

## Marketing strategies that help you win

By Joyce Bosc

**R**esponding to requests for proposals is a time-consuming, but critical, part of doing business in the highly competitive government market.

In the traditional RFP process, industry professionals use every page of the RFP response to highlight strengths relevant to the contract and emphasize positive factors, such as superior products, top-notch expertise, leading management processes and the like.

However, the RFP response is not the only time companies can communicate vital facts to the contracting agency.

RFP development and contract awards don't exist in a vacuum. Companies of every size can make themselves more competitive by building a pre-RFP marketing program into their operational and business development efforts.

This well-planned, intentional outreach—a combined effort of the marketing and business development teams—creates and leverages opportunities to give government a sense of familiarity with your firm and confidence in it.

The overall goal of pre-RFP marketing is to identify and communicate to key decision makers a company's strengths and relevance to the contract and its requirements. All of this is done well in advance of the RFP.

If an upcoming contract requires expertise in a particular project management discipline, place your credentials and experts at the forefront of your com-

munications. If the contract will need a certain technology skill set, make sure to spotlight your technical qualifications and proven successes at every opportunity.

By leading all communications with the messages key to the contract you want to win, you help to build an awareness of—and confidence in—your company and your ability to get the job done.

The ways to communicate pre-RFP messages include:

- *Strategic public relations:* Use bylines, newsletters, media briefings and white papers to help establish your subject matter experts as thought leaders in the areas most important to the contract. This strengthens your company's brand in the eyes of your key decision makers.
- *Timely advertising:* Particularly during the time of restricted communication, targeted paid advertising, including online, print, broadcast and even outdoor billboards, helps maintain visibility with your target audience.
- *Specific trade shows:* Create a presence for your company at government and industry events that provide the greatest opportunity for interaction with key decision makers.
- *Compelling graphics:* Create visual images that communicate key RFP-related themes, and use these images across all mediums, including your RFP microsite. Create a special logo that will give a visual identity to your pre-RFP campaign.

To win competitive government contracts, companies must market consis-

tently from quarter to quarter and from fiscal year to fiscal year. Pre-RFP marketing can position your company with a target audience long before an RFP is issued or even written, making this effort one of the most effective tools in any company's business development arsenal. Frequent and substantial communication of key strengths relevant to the contract can be the difference between winning a contract or being weeded out in the first round.

But, always remember: the RFP marketing process does not stop after the contract award.

Just as pre-RFP marketing can be the difference between winning and losing big government dollars, post-RFP marketing is vital to ensuring that your company gets its fair share of task orders. To actually get the work, companies must constantly demonstrate expertise in the areas required to fulfill specific task orders.

By making post-RFP marketing an integral part of the company's overall business development strategy, this critical aspect of communication can continue seamlessly for the life of the contract.

Executed effectively, this type of marketing program can demonstrate domain and subject matter expertise that helps highlight a contractor's experience, so they can make the short list, win the award and secure task orders.

Marketing departments should complement and work with business development teams to create a powerful synergy that ultimately brings in more government dollars for the company. **B**