

Patience

Many companies new to the federal IT market expect immediate or near immediate results and conclude that they have failed when they simply have not given the market enough time. New firms to the market must learn how it is structured, who the major players are, and how the government procurement process works. Learning the market takes time. As noted above, success in the federal IT market also depends on a firm's ability to develop strong business relationships with its potential teaming partners and government end-users. In both social and business environments, relationships are built on trust and, again, gaining trust takes time. Carefully collecting the needed information and developing an effective federal business strategy also takes time. Observers of the federal IT market estimate that learning the market takes approximately 6-12 months and that firms should not expect a significant return on their investment for 1 to 2 years. Companies that invest the resources necessary to develop and implement an effective federal business strategy often find their returns to be well worth the wait.

Market Intelligence

The third element, information, is closely related to the first two elements. An effective federal business strategy cannot be developed without collecting a large quantity of accurate and timely information. New firms to the federal IT market must invest the resources (money, a capable staff, and time) that are needed to collect intelligence that can be used to develop an effective strategy.

Getting Started

There are a number of initial steps you should take when entering the federal IT market:

Read Publications

The *Canadian Embassy* provides a basic kit called "Selling to the United States Federal Government" to Canadian companies that are interested in entering the U.S. federal market. The publication is designed specifically for Canadian companies and it provides an excellent overview of the federal procurement process.

An *Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)* is located in every U.S. federal agency. OSDBUs provide a publication called "Doing Business With (Agency Name)" that lists the products and services purchased by the agency and explains the specific procurement procedures of the agency. To obtain an agency's "Doing Business with..." handbook, contact that agency's OSDBU (see Appendix A under "Miscellaneous Assistance").

Attend Courses and Seminars

There are many companies and universities that offer courses and seminars on a wide variety of topics related to the federal market, including: government marketing strategies, government sales channels, selling from a GSA schedule, electronic commerce, and federal procurement regulations. Attending the courses is one of the fastest ways to become familiarised with how the federal market works. Refer to the *Consulting Firms and Course Providers* section in Appendix A to help you determine the course provider that best meets your needs (this list is not exhaustive).

Attend a Personal Introductory Briefing at the Canadian Embassy

At the *Canadian Embassy, Washington, DC*, the Commercial Officer will hold a personal introductory briefing with you to help you assess your competitiveness in the federal IT market, identify your best federal prospects, and discuss your first steps in penetrating the federal market. Call (202) 682-7746 (see "Miscellaneous Assistance," Appendix A).