

Summary - Preparing a High Impact Consultant's Report

Common Types of Security Consultant Reports

There are many types of reports prepared by consultants, but the most important ones are Security Assessment Report, Design Concept Report, Architectural Design Phase Report, Peer Review Report and Forensic Report.

Security Assessment Reports

The most common type of report prepared by consultants is the already mentioned Security Assessment Report. The report is a document which objective is explain to the client what you discovered about all the security conditions of their facility. There is not a single style of report, each consultant adopt his own approach to the situation, and it is very common that the consultant is free to format the document in his own way.

The report usually starts with an outside cover containing the date of the report, the client logo and facility location. However, it should be clean and simple. After the outside cover, there is an inside cover with some basic information about the consultant and whoever else that worked on the project.

After that, there is acknowledgements that is not required, but highly recommended. This section is a list of all people who contributed to the project. It is very important because it can cause a strong impact within the executives and powerful people. The acknowledgements are followed by the table of contents that must be detailed to allow to the readers easily navigation in the document.

The next section is the executive summary. It describes, in a very relevant and meaningful way, the most critical things that you want to inform to the CEO. It is also known to be the hardest part in the whole document, and it is recommended to be completed after all the other sections.

Right after, it is time to the introduction and scope. It should be a description of what was and what was not addressed in the document. It also should contain all the tools used like field surveys, people interviews and so forth. After that, there is the description of the facilities which purpose is give basic information of the facilities to someone who does not know the place.

The description of the facility is followed by the description of existing security program. This section is very important because most the executives of the companies do not know the details of the security programs, so a description of the company actual conditions is helpful. It should be brief but complete: it should contain information about staffing, security systems and so forth.

Next, the risk analysis should be a summary of all the risks and threats found by the consultant. It is optional but a risk analysis matrix can be included to make easier to see the impact and consequences of the risks. After that, there is an optional part: the consultant's evaluation and opinion. If the consultant decides to include this the report, it should have general strategies for improvements and highlight the most crucial strengths and weakness of the program.

After that comes the most important section of the document: finding and recommendations. In this section, the consultant must highlight the encountered issues and suggest solutions. All the problems should be addressed separated, each one followed by recommended solutions. The consultant can use pictures in this section if he thinks that it is going to be helpful. The problems can be divided in

categories, like Personnel or Physical Security, or by location, like Administrative building, garage and so forth.

After that, there is the appendices or attachments if the consultant used them during the document. Finally, the last section is the summary of recommendations which is a table containing summary of all the recommendations. It is very helpful to the client because has a brief description of all the recommendations.

Report Writing Tips

The first tip is about the importance of the report. This document may be read many years later, for many persons that the consultant does not even imagine. It also can become a legal document in the future. The second tip is related to who is going to read the report: top-level executives, board of directors insurance companies and even lawyers, judges and jury.

The third tip is that each project should have a different and unique report. The report should be specific to address the situation in each client. Another tip is related to the time when the consultant should start to write the report, and that is early. The consultant needs time to think and address all the problems in the report, and that demands time.

The next tip is about the style of writing of the report that should be simply and clearly. The consultant has to remember that the objective is communication, not impress anyone. The report also does not need to be big, it should only long, as it needs to be. The consultant should also define all the concepts and terms that might be unknown for who is going to read the report. Another tip is use terms consistently; it means keep using the same word for the same thing.

The next tip is use facts to make direct statements; it means that the consultant should use actual number and facts to make powerful statements. The consultant also can use charts and photos to enhance the report as long as they have a purpose and add real value to the report. After finish the report, the consultant should have the report reviewed by the team before sending to the client.

The last tip is about avoiding common beginner's mistakes, for example forget to point out things that the client is doing right or use sarcasm or humor in the report. The consultant also should be very careful when writing about estimated costs and during the formatting of the document.

Summary - State Office of Education, Network Design Proposal

Feasibility Study

The proposal is for a data communication network to serve the Maryland public education system. This proposed network is designed to serve the State Office of Education and two of its school district offices. However, the network is for administrative purposes only, independent of student computing facilities. The North School District is located 25 miles from the state office and the South School District is located 40 miles from the state office.

There are many goals for this network; the first one is a secure service. The network will provide secure administrative computing for the state office and its districts, it is designed to be functionally and physically isolated from access by people that are not employees of the buildings. Another objective is integration and update of the network because the actual network has many problems of incompatibility. The network will also allow users to retrieve process and store data from any connected computer. Additionally, the network will allow collaboration between many users with different skills regardless of their physical location. The last objective is that the network will be easily saleable, so more district offices can be added to the network in the future. The design assumes that the state education network already has a firewall and an internet connection.

Network needs analysis

The types of data that will be dealt on the network are reports, web pages, bulletins among others kind of documents. The data will be created by software applications like the Microsoft Office and Dreamweaver. About the network speed, executed applications, file transfers, and so forth should ideally appear to operate as quickly as processes executed within an end station. The maximum estimated number of users on the network at any given time is 100. Each user will need an average of 100 MB of server space (in addition to secondary storage on local PCs. A main data server in the State Office will have a 36 GB capacity. The network is expected to operate at 99.9% uptime and an undiscovered error rate of .001%.

Strengths of the proposal

I think the proposal is really direct and straight forward. The statements are as clearly as possible, and there are no ambiguous words or sentences in the text. Additionally, the proposal uses data from interviews with the users to make points and in my opinion, it is a great way to convince the readers.

Another very good aspect in the proposal is that is very well illustrated. There are fifteen diagrams that show to the readers exactly how each part of the network will be build. It also shows where each equipment will be placed.

The cost-benefit analysis in the end of the proposal is excellent. It shows and analyzes all the costs and benefits, including the intangible benefits (like increase staff morale). Besides it, there are relevant comments in the end, explaining that the project will pay for itself after 14 months for example.

Weakness of the proposal

One weakness of the proposal is that there is no alternative to the suggested equipment. I think maybe the person or the company that elaborated this proposal could offered more options of printers, servers and so forth. Clients usually like the possibility to choose between some products.

The tables in the appendix are too technical for the average reader of the proposal. I think that whoever wrote the proposal should have written something more. For example, they should have written a small paragraph explaining what these numbers represent and why are they important to the proposal.