

## How to Market Yourself to the Federal Government

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***Summary:** Marketing to the federal government is different than the commercial market. No need for elaborate materials, simple is best. Establishing relationships should be approached differently. To be effective, many administrative steps need to be in place before making the sale so you are one of a hundred versus one of millions. You may only get one shot, make it count.*

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It is no secret that the federal government is the biggest spender, yet companies of all sizes avoid the largest marketplace our country has to offer. If you are in business to make money, why isn't reaching out to this sector part of your strategy for growth? Are you ignoring the elephant in the room? If you are, your competition will start embracing it, and as they ride it, you will be left behind.

However, to be successful in the government market, it is imperative to understand the intricacies of selling to the government and how to comply with the many regulations. There are two types of buyers—end users and Contracting Officers. They go hand in hand and you must understand both buyer motivations if you are to be successful. The end-user is mission driven while law drives the Contracting Officer.

The commercial market is very different. There are no golf, gifts, networking, or dinners going on in the government business sector. There are rules against just about anything that would show favoritism. If you are lucky enough to get in with a buyer, you better know what they want to see because you only have about 15 minutes, if you are lucky, to leave an impression. So what is the approach you should take? What should you say and leave behind?

### Be Prepared

First, as in any attempted sale, do your homework. Figure out what the client's motivations are and how you fit in:

- Why do they need what you offer?
- As in regular business, what pain are you trying to alleviate?
- Do they have quotas (socio/economic factors), an urgent mission, or Executive and Legislative mandates they must follow?
- Why should they consider you over the thousands of others bidding on jobs?
- What makes you different?
- Most importantly, what tools do you have in place to make it easy for them to do business with you?

Unlike the commercial sector, many time intensive administrative steps need to be followed so you show the buyer you know how this game is played. If you try to jump in half way prepared, you will get frustrated and eventually throw in the towel, perplexed you did not get work you thought was a perfect fit for your company.

Besides the typical registrations into government computer systems, companies should think long-term and position themselves as a pre-screened vendor meaning they have been deemed compliant and competent, and their prices are considered fair and reasonable. All this preparation takes time—generally over a year with outsourced help—but in the end, your company will be optimally prepared to do business with the Federal government.

### **The Sales Pitch**

After pre-positioning yourself and developing a targeted sales and marketing plan, you are ready to hit the streets and sell your product/service. First, remember simplicity is key. The best approach is to pitch what makes your product or service unique and tell the buyer why they should consider doing business with you. Most importantly, if you have contracting tools in place, that makes the acquisition process smoother, and is a bonus for the buyer because they know you have done about half their work for them.

Unlike commercial clients, Federal buyers don't like a lot of leave behinds. Your business card is your most important selling document. Often this is the only "document" the buyer files so make it say something. If you have a government contract number, list it. If you're a small business or minority owned, say it. Make sure you include your website address and make sure your website properly demonstrates your abilities.

Other "leave behinds" may include a small brochure, a briefing point sheet, or a simple desk-side brief. Don't waste your time with fancy Power Point presentations.

### **Speak the Language**

If you are sincere about pursuing government business, have a government tab on your website that speaks the language they like to hear. List brief descriptions of any government jobs you have performed in the past. Consider using key words such as total solution, small business, experienced, pre-approved, trademarked, patented, energy-efficient, bio-based, sustainable, warranties, ease of maintenance, workforce development, capacity to handle large jobs, U.S. made etc.

Get familiar with terms like Blanket Purchase Agreement and Sole Source. These essentially mean long-term reoccurring business and a way to get in the door with limited competition because you bring something unique. Also, learn about how the government buys and from whom. A good site to get started is <https://www.fpds.gov/fpdsng cms/>.

## **Start Locally**

Statistics show that federal buyers buy local so start selling in your own backyard. Then look regionally and eventually nationally. Get your foot in the door, impress the local buyers, and establish a relationship. Make your time count.

Above all, be patient. Nothing happens quickly in government, but with enough persistence on your part, you will get a shot. Once that door is open for you, do well and more chances will come. Government buyers will not just stand there and welcome you in, so be persistent and be prepared. You too can be riding the elephant moving your company forward in a clear direction as a government contractor.

*\*While serving in the U.S. Army, Erica was responsible for buying millions of dollars worth of goods and services to support some of the most highly deployed units in the country. Her experience has taught her what sales pitches work and the importance of complying with all of the government's regulations for purchasing. To learn more, visit her website at [www.courtneyconsultingsolutions.com](http://www.courtneyconsultingsolutions.com).*

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