



**BIDINTELL INDUSTRY REPORT**

# The Go / No-Bid Blind Spot

Why the number that decides a specialty subcontractor's profit is the one almost no one tracks — and what the leading subs do differently.

REPORT INFORMATION

# About this report

<b>Publication</b>	BidIntell Industry Report
<b>Title</b>	The Go / No-Bid Blind Spot
<b>Subtitle</b>	Why the number that decides a specialty subcontractor's profit is the one almost no one tracks — and what the leading subs do differently.
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<b>Audience</b>	Specialty subcontractors, estimating leads, preconstruction managers
<b>Reading time</b>	About 8 minutes

### What this report is — and is not.

This is a synthesis of publicly available industry data on the bid / no-bid decision in commercial subcontracting. Every figure is attributed to its published source. It does not yet include proprietary BidIntell data — that is a deliberate choice, and a future edition will replace borrowed numbers with measured ones.

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## SECTION 0

## Executive summary

For a specialty subcontractor, the choice to bid or pass on an invitation is the single highest-leverage moment in the estimating process. Pursue the right work and the estimating hours convert into backlog. Pursue the wrong work and those hours are gone — spent on jobs that were never winnable, never fit the shop, or were never going to be awarded by a particular general contractor.

And yet the published evidence points to an uncomfortable pattern: the metric that would tell a sub which jobs are which — the bid-hit ratio, broken down by general contractor and by trade — is tracked by almost no one. The go / no-bid call is still made on gut feel, in a conference room, against a deadline.

### What the data shows

- **Fewer than 10%** of contractors surveyed by an industry consultant know and track their bid-hit-win ratio. The number that most predicts profitability is invisible to roughly nine out of ten firms. *[Hedley, Metal Construction News, 2025]*
- **About 25%** is the commonly cited commercial win rate — roughly one award for every four bids. For hard-bid public work it falls to 10–20%. *[ConstructConnect; industry benchmarks]*
- **About \$140,000** in wasted pursuit spending is the figure from one vendor's published model of a mid-size firm chasing 30–40 poor-fit opportunities a year — illustrative, but directionally consistent with how estimating hours leak. *[Buildr model, 2026]*
- **A majority of bids** commonly go through two to three rounds — or more — before resolution. Each cycle adds time and cost to work that may never close.

### The throughline.

Specialty contractors are pouring estimating capacity into a decision they make blind. The firms that win consistently are not bidding more — they are bidding better, qualifying each invitation against a fixed framework before estimating starts.

This report reviews the published industry evidence on that decision — where the hours go, where the dollars disappear, and what the disciplined minority do differently. It closes with a six-factor screening framework and a one-page pre-bid checklist your team can use against the next invitation that lands.

## SECTION 1

## The number almost no one tracks

Every sub has a sense of how they are doing. Few have the number. The bid-hit ratio — jobs won as a share of jobs bid — is the closest thing the trade has to a single profitability gauge, because it ties estimating effort directly to backlog won. When a veteran construction business consultant surveyed his audiences, the result was stark.



Source: George Hedley, *Metal Construction News*, 2025 · Survey of 2,000+ contractors.

The tracking gap is plain: roughly 9 in 10 firms fly blind on their own win rate. The same source frames the consequence plainly — bidding without tracking your ratio is like fishing anywhere and not caring whether you catch anything.

The factors that move the ratio are well understood: number of competitors, markup, project location and type, contract type (bid versus negotiated), and customer relationships. What is missing is the discipline of recording the outcome and reading the pattern back.

That gap matters because the ratio is not one number — it is many. The same sub can run a strong ratio with one general contractor and a dismal one with another; win regularly on small local jobs and almost never on large out-of-town ones. Without tracking by GC and by job type, those patterns stay hidden, and the sub keeps spending estimating hours where the work was never likely to land.

### Why this is the foundation

- A bid-hit ratio is only useful when it is sliced — by general contractor, by trade, by project size, by bid-versus-negotiated.
- The published guidance is consistent: track it monthly, quarterly, and yearly, for every project and every customer you bid to.

- The sub who knows their ratio by GC can answer the only question that matters before estimating starts: is this one worth our hours?

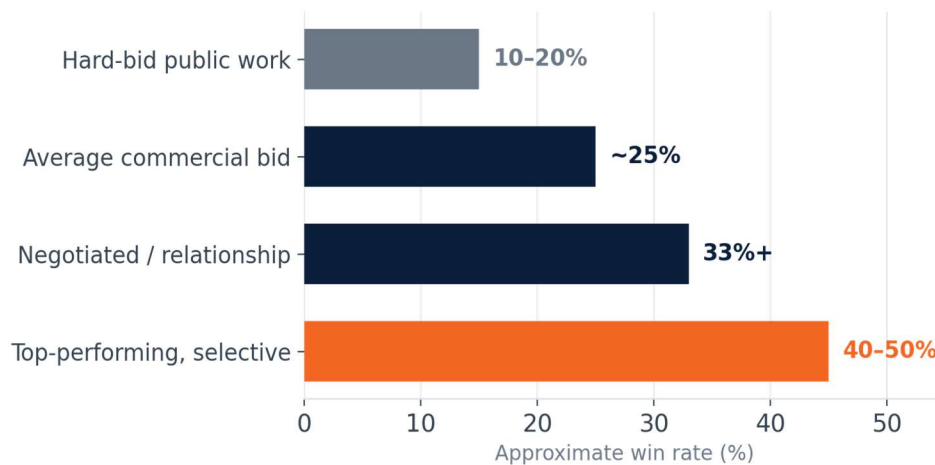
SECTION 2

## What a normal win rate actually looks like

If most subs do not track their ratio, they also tend to misjudge where it should sit. Published benchmarks cluster tightly — and they are lower than many estimators assume.

### The commercial baseline

Across multiple industry sources, the average commercial win rate sits at roughly 25% — about one award for every four bids submitted. Top performers are reported in the 40–50% range, and they get there less through price than through selection: bidding fewer, better-fit jobs. For hard-bid public work, where the competitor list is long, a 10–20% rate is normal even for strong firms.



Ranges synthesized from published commercial-construction benchmarks; see Sources.

#### Win rate climbs with selectivity, not volume.

The most selective firms win nearly half their bids. The practical reading is not chase a higher ratio at all costs — a ratio that is too high can mean a sub is bidding too little or pricing too conservatively. The point is to know the number, by category, and bid deliberately against it — rather than discovering at year-end that half the estimating budget went to a GC who awards elsewhere.

### Benchmark: typical win rates by type of work

Type of work	Typical win rate	Bid-to-win
Negotiated / relationship work	33% or higher	~3:1 or better

Type of work	Typical win rate	Bid-to-win
Average commercial bid work	~25%	~4:1
Hard-bid private work (target)	25% or better	~4:1
Hard-bid public work	10–20%	~5:1 to 10:1
<b>Top-performing, highly selective firms</b>	<b>40–50%</b>	<b>~2:1</b>

SECTION 3

## Where the hours and dollars disappear

A bid is not free. The cost of pursuing one is the estimator's hours, the takeoff, the plan review, and the opportunity cost of the bid not pursued because the team was buried in this one. When a wrong-fit job is pursued, all of that is spent on work that was never going to convert.

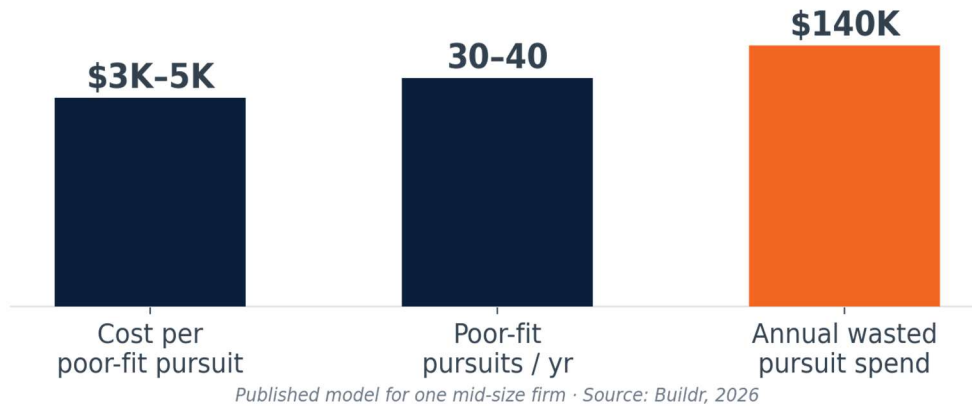
### The wasted-pursuit math

One industry model of a mid-size firm pursuing roughly 120 opportunities a year puts a hard number on it: 30 to 40 of those pursuits are poor fits — wrong geography, outside core expertise, or misaligned expectations — at an estimated \$3,000 to \$5,000 each.

# ~\$140,000

**Annual wasted-pursuit spend in one vendor's published model**

Roughly 35 bad-fit bids × about \$4,000 each. Source: Buildr, 2026 — illustrative, not measured.



The building blocks of the \$140K figure — each one a published number, not an estimate.

The same model puts total opportunity cost — wasted pursuits plus the qualified, in-sweet-spot jobs that got passed over while the team was busy — well into the six figures. The mechanism is simple, and it compounds: every hour spent on a job that will not close is an hour not spent on one that would.

### The revision drag

Wrong-fit work also tends to be slow work. A majority of change order and bid revisions run through two to three rounds before resolution, and a meaningful share go four or more. Each cycle adds days or weeks and more administrative load — stretching the time-to-decision on exactly the jobs a sub should have screened out earlier.

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## The selection-game shift

The published conclusion is blunt: commercial construction is no longer a volume game; it is a selection game.

- Firms growing fastest run a disciplined bid / no-bid process and pursue work where their record, relationships, and fit give them an edge.
- Better-fit projects beat more bids. The lever is not effort — it is which invitations earn the effort.

## SECTION 4

## What the leading subs do differently

The pattern across the data is consistent. The firms that win more do not have more estimators or lower prices. They have a filter, and they apply it before the estimating starts. Three habits show up over and over.

### 1. They qualify every invitation against a fixed framework

Six factors drive most go / no-go decisions — client, project, contractor, bidding situation, market, and economy (see Section 5). The strongest signals are client financial capability, project risk, profit potential, and the number of competitors. Leading firms score these deliberately rather than debating them, and they reach a go / no-go answer in minutes — not after a takeoff is half-built.

### 2. They track outcomes by GC and by trade

Because they record what happened — won, lost, or no decision — they can see which general contractors actually award them work and which simply collect their numbers for coverage. Over time that record is the single most useful asset a sub has going into the next invitation from the same GC.

### 3. They bid fewer, better-fit jobs

Selectivity is the whole strategy. The firms reported at 40–50% win rates get there by passing on work that does not fit, which protects estimating capacity for the work that does. Doing poor work or chasing the wrong jobs damages a reputation far more than declining a bid ever could — and reputation is what drives the next invitation.

#### **The decision, in one line.**

A faster takeoff on a wrong-fit job is still wasted time. The leverage is not in measuring the job faster. It is in deciding, before you measure, whether the job is worth measuring at all.

SECTION 5

## A six-factor go / no-bid framework

Across the published guidance the same six factors come up repeatedly. They are the spine of a disciplined screening process. Score each one on the invitation in front of you before estimating starts — the goal is a defensible read, not a perfect one.

#	Factor	What it really tests
1	<b>Client</b>	Is the owner financially capable and a known quantity? Their record paying on time, holding scope, and being workable matters as much as the design they put out for bid.
2	<b>Project</b>	Does the scope match the shop's core expertise? Is the size and complexity inside the band where you bid competitively, or are you stretching just to be in the room?
3	<b>Contractor</b>	What is your historical hit rate with this general contractor, at this size, in this geography? Are they inviting you to win or to cover the field?
4	<b>Bidding situation</b>	How many competitors, what is the bid form, and how is the award being made — low number, best value, or a relationship call? The fewer the unknowns, the cleaner the decision.
5	<b>Market</b>	What is local trade capacity, labor availability, and material lead time doing right now? A great project in a stretched market is a different bid than the same project in a slow one.
6	<b>Economy</b>	Where is the cycle? Rising interest rates, public funding shifts, and sector-specific demand (data centers, healthcare, education) all move the size of the prize and the risk of cancellation.

### How to score in practice

1. Score each factor 0–3 (no fit / weak / good / strong). Anchor scores in evidence — last three bids with this GC, last project in this geography, current shop capacity.
2. Multiply red-flag factors. A single hard no on client financial capability or shop fit should be able to kill a bid by itself, regardless of how the other factors look.
3. Set a minimum threshold. Many leading firms use a simple rule: under N points, no bid. Above N, the estimator gets a takeoff window.
4. Log the outcome — won, lost, no decision — against the factor scores. Patterns surface within a few cycles; the framework gets sharper from there.

## SECTION 6

## A pre-bid screening checklist

This is the framework above turned into a one-page checklist. Run it on the next invitation that lands. If the answer is no on three or more lines — or hard-no on any client or capacity question — pass.

### Client

- Are they financially solid and known to pay on time?
- Is the scope as defined likely to hold, or do you expect heavy change order traffic?
- Do you have a working relationship — direct or through this GC — that gives you signal?

### Project fit

- Is this inside your core trade and shop expertise?
- Is the size inside the band where you have actually won before?
- Is the geography one you have crewed successfully in the last 24 months?

### General contractor

- What is your bid-hit ratio with this GC over the last 12–24 months?
- Are they inviting you on a job their preferred sub can also bid? If so, are you coverage?
- Have they paid on time on your last two awarded jobs?

### Bidding situation

- How many subs are bidding? Is the field selected or open?
- Bid form: low number, best value, or qualifications-based?
- How many revision rounds are likely before award? Is your team available for them?

### Market and economy

- Is your shop at, under, or over capacity for the bid window?
- Are the materials inside lead-time you can hold price on?
- Is the funding source stable, or is cancellation risk material?

### The hardest part is saying no.

Declining a bid almost never damages a relationship. Doing poor work or pulling out late always does. Selectivity is a reputation strategy, not a workload strategy.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

## The four things to remember

- **The decisive number is invisible.** Roughly nine in ten contractors do not track their bid-hit ratio. The metric that most predicts profitability is, for most firms, simply unknown.
- **A normal win rate is about 25%.** About one award for every four commercial bids — lower for public work. Estimating effort spent above that ratio is, on average, effort spent on losses.
- **Wrong-fit pursuit is expensive.** One vendor's model puts wasted-pursuit spend near \$140,000 a year for a mid-size firm. The figure is illustrative, but the mechanism is real: hours on jobs that will not close come straight out of the work that would have.
- **Selection beats volume.** The fastest-growing firms qualify every invitation against a fixed framework, track outcomes by GC and trade, and bid fewer, better-fit jobs.

**The work is high-value and constant. The decision that governs it is still made blind.**  
That is the gap this report exists to name — and the gap BidIntell is built to close.

CALL TO ACTION

## Where BidIntell fits

BidIntell scores the bid documents before the estimating starts — location fit, contract terms, GC relationship, and trade match — into a single read, and then tracks the outcome of every bid so the score gets sharper with each one logged. The aim is plain: a defensible go / no-bid read in about a minute, and a record of which GCs actually award you work.

### What the read actually looks like

- **A 0–100 fit score** scored across the six factors above, with a plain recommendation — pursue, look closer, or pass — not a black box.
- **A short reason line** in estimator language: for example, a low historical hit rate with this GC, at this project size, in this geography. You see why, not just a number.
- **A logged outcome** after each bid, which updates your hit rate for that GC and trade so the next invitation from the same source is read against your own history.

Takeoff and estimating tools measure the job. BidIntell decides whether the job is worth measuring. We filter; they measure — the two sit side by side, not in competition. That is the line, and this report is why it matters.

### Two ways to put this to work

**01. SCORE A REAL BID**

**Send one live set of bid documents and get a one-page scored read back.**

No signup, no call. See what a go / no-bid read looks like on your own work.

**02. ADD YOUR NUMBERS**

**Help shape the next edition of this report.**

We are fielding a specialty-contractor survey on the go / no-bid decision. Add yours and the next edition carries data no one else has.

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**METHODOLOGY**

## Sources and method

This report synthesizes publicly available industry data. It does not yet include proprietary BidIntell data — a deliberate choice. Every figure here is attributed to its published source so it can be checked. As logged-outcome data accumulates, future editions will add first-party benchmarks and label them clearly as such.

### Definitions used in this report

- **Industry convention.** A figure repeated consistently across published sources but not traceable to a single measured study.
- **Vendor model.** An illustrative calculation published by a software or services vendor — directional, not observed data.
- **Survey.** A figure produced by a formal or informal poll of a defined contractor population; sample sizes are noted where the source provides them.

### Sources

George Hedley, *“You Must Know Your Bid-Hit-Win Ratio,”* Metal Construction News, January 2025. Survey of 2,000+ contractors; <10% track their ratio; bid-hit benchmarks and the factors that move them.

Buildr, *“4 Ways Preconstruction Inefficiency Is Costing General Contractors,”* 2026. Wasted-pursuit and opportunity-cost model for a mid-size firm.

ConstructConnect, *“Bid or No-Bid: How Contractors Choose Which Projects to Pursue,”* 2026. Six go / no-go factors; true cost of a bid; bid-to-win ratio guidance.

SMPS Foundation, *“Measuring for Success: A Look at Hit Rates & Other KPIs in the A/E/C Industries.”* Survey of 303 U.S. AEC firms; construction hit rate ~37.9%.

Additional commercial win-rate and revision-cycle benchmarks are drawn from published 2025–2026 industry analyses, including DownToBid and Bidi Contracting. Ranges are presented as synthesized benchmarks, not single-source figures.

### A note on honesty

Where sources disagree, we present a range rather than pick the most flattering number. No statistic in this report is fabricated, and none is BidIntell's own — yet. That is the point of the survey: to replace borrowed numbers with measured ones.

APPENDIX

## Benchmark table

Every figure cited in this report, with its source and what kind of evidence it is. Use this table to weigh each figure on its own terms.

Metric	Value / range	Source	Type of evidence
<b>Contractors who track their bid-hit ratio</b>	< 10%	Hedley, Metal Construction News (2025)	<i>Consultant survey, 2,000+ contractors</i>
<b>Average commercial win rate</b>	~25% (1 in 4)	ConstructConnect; multiple industry sources	<i>Industry convention / synthesized</i>
<b>Construction firm hit rate</b>	~37.9%	SMPS Foundation	<i>Formal survey, 303 AEC firms</i>
<b>Hard-bid public win rate</b>	10–20%	Multiple industry sources	<i>Industry convention / synthesized</i>
<b>Top-performer win rate</b>	40–50%	Published 2025–26 analyses	<i>Synthesized range</i>
<b>Annual wasted-pursuit spend</b>	~\$140K	Buildr (2026)	<i>Vendor model — illustrative</i>
<b>Bid / revision rounds</b>	Majority 2–3+	Multiple industry sources	<i>Industry convention</i>

*BidIntell Industry Report · First edition, June 2026  
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