



Successful Selling to the Government

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Back to Basics: Gaining the Trust of the Buyer

By Peter Adler, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

Among professional sales' First Principles is gaining the trust of your prospective client. We know this all too well, don't we?

Despite our knowledge, we can all use a review from time to time on the most important aspects of selling to the Government buyer or, for that matter, to any prospective buyer. We know that trust is earned, but what are the basic mechanisms upon which this trust is built? For better or worse, our Government buyer will assess our trustworthiness early on in our first meeting or substantive phone conversation.

Perhaps one of the quickest ways to gain trust is to have a party that your prospect knows and respects and that you have successfully provided a solution for make a personal referral. While their requirements may be quite different from those of your prospect, it is the implicit personal endorsement that emanates from this relationship that helps to establish you with your current prospective buyer.

Oddly enough, it is easier to develop a trust relationship by *listening* to your prospective buyer attentively than it is by telling him or her something. Why is this so? Most likely this occurs because culturally we are pre-disposed towards patient listeners. We associate this ability to listen attentively with role of any professional advisor. And, after all, that is the role we are attempting to fulfill in this transaction.

When we do address the prospect, it can be very effective to note some shortcoming or less than perfect attribute of our offering. Why? Because we do not accept readily someone who purports to have the perfect solution. In fact, such a solution rarely exists. So why spend our personal "capital" on proposing a solution that sounds "too good to be true?"

Given the current sales climate which has become increasingly competitive, now, more than ever, we must gain the buyer's trust very early in the cycle. Failure to do so most likely puts us "out of the running" for the buyer's business.

Understanding the need to establish credibility with the prospective client is contained within the skills portfolio of all sales professional. However, do we remember to "dust off" this skill and establish our personal, as well as our, corporate credibility with each and every buyer with whom we deal whether that is a government end-user, a teaming partner, or a vendor with whom we do business?

The GSA Corner

By Deborah Wolland, *The JDS Marketing Group*

FSS/FTS Merger

The long rumored merger of FSS and FTS is now a reality. The Bush Administration included in its 2006 budget request a statement that the two organizations within GSA

are no longer needed and should be consolidated into a "Federal Technology and Supply Service" Agency.

Additional oversight is being felt at the Congressional level as well. The House Government Reform Committee will be taking a "closer look" at the two organizations with an eye towards consolidation, as is GSA itself. In a memorandum dated January, 2005, Commissioner Perry announced an FSS/FTS Reorganization Steering Team comprised of the following high level executives:

Stephen A. Perry, Administrator
Barbara L. Shelton, Acting Commissioner of FTS
Donna D. Bennett, Commissioner of FSS
F. Joseph Moravec, Commissioner of PBS
Donald C. Williams, Regional Administrator, National Capital Region
Peter G. Stamison, Regional Administrator, Pacific Rim Region
Kathleen M. Turco, Chief Financial Officer
G. Martin Wagner, Associate Administrator, Office of Government-wide Policy
Michael Carleton, Chief Information Officer
Susan G. Marshall, Senior Policy Advisor and Associate Administrator,
Office of Performance Improvement

Individual Task forces will be established to provide data and opinions on the consolidation to include financial management systems, internal IT processes and other functions. A complete plan is due by July of this year.

Federal Opportunities Spotlight

Small Business Opportunities: NASA and U.S. Navy

By Peggy Seefried, FSI (Federal Sources, Inc.)

In order to succeed in the government market, small business IT shops must become adept at identifying early-stage opportunities that are set aside for small businesses--or have the potential to become so. One example is NASA's Information Technology Systems Engineering and Management Support Services (ISEM) re-compete with a five-year, **\$150 million award slated to take place later this year**. Although NASA has not yet declared that ISEM will be set-aside for small business competition, the agency is certainly considering it, judging from its March 8 request for information (RFI) aimed at small business sources.

"NASA Headquarters is seeking a vendor to provide integrated information technology, systems engineering and operations, and IT-related management support for all mission directorates and mission support organizations at NASA Headquarters," the RFI explains. "To be considered a prime contractor source, small businesses must possess real experience in the technical and management areas addressed below and employ experienced staff that have actually managed and worked in these areas. All qualified firms are encouraged to respond."

The purpose of NASA's RFI is to evaluate whether small firms are capable of meeting ISEM requirements, or whether only big fish like incumbent SAIC can deliver the broad array of support services outlined in the RFI document. So while submitting a reply does not materially enhance any firm's chances of winning the award, demonstrating to NASA that small business enterprises are capable of satisfying ISEM requirements does provide an incentive for the agency to set the award aside for small business contractors. And, to the extent that it helps small enterprises compete for large contracts--and perhaps get one's company "on the radar"--responding to such RFIs could be a sound investment of energy for business development pros at small IT shops.

Another upcoming opportunity to look out for, (this one already set aside for small business contractors) is the U.S. Navy Joint Medical Information System Office/Department of Homeland Security (JMIS/DHS) Information Assurance (IA) Engineering Support Services procurement. The Navy describes the work involved as "highly technical services in support of U.S. tactical and strategic operations" and estimates a **contract value of \$100 million**. Expertise in the full range of IA disciplines will be required, including Network Security, Security Life Cycle Management,

Governance, Certification and Accreditation, Risk Management, Security Awareness, Training and Education, Security Engineering, Cryptographic Repair, Crypto Modernization, and Cross Domain Solutions. A pre-solicitation notice for this opportunity is expected in April 2005.

For more information on these and other opportunities to win government IT contracts, please contact FSI at 703-610-8700.

Myths about selling to the Federal Government

By Tom Basile, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

Myth: "With all the federal IT spending, I should see revenue quickly."

The federal government is no doubt lucrative. Federal IT spending is at its highest level in years. Spending for fiscal year 2005 is expected to exceed \$60.8B with spending in 2006 to be \$65B. However, just because the federal government is spending considerable tax dollars on IT initiatives is not a good reason for entering the federal market. Nothing happens quickly in Washington or for that matter anywhere else across the national Federal landscape. If you believe you will reap the benefits quickly you are mistaken and you may want to reconsider.

There are many considerations for deciding to "invest" in the federal market. The federal market offers companies many of the right reasons for pursuing business. There are significant numbers of large scale contracts being competed on a regular basis. Some are open to companies of all sizes while others are restricted to small businesses only. This category is further restricted by type of small business, for example Service-Disabled Veteran Owned companies. One thing for certain, or at least close to certain, revenue is consistent and recurring. This means stability for companies that have experienced the ups and downs of the commercial marketplace. And yes, Federal business is profitable just like commercial business.

One other important reason for companies to consider selling in the Federal market is diversification. The Federal market is less volatile than the commercial market. The Federal market offers companies an opportunity to spread their risk and lessen the impact of changes in the market. As a bonus for doing Government business, companies are a significantly better acquisition target for larger companies wishing to gain a foothold in technology different from their own.

With all this said, take the time to fully understand the Federal market. It does require a different business model. Build a plan, follow the plan, focus and be patient. Success is measured in 9 to 18 months, not 30-60-90 days. So, these markets are not for the faint-of-heart.

Sales Tips for Government Success

By George Bishop, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

Attracting new clients or winning new business is always a challenge, even for the most experienced sales professional. Let's think about it, why should an agency want to do business with you or your company? Most likely they don't, unless you have something they need!

I am sure you have heard it said, "Sales are easy, just find a need, and satisfy the need!" Well, in government sales we throw in a few wrinkles, such as best value, 'lowest cost', 'Performance based', set-a-sides (SB, SDB, 8(a), Disabled Vet, etc.) and weighted evaluations to mention a few. Still think it is easy? Take a look at the Federal Acquisition Regulation's (FARS) and the length of the Terms and Conditions attached to every

solicitation.

So how do you go about penetrating this market? Many years ago, when I was selling services to the Department of Defense for a major integrator, I learned a lesson that I believe is still valuable today. I called on the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), in Crystal City, Virginia. I was attempting to find a need I could support, so I called on a contracting officer to discuss support services. He asked simply: "What do you know about the Navy and NAVSEA?" I knew DOD and Army, but little about the Navy. He said: "when you can discuss Navy and understand our business come back to talk to me!"

From that day on, I never made a call on a company, or government agency without knowing their organization, business, key personnel, requirements and desires. Moreover, I correlated these to my services and products and how I could best assist them in satisfying their requirements.

So how do we sell to the government? Aside from dealing with the 'governmentese' listed above, I recommend the following approach:

- Analyze your (company's) skills, experiences, contacts and knowledge to target selected government agencies. If this is done thoroughly you will know the best place to start selling your products and services. Then the next actions will be far easier!
- Understand the targeted agency's business and how to work efficiently and professionally to support them.
- Know (identify) the requirements that match your skill sets or products and have a cost effective solution to satisfy them.
- Lastly, provide proof of your capabilities in the form of credentials and references, competitive costs and resumes. The government likes to feel secure in its vendor selection.

These actions constitute a lot of time and work on your part, but they are essential ingredients for securing that sought-after Government Contract.

Inside the Intel Community

By George Comnenoi and Duane Love, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

Asymmetric Warfare is not a new term or concept for the Department of Defense but it has become a new focal point in which considerable investment is being made. What is Asymmetric Warfare? It is a military term to describe warfare in which the two combatants are mismatched in their military capabilities or accustomed methods of engagement such that the militarily disadvantaged power must press its special advantages or effectively exploit its enemy's particular weaknesses if they are to have any hope of prevailing.

The Department of Defense and the uniformed services are searching for technologies and systems that will provide instant intelligence and communications in any point in a military contested on foreign soil. For example, facial recognition technology that can with a high degree of certainty, spot a known suspect at a checkpoint. The corporations whose technologies address these needs will discover an audience that is receptive to new concepts and solutions.

The audience for these technologies includes the joint commands, various operations commands and tactical intelligence supports commands. These organizations have to overcome uncertainty and the unexpected to achieve their goals and maximize the safety of their forces. In an urban environment knowledge of who is a non-combatant and recognition of the enemy based on dependable intelligence levels the playing field created by uncertainty and the unexpected.

Procurement Spotlight

By Warren Corbett, *Set-Aside Alert*

GSA Preparing RFP for Disabled Vets' GWAC

GSA plans to release an RFP this spring for a government-wide acquisition contract that will be set aside for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

The GWAC, known as Veterans Technology Services or VETS, will be worth up to \$5 billion over 10 years. President Bush directed GSA to create the vehicle in an executive order last fall.

Awards will be made in two functional areas, covering information systems engineering and systems operation and maintenance, both of which will include IT security. GSA's pre-solicitation notice did not say how many contractors will be chosen for the vehicle. Awards are anticipated early next year.

A five-year base period with one five-year option is planned. GSA said it may establish an on-ramp/open-season at the option period "if it is deemed to be in the Government's best interest."

Congress authorized sole-source and set-aside contracts for service-disabled veterans last year and the President's October executive order underscored the commitment to improve opportunities for those firms.

Congress several has set a goal of awarding 3% of prime contract dollars to SDVs, but agencies have never achieved even one-quarter of 1%.

Vietnam Veterans of America charged that SBA has sabotaged the set-aside program with its interim rule, which applies the "rule of two" to SDV contracts: no sole-source contract is permitted if two or more qualified SDVs are available. In a letter to the administration's Acquisition Advisory Panel, the Vietnam Vets group said the rule violates the spirit of the law and of President Bush's executive order.

VVA also urged SBA to rewrite the rule to provide that contracting officers "shall" set aside work for SDVs if qualified companies are available, the same language that applies to 8(a) and HUBZone set-asides. The interim rule says contracts "may" be set aside for SDVs.

GSA's Small Business GWAC Center in Kansas City, Mo., will manage the VETS procurement. That office also manages GWACs set-aside for 8(a) and HUBZone firms.

A presolicitation conference was held by webcast on March 22. More information is available at www.gsa.gov/vetsgwac.

The Defense Department and the Army are sponsoring a business conference for SDV entrepreneurs in Las Vegas June 20-22. For more information, go to www.sellingtoarmy.info.

Partner Corner

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