

above, the official mission of OSDBUs is to help U.S. small and disadvantaged businesses. Still, in practice they will provide information to any companies that request it, including Canadians (see "Miscellaneous Assistance," Appendix A).

Consulting Firms

IT consulting firms can conduct customised searches to locate important government users and purchasers of your company's products and services. As usual, using consultants is expensive, but can be worth it. For a sample list of consulting companies, refer to the "Consulting Firms and Course Providers" section in Appendix A.

Identifying Federal Contracting Opportunities

On average, successful firms in the federal IT market track over 150 federal IT programs each year, resulting in 3 or 4 wins (i.e. contract awards or subcontracting agreements). 3 or 4 wins may not sound that impressive, but in the federal IT market, 3 or 4 wins often represents millions or even tens of millions of dollars. To successfully track 150+ programs each year, you must rely on many resources:

Customer Calls

Customer calls provide the best way to identify and track federal contracting opportunities. In-person and over-the-phone calls to the government users and purchasers of your company's products and services allow you to develop relationships with your government customers, create government demand for your product or service, find out about upcoming contracting opportunities, and influence contract specifications. No other information-gathering or marketing technique is as effective as customer calls.

Fed-Mark Federal

Federal Sources' "Fed-Mark Federal" database tracks and reports contracting opportunities emerging from the top 500 federal IT programs. The database lists a description of the contract, the contract requirements, the estimated value of the contract, the prospective bidders (and winners), and the likely subcontractors. A full one-year subscription to the database costs US\$9,750 for small businesses (US\$13,000 for large businesses) and can be immensely valuable to firms that are committed to the U.S. federal IT market. Call (703) 610-8700 (see "Consulting Firms and Course Providers," Appendix A).

Note: The Canadian Embassy can search this database for your company. Call (202) 682-7746.

Publications

The *Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilisation (OSDBU)* at each federal agency publishes a handbook called "Forecast of Upcoming Contract Opportunities." The forecast lists anticipated agency contracting opportunities for the forthcoming three to five years. It is an excellent resource. You can use the forecast to identify contracting opportunities far in advance, giving you plenty of time to market to the appropriate end-users and purchasers; creating government demand for your product or service and influencing the contract's specifications. (see "Miscellaneous Assistance, Appendix A). However, many other agency contracts are likely to arise as-needed and will not be listed in the forecast. Therefore, only frequent customer calls can ensure that you do not miss any federal business opportunities.

The *Commerce Business Daily (CBD)* is issued Monday to Friday by the Department of Commerce and lists a synopsis of all U.S. federal government proposed procurement, sales, and contract awards above US\$25,000. This publication is essential. However, if the first time you hear of a contracting opportunity is through the CBD, then you are at a disadvantage to your competitors. You can be sure that some of your federal competitors already knew about the opportunity. Frequent customer calls will ensure that you know about contracting opportunities far before