

**B2G Insights**

# Summer is use-it-or-lose-it time for federal government

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You know what they say: Timing is everything.

When it comes to business development and federal spending, timing can be your best friend, but if you don't keep an eye on the calendar you may be missing the opportunity of a lifetime.

This time of year, government agencies are racing to spend the remainder of their annual budgets by the end of their fiscal year on Sept. 30. This can create a use-it-or-lose-it situation for your government customers and prospects, who have to spend their money by the end of September or lose it forever.

Year-end spending in the federal government is not just about nuts and bolts. Training, services and software spending can see big boosts, as well. While government planning has improved over the years -- thus taming the spending frenzy we used to see at the end of the federal fiscal year -- the trend to spend continues to offer brisk business opportunities for companies.

The peak for year-end federal spending usually occurs between July 1 and Sept. 30, accounting for much of agencies' overall budgets. Expert industry observers agree that savvy business development teams can implement a strong, end-of-fiscal-year marketing strategy to make the most of the federal dollars that are now up for grabs. Here are five tips to help strengthen your bottom line during this busy buying season:

Issue a new white paper.

To establish your company as an important source for information, issue a white paper on a topic of particular interest to your government customers. Your team may have experts on hot topics or new trends that the government is watching, and you can leverage that expertise into an opportunity for meaningful -- instead of superfluous -- communication with your customers and prospects.

Extend your hours.

Your customers are working overtime right now to make sure they get the most bang for their remaining bucks. Make it easier for them to get the job done by extending your hours during the busy season. Consider providing guaranteed response times for voice mail and e-mail inquiries and set up a special rapid-response call center if possible. Most importantly, make it a point to over-communicate your extended availability and promise of responsiveness. Include this information in every marketing promotion, on your Web site, in your e-mail signature line.

Update your Web site.

Make sure your Web site is current and easy to navigate. Prospects and customers should be able to find you and your information with no fuss. Information on your government services and offerings must be

easy to locate. If possible, you should update your Web site on a daily basis during the busy season to feature specials on products or services, announce important news and emphasize any busy-season services that you offer during this government buying bonanza.

Appreciate your customers.

Hold a customer appreciation day or a similar special event at key government agencies and customer sites. Remind your customers that you are there for them, and have some fun with it in the process. Put together a "busy-season survival kit" with a few thoughtful items in it or send over a treat to celebrate reaching an important milestone or anniversary.

Reconnect with primes.

If you subcontract to other companies on federal contracts, this is the time to reconnect with past, current and even future prime contractors. Look for ways to check for new opportunities with each prime contractor you know. Early-morning breakfasts are a good tactic because they provide a time- and cost-efficient venue to increase your visibility with these important partners. There are also affordable, agency-specific tabletop trade shows during the summer that can help you reach your target primes.

The end of the federal fiscal year can be a busy time but very profitable for a business development professional who is up to the challenge. These tips will get you started on the path to a successful buying season and help you plan for next year -- when you won't wait until the last minute to start chasing down those federal year-end dollars.

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