Successful Selling to the Government

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The GSA Corner: GSA Oversight on the Rise

By Deborah Wolland, The JDS Marketing Group

With the success of the Schedule program comes a price. GSA anticipates an increase in post award audits as a direct result of the July Congressional recommendation that the Agency resume these audits as a means to correct defective pricing data.

GSA discontinued post award audits in 1997, just when the program began to build. Speculators say it was the result of industry pressure related to the disruptiveness of the audits. The Department of Veterans Affairs maintains its' audit program and has found over $300M in the past 12 years due the Government.

Last February's GAO report has also contributed to the new look at post award audits. This report stated that contract pricing continues to be an issue in GSA's MAS program.

Current contractors are seeing a rise in the number of pre extension audits as well. Contracts are randomly chosen from those due for a 5 year period of performance extension. Commercial sales practices and all pricing data are audited and recommendations made to the Contracting Officer prior to approval of the next option period.

Additionally, Administrative Contracting Officer's in the field are scanning the Schedules for contractors who have reported little or no sales in the past 10 quarters. These contracts are being cancelled for lack of use.

Conclusion – maintain the minimum $25k in sales and ensure contract pricing compliance.

Back to Basics: Creating Interest when Prospecting

By Peter Adler, Seneca Creek Consulting

For those of us engaged in Government sales, we oftentimes must approach a prospective client without the benefit of a "bow wave." A bow wave in this context is any action on the part of your enterprise that leads the way into a prospect's mind by delivering marketing messages via a wide variety of means. This can be telemarketing; print or internet advertising; trade show representation; and major mail campaigns, among others.

Many of the commercial providers of solutions to government do not have the resources essential for creating this bow wave. So, in the absence of this powerful asset, what are we to do when making initial contact with a prospective client? The answer is that we do not depend upon the brand equity of major Fortune 1000 concerns that permit instant recognition among Government buyers. Rather, we must depend upon detailed knowledge of an area of topical interest to the buyer.

A hypothetical example of such an opening is when addressing a manager within a Program Office may be: "I understand that when submitting requirements to your Acquisition Office, it is now imperative that you can demonstrate that all your requested needs must comply with the most recent FISMA standards. We provide a software solution that addresses specifically this need and guides you through the compliance process and provides the citations from within the standards that will now be included with your requirements submission."

The issue is obvious. If the problem is real, it is not of major concern initially where you hail from. Rather the interest is peaked by your knowledge of the prospect's needs and timing. Ultimately, you will have to offer proof statements to substantiate your claims. However, there is no opportunity to provide this until you have the buyer's interest. If you are from major systems integration or other large commercial organization, the marketing that precedes your call is oftentimes sufficient to engage the client.

This is not normally true when you phone a Government facility and introduce yourself as a member of a virtually unknown organization. The buyer's first thought is: "Who is this?" Not, "does he understand my operation and my needs"? Therefore, if your organization is absent this "bow wave," it is imperative that you immediately go to the heart of the problem. Failure to do this, will often lead to a rejected phone call or, at best, a perfunctory conversation that does nothing to move you toward your goal of a meeting and further discussion of the applicability of your solutions.

Information on specific activities within the Government, even at the Program level, are available readily from literally scores of sources such as Government Computer News, Federal Computer Week, National Journal, daily news articles on internet sites, along with dozens of other information assets that are available for the "looking."

Therefore, until your enterprise chooses to establish its own "bow wave" to clear a path for your sales entrance, you must apply the techniques that have repeatedly proven successful. Use all available intelligence to provide a sales entrance tool that allows you to connect to your targeted Agencies and Programs.

Winning Proposals: Making your Technical Proposal a Selling Document

By Joe Nocerino, Seneca Creek Consulting

Most people, regardless of their years in the business, confuse marketing with selling. In the competitive proposal arena, marketing is every activity that leads up to the release of a proposal solicitation. The proposal preparation is where selling happens. To win, a proposal must sell both in content and format. In many cases form and format can be equally or more important than content.

Putting together a compliant technical proposal, i.e., one that meets all procurement requirements, is a minimal starting point for winning. It just levels the playing field. Proposed innovative solutions, as part of meeting requirements, is also a prerequisite to being a contender, but not sufficient. To win, your proposal must also sell your message. What follows are tips for selling your message.

A winning proposal must answer the question, "of what benefit is your innovative solution to the procuring agency; how does it meet the requirements; and why is it better than a competitor's solution"?

A winning proposal begins with the cover and extends all the way to the last appendix. The cover is the beginning of your executive summary. You must grab the evaluator as soon as the document is picked up, and maintain that hold, until the reading is completed.

We sometimes forget that evaluators are people just like you and I. They want to quickly get through the proposal and feel confident about their appraisal. Making a proposal an easy read goes a long way to winning. This includes a detailed table of contents and a complete compliance matrix. In addition, sentence and paragraphs should be concise, as short as possible, flow logically and be augmented by graphics (e.g., pictures, flow charts, diagrams).

Besides an overall executive summary, each major section should also have its own executive summary, complete with a major theme, graphics, and captions, integrated with content that together encapsulates and sells the more detailed content to follow. It should boldly draw in your evaluator, motivating him or her, to continue reading.

Extensive use of references and pointers are powerful ways to minimize redundancy and pull into the proposal text, appendix details, previously presented graphics, related details in other sections and plans, not required, not submitted and available for review.

These are just a few technical proposal tips for winning. Future articles will address other proposal form and format tips, including how to make your cost/price proposal a winning document.

Partner Corner

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