

What is your Niche? Narrowing Down What You can do for the Government Customer

5/3/13

Stephanie Amend, Principal – [Arrowhead Solutions, LLC](#)

As you probably already know, there is quite a bit of competition in the government marketplace. Even among the “small business” set-asides, thousands of companies could potentially go after the same exact opportunities. It is true that many companies find success by hiring ex-government officials to go off and schmooze the customer and track leads like bloodhounds on a full time basis. It is also true that many (if not the majority) of very small businesses cannot afford to have such a person or even a business development person building key relationships with government customers that will steer contracts their way.

So, what is a small business to do? Find your niche. If you have ever read a government statement of work, you may have realized how specific they can be. The government often knows EXACTLY what type of contractor they’re looking for. Check out this recent FBO.gov posting from GSA. This is a 100% Woman-Owned Set-Aside requirements list:

The contracted evaluator must have the following skills and/or knowledge:

- Utilize the OIG’s AutoAudit software to document evaluation efforts;
- Utilize Corporation’s information technology (IT) systems (Momentum, MyAmeriCorps Portal, eGrants, and eSPAN) and government-wide IT systems (Payment Management System [housed by the Department of Health and Human Services] and Federal Audit Clearinghouse Database, including Image Management System [housed by the Census Bureau]) to assist evaluation work;
- Operational knowledge of Corporation’s unique grants, including experience in special VISTA grant provisions;
- Working knowledge of the Corporation’s IPERA efforts;
- Understand the Corporation’s internal control environment;
- Knowledgeable of the Single Audit Roundtable; and
- Knowledgeable of the Corporation’s audit resolution processes.

You may say, “Ok, this has got to be geared for a specific contractor.” That may be true, but why would the government want to go with that specific contractor? Because they have a skill set that is so specific to GSA’s needs and GSA wants them! Every bullet above is a niche, on top of the icing niche on the cake, 100% WOSB set-aside.

So often I work with clients and I ask them to tell me about their business, what they do and what they can do for the government? Often I hear “we do IT services”, or “we have like research and development”, or something along those lines. Yes, I understand you are just chatting with me and not your government customer, but I also need to know what your niche

is, that way I can help you get to the right customer. The government is BIG, there are lots of contractors, and there is lots of work to be done. So where do you fit?

Improve your messaging to find your fit and to sell your fit. Here are a few questions to ask your company:

- What is your company really good at?
- What unique skill sets do you have?
- Why are you different than the next guy?

For example: Instead of “Our company provides IT Services”, say, “Our company solves the high risk problem of cyber security with engineers experienced in building and maintain defensive networks.”

Have a person familiar with the marketplace review your answers to the questions above with you. You may think you are communicating sufficiently, but only someone else can really tell you if you have honed your message.

By identifying your niche you are able to pinpoint a) your target customer and b) communicate to your target customer exactly what you can do to support them. You may have a couple of niches; that is great, use them with the right audiences, not all audiences at once. Take some time to really think hard about what makes your company different than the rest; finding, then communicating your niche will only help in today’s environment.

In the next article, we’ll talk about marketing to your niche. Stay tuned!