

Federal Sales Success: The 5 Step Plan

Our starting point is to first address a few general questions:

What Business are You In? Need Creation or Need Fulfillment?

If you are in need creation, plan for a long sales cycle of typically 15 to 24 months. Assuming you can convince the decision-maker in Government that your solution is needed, it must still go through the budget request process and ultimately the acquisition cycle.

On the other hand, if you are in the need fulfillment business, you are already aware of requirements that the government is seeking and has in its acquisition plans. The goal in this case is to get your solution in front of the key customer management team including the contracting officer early. Do this as early as possible in the sales cycle and differentiate yourself from your competition. Customers rarely buy from people they have never met. As a general rule, if you have not met the customer, your chances of a bid award are lessened considerably.

What drives sales – Sheer numbers or Focused Targeting?

Rapid revenue is not the result of call numbers, but rather via a concise tactical approach that dovetails with the overall vision and strategy of the enterprise. Anyone with perseverance and time can schedule meetings. Meeting for the sake of meetings does not equal sales.

Get to know your customer. Do your homework and understand the agency's challenges, future initiatives and competitive environment. Map out all the key personnel that you need to meet with and why.

A targeted tactical approach may include the following:

- Targeted agencies selected based on documented need and budget.
- Agency forecast of procurements that include your solution/product set.
- Awareness of the contracting strategy to align with each forecasted procurement.
- Tailored call program to capture the opportunity.
- Marketing program to establish your company as a trusted adviser and achieve brand recognition.

Does your firm have the infrastructure in place for meeting requirements as they occur?

All the BD efforts in the world will not bear fruit if the infrastructure is unable to support the requirements, or can only do so by means of a frantic paring of existing personnel from accounts and tasks where they are highly valued by a current client. Be realistic in what you pursue in the Government markets. Understand the commitment of time and resources necessary to successfully compete for an opportunity.

There are many considerations before undertaking a significant proposal effort. Two common challenges are: do I have the right bench strength to meet the personnel requirements; and do I have the internal resources to write a winning proposal?

Firstly, if you do not have a top notch in-house recruiter then establish a relationship with an outside firm that specializes in finding candidates for your service offerings. The ability to quickly identify and present acceptable candidates is quite difficult. Everyone says they can do it so set up a test case or two as part of your selection process.

Secondly, most companies can write a technically responsive proposal but there is a vast difference between a proposal that meets the requirements and a “winning” proposal. Remember, the proposal is the “last sales call”.

5 Step Plan to Sales Success

Goals leading to revenue are most commonly achieved through a focused, concerted process:

Agency Focus

- 2 – 3 primary agencies and 2 – 3 secondary agencies.
- “Fit” based on research (Strategic/IT Plan, GAO Reports, Forecasted Procurements, FPDS, Other).
- Procurement goals that match your firm’s classification (e.g. percentage of contract dollars set aside for women-owned companies).
- How do they buy - GSA Schedule, BPAs, Single Award, Multiple Award, or GWACs?
- Who are the competition and established companies in your service/product offering?

Program Focus

- New opportunities versus re-competes
- NAICS code match up
- Capture Plan focused on key POCs from the program/contracts group and teaming partners
- Proposal capacity either in-house or outsourced
- Competitive pricing and attractive loads for subcontractors
- Submitting as a Prime is preferred in order to maintain control, become a preferred player in a particular agency and gain leverage from subcontractors.

It should be noted that upon entry into this market, it may require an enterprise to bid as a subcontractor in order to build a Past Performance record within the government.

Contract Focus

- Secure the right GSA Schedule contract (s).
- Target some number of multiple award (agency specific or government-wide) contracts over and above your GSA Schedule.
- Each target agency will most likely have a preferred contract of choice for services and products (e.g. the preferred vehicle at NIH for IT services is the NIH CIO SP contract).

Partner Focus

- Select partners based on similar values, complementary offerings, and standing within your target agencies.
- 1 – 2 large companies.
- 2 – 3 small companies (SDVOB; 8a; Hub-Zone, etc).
- Large companies: present yourself as a go-to small business to fulfill ad hoc requirements as well as priming opportunities where the large company has relationships but cannot meet the size standard.
- Small companies: team with companies that can address set-aside “buckets” and where your services compliment one another.

Marketing Focus

- Establish Brand recognition through a well thought out marketing program.
- Advertise in targeted trade publications.
- Present and exhibit at selected trade shows and conferences.
- Conduct targeted seminars to your buying audience to become viewed as a “trusted advisor”.

This is simply an overview but it does not need to be much more complicated than this. Lay out your plan on paper. Establish a pipeline report to track progress and ultimately, sales. Revisited your 5 steps every quarter and make adjustments as necessary.