SMEs should be equally valued for their contributions to the marketplace, often characterised by agility, flexibility and innovation. APP UK proudly holds its place in this very competitive market, having formed in-depth partnerships with our clients and been successful in tender processes where we were competing against much larger organisations.

This has not been achieved by simply “talking like a big company.” It has been achieved by looking at how flexible our business can be, how responsive and proactive we need to be and how we can stay constantly ahead of our game to deliver a best-in-class service.

“At APP UK, c.69 % of our employees live in areas of economic deprivation and high unemployment.

As we grow, we are better able to support the local communities in which we operate and to have a greater social impact on local people.”

SME's often offer overall value for money because they can respond very quickly to changes in technology and / or develop new service offerings to differentiate themselves in the market.

In addition, SMEs have fewer levels of management which enables greater flexibility and a more bespoke, personal level of service. This makes SMEs extremely responsive and ensures your cleaning company is placed to deliver rapid commercial solutions.

Small businesses also create and support jobs both directly and indirectly, offering increased value to the economy and supporting local communities.

“How can prospective buyers evaluate all tendering companies fairly and give cleaning the respect it deserves, if the focus is solely on cost and the procurement process delegated to junior employees to go and get the cheapest quote?”



All too often, we have experienced a perfunctory approach to procuring cleaning services and cleaning certainly used to be considered as an afterthought.

The process which end users put in place to go about procuring cleaning or any other soft service, can significantly increase the chances of SMEs competing on a level playing field and prove to the end user that they are a viable alternative to large national and often international companies.

With any service provision, there are no tangible, visual items to review and no set way to confirm whether the service you will get is fit for purpose. A service is an abstract entity that relies upon rhetoric and promises regarding service delivery excellence. So how can you judge the service that you will receive ?

There needs to be a succinct tender specification document that clearly outlines each component part of the expected requirements of the contract. To achieve this, you need to ask yourself and prospective cleaning providers, via the invitation to tender, the following questions...

Evaluating Your Cleaning Tenders: Key Questions To Ask

1.

How do the skills and professionalism of the contracting company complement and strengthen your cleaning function?

2.

Is the management team fully accountable for the service delivered and is this measured via a Service Level Agreement?

3.

Is the Service Level Agreement specific, measurable, accurate and objective?

4.

What is the contractor's approach to staff welfare and development?

5.

What level of staff training and what continuous improvement processes are in place?

6.

Does the contractor have robust IT and management systems in place to support the service delivery and management teams?

7.

What about cultural fit? How agile is the contractor, how flexible, how innovative? Is their service tailored to your needs?

8.

What about your ethics values and CSR? Can the contractor demonstrate strong synergy with these or help you achieve them ?

9.

How important is your contract to your contractor?

“Confirming the scope of services, contract requirements and site briefings are essential. They enable tendering companies to tailor their recommendations and give the client the opportunity to assess their expertise.”

Whether you are just getting a quotation or issuing a tender document, it's important to confirm the full scope of services including hours per week and specification of requirements.

Other factors to consider include:

- The experience of staff
- The level of involvement from the management
- Terms and conditions that will apply
- Budgetary and contract length factors
- Company policies or systems that must be incorporated into the contract

In addition, a site briefing should always be conducted. The briefing gives tendering companies an opportunity to discuss the specification and tailor it if they feel that's necessary. The client can then evaluate the contractors' expertise and benefit from it. The site briefing also gives you a chance to reiterate the salient aspects of your needs and expectations.

“Do not be lulled into a false sense of security by slick sales processes and the latest, state of the art presentation technologies. This doesn’t necessarily translate into the best possible service.”



If you are running a full tender process, it’s always a good idea to supplement any tender response with a follow-up presentation which addresses any elements of the tender /quotation bid that the client wishes to explore in more detail. This also gives both parties the opportunity to test their thinking and resolve any outstanding questions.

However, a word of caution on presentations: Slick sales techniques and the latest, state of the art presentation technologies and “razzmatazz” will not always translate into you receiving the best possible service !

Take the hi-tech out of the equation and look instead at the people. After all, the presentation should be about cultural fit and getting to know the team who will live, eat and breath your contract. Do you trust them, do you have a mutual understanding and empathy, can you actually work with them and are the people at the presentation the team who will drive the success of your contract?

“And finally...”



After the tender process has concluded and the decision has been made, there is one vital part left to do - giving feedback to the bidders.

If our tender is unsuccessful, we either receive no feedback or the feedback provided is not particularly helpful even though this feedback is an essential part of our continuous improvement programme.

Similarly when a bid is successful, it is just as important for us to understand why this was the case.

Constructive feedback on both the positive and negative aspects of a tender, and not just the pricing element, will go a long way to helping SME's refine their bidding processes by clarifying where the bid was both strongest and weakest.

With a level playing field being offered to all bidders through this sort of process, we hope that SMEs offering the best overall value for money will be more successful in winning contracts.

This will not only ensure we all benefit from a vibrant cleaning sector but will also enable us to contribute to the success of the local economy as a whole.

Need more help and advice...

Contact us at info@app-uk.co.uk

www.app-uk.co.uk



APP UK is a leading commercial cleaning company, with over 20 years' experience of delivering the very highest quality cleaning services. As a social enterprise, owned by Platfform, the leading mental health and social change charity, we are also passionate about looking after the people, places and the communities in which our teams live and work.