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WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

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B2G Insights

Don't wait for the feds to come for you, go get the biz

Washington Business Journal - February 9, 2007 by [Joyce Bosc](#)

Correction at bottom of article

From tanks to towel rods to batteries to biometrics, our federal government has a voracious appetite for everything. It is the No. 1 market force.

Likewise, the Washington area is home to every imaginable type of business. Did you know that there is a company that provides dogs to airports to scare Canada geese off the tarmac?

We're living and working in a very lucrative business area that's home to large real estate management companies, influential nonprofit organizations, successful information technology companies and other businesses. Some have mastered the art of selling to the government. However, some have apprehensions about diving into what I call the B2G waters (that's business to government for those who are acronym-phobic). Companies are hesitant to dip their toes in the government water because, quite frankly, the process intimidates them.

Here's a hint: Barrier to entry is not nearly what it was 10 years ago. It can be faster and less costly now than ever before. And government, along with the government-contracting community, offers a number of ways to get in the door. However, doing business with the government still means more quicksand than you'll find in other markets. Companies wishing to expand their services to the federal government need to understand government business has its own language, rules, needs, challenges, experts and trends.

This column will show you how marketing is the glue that binds your government sales and business-development efforts. If you're looking to break into the government contacting space or want to expand ongoing business-development activities, this is a must-read.

Dive to thrive

A good friend recently reminded me of how far marketing to the government has come since the 1970s and '80s. Then it seemed all you had to do was know the government contracting officer. You came in at the lowest price and bingo: The business was yours. However, today federal contracting is trying to look at "best value" and even commercial best practices! Yes, they even look at commercial capabilities for a federal procurement.

So now that I have your attention, before you start developing marketing plans, customizing your company's collateral and building your Web site for this unique market, be sure the government has a need for your services. I call it my "so what" question. If you tell me you have a new widget, I'll ask you, "So what?" I know it seems obvious, but you'd be surprised by the non-answers I get when people are asked the question.

If you can't answer that question, it won't matter if your products or services are less expensive and it won't matter what your Web site and your collateral might report. The government won't buy it.

There are a number of trusted consultants and companies (let the buyer beware) that will prepare feasibility reports and go-to-market plans. They'll look at your existing offerings and case studies and compare them against what the government has stated it needs. There are tons of information about the government's needs, and this process is usually better outsourced to an expert.

The feasibility reports and go-to-market plans will help you determine the easiest market-entry points.

Specifically, they should: highlight competitors (existing and expected), provide a history of government spending, pinpoint key decision makers, divulge government spending patterns, estimate procurement budgets, spotlight other opportunities on the horizon and identify customers' needs.

Start swimming

You're now prepared to wade into government contracting. Your marketing and business-development teams have crafted strategies and tactics that complement your go-to-market plan. You've made sure business-development execs have their travel budgets and trade-show schedules.

With the federal mandate of earned value management, the role of return on investment is coming to the forefront more than ever before. Government contracting decision makers and entrenched business-development teams are already accustomed to speaking in these terms. It only makes sense that your marketing plans include an emphasis on ROI.

Measurement is the best way to capture ROI. All your government contracting efforts and marketing campaigns should include measurement tools that demonstrate the effectiveness of your campaigns.

Is your targeted audience responding to your call to action? Did your press release reach the desired publications, and did the resulting media coverage include your key messages? Are trade shows generating enough qualified leads to justify the expense? Are the perceptions of your customers and prospects effected by your marketing efforts?

Be honest. Doing business with the government doesn't sound so bad now, does it?

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Correction:

An earlier version of this story incorrectly identified the author of the story as Judy Bosc.

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