



Successful Selling to the Government

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Sales Tips for Government Success

The Government IT Sales Professional: Compressing the "Buy" Cycle

By Peter Adler, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

For those of us who have worked as professional salespeople in the Government IT community, we occasionally need to remind ourselves that the acquisition process must not permit the suspension of our sales skills.

The steps involved in the award of a Government contract are, in many ways, process bound. We must not let this inevitable process keep us from exercising our hard-won sales skills. While you may not be able to accelerate the paper process involved in acquisition, we can most definitely compress portions of the sales cycle, thereby reducing the overall time to award.

Early stage needs analysis can be compacted by our acquiring a thorough understanding of the Agency's problems in the IT sphere before our initial "sit down". We no longer require long, tedious probing sessions to determine areas of concern to the prospective buyer. Much of the requisite information is readily available in the Agency's Strategic IT Plan and in the Agency's Mission Statement, both located readily on the internet. Trade publications are another rich source for information on the Agency's challenges and concerns.

Now when we approach our prospective client, we need to listen primarily to reinforce those problem areas that we have already identified via some of the means previously described. Should the prospective client desire a presentation on the very first meeting, we can now construct a PowerPoint that is about them, their challenges, and viable solutions offered by our organization.

Intelligently thought-out first meetings and/or presentations have already shortened the discovery cycle significantly by having a gap analysis of the buyer's needs and proposed solutions in hand when we walk into their office for the very first time. This approach also avoids the pitfalls one may encounter when the Senior Executive or O-6 with whom we meet poses the question: "if you don't understand the business and challenges of my agency, don't come in here and waste our time."

Wouldn't anyone choose to do this if the early stage of the cycle can be compressed into a matter of weeks rather than months? If you haven't done so already, give it a try. You will be pleasantly surprised.

The GSA Corner

By Deborah Wolland, *The JDS Marketing Group*

In response to criticism from the acquisition community, GSA has introduced the "Get It Right" campaign. This campaign is designed to improve contracting operations and proper use of GSA's contracting vehicles.

Geared towards GSA's Contracting personnel, Contractors and Customers, the Get It Right Campaign will solidify contracting procedures both internal to GSA and within the customer agencies as they procure products and services through GSA's numerous contracts.

Major aspects of the plan are as follows:

1. Ensure compliance with federal contracting regulations.
2. Make contracting policies and procedures clear and explicit.
3. Ensure the integrity of GSA's contract vehicles and services.
4. Improve competition in the marketplace when GSA's contract vehicles and services are used.
5. Improve transparency relating to how GSA's contract vehicles and services are used.
6. Ensure that taxpayers get the best value for their tax dollar whenever GSA's contract vehicles or services are used.

In response to the *Get It Right* program, The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum for Senior Procurement Executives regarding approval levels for sole source orders under Federal Supply Schedules. These new approval levels and documentation requirements were put into place to better promote competition when utilizing Schedule contracts.

DoD procurement officials now have higher levels of approval required for all Schedule orders, whether placed directly with a contractor or placed via a non-DoD contracting activity on behalf of DoD. In the latter instance, additional approvals are required to support the decision to utilize a non-DoD contracting authority.

Expect the oversight to continue as the Schedules program continues to grow in both size and popularity.

Myths about selling to the Federal Government

By Tom Basile, *Seneca Creek Consulting*

Myth: The Federal Government Market is only open to the big player.

The federal government is a lucrative market for all sized companies, larger or small. In fact, a significant portion of federal procurement dollars are statutorily mandated to achieve specific percentage goals based on the type of small and/or disadvantage business you qualify as. Small business procurement goals by type of business:

Goal: 23% of all prime contracts are set aside for small businesses.

Goal: 5% of all prime and subcontracts are set aside for women owned businesses.

Goal: 5% of all prime and subcontracts are set aside for small disadvantaged businesses.

Goal: 3% for HUBZone businesses.

Goal: 3% for Service disabled veteran owned businesses.

However, don't expect business to be handed to you just because you fit into one or more of the categories above. Do your homework whether you plan to bid as a prime or subcontractor to one of the major systems integrators. If you are seeking subcontract opportunities and the procurement is in the pre-RFP stage, ask yourself how can my solution or offering solve a particular problem in the agency? Can my solution provide the prime contractor with a key discriminator to help them win the business?

If the contract is already awarded to a prime contractor, determine how your solution or offering can solve a specific problem the prime is facing. Does your solution bring value that can be translated into savings?

The bottom line is - know your customer. Solid past performance, knowledge and understanding of the agency and how your solution can solve a specific problem in the agency will put you on the road to success.

Inside the Intel Community

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

The Intelligence marketplace has captured the business interest of corporate America because of the emphasis by the Federal Government since September 11th to resolve critical short falls in the intelligence construct. It should be no surprise to anyone that a huge influx of vendors into the intelligence solutions arena has occurred. In their minds, they are confident they have the services or products that will contribute the requisite solutions.

Before any corporate organization makes a determination that the intelligence community should be their business focus, several considerations and self-examinations must be taken before that corporate commitment is made. It is not the intent of this article to help find the business but rather to raise questions and provide a self-critique vehicle that assists the vendor in the quest for business opportunities in the intelligence community.

Monthly, we will examine the following issues in detail to educate, provoke constructive thought and simplify a complex sales cycle. These issues or questions are:

- What is the Intelligence Community (IC)?
- What are the various missions within the IC?
 - How is a specific agency structured?
- What are the needs of the intelligence community?
 - Who has the money?
- What is required of a qualifying vendor?
 - Who are the favored vendors within your target agency?
 - What contracts are in place and how does a vendor become a participant?
- How does a vendors services or product qualify?

- What are the general procurement practices?
- What is an IC sponsor?
- What is the length of the procurement cycle?
- What should my expectation be for new business?
- What type of business/vendors is the IC community placing its focus?
- Bid/No Bid decision criteria for targeting the IC.

We have had successful marketing experience in the intelligence community using these guidelines. We look forward to sharing some of these points with you over the coming months.

Procurement Spotlight

By Tom Johnson, Set-Aside Alert

“New Incentives for Vets, HUBZone Subcontracts”

The Defense Department is moving to steer more subcontracts to service-disabled veteran and HUBZone businesses by rewarding large prime contractors for working with those firms.

The Defense Contract Management Agency is telling primes they cannot earn top performance ratings unless they meet their negotiated subcontracting goals with businesses in four categories: small businesses, woman-owned firms, small disadvantaged businesses and either service-disabled or HUBZone companies.

A company that fails to meet all four goals will be graded "acceptable," rather than "highly successful" or "outstanding." A higher rating improves the company's past performance score for future contracts.

Some prime contractors say that will lead them to shift work to SDV and HUBZone firms. "I can guarantee you that those dollars are going to come away from minorities and go to SDVs," said Murray Schooner, director of supplier diversity for Unisys. He spoke Nov. 18 at a forum sponsored by the Federal Interagency OSDBU Council in Arlington, VA.

Primes are learning of the new policy as they go through their annual DCMA performance reviews. "It is a little bit of a shock to some of these contractors," said Mary Seabolt, assistant director of DCMA's small business office.

She said the policy was changed to conform to the Small Business Administration's performance rating system. SBA is responsible for reviewing the subcontracting performance of prime contractors in civilian agencies.

Congress has set a goal of awarding 3% of prime contracts to companies owned by service-disabled veterans and an additional 3% to HUBZone firms. A prime contractor's subcontracting goal may be set higher or lower.

Neither the Defense Department nor civilian agencies have ever come close to those goals. In fiscal 2003, the Federal Procurement Data Center reported, SDV firms received less than one-quarter of 1% of DOD's prime contract dollars; HUBZone firms received about 0.8%.

President Bush issued an executive order Oct. 20 directing all agencies to provide more contract opportunities for service-disabled veterans. A set-aside program for those businesses was established last spring. "It was Congress's recognition that veterans have not had the same opportunities as some others have," said Wayne Simpson, deputy director of the Veterans Administration OSDDBU.

The emphasis on SDV and HUBZone companies is drawing fire from some minority business advocates. Henry Wilfong Jr., president of the National Association of Small Disadvantaged Businesses, said contracts that go to SDVs should come out of the pockets of large businesses rather than small ones. "It's not that I don't want you to get your share, but I don't want you to jump on my share," said Wilfong, who is a disabled veteran of the Korean War.

Partner Corner

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