

Want to Boost Your Public Sector Sales? Know How to Market to the Government Market

While it's possible to generate new revenue from public sector customers simply by submitting the lowest bid or taking advantage of set-aside opportunities, the most successful companies will confirm that – in order to really grow your business in the government market – you must proactively and consistently market your “solutions” to potential customers. Whether you are actively pursuing a specific contract or simply anticipating new solicitations in the near future, it is always a good idea to create and sustain awareness of your company's goods/services, industry expertise, and performance/success rate.

However, traditional business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) sales and marketing strategies will often fail to generate the same volume of quality leads in the government market if used in a templated-like manner, even if there are similarities between the B2B/B2C and business-to-government (B2G) applications for your product or service. That is because the public sector is accountable to a very different set of stakeholders, regulated by a different set of policies, and driven by many different missions. While public sector agencies may share funding sources (i.e. taxpayer money), every government organization is run just a little bit differently. They each have their own mission, their own set of resources, and their own procurement strategy.

That is why there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to government sales and marketing. In fact, the fragmentation of the government market could be one reason why so many federal government contractors admitted in a recent study conducted in partnership with Merritt Group and Professional Services Council that it was either somewhat or very challenging to identify the key insights needed to execute effective marketing campaigns, successfully build their sales pipeline with quality leads or close deals/win more contracts.

Fortunately, there are some very easy changes that your marketing and business development teams can make today and some widely-accessible tools that they can use, to more effectively generate awareness of your brand, unique solutions, expertise and value among government buyers (and their customers) ahead of your next bid/proposal.

Know Your Audience and How to Reach Them

According to 81% of winning federal government contractors, the key to success is the development of marketing content that targets the government decision-maker. Now, there are technically three different sets of decisions makers that you must reach: The actual end-user customer, the influencers (agency leaders, such as the CIO; IT; and sometimes the mayor/governor) and the ultimate buyers (the procurement team). A message that may resonate with one group may not be important to the other. For example, the end-user wants to know which product or service is going to deliver the precise results they need. However, buyers have to balance quality vs. price, as their bosses (i.e. governors, mayors, CIOs, etc.) are often focused on how every purchase will impact the bottom line. Therefore, it is essential you consider a multi-tiered messaging platform that will communicate the benefits of your company, products/services, pricing, and overall “solution” in terms that each audience will care about.

You then need to ensure the right messages are reaching the right audiences via the most appropriate channels. Depending on your industry, your customer may not spend their days in front of a computer (i.e. construction and engineering), rendering email campaigns ineffective. At the same time, digital marketing strategies – including email campaigns – may be the only way to reach some decision makers who spend their days glued to a desk. If you determine that a digital strategy is best, consider multiple channels: SEO, social media, lead generation campaigns with trade/business publications, Google ads, print ads, earned media coverage, newsletters, etc. Sometimes, it may be best to just pick up the phone to introduce yourself and inquire about current and upcoming contracting opportunities.



No matter your audience, though, increasing your visibility at industry days, vendor events, tradeshow/conferences, and other networking venues will always pay off. These in-person interactions allow for more personalized and intimate interactions with government decision makers, resulting in more valuable two-way conversations about customer challenges (which 43% of contractors admittedly struggle to understand) as well as the solutions you offer specific to these challenges. Just don't squander these opportunities with a canned sales pitch about your product. Use these events as an opportunity to ask questions about the customer's current needs, goals, and vendor expectations – and then to showcase your subject matter expertise. You can then take the insights you gain to identify the right win themes (another challenge for 45% of government contractors) and then tailor your marketing and sales messages in follow up communications. After all, this same study found that personalization was the most effective account-based marketing tactic (63%) followed by prospect-specific calls-to-action (43%). You will only be able to execute such personalized marketing efforts if you have a direct line and personal knowledge of the prospect's needs and buying process.

Know the Typical Buying Cycle

Perhaps more than any other sector, marketing and selling to the government is all about timing. So much so that 49% of contractors recently admitted that they're struggling to understand the government procurement cycle – and that's hindering their success. While government bid notification services such as BidSync will let you know the minute a new bid posts, the last thing you want to do is wait until the "right opportunity" comes down to start marketing your business. That is why it is critical to conduct market research on a consistent basis.

While it is no secret that agencies typically go on spending sprees at the end of their fiscal years, not all contracts are solicited on a fiscal year schedule. That is why market research/intelligence is receiving more marketing and business development dollars this next year among government contractors. Knowing what customers want – and when – along with historical category spend trends, past award criteria, and forward-looking plans will prove valuable when competing for any contract.





Do your due diligence to understand when existing contracts expire so that you can be ready to act once the recompetes solicitations are issued. The Small Business Association (SBA), GSA and other organizations may have online resources you can access to help with this effort. You'll also want to have a direct line to those who can anticipate when new solicitations may be released. This is where those relationships you establish at industry days, networking events, etc. become so beneficial. Of course, utilizing a government bidding service such as BidSync is non-negotiable as well. It's the only way to receive real-time notices when relevant/winnable bids are posted from more than 90,000 agencies in North America, many of which only issue their solicitations and accept vendor proposals via BidSync.

Again, though, if you want to ensure your brand is familiar to those evaluating proposals, you need to anticipate opportunities and proactively market accordingly – even if it is just for those 20-30 days from the time the bid posts to when proposals are reviewed. In fact, in the study referenced earlier, 89% of federal government contractors claimed that anticipating upcoming RFPs and develop campaigns with those in mind was the key to their success.

Speaking of the Proposal...

Remember that one of the most important places to market your business is in the bid/proposal itself. Regardless of your sales and marketing efforts leading up to this solicitation, your written response may be the only source that decision-makers will use to determine your qualifications. It should be treated as your most valuable marketing tool. In fact, 80% of winning contractors credit their success with their ability to align the proposal criteria with their company's brand (and developing a plan ahead of time on how to do just that.) While this guide will offer more detail on how to write a winning proposal, we want to stress that your brand, expertise, reliability, quality commitment, past performance, pricing standards, etc. should be clearly articulated in the proposal. And, don't rinse and repeat from past proposals.



Final Thought: Know When to Sell Your Product/Service vs Your Unique “Solution”

While it is important to market your product or service to government buyers, it is even more critical that you clearly demonstrate how your product or service solves their current business challenge. In other words, it is typically more effective to communicate why your product or service is the best solution for the customer – not just why your product or service is the best compared to competitors. Product comparisons are subjective, and a lot of goods and services look the same on paper. Don't rely solely on spec sheets, certifications, awards or other “comparison” tools to differentiate yourself.

If you want to tout your certifications, do so in terms that will matter to the customer. But, don't focus too much on the specs for the sake of checking customers' criteria boxes.

The most successful government contractors are those who market their value in terms of a customized solution. Successful marketers will focus on how their product or solution makes the government customer's job easier. They talk about how they can specifically engineer their product or setup their service to meet each customer's individual goals, minimize risks (whether related to security, expenses, downtime, etc.), and ultimately deliver the greatest return on investment of all possible solutions on the market. They design their marketing messages to focus more on the customer, not themselves. That's not to say that you can't tout your legacy, your past performance or your customer successes in the government market. You just need to position them in a way that helps customers make an association to their current situation.



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