

What goes in a quote that wins the job

The only piece of your work they see before they say yes. Six things that belong in it, and one that doesn't.

Somebody asks what it'll cost. You go out, look at it, think about it properly on the drive home, and that evening you send them a text that says *\$2,400, could start week after next.*

That isn't a quote. That's a price. And a price on its own hands the person reading it exactly one thing to think about, which is whether the number is big.

Here's the part that's easy to miss when you've been doing the work for years. That document is the only piece of your work most customers ever see before they decide. They haven't watched you do anything. They don't know anybody who has — if they did, they'd have said so when they called. All they have is the thing you sent them, sitting next to the thing somebody else sent them.

Which means the quote isn't paperwork you do after the selling. It *is* the selling, and it's the one part of it you get to do carefully, at your kitchen table, with nobody watching you think.

01 Send it while they still care

Interest has a half-life. The afternoon they called you, the leak or the dead lawn or the noise under the hood is the biggest thing in their week. Nine days later it's just a thing they've got used to, and your quote lands in a mood that's completely different from the one they were in when they asked.

Most people lose jobs here without ever knowing it, because nobody writes back to say *you took too long*. They just go quiet, and you assume it was the price.

WHAT TO DO

- Before you leave the driveway, tell them when they'll have it. *"I'll get this over to you tomorrow evening"* is a promise small enough to keep and specific enough to be noticed.
- Then beat it. Tomorrow afternoon is better than tomorrow evening, and the gap is the entire impression.
- If it genuinely needs pricing up — a supplier to call, a material to check — send a holding line anyway. Silence and working on it look identical from their side.
- Keep a rough template for the jobs you do most. Most of a quote is the same every time; only the middle changes.

A decent quote on Tuesday beats a better quote on Friday. Speed isn't a tiebreaker here — it's most of the competition.

02 Start with their problem, in their words

Open the quote by telling them what you understood the job to be. Not in trade language. In the words they used when they were standing there pointing at it.

"Water coming through the ceiling in the back bedroom, worse after heavy rain, started about a month ago." Two lines. Then the price.

This does three things at once and costs you thirty seconds. It proves you were listening rather than measuring. It proves you understood the actual problem rather than the one you see most often. And if you got it wrong, they'll correct you now — which is enormously cheaper than finding out halfway through a Thursday.

WHAT TO DO

- Write one or two sentences describing what they told you, in their vocabulary, before anything else appears on the page.
- Include the detail that mattered to them even if it doesn't matter to you. The dog, the newborn, the party on the 20th.
- If two people were there and they disagreed about something, write down what you're pricing. That sentence has saved more arguments than any contract.
- Never open with your own company history. They know who you are; they asked you to come.

Nobody buys from somebody who doesn't seem to know what's wrong.

03 Describe the work, not the materials

A list of materials is a shopping list, and a shopping list invites exactly one response: they start pricing the items themselves.

Describe the job as a sequence instead. *Lift and take away the old slabs, dig out and level the base, lay the new, point it and wash it down.* That's the same job as *18 slabs, sand, cement*, and it reads like a completely different amount of work, because it is a completely different amount of work and only one version shows it.

The parts you'd never think to mention are usually where your value actually lives. Protecting the floor. Taking the old one away. Cleaning up so they can use the room that night. Coming back in a week to check it. Every one of those is invisible from outside, and every one of them is a reason your number is what it is.

WHAT TO DO

- Write the job as steps in the order it happens, not as a parts list. Four to six lines is plenty.
- Name the prep, the protection, the disposal and the cleanup explicitly. They're a third of your day and none of them are obvious.
- Say who's actually turning up. *"The person who quoted is the person doing the work"* is worth real money and most of your competitors can't write it.
- Mention the guarantee and how long it lasts. If you don't put a number on it, it doesn't count.

They can't put a value on what they can't see, and most of a good job is invisible once it's finished.

04 Say what isn't included

This one feels backwards. Writing down what you're *not* doing seems like handing somebody a reason to say no.

It does the opposite, for a reason worth understanding. Two quotes with nothing but numbers on them can only be compared on the numbers. Add exclusions to yours and suddenly there's a second question in the room: *does the cheaper one include that?* Usually it doesn't. That's frequently the entire reason it's cheaper.

It also ends the argument that happens at the end of jobs, where somebody assumed something was in the price and you assumed it obviously wasn't. Neither of you was lying. Nobody wrote it down.

WHAT TO DO

- List three or four things you're not doing, in plain language. Not legal boilerplate — a short honest line each.
- Cover the usual suspects: permits, parking or access, disposal of anything unexpected, making good on somebody else's work.
- Say what happens if you open it up and find something. Not *extras may apply* — say you'll stop, photograph it, and price it before continuing.
- Put a date on the quote. Thirty days is normal, and it quietly protects you when materials move.

The cheapest quote is usually the one with the most missing from it. Yours should be the one that makes that possible to see.

05 Give them one easy yes

Somewhere along the way people started sending three-tier quotes, because a good, better, best table looks thorough and professional.

What it actually does is convert a decision into homework. Three options means comparing three things against each other *and* against whatever the other firm sent, and the reliable way to avoid that much thinking is to leave it until the weekend. It doesn't get picked up again on the weekend.

Send one price for the job you'd genuinely recommend. If there's a real second option — a smaller version for a tighter budget, or a sensible upgrade while you're already there — offer it underneath, and say plainly which one you'd choose and why.

WHAT TO DO

- Lead with the option you'd pick if it were your house. Make it the biggest thing on the page.
- Two options maximum, and only when the second is genuinely different rather than a discount in a costume.
- Write the recommendation down: *"I'd do option one — you'll only want the other done properly in two years anyway."*
- One number per option. A range reads as a guess, and people hear the bottom of it and remember the top.

Three options is homework. One option with a reason attached is a recommendation, and people buy recommendations.

06 End with what happens next

Most quotes stop dead at the total. The page ends, and now it's nobody's move — which in practice means it's nobody's job to do anything, and nothing is what happens.

Finish by saying exactly what you'd like them to do and what you'll do when they do it. *"If you're happy with that, just reply and I'll put you in for the week of the 14th. I can hold that until Friday."*

A reply, a date, and a reason the date might go away. That's it. You'd be surprised how many quotes are lost to nothing more than both sides politely waiting for the other one.

WHAT TO DO

- Name the one action you want: reply, call, or sign. Only one.
- Offer a real start date rather than *we'd book you in*. A date is a thing you can picture.
- Say how long you can hold it, honestly. A deadline you invented gets ignored; a real diary is persuasive.
- Then actually follow up once, a few days later. The follow-up nobody sends covers what that message should say.

A quote that doesn't say what happens next is asking a stranger to invent the next step. Most people just won't.

None of this makes you the cheapest, and it isn't meant to. It makes you the one they can actually understand, which is a much better thing to be and a far easier one to stay.

It also removes the most common objection before it's ever said out loud. *You're too expensive* is usually "I don't know what I'm getting" wearing a different jacket, and a quote that explains itself never has to be defended.

*Send it fast. Say what they told you, what you'll do, what you won't, and what happens next.
That's the whole thing.*

Your website is doing the same job as your quote, a step earlier — explaining what somebody gets before they've spoken to you. Send me yours and I'll tell you what a stranger can and can't work out about what you do, along with what I'd fix. Free, within two business days, and it obliges you to nothing.

Written by JT Creeden at RedHorseWebDev, who builds websites for small businesses in the Hudson Valley. The whole guide is free to read at redhorsewebdev.com/learn — this PDF is just easier to keep.