

Washington Business Journal - November 5, 2007

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WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, November 2, 2007

Learn to talk the talk of government business

Washington Business Journal - by [Joyce Bosc](#)

By now, I'm assuming that you've decided to test the business-to-government (B2G) waters. I'd like to think that this year's advice steered you in that direction because the opportunities in the space can be tempting.

Earlier this year, we talked about networking -- where to do it and how it can help you grow your B2G efforts. Attending these events can be pretty daunting, especially if you are not familiar with the latest trends, news and lingo.

I've compiled a list of terms, phrases and acronyms that you must be familiar with in B2G, especially as we head into 2008. There are many more, but based on what I've been hearing, you'll need to know these terms backward and forward:

Indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity, or ID/IQ: This is similar to a government-wide acquisition contract, GWAC. The main difference is these contracts are agency specific. Last year the Army awarded a couple of large ID/IQs to a select few companies. Like GWACs, these contracts usually give the winning company a license to hunt but no guaranteed revenue; however, some have been known to have guaranteed minimum revenue.

Certification: Usually a differentiator, certification is an accepted industrywide or governmentwide standard that authenticates or validates that a company has established processes or methodologies to ensure the government will receive a guaranteed level of competence or predictable level of quality. When applicable, a certification meets government mandates or initiatives.

Examples of certifications the government prefers include ISO 9001:2000 (certifying business processes are in place to guarantee a defined quality of service); CMMI, or capability maturity model integration (a multileveled certification that guarantees the quality of software created and applied to a process); ITIL, or information technology infrastructure library (a best-practices standard that guarantees a high level quality of information technology services); and others.

Continuity of operations, or COOP: COOP describes plans and processes that are in place to make sure the government can continue to serve the public in a natural or man-made disaster.

Since this is a hot topic in government, you can be assured that other B2G providers are

figuring out -- and playing up -- how their services and solutions fit into the COOP equation.

GWAC: This is a contract vehicle available to federal and military agencies that need to purchase services, solutions or products from qualified, pre-screened companies.

Earlier in the year, two large GWACS were awarded, Networx and Alliant. GWACs are big in scale, and we know companies tracked and pursued these two opportunities for more than three years. If a company holds many GWACs and other government contracts, this could make it look desirable when it comes to partnering and acquisition opportunities.

Performance-based contracting, or PBC: This term is now called performance-based acquisition, or PBA, but both phrases have the same meaning. They refer to a contract that is built around the desired outcome or results of the work rather than focusing on how the work is completed or carried out.

PBC, at the time of the issuance of a request for proposals (RFP), was a major factor in the selection criteria when the government decided on qualified candidates for Alliant and Networx, as well as for other significant agency-specific contracts.

Make sure your contract managers and project managers have a full understanding of the PBC concept and why it's important. Government, as a whole, is looking for contractors that follow this principle.

Now, let's talk industry lingo.

Bandwidth: This is the amount of resources a company has to devote to a contract or customer. For example, "We have plenty of bandwidth to prime this contract."

Behind the power curve: This describes a situation familiar to us all when we're playing catch-up and can't quite figure out how to get ahead. As a friend once told me, "We are way behind the power curve on this procurement."

Black hat review: This is when an outside consultant meets with the proposal team and outlines the competition's strengths and weaknesses. When you go after RFPs, this is a very important part of your process.

Deeper dive and drill down: These two are essentially the same. Both mean exploring any situation at a deeper level, most likely when searching for a solution to your customer's problem or challenge.

Ghost the competition: I'm sure all of us would like to scare the competition out of going after the contract we're seeking. However, this phrase means tracking and countering your competition's messages or market perceptions with your own message and positioning.

Gray beards: This refers to the SMES, or "subject matter experts," who have years of experience and can provide subject matter knowledge about constructing teams for government programs or reviewing responses to requests for proposals.

Runway: This term relates to the availability of time. When I heard it, it was used in this sentence: "The owners of the business are all in their 40s, so they have a lot of runway left to build this business."

The rope in that tug of war: This gave me a chuckle when I first heard the phrase. It describes a situation all of us have been in at one point. Haven't you been caught in the middle of a power struggle where you felt pulled in both directions? Well, if so, you were the rope in that tug of war.

As you get out there and learn more about the B2G space, you will come across so many sayings, terms and phrases that your head will spin. Once you're in the game, however, it will come naturally to you and become your second language.

*Joyce Bosc is president and CEO of Boscobel Marketing Communications in Silver Spring.
www.boscobel.com*

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