



From Weather-makers to Jungle Guides...

Winning Public Sector Business Part 1

Have you ever wondered why some companies are better at winning ITO and BPO public sector business than you are?

Is your hit-rate at winning public sector business less than 1 in 3?

Does your sales team always seem to be bidding too many opportunities?

If your answer is 'yes' to any of the above then you are probably in need of both weather-makers and jungle guides.

Firstly, a little about us – we belong to BidPartners, a business services based company based in North London. Our principal aim is to assist our clients in the winning and delivery of long-term, profitable and sustainable business predominantly, although not exclusively, in the public sector.

Our analysis of bidding for, and delivering multi-year, multi-service partnering contracts to the public sector is that there are three key characteristics that need to be understood and developed.

These comprise:

- relationship management,
- understanding procurement processes, and
- business solution creation including commercial issues.

Relationships and the Weather-makers

It is often said that '...people buy from people' – this we intuitively know to be equally true for products from the local DIY store through to services that large scale public sector organisations procure, albeit under the regime of EU procurement directives.

It may be a truism, but public sector based organisations are fundamentally a composition of men and women who are in the business of public service delivery (mostly) for the benefit

of all. True, there are EU regulations to adhere to, but these are, for the most part, to ensure fair play and consistency of approach.

Anyone considering selling services or products to the public sector therefore needs to create some form of relationship with the buyer of their services and/or products – from experience, we've found that the better the relationship the better the business outcome.

Knowledge of the environment

At a simple level this can manifest itself in knowing some of the individuals in the procurement department, through to having a complete and detailed knowledge of all buyers and their functions within the decision making process. Better still, prior to the start of any formal procurement taking place, it is often far better to have created a relationship first such that a) you're a known quantity to the buyer(s) b) you've at least had an opportunity to help influence the emerging end-client business requirements by virtue of (hopefully) spending valuable face-to-face time with the key buying individuals and/or the committee of buyers.

Our analogy for this kind of activity is being a Weather-maker – clearly, you're not guaranteed as to the precise nature of the weather you're going to get, but, more than likely, you will have a portent as to whether you need to bring along your umbrella. Put into a business context – by having a pre-existing relationship and having had some dialogue with the end client, you are in a far better position to understand the emerging business requirements than the person who has just had four 'out of the blue' OJEC adverts put onto his/her desk!

Thus far, we've identified that, having been a weather-maker, you've an inkling as to what the future may hold – but how do you now proceed in the procurement jungle that beckons?





Procurement processes – The need for Jungle Guides

So, the OJEC advert has now arrived on your desk – having been a Weather-maker (rather pleasingly) some of the words within the OJEC advert are familiar to you; better still, the end-client whom you already know, rang to tell you that the OJEC was coming out – what do you do next? There is a detailed pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) to fill in – then, having done this, there is to be a detailed study period with the end-client organisation – this could take three months to complete – and then there then follows a more detailed Invitation to Tender to complete, and then a BAFO - what's that? – help, you're lost in a jungle what's more, the weather's getting worse!

But wait, think about it! – what you need now is a Jungle Guide – you want this guide to know the jungle and to lead you to safely through it and on to Shangri-La....well, safety would do in the first instance.

So what is the Jungle Guide's job? – put quite simply, a Jungle Guide's job is to take you into the jungle, keep you safe throughout the journey, and importantly, get you through the experience with sound mind and body.

The analogies here about understanding the procurement processes and the need to develop robust business solution(s) to business-led IS/IT requirements should be self-apparent but often they are not. Our experience, at least to date, shows that many firms are not familiar with even some of the most basic of EU procurement processes. Often firms bid for opportunities for which they have a) no solution or proposition or b) no understanding of the effort required to partake in the remainder of the procurement process – in summary, they have used neither the services of a weather-maker nor used a Jungle Guide – yet they still believe they have half a chance of winning a significant deal!

Conclusion

BidPartners believe strongly that entering a jungle without a guide is foolhardy at best, as is exploring without knowledge of the weather charts. We are acting as both weather-makers and jungle guides to a number of enlightened service based companies. We don't promise them Shangri-La but we'd be disappointed if they didn't emerge unscathed and enriched by the experience!

John Jones
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About John Jones

John Jones is a founding Director of BidPartners and a recognised industry expert in senior client relationship management, market and competitive intelligence, development of win strategies and qualification management. With over 20 years experience, John has worked in health, central government and defence sectors within some of the UK's premier service and systems companies including: Scicon (now part of EDS), Logica and CMG. He has been responsible for building relationships that led to the winning of large scale strategic IS/IT partnership/outsourced deals with values over of £200M.

About BidPartners Limited

BidPartners is a strategic sales services company whose purpose is to enable its clients to achieve 'step-change' growth. Working at all stages of the sales cycle, from the earliest positioning, through the formal bid process and into transition, BidPartners augments a clients in-house sales skills with the specialist techniques and knowledge need to win long-term profitable business.

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