SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW FOR GOVERNMENT OPPORTUNITIES?

Turn to the Cloud

Competition is fierce in today's business environment.

A combination of economic improvements and societal changes, along with a rapidly evolving technology landscape, has contributed to rising entrepreneurship levels and an influx of quality market entrants in the past couple of years. As new and more advanced goods and services become available, the relevance of existing products will seemingly start to diminish. In turn, many existing organizations are being forced to adapt and evolve at a faster pace. Fortunately, the government offers rich opportunities for business growth and long-term stability if you deliver the high quality goods and services they need at a competitive price.

That's because, though government agency budgets can and do fluctuate, their spending levels are far more consistent than many private sector organizations. In fact, state budgets — while only growing "at a moderate pace, post-recession" — are indeed growing. As reported in the Keating Report 2016: This "is the six consecutive year of spending and revenue growth for states." The Fall 2015 Fiscal Survey of States confirmed that 43 states enacted spending increases in fiscal year 2016 compared to 2015. Even better for you, government spending is expected to continue its growth trend in 2016 and 2017. According to Lexington, Mass.-based IHS Global Insight, state and local government purchases totaled $1.96 trillion in 2015.

So what does this all mean for you? You can't underestimate the sheer number of opportunities that potentially exist for your business in the government sector.

Demand for qualified suppliers and service providers will likely remain high for the foreseeable future because government entities are required to maintain a high level of service themselves. They don't have the in-house resources to meet operational requirements, so they outsource. Plus, the public sector buys products and services similar to those purchased by private companies and everyday citizens. In other words, the chances are good that at least one agency needs a product or service like yours.

Even if you have exactly what the government needs, agencies may not always be aware that you exist. Government procurement guidelines and procedures are not standardized, nor do all agencies at all levels utilize the same vendor registration system. Therefore, the burden falls to you to qualify your company to ensure you're even considered.

Once you understand how the government currently conducts their searches for vendors, then it becomes easier to uncover opportunities and secure contracts. The challenge is that you still need to make sense of the unique lingo, licensing and certification requests, and lead-time criteria of **100,000** federal, state, and local entities currently active in the U.S. Thus the need to understand which resources exist to help you move from DIY mode to ROI-driven methods.

> " In 2016, spending is expected to rise 3.1 percent to reach $2.02 trillion. In 2017, we can expect an additional 3.9 percent increase to $2.10 trillion."
>
> *IHS Global Insight*

A SNEAK PEEK INTO HOW GOVERNMENT AGENCIES BUY

Paper-based processes have long been used to plan, prepare, and publicize requests for proposals (RFP). Bartering, cold calling, robocalling, in-person pitches, public-private partnerships, and (more recently) hundreds of different online technology systems have been utilized over time to complete goods and services transactions with government entities. Of course, some of these methods date back centuries. But the point is that government procurement methods change over time, even if progress is slower than the private sector.

Agencies need a way to communicate the specifications and requirements for the product or service they intend to buy, and find the easiest way is via an RFP. They also tell you exactly how they want you to sell to them and how they're going to evaluate

each proposal; a huge bonus when you're new to the government sector. What is challenging for those on the government side, and sometimes frustrating for suppliers, is that it can take weeks or months for agencies to determine the scope or products or services needed and then research, identify, and finalize budgets. That's why it's hard to predict when new solicitations will post, making it even harder for you to manually manage the search process.

WHY THE SEARCH PROCESS IS SO COMPLEX....FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

There are laws governing the government procurement process that enact certain procedural requirements each agency must follow, even if it seems inconvenient to you. For example, in the United States, federal agencies' purchasing is governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), a standardized set of regulations used in the procurement process among all areas and levels of government. In adhering to the FAR, agencies will mandate that responding vendors adequately address each requirement in the RFP order to qualify for consideration. So agencies must ensure that each requirement is clearly stipulated in the RFP before they can post.

By law, federal agencies are also required to seek out qualified suppliers and service providers from "disadvantaged business entities" (DBEs)—small businesses, woman-owned businesses, economically disadvantaged businesses, service disabled or veteran-owned businesses, and companies located in HUB Zones—for a pre-determined percentage of all acquisitions. The inherent difficulty of issuing these types of solicitations is ensuring that business that meet these criteria — or really all businesses, regardless of DBE status — are made aware of the posted opportunities. Agencies have to ensure they're disseminating the solicitation as widely as possible. Just as it's challenging for you to follow every agency's posting using manual online searches, it's hard for them to reach you sometimes given the vast and somewhat fragmented design of the internet.

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THE PAST REALITY OF FINDING RELEVANT BID OPPORTUNITIES: PIE-IN-THE-SKY

Historically, companies would dedicate internal staff to search for bids, build relationships with government agency contacts and process relevant bids. They would then commit additional time and resources to preparing proposals that met the strict requirements of the government agencies. The process has never really been manageable for most potential government vendors.

Prior to the emergence of the World Wide Web, government agencies depended on printed publications to publicize RFPs and bid requests. These communication channels included legal and classified sections of newspapers, industry and business journals, and letters sent via direct mail to known consultants and vendors. Targeted solicitation was hindered due to time and costs associated with publicizing bid requests. In turn, vendors had to front the burden of searching for and sorting through the hundreds of RFPs issued daily. The costs associated with subscribing to numerous publications and manually sifting through the various RFPs were exorbitant for many companies, especially small businesses with limited resources.

Submitting a final proposal to a government agency in the pre-internet era was done exclusively via hardcopy. Vendors were required to produce multiple copies of a single proposal, which, depending on the complexity of the service requested, could be

hundreds of pages (and dollars). Typically, proposals were required to be submitted either in person or via certified mail, leading to more lost time and even greater costs.

Even with the government's more recent transition to internet-based solicitation systems, you may be finding it difficult, if not impossible, to proactively monitor and filter the thousands of bid opportunities posted each day. Manually searching each agency's system is a time consuming task that may yield minimal profitable results and take other operations offline. Then you still have to read through each posting to determine which ones warrant the time and effort required to prepare a winning RFP response. Fortunately, the rise of the internet is not only driving a rapid evolution of how RFPs are issued and responses submitted, but it's empowering many to introduce more comprehensive tools that actually uncover relevant government opportunities for you and provide automatic notifications of relevant postings so that you can better manage your overall business development process.

CONNECTING WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ON YOUR TERMS,
SO YOU CAN SPEND MORE TIME MEETING THEIRS

In less than a decade, cloud-based computing (aka SaaS, or "Software-as-a-Service") and other supporting technologies have transformed the procurement industry from the traditional paper and file cabinet systems employed for more than half a century into the e-procurement processes used today. Technologies can now aggregate bid requests from government agencies nationwide in a simple SaaS output for vendors and employ relevant coding systems to collect, collate and categorize bid requests. Suppliers and service providers are able to search for and find relevant bids in one centralized cloud-based platform, such as Periscope Holding's BidSync service.

As a qualified supplier or service provider, by subscribing to such a centralized bid aggregation service, you still maintain the ability to manually search through current RFPs and bid requests. You just also gain the benefit of receiving automatic notification of relevant

bids through email, mobile text and other emerging platforms. This not only provides you greater access to an increased volume of bid notifications but, in turn, more opportunities to win new business and increase revenue streams.

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WEIGHING THE VALUE OF BID NOTIFICATION SERVICES

There are a variety of cloud-based bid notification providers that serve the government sector. They're all supposed to reduce, and in many cases eliminate, the overhead costs associated with searching for bid notifications so that you can spend more time focusing on your core business. However, you'll only benefit from a subscription service that consistently delivers bids that align with your company's offerings. If you are a legal consultant, you don't want to waste time sifting through requests for commodities. Before you commit to a subscription, though, understand...

1. **How many bids the subscription service aggregates on a weekly or monthly basis:** The volume of bids can be an excellent indicator of the real comprehensiveness of the notification service. If you can find more manually, it's wasteful to pay for that subscription in more ways than one.

2. **Can you customize your profile to receive notifications based on specific criteria, that matter to you.** For example, a company in Seattle may have the resources to provide services to government agencies only in the Pacific Northwest, while another company in Chicago has the desire to provide supplies to government agencies nationwide. If either company is unable to tailor the bid notifications they receive to best fit their business model, they'll waste time culling through irrelevant bids.

3. **Can they match your company's descriptions of goods and services to RFPs and bid requests based on national standard coding systems.** Look for premium bid notification services that employ advanced software with filtering capabilities to provide a more tailored service.

4. **The timing of bid notifications.** This is critical. If there is any delay in RFP notification, then you're put at a disadvantage, unable to prepare a quality proposal in time and ultimately rendering the notification service useless. Bid notification providers that have long-standing relationships with government agencies at all levels of government and in diverse geographic regions are able to provide subscribers with a high volume of timely bids directly from the agencies.

5. **The bid notification provider's track record of success.** Providers that consistently deliver a high volume of relevant and timely bids to their subscribers will be able to help a company reach its business goals and be a competitive player in the government sector.

FIND YOUR (CODING) MATCH

Once you've compiled a shortlist of subscription services, make sure you confirm which coding systems each uses to match your company with relevant opportunities. Various coding systems have been developed by national governing organizations tasked with procurement oversight and best practice development. Each system is intended to help government agencies find the right suppliers and service providers for their needs and help vendors discover appropriate RFPs and bid requests that fit their expertise. With the ever-changing economic landscape, these codes help to categorize the numerous products and services government agencies purchase:

- The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) was established in 1997 to better define and describe the major industries that provide goods and services. NAICS codes classify businesses based on the type of activity or process of production they engage in. In the United States, NAICS is used primarily by the federal government and certain private entities.

- The National Institute of Governmental Purchasing's Commodity Services Code (NIGP Code) was developed in the mid-1980s and has become the standard coding system for thousands of government agencies throughout North America.

- Custom classification systems: Several entities have developed their own in-house methods to classify and search for relevant goods and services, such as a keyword matching system.

While each coding system has limitations, the NIGP Code is recognized as the most complete and exhaustive coding system and boasts an extensive classification structure for a wide variety of products and services. Just ensure that, regardless of the coding system used by the subscription service you select, your business is classified correctly to ensure proper opportunity matching.

STILL NOT SURE IF A SUBSCRIPTION IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Remember this:

Bid aggregation and notification systems remove the aggravation of navigating complex government buying and selling environments so that you can remain competitive in a fluctuating economy. Simply put, cloud-based e-procurement applications connect government agencies to vendors seamlessly through an internet browser to mutual benefit: Government agencies employing cloud-based applications can now publicize RFPs and bid requests to qualified suppliers and service providers digitally, rather than relying on the limited distribution of third-party printed publications. And cloud-based bid notification has leveled the playing field for businesses of all sizes and in every industry by increasing the visibility of RFPs and bid requests.

Bid notification services, especially the premium level ones, give you a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on the constant stream of government sector procurement needs. The rapid technological enhancements made by these service providers will continue to help you better position your company for future growth, regardless of your current size.

Plus, you know that you can only win government contracts if you have access to the most timely and relevant bid notifications. By employing a competent bid notification provider, you eliminate the laborious task of searching for bids manually and can instead focus resources on improving your core business. The qualified suppliers and service providers who invest in becoming aware of the limitless opportunities available in the government sector are the companies that thrive when economic uncertainties rattle the market. Ultimately, the key to success is finding a provider of consistent bid notifications that are relevant for your company's offerings.

HOW PERISCOPE'S BIDSYNC LINKS PLUS SERVICE CAN HELP YOU

BidSync Links Plus, powered by Periscope, is a search and daily bid notification service that enables vendors and service providers such as yourself to access active contracts and bid opportunities from more than 90,000 state and local, county, municipal, military and Federal agencies. As the largest bid opportunity database in North America, BidSync Links Plus gives you access to over one million public sector solicitations that are posted yearly across all categories. Plus, Periscope's in-house research team and proprietary bid extraction software does all the heavy lifting of identifying and posting the opportunities not automatically submitted to the database by Periscope's in-network government agency partners. All you have to do is set up alert profiles through the BidSync online portal, review relevant RFP information, and submit a strong proposal. In other words, the BidSync service saves you time and money and increases your growth potential while reducing the risk of missing opportunities — a common issue with manual RFP searches. For more information, visit www.bidsync.com or call 1-800-990-9339

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