



Strategies for Business Marketing to Government in the Digital Age

*B2G Digital Marketing
Part I - Your Audience*

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Introduction

This whitepaper is targeted to smaller businesses who are preparing and seeking to grow their business with the government, and need a roadmap for marketing to government buyers. More specifically, this paper lays out the approach for digital business-to-government (B2G) marketing, a critical tool the government will leverage to find, evaluate and do business with you.

Part I focuses on the target, the customer, the audience. Who are they, and what do they want or need from you - to buy, use, and recommend your products or services? To do so in a way that meets their expectations, goals and requirements from a government purchasing (or Prime bid teaming) process perspective? That makes it easy for them to choose you?

Part II will focus more on you - the steps you can take to align your digital marketing strategy and tactics to this audience. Part III will be additional depth for specific B2G tactics and strategies.

Part I is published online - please [contact KME.digital for B2G](#) Parts II and III, in addition to any other questions or comments you might have.

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Background

What's the source of this information and insight? The content published here contains no proprietary, sensitive or otherwise company-specific information; it is a unique aggregation of thought leadership, perspective and opinion solely from the contributing authors and 3rd-party, public information. This information is provided to address the rapidly growing, emerging intersection of commercial and government digital marketing, engagement and technologies, all in service of public sector constituents with consumer-driven expectations. By "public sector", we mean federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, NGO and non-profit government-focused activities.

B2G digital marketing is a unique, multi-faceted capability your marketing and sales function must learn, and must utilize to keep pace both with government needs and the GovCon competition. However, this paper is intended to advise all players in government procurement - regarding how and why digital B2G marketing is both useful and necessary, and how it can make the overall process more effective, buying for and selling to the government. That's what we, the American taxpayer, really want and need. This series is produced specifically geared towards smaller GovCon businesses, who tend not to have internal resources ready to learn and execute this guidance. However, it's very apparent that even the largest contractors can also find this useful input, though they will have an easier time establishing budget or assigning resources to address it.

B2G Small Business Goals

Many small businesses don't start with the intention of selling directly to the government. Those that do, tend already to have some connection or influence with the government, typically through an existing personal relationship, a past job or subcontract (to a government contract-holder). That's a great way to start, as the more successful government contractor (GovCon) holds great personal relationships with their customers, the government employees and staff who not only use their products or services, but who also may be part of the large and complex machinery of the government procurement process. In the government purchasing arena, the end-users of what you're selling, may not be the actual buyers and recommenders.



This isn't so dissimilar from the commercial marketing arena (B2C/B2B), where analysts, influencers and reviewers tend to make the recommendations that others use for purchasing. After assessing 200 sorted reviews on Amazon.com for a running shoe, reading some analysts reports on Runner's World, plus checking with your Facebook club - you can be reasonably assured your selection and purchase will work out, with little risk. The government is charged with spending taxpayer money in the most compliant and mission-aware way as possible - and is therefore also interested in finding and assessing as much relevant, verified feedback as possible. But the information and feedback needs to check a long list of criteria, to meet legal and procurement regulations - for the investment (i.e the project or program), for the Agency and perhaps for a broader governance domain (i.e. in the case of a multi-agency initiative, or for a locality or State). Therefore, the market research, industry engagement and downselect of target vendors tends to be done by uniquely-trained acquisition and procurement staff using regulated processes.

Your smaller business goals, however, may not be (now, or ever) to actually sell directly to the government. Yes, once on a delivery and payment schedule, the government can be a very reliable, long-lasting and influential client. Maintaining this client, however, involves quite a bit of overhead you may not have. To set up and manage a relationship with the government on their terms (assuming all the work you did to win a contract, purchase order or schedule pans out), includes addressing financial requirements, reporting and inspection requirements, employee clearances, security controls, payment terms and conditions, product regulation and standard certifications, extra deliverables - all of these are elements you need to address to successfully deliver and get paid. This means your team needs to be well educated on government contract (or grant) management, and have invested in this work overhead (i.e. people, reporting tools, financial systems, etc.) necessary to meet the requirements.

So your B2G goals may actually be to become a subcontractor, get on a team, work with a Prime vendor - i.e. another company, typically larger, and more established in the particular government marketplace. A "traditional" GovCon player, who's already invested in the machinery necessary to maintain government contracts. Guess what - these companies, who may be seeking for your products or services (to use on their team, on a new or existing government bid response), have the same criteria for assessment that the government procurement staff do. They also have more, with respect to exactly how you can fit on their team, uniquely contribute to the win, avoiding unknown or unplanned risk.

Also, how much you'll discount your pricing to get a spot on the team. A lot of times a Prime's subcontractor relationship does end up paying less than a direct government contract would, accounting for the Prime's margin needs - but that's the price of entry to a new government market.

B2G Small Business Audiences

With this in mind, it turns out that marketing and selling to the government involves up to eight primary audiences. All of whom use the Internet, and Google (even Bing), a lot. They also search using Twitter and LinkedIn, search among industry discussion groups, and search even a bit on YouTube. Instagram/Pinterest/Facebook - not so much (at least in the U.S.). This really shouldn't be surprising - but it seems still to be, to so many of the companies and marketing teams I speak with. Even the largest ones, who tend to have marketing teams led and staffed from the ranks of the traditional PR/marketing crowd, vs. the hungry, informed and #agile #B2G #digitalmarketing start-ups.

The audiences are (identified by tags we'll use later), ordered by priority of investment you'll need to make:

1. **Customers:** Those who have final approval for a relationship with you, purchasing your goods or services, that explicitly meet their requirements
2. **Buyers:** The government acquisition and procurement community (i.e. the procurers)
3. **Company:** Your own company and partners (if approval and help is necessary to support the bid)
4. **Users:** The end-user, or government Agency (employees and contractors using your stuff, whether they were part of the approval/selection process or not)
5. **Mission:** The mission community (i.e. all the stakeholders, partners, experts, influencers in the mission domain, that the Agency relies on for help or advice)
6. **Public:** The public, or constituents of the Agency (i.e. their own customers)
7. **Primes:** Your GovCon targets (i.e. existing or bidding contractors you seek partnership with)
8. **Competition:** Those whom you're competing against, whether directly or indirectly (as in the case of negative reviewers, or Agencies with overlapping capabilities or contracts)

Note this audience focus isn't so new - the [SBA's guidance a decade ago](#), updated in 2016, outlines three audiences in their "primer for small businesses" - procurers, influencers and end users. From a holistic marketing perspective, however, particularly with respect to the current Internet and rise of mobile channels - this isn't enough.

Are you ready, to market to the eight audiences outlined above? What are these audiences looking for, where will they find it (find you), particularly on the Internet? It probably seems a bit overwhelming (8 audience campaigns!). You're probably used to marketing focused on customers, perhaps some branding attention for the public, and even creation of thought leadership content for industry communities and analysts. That's not enough for successful government sales, however.

1. B2G Customers

In the government acquisition and procurement process, the customers are most certainly those who provide either the decision criteria (like Section M and the SOW in an RFP, or the product specifications for an RFQ), or actually provide the decision feedback (for the procurement team to act upon). They might not actually buy your stuff - but the mission-aware evaluation, proposal-scoring and decision to buy rests in their hands. They are typically directors, managers and leads on agency programs, who know best how your product will or should fulfill their functional or technical requirements (assuming all compliance factors are met). They may actually be advocates or representatives of a larger user population - even thousands of users - and are the ultimate experts. Note these "customers" may also be Prime contracting staff who work directly with agency customers - and so are best positioned to evaluate your product from that close mission perspective.

What are B2G Customers looking for online, and where?

Generally speaking, these are busy people, managing and delivering the current mission, while committing extra cycle for the "next" phase, i.e. the procurement you're interested in. But they know in sordid detail what's lacking in their current tools or contracts, or the explicit gap between the old and new requirements (that products like yours can fill). They have usually self-validated this through research by themselves, or their team, online - either self-directed, or guided by the sales efforts of other vendors who already have agency relationships.



These people are the most difficult to attract and influence with any kind of online content, particularly while the procurement is underway - their attention must be gained before and during the earliest acquisition-shaping phase, while the requirements are just emerging. What attracts their attention, what do they seek? Trusted, validated, detailed, mission-specific content - or really new, interesting, unique features, though with immediately compliant, risk-free, and value-added purchasing options. Perhaps something you've sold at another Agency. Can they find this really quickly online, from you, ahead of the competition? Clue, to be covered in Part II - what they find from you, online or in their email, isn't a single piece of content - it's a carefully-crafted anchor in a sea of linked, accessible benefits.

2. B2G Buyers

If your small business hasn't yet sold to the government, this is an invisible community to you. The government acquisition and procurement community is a unique, independent group of investment and contracting experts, whose job (at least in the Federal government, and for state and local recipients of Federal grant, loan and aid programs) is to manage and enforce compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulations (i.e. the "FAR"), plus Department or Agency-specific procurement regulations. Using their own language, terms, processes. State and local jurisdictions have their own procurement laws and regulations, and rapidly-growing intersections with federal - particularly in health care.

Procurement officers and teams are engaged from the very earliest phase, validating budgets and shaping acquisition strategies. This includes market research to evaluate the types and availability of products and services that may meet the mission need, and ultimately adjust or shape the acquisition so that it can be most successful for the government (and its constituents) - in terms of requirements, compliance, low-risk, low-cost and all the other benefits demanded by taxpayers. Government market research is a well-scripted, methodical process, with many requirements - but is certainly responsive to changing or new sources of information for researchers.

What are B2G Buyers, Procurement Teams looking for online, and where?

In addition to government sources (like...), B2G buyers use all the Internet tools available - primarily Internet/social/industry search, but also any services that offer evaluation, prototypes, tests, education, training, online analysis, or any other tools to help identify and assess a possible source selection. At multiple points in the procurement lifecycle, up to and including award or purchase order. What they really want to see, is 3rd-party validation, approval, evaluation - of your product, market and vendor community (including you!), within the parameters of the mission performance and government contract requirements. They have a checklist of information to collect and verify, to include you in their source selection pool, to engage further and ask to bid - including proof points, strengths, solution integration details, logistics, price points, company leadership, past performance, etc. Give this to them online, easily consumable and found, both by search and website navigation. More in Part II.

3. Company

Crafting and executing a B2G strategy for government customers and buyers requires expertise in government procurement, digital marketing and, presumably, the mission space which needs help. Where larger companies tend to get hung up, is on the internal approval and knowledge-sharing processes necessary to plan and act on the B2G strategy, and put together a compelling, compliant, high PWin (probability of winning) bid. However, even though smaller companies should have more streamlined and agile decision-making processes, even they sometimes don't share the right information among themselves, their partners or suppliers, and the BD/sales/marketing/proposal team (which might just be 1 person). Your team needs to be able to find your offering in the same way customers and buyers do, both on the Internet, and among internal content repositories. This means inward-facing digital marketing, with a dose of "knowledge management" - coordinated with the outwards-facing search visibility and content marketing tactics. Imagine an Orals presentation, of a very well-crafted, written proposal, where a key resource, a subcontractor, wasn't aware of the basic categories of your offering and related services, as listed on the website (that the technical evaluation team noticed). Been there, done that.

4. Users

Users are the squeaky wheel, where the highest degree of negativity or complaints might emerge, though with the greatest potential of really helpful, positive testimonial support. In B2C-land, users and customers are typically the same thing, i.e. those who buy and use your product. And give you a 4-star rating. It also may be possible to track and engage your commercial users, if they interact directly with your product. This is usually not the case in government - the users of what you sell are likely separated from you, the vendor, by many layers of program, process, and security, and their feedback typically doesn't appear on public Internet review sites. But it might, so keep up your brand and reputation alerts (another topic for Part II).

The users, however, are tightly connected directly or through proxy to the customer, and buyer, and they need to find not only the information those roles can find, but also more job/skill/role/-function-specific information to enable their success. Say a technician needs spec details for Part X, they search online and easily find it, along with a link or two to testimonials about Part Xv2 (and add-on Part Y) - this research can easily become part of another Task Order, a BOM update, a tech refresh initiative, etc. User language and terms, however, may be quite different, more "hands-on", than exposed through acquisition materials (i.e. more "quality" than "value"). Your B2G user audience does require its own channel and tactics, commensurate with the "bottoms-up" influence of the users on the purchasing decision.

5. Mission

B2G marketing to the mission stakeholders and community, is essentially an "influencer marketing" campaign (a Part II topic) - making sure those in the mission community who know most about the problems your product or service solves, know a lot about your product or service. Many times, the community subject matter experts (SMEs) are in fact accessible (unconstrained by your customer), and therefore great targets for content management and digital engagement techniques (along with audience-specific SEO). For example, updates on your new or developing products, thought-leadership pieces that cement your market leadership, internal research and reports that shape request for more details. These mission SMEs are also likely government employees, serving in roles and locations that are part of the complex mosaic of professional relationships, education and public/private mission collaboration that's an important feature of the public sector community.

A key tenet of procurement marketing research in government, is whether another agency or entity can corroborate your claims, or agrees with your assertions. Approval and referrals from informed government employees (and in rare cases, an online link from a .gov/.edu domain), is pure gold - so arm your content and online presence specifically for this audience. Be sure your own SMEs, your own employees - are known, identified and findable via search by the government SMEs. (Harnessing your own staff, SMEs, for digital marketing - that's another Part II discussion).

6. The Public

Your public profile, reputation, brand status - can really hurt you in the B2G game. If problematic, it's an easy and legitimate disqualifier from further consideration. Just like failure to follow "Section L" RFP instructions, to the letter. If you've got the right marketing focus on the mission community, this should generally cover the online, positive presence ground a public campaign might deliver. Sometimes your product or service isn't so specific, however, like "systems engineering consulting". Everybody does that, design/build/test. So what else is there about your corporate brand, leaders, identity, persona, activities, social/environmental causes that can help you stand out among the hoi polloi, generate some buzz and referrals among the six degrees of Kevin Bacon? Who might actually know someone you're targeting as a user or customer, and be in some way a positive influence on your social or search presence? (Mr. Bacon certainly would.) This is your front page, your social profile, your email tagline, your Google Maps ID, your advertised presence at industry "giving" events. B2G digital marketing is not complete without proper attention to the Public - and this includes industry reviewers, analysts, and other active, publishing influencers.

7. B2G Primes

As stated earlier, your B2G strategy may not be to actually sell/contract directly with the government. It may be to land on a Prime team (i.e. the primary bidder or existing contract-holder), contributing to creation of a market offering, responding to a contract or schedule solicitation, a Purchase or Task Order, perhaps a Simplified Acquisition Procedure (i.e. Other Transaction Authorities, OTAs, or Commercial Solution Openings, CSOs). So your audience is quite commercial, and therefore less restrained with respect to the variety and volume of digital marketing and engagement techniques you might use - but they still need for you to enable them to assess your offerings as the government would. Procurement language and all.

This requires a smooth and frictionless “user experience” across your digital presence, converting the searches and exploration by Prime capture teams (i.e. Capture Manager, BD, Solution Architects, Domain SMEs, Proposal Manager) into a clear call to action. To contact you, get you in the door for further assessment, collaboration, agreement to team. Solution Architects, in particular (spoken from direct experience), are always eager to find alternatives, trade-offs, unique elements to supplement and differentiate the developing solution - and they’ll be explicitly aware of the gap you need to fill, on their team. Hopefully, your B2G digital marketing activities targeting the other audiences, as described above, provide enough evidence to the Prime that having you on their team will positively differentiate their response.

8. B2G Competition

Take a look around the Internet, do your own research, act like the customer. Who would they notice, contact, possibly even sole-source to? Is this competition a clear and present threat? Run some Spyfu - what is the competition specifically trying to sell, to whom? This kind of search will very likely adjust your entire marketing and sales process, if not also your product direction. For offense, or defense, of your brand, market share and target customer intimacy. Besides simply doing better than the competition, explicit “brand marketing” and “brand bidding” (for PPC) can be used to stay in front, be more visible in searches, and possibly even “ghost” the competition a bit (i.e. allude, tacitly, to either negative characteristics of the competition, or to why your offering is specifically better than their own claims). Do not ignore this important B2G audience - in fact, they may respond quickly to your subtle positioning, with their own. Match you keyword-for-keyword. In the B2C/B2G digital marketing world, this is standard warfare - but really has yet to become de rigueur in services-centric B2G marketing (but smart, digitally-aware companies will have this focus).

Conclusion

In this whitepaper, we covered the characteristics of the B2G digital marketing audience, what they’re looking for, what makes them happy, how to succeed. This is the critical first step - beyond actually creating and offering a compelling, unique, compliant, mission-centric product or service - to becoming part of a source selection, or even shaping the acquisition to your benefit.

With this guidance, a new B2G marketing strategy can be created, or your existing B2B/B2C marketing strategy tailored (which it must be).

Part II will explore B2G digital marketing tactics shared across the audiences described in this paper. In particular, we'll start with the gap between traditional government business development, and traditional government contractor marketing. What the government business development and capture team can and should do, with respect to digital marketing. This gap exists for all size companies, even the largest ones, though they tend to have resources to deal with this - where smaller companies may not.

What will be covered:

- Government Business Development - new tools to use
- Working With Your Corporate Marketing Team
- Supporting Proposals

These topics will be further explored in detail in Part III:

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Procurement Taxonomy
- Search Engine Marketing/Pay Per Click (SEM/PPC)
- Inbound & Influencer Marketing
- Digital Press Kits
- Earned Media

Contact KME.digital for any additional information on this critical and overlooked B2G digital marketing topic – **and to request part II**. If developing or executing a B2G strategy, be sure your team includes B2G digital marketing expertise.

Contributing Author

Ted McLaughlan has held all kinds of roles in the GovCon marketplace over the past 30 years, from delivering IT engineering, program and project management services directly to hundreds of Federal, state, local and nonprofit public sector customers, to leading and participating in every phase of GovCon business development, capture, marketing and sales - most frequently as a sales engineer, solution architect and proposal developer. This is in addition to expertise in digital technologies, marketing and SEO, developed first at Accenture, Blackstone Technology Group and Oracle, and secondly in support of KME.digital, with his wife **Kelly McLaughlan** (CEO).