



5 Key Capture Management Steps for a Win



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Introduction



Government contracts offer an important potential revenue stream, if you can land the deal. But capture management with government agencies can't be compared to run-of-the-mill B2B sales, wherein you locate the right person and make a great pitch. There is a long and winding road between identifying an opportunity and securing a government contract.

Take the Long Road to Closing the Deal

Why is the capture management process so time-consuming and complicated? Government agencies need transparency in their award process, and there are no handshake deals or shepherds to get you in through the backdoor.

Even a well-managed capture can take more than two years and require an enormous amount of time spent in meetings. And that's just the first stage of the research! Team meetings and contracting shop meetings can help you react to the agency's needs and shape the deal for the best possible chance of winning.

What You Can Expect

You might write several White Papers detailing possible solutions or explaining technical details. Responding to Requests for Information (RFIs) take time, as does a well-thought-out response to draft RFPs. Every document that goes out the door should be as complete as possible, which means fully drafted, reviewed and polished, before it is sent out.

At the same time you are working on these documents, you'll need to start identifying the competition. Who else is likely to bid on the same contract? Each step takes days, weeks or months to complete.

Simplify for Success

As complex as the Government Contracting capture management process can be, there are ways to simplify the steps you need to take. The key is effective prioritization. You need to understand which steps are most critical to your ability to win the contract. This eBook will help you do exactly that.

- Learn what a well-done capture looks like, from start to finish.
- Explore the different steps in the process, and discover when and how to start each one.
- Get tips on how to make your capture management process measurable and repeatable.
- Learn how to build a good capture team and what support they need for success.

The more you know before you start your capture management strategy, the less time you'll spend spinning your wheels.

Getting traction in government contracts takes a specific skill set and commitment to the process, but you can succeed in your goals. The potential revenue from government contracts can help your business withstand the ups and downs of a volatile marketplace.

Yes, there is significant effort when investing in capture management, but it is always worthwhile. Start building your capture management process with this helpful guide, and learn how to land long-term government contracts.

Step 1: Implementing a Repeatable Capture Management Strategy



The first step in creating any process is ensuring repeatability. Anyone can luck into success once, but being able to keep the momentum going depends on having a tested process in place that works. Your opportunities will change every year, but your analysis of those opportunities should remain the same. Because the same questions come up for every capture, you should store key information and analysis.

Store the Important Information

During every capture, the Capture Executive must find out specific information from the same sources. Over the two-year capture process, you will generally ask the same 100 questions for every potential contract.

What to Ask

From the government agency, you want to ask questions like:

1. WHAT CONTRACT VEHICLE WILL THIS COME OUT UNDER?

You need to be able to help the agency representative understand which vehicle works best for them (of course, guide them to select ones that you are on) based on the type of work being requested and to use the best competition (of course, you should list the competition that you generally beat).

2. IS THIS A SMALL BUSINESS SET-ASIDE? WHAT CATEGORIES?

If this is a small business set-aside, you'll need to ensure your company meets the requirements and adjust your competitors list to compensate. If you are a small company, then recommend the best categories that match your company. If you are a large company, shape the deal and try to get it changed to large Full and Open.

3. WHAT TYPE OF SOLUTION ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

The type and scope of the required deliverables may impact your interest in a specific contract. Make certain the solution matches **both your capabilities and your Past Performance**. In addition, you want to fill any gaps with the companies that the customer likes best!

4. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT NEED YOU HAVE?

Identifying critical needs helps you shape the deal to play up your strengths.

5. WHAT OTHER CONTRACTORS DO YOU LIKE? WHAT CONTRACTORS DON'T YOU LIKE? WHY?

The more information you have about what the client is looking for in a contractor, the more you can frame your service offerings to overcome objections.

6. HAS THE INCUMBENT DONE A GOOD JOB? HOW IS THEIR MANAGEMENT, PRICING AND SERVICE?

Incumbents often have an advantage when it comes time to bid on a contract. A big part of capture management is identifying contracts where the incumbent failed to deliver to the Government's expectations or needs.

Each of these questions will help you narrow down the focus as you gather information you will use to craft a proposal later. You need to know every detail of the deal and shape your response appropriately. The challenge lies in knowing what questions to ask and when.

Learning When to Ask

By compiling all of your capture information in one place, you can quickly grade performance. The more information your Capture Executive has collected, the more likely you are to win the bid. Track your captures to see how well each one is doing using our CaptureExec software.

This software gives you a platform that gathers all of the information on every capture in the pipeline. When you can see what deals are most complete and which need more work, you can better decide where to focus your efforts. A quick grade is the easiest way to separate out your best-qualified leads from those that need more nurturing. An objective grading process is a big part of what makes a capture management process repeatable.

Deciding to Close

Over time, you learn the questions you need to ask, so it is time to take a look and make some decisions about which opportunities to pursue. Diluting your effort might result in a slew of almost-deals when a little focus could help close several. Identify the opportunities that are most likely to win and work on these first.

Knowing when to walk away from an opportunity is the foundation for success on the deals you do choose to pursue. Objective and measurable scoring methods are the best way to avoid the trap of chasing after a capture there is no possibility of closing.

Step 2: Understanding Your Potential Customer



You have a list of qualified leads. You have enough information collected to start actively working on the capture management process. What's next? Relationship building is the next big chapter in your capture management success. You have to understand what makes your customer tick.

The bidder with the most information wins, so make sure to position yourself as the most knowledgeable.

Build a Complete Customer Profile

A customer profile shows you everything you need to know about a customer.

- What do they want? What do they like? What can they afford?
- What are their requirements? Are they open to new ideas and products?
- Do they have any hot buttons you should know about or avoid?

In addition to client-specific information, you also need to look at government contracts as a whole. Learn everything you can about how government contracts work. Take a look at the small business definitions. Determine your NAICS code(s). The North American Industry Classification System quantifies business products and industries using codes, and only certain codes may be eligible to bid on specific jobs.

Educate Yourself About Government Contracting

The government is like no other client you have ever worked with. Their requirements are often highly specific, but they also offer a fair amount of information — if you know where to look. Before you make your first phone call or schedule a meeting, do some agency-specific research.

Every government agency publishes information about their organization and budgets. You can take a look at these strategic documents on the Office of Management and Budget

website. From there, you need to remember the Dos and Don'ts of government contracting. With all of that in mind, you can make contact.

Talk to the customer. Ask lots of questions. As you get to know the customer, you will get a better understanding of their likes and dislikes. It's good to follow the leadership to every speaking engagement, read up on current events that might impact the agency, research new management hires, policy changes or other news that could impact what the agency is looking for, and understand their organizational needs, budgetary support, integration with other agencies, etc.

Remember the Government Contracting Officer

The Contracting Officers (KO's), are not your customer, but they are the people who sign off on the deal. You always want to include them in the conversation. Selling to the customer only to get held up by the Contracting Officer is not the way to manage a successful capture. Many changes to the RFP can be made by working with the KO and showing them different options that might help them (and of course, be better for your company as well).

Identify and Include the Funding Source

Where the money is coming from can also impact your eventual success. As the old adage goes, "who controls the money has a say in how it is spent". Is the contract for a federal, state or local government agency? Which agency has ultimate oversight on spending for this contract? The agency funding the contract may have some guidelines specific to their contractors. Also, not all funding is available immediately. By contacting the funding source, you may glean information about prospective start dates and payment schedules. The more information you have, the more you can shape the deal to balance your company's needs with the needs of the customer.

Take Advantage of Educational Meetings and Industry Days

During the capture process, many agencies will set up meetings and industry days to explain the opportunity. During such events, agency representatives detail what they expect out of the contract and what they are looking for. These meetings are important because they are an opportunity to see the competition, begin setting up team mates and meet the customer face to face. You have a long laundry list of questions, and some of them might be answered at one of these events.

Build a Relationship

Take every opportunity to meet with all of the different segments and personnel of the Government. You can never overestimate the importance of face time. The better you get to know the customer, the more you can anticipate their needs. If they know you, they might be more likely to reach out with questions on their end. Ultimately, building a relationship allows you to improve your odds of landing the contract. Remember, people enjoy doing business with people they like, if they get the chance.

Step 3: Analyzing Your Competition



When bidding for a government contract, one thing is absolutely certain: There will be competition. Hence, knowing what you're up against is crucial to your success. Competitive analysis, if executed correctly and efficiently, can provide great insights into how to land a customer. Here's how you can do just that.

Learn What Your Customer Needs

An RFP is a competition, and to even begin to find ways to up your total score in the eyes of the customer, you have to understand who else is going for the win. Rival contractors probably won't advertise their pursuit, so you might worry that it could be difficult to figure out just who they are. However, by studying what your customer needs, talking to everyone in the industry and researching which contracting companies have the ability to provide solutions for those needs, you should be able to come up with a short list of other contractors likely bidding for that new business.

TIP: Don't forget to look at the sign-in registers whenever you meet with the Government - you might learn quite a bit about who was there before you!

Discovery of your competition's bidding plans and strategy requires that you take time to thoroughly understand the customer's range of products and services, as well as their

requirements. As you note which companies are able to fulfill client needs, you might notice that some competitor businesses could actually be teaming up to win bids. Once you have a good list of the possible competition, you can begin identifying your team's and your competitors' strengths and weaknesses. You should create a clear status and analysis report, SWOT chart, for each of the top, most relevant competitors on your list.

Conduct a Black Hat Analysis

A black hat review process involves analyzing another firm's strengths and weaknesses through what is called a "SWOT" (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. The exercise consists of visualizing, discussing and even acting out how a competitor will make a bid, provide solutions, create pricing or develop a team. During the black hat analysis, you should make a point of going over how your competition will line up their own proposal so you can ghost their weaknesses and promote your strengths.

In most instances, it's advantageous to include someone familiar with the other company in your black hat review, such as an outside consultant or internal employee who once worked for them. This activity can focus on personnel, historical performance and other key differences between your company and the competition.

After the black hat exercise, your team should have a better grasp on where you stand compared to your rivals. When the review is complete, discuss actionable strategies for surpassing other bidders. Always include a plan and timeline for bringing these ideas from paper to reality.

Leverage the Differences

A Black Hat review process allows you to fill in gaps you might have missed and to address weaknesses you did not previously consider before you submit what would otherwise have been a less competitive bid. Furthermore, a Black Hat analysis provides you a clear outline of rival bidders' weaknesses compared to your strengths, which you should make visible to the customer. You need to show how you can offer solutions when and where the competition can't. Simply put, if you know how your firm compares to other bidders, you can leverage differences to your advantage. To do this properly, you need to be brainstorming for actionable ideas and concrete plans not only while performing a Black Hat analysis, but also after.

Another aspect of this part of the bidding process is seriously thinking about how your competition will perform Black Hat analysis about you. In this sense, as you analyze competitors, you have to also be objective about your own team's shortcomings, as well as to understand where you thrive. This process is called a White Hat. Defining your White Hats will make writing a bid that captures the attention of the customer go smoothly, and help your chances of getting that new government contract.

Step 4: Constructing an Ideal Team



Many companies dream of performing contract work for the federal government. After all, the federal government typically spends more than \$500 billion in contracts each year. However, the reality is that getting a job with the government is easier said than done. And that's because expectations are high.

To win any government contract, you need a team that solves every need of the client. However, as you probably have already learned, constructing the ideal team for any bid requires some effective leadership, intuitive decision making skills and the willingness to form partnerships. Here's what you need to know about constructing an ideal team and writing a winning bid.

Understand Where Your Firm Is Lacking

A Black Hat review process provides insight into how a competitor will pitch a client, which in turn allows you to better prepare your proposal. Next, you perform a White Hat review of your own company and you will realize how competitors will ghost your strengths and emphasize your weaknesses, all the while highlighting how they can solve all the client's needs. Such analysis should clearly bring into focus the areas where the competition beats you – or is able to offer what you can't.

In short, you need to know what capabilities you need to solve all of the specific government agency's needs. If the government wants eight types of technology delivered, but your company can only offer four, then you will either need to find a way to offer such services or begin to think about partnering with other companies that have the capabilities you need. Although you may need to partner with a company that would typically be your competition, understand this: it's better to win with another firm than lose altogether.

Look for the Best Partner

After forming the best possible core team within your firm, you may find that you require help from another company to win the contract. Hiring outside consultants who are familiar with the particular government agency is a good first step. You should also be searching for companies that can help fill in gaps in your services. By joining with a partner, you'll be able to provide the customer with the best possible services.

Exactly who your team partners with differs with each project and depends significantly on the capabilities and technology your team needs to add. You will most likely have to build a different team for each government bid you are submitting. As always, consistently networking and marketing with others in the industry will help shed light on who could be the best partner for a certain government contract. You want to be constantly building a list of contacts who might be able to help you land a job at some point or another. Meeting decision makers – and building lasting relationships with people who can help your business – is the key to success in obtaining government contracts.

There are other methods you can employ to get the job, too. If you're a small business, for instance, it's good to learn which larger companies have solid reputations for working with smaller businesses on government contracts in your field. A partnership with such a corporation can provide you with unmatched name recognition and resources when making a bid.

Go with What Works Best

Constructing the ideal team is about forming a group that can offer every possible solution the government agency you are bidding for requires. That means not only making sure your own team is operating at the top of its game, but also that you choose the right companies to help strengthen your team when and where needed. This way, you – and your partners – can present a convincing proposal. Then you land the contract, everybody gets the job, and everybody wins – including the government.

Step 5: Managing Your Team the Whole Way Through



The capture process can be a long and arduous journey, sometimes taking years from initial lead to final sell. It is vital that you manage your team the whole way through. Because the process involves a myriad of details and shifting client needs, it is your responsibility to monitor your team's capture process and ensure accounts are being moved through the system appropriately and efficiently.

The key players include your account manager, capture executive, delivery manager, program manager, pricing manager, contracts manager and proposal manager. Opportunities must be integrated throughout the team, iterating through as you seek to improve the process on the fly. Here is an overview of the main players and their roles.

Account Manager

Your account manager is responsible for filling the sales pipeline. They manage relationships at targeted government agencies, uncovering new procurement opportunities through constant communication with current customers and other contacts. They also look for announcements through federal business opportunity clearinghouses and government information services. They look for answers to several questions about each opportunity:

- Does the prospect have enough funds?
- Does the prospect have a challenge we can help them take care of?
- Does the prospect know about our organization and how we can help solve their challenge?

The result of these questions helps the account manager make an initial qualification judgment on each lead. To help with the process, the account manager may contact one or several customers and make several in-person meetings.

Capture Executive

A capture executive manages the sales pipeline, qualifying each opportunity. They determine which deals you will pursue and which will be dropped. They also decide which projects should be set aside for reassessment at a later date. For the opportunities they deem worthwhile, the capture executive will begin shaping a strategy.

The capture executive is tasked with understanding your clients, the competition, product lines and available technology. They will get to know each account, seeking to understand their problems, goals and personal preferences. The capture executive wants to know what work for the customer, what challenges they encounter and what new technologies or processes they are looking for to make their organization run better. Understanding customer issues and structuring a strategy that will match your features and benefits to agency needs is often the deciding factor in winning proposals. The capture executive will also manage all the activities of the delivery manager, program manager, pricing manager and contracts manager when the time comes to include them in the long bidding process.

Proposal Manager

Once a government agency releases a Request for Proposal, this role organizes the process of creating the bid and submitting a proposal. At this point, you must match the benefits you bring to the table with client needs. The proposal manager has to manage the calendar and compliance so your company guarantees fulfillment of the RFP's requirements. For large projects, there will be many steps to follow. Smaller projects are simpler but require the same focus on outlining the project and your proposed solutions, in order to create a succinct proposal that meets technical requirements while offering appropriate solutions and competitive pricing. Understanding the costs of the bid and setting the correct bid price is an exacting job that requires extensive research and a keen understanding of the client's evaluation process - the capture executive manages this process along with company executives and the pricing team.

Managing capture initiatives is a constant challenge. You must continue to raise the bar on your company's ability to compete using a structured capture process. Determining client needs, reading between the lines in their responses and crafting proposals that are technically sound while also persuasive will mean the difference between landing deals and spinning your wheels.

Do You Know How To Use a Black Hat Review Process?

When used in your Capture Management process, a **Black Hat review can provide your organization with valuable insights needed to help you win.** This review offers a format for identifying and analyzing your top competition for a given opportunity. Sounds easy enough, right?

Actually, the Blackhat process itself is not that easy - but it's worth it.

Watch Our Free On-Demand Webinar to Learn:

- The steps of a Black Hat Review Process
- The optimal way to manage and implement a Black Hat Review Process
- How to analyze the results of a Black Hat Review Process
- What to do with your Black Hat results, and how you can use them to win

...and more.



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