



Successful Selling to the Government

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Getting Your Proposal Started

by Albert Pines, Seneca Creek Consulting

A famous quote on writing: "The hard part is getting to the top of page 1." - Tom Stoppard

Most proposals turn out to be more difficult than they should be for two reasons:

1. The effort is not started early enough
2. People are too anxious to get to the writing

Everyone knows that once the RFP is out the proposal effort is going to be a race to the finish line, and it is not a long distance run, it is a sprint. So why do so many companies wait until the RFP is out to start the effort? A good racer spends time preparing for the event before the gun goes off. You can do the same with your proposals.

If you have tracked a program and spent time marketing the effort then there should be a good deal that you already know about what will be required in the RFP. It is also common for the government to publish draft RFP's which do not tend to change dramatically when issued as final.

With this information in hand you can, before the RFP comes out, begin to:

- gather resumes and place them in a common format
- gather data on the appropriate approach/solution you will propose (what we refer to as 'information chunks')
- develop win themes
- develop competitive ghosting concepts
- and develop competitive discriminators

All of these items will become useful as part of your proposal architecture, which needs to be put together and thoroughly detailed out before you start writing. This is the second big mistake that organizations make; they start to write too soon. The writing of the proposal will be much easier, and more effective, if it is guided by a well thought out and documented proposal architecture. While most organizations know they should take this step (every proposal training class, book, and consultant talks about it) rarely is it done well and often it is not done at all.

Just doing a decomposition of the RFP and creating an outline for the proposal does not constitute proposal architecture. Think about what an architect does when designing a building. They do not simply make up a list of what the building will contain and what materials will be used. They develop conceptual drawings and then detailed drawings to show exactly what the building will look like and how it will be built. Your proposal architecture needs to do the same thing.

Selling to the Government; How do We Gain the Trust of the Government Buyer?

(This is the second in the series of articles addressing gaining the customer's confidence) by Peter Adler, Seneca Creek Consulting

It is common knowledge from Sales 101 that prospective buyers who do not trust us will go out of their way not to conduct business with us or the firms we represent.

So, how do we gain the trust of the buyer? The obvious answer is: to be truthful to a fault with the prospect. If this were the sole ingredient, then everyone would be in a trustworthy relationship. The answer is really quite more complex than this simple statement reveals.

Are we timely with the responses to information requested by the prospect? Do we demonstrate that we have a firm grasp of his/hers required solution. Do we understand the political and budget pressures that the buyer's may be under and the constraints that these positions may impose?

We need to be aware of the buyer's environment and his or her role in relationship to other parties that are part of the entire acquisition process. What is the established relationship with the Contracting Office, members of the Source Selection Board, and the Finance Office? These relationships have a direct bearing on the success of the acquisition. Any lack of confidence in you or your firm by any of these parties will surely result in a set-back for the buyer and his ability to conduct business with you.

So while most of our attention is focused on the buyer/end-user, we must be mindful that we have to be candid, consistent in our presentations and explanations, and responsive to the expressed needs of all of the "players" who are party to the acquisition process.

If any of the parties do not have trust in us, then we have failed to communicate and convey our message in the manner described in the preceding paragraphs. While these points may well be shop-worn bromides, they are nonetheless essential ingredients in gaining and maintaining the trust of the buyers.

Proposed Rule Could Keep Some Businesses Small

By Warren Corbett, Editor, Set-Aside Alert

SBA is proposing to change the way small businesses count their employees, possibly allowing some companies to remain officially "small" longer.

At the same time, the agency said it has dropped its controversial 2004 proposal to measure all size standards by employment rather than receipts. The original proposal was withdrawn, but the agency asked for an additional round of comments on the issue more than three years ago.

For size standards based on employment, the proposed rule would count employees using the average of the past three complete calendar years. Currently companies are required to re-calculate their employment using a rolling average of the previous 12 months.

By relying on a three-year history, a fast-growing company could retain small-business status longer.

"SBA believes a change in the method of calculating the number of employees will simplify size standards and lessen the burden on small businesses in calculating their size status," the agency said in a July 27 notice in the Federal Register.

The change would put employee-based size standards on the same basis as revenue-based standards, which are calculated using a three-year average.

SBA said it does not intend to count employees on a full-time equivalent basis, as it had once suggested.

The proposed rule would allow companies to verify their employment by submitting their IRS Form W-3, the "Transmittal of Wage and Tax Statement," which is filed annually. Additional payroll records would not be required in case of a challenge to a company's size status.

"Besides reducing the burden on businesses, this proposed rule would reduce the burden on SBA officials performing size determinations," the notice said.

SBA estimated the proposed rule would affect no more than 2,000 of the 300,000 small businesses listed in the Central Contractor Registration. Those companies are at or near the limit of their size standard.

SBA previously announced it has begun a review of all size standards and will make "appropriate changes" over the next 18 to 24 months. (SAA, 7/27)

The proposed rule is RIN 3245-AF60.

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