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## **Knowing Your Customer's Idiosyncrasies Also Applies to Serving Government Markets**

*\$425 million plus in contracts awarded each year to private sector printers*

*by Deborah Snider, Senior Vice President, e-LYNXX Corporation*

Knowing your customer is fundamental to business success. For some reason, though, there seems to be a mystique about government markets, like supplying print for the United States Government Printing Office (GPO).

Let's remove the shroud. Being a supplier for GPO is really no different than doing business with a large commercial customer. Each has its own idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, personalities, requirements, standards and rules -- written and unwritten.

The key to developing any market is to know the customer. That begins with market intelligence. You wouldn't walk into a computer store and randomly buy a computer without at least asking some key questions. In reverse, the same should be done when evaluating whether your firm should be doing print work for GPO or any other customer. In the consumer world, that evaluation process is called market research and retailers do it all the time to determine the likes and dislikes of shoppers.

Doing GPO market research begins with knowing some GPO basics, such as the federal law requirement that all three branches of the federal government - executive, legislative and judicial - are to use GPO to procure their print, with only limited exception. According to GPO, "when agencies fail or refuse to use our services, as they are required to by law in Title 44 of the U.S. Code, taxpayers take a beating and government information becomes hard to find. We're here to save money and protect public access. That's the job we do best, as our record shows." GPO Deputy Public Printer of the United States Robert T. Mansker made that statement more than 10 years ago.

Private sector printers are essential to GPO work being done cost effectively, with quality results and delivered on time. Each year, GPO awards more than \$425 million to the private sector benefiting printers with a broad range of capabilities. Most have about 25 employees and annual revenue in the \$4.5 million range, but there also is plenty of work for large printers that can deliver million dollar plus projects. If you are a printer of any size, you need to look into winning GPO work to supplement your commercial accounts. Your profitability could increase substantially.

To find the right niche with GPO, a printer needs to first know at what quality level it can bid on GPO jobs. There are four levels ranging from best quality (Level 1) to basic quality (Level 4), and the printer must understand that once approved it can only bid on jobs at that quality level or lower. Obtaining approval for the highest quality level possible is an important first step. The printer must do its research to determine which level is best for it and submit samples, forms and other materials as required. Should the printer buy new equipment, hire additional staff or in any other way change its capabilities, it can re-submit to get approval at a higher quality level.

Next, the GPO print supplier must be comfortable with the GPO bidding environment -- one in which printers bid low knowing that GPO typically accepts the lowest bid on most jobs. By basing their bids on what it would cost to print GPO work during downtime, printers are able to reduce their pricing significantly, in some cases as much as 50%. Work to fill downtime at a reduced fee is better than having a production gap, no work and no income at all. On the other hand by having market data on hand, it is possible to know when competition is limited and to charge at or above commercial rates.

Paperwork is another key area to understand. GPO works on the premise that if there is no paper work, or if the paper work is defective or incomplete, payment cannot be made or proof of claim cannot be substantiated. A clear trail of all paperwork is essential. All changes must be justified and approved in advance. All billings must be exact with the appropriate attachments. The GPO only pays for what can

be documented as having been previously approved by an authorized GPO representative. No job is finished until the paper work is done, and doing the paper work properly is the only way to obtaining payment and not having to pay penalties for misunderstandings. Commercial accounts expect full documentation as well.

Careful research also should be devoted as to how a printer obtains information about GPO jobs opened for bids. This can make a huge difference in how successful you will be in developing government work as a profitable secondary market -- one that complements and supplements your commercial business. One way is to use the GPO website and its listings. This, however, only lists some of the available GPO work that is put out for bid. To obtain full access to *all* available GPO bids, you must subscribe to GPO's Bid Subscription Service. Only one private sector bid service firm is a subscriber, and only it obtains *all* available GPO bid opportunities. Printers should be wary of any bid service that does not purchase the full GPO Bid Subscription Service. Some have even been known to sell to unsuspecting printers the same limited information that they can get for free off the GPO website. Caution is the watchword here.

These examples just scratch the surface of what asking intelligent questions will reveal. Understanding the complexities and subtleties of working with GPO is critical to winning federal government printing jobs and being successful and profitable with them. Printing for the government can fill an important gap for a printer and can generate income that otherwise would not be there. GPO will complement your other business.

### About Deborah Snider

Deborah Snider is senior vice president of e-LYNXX Corporation and division president of the firm's Government Print Management Division. Mrs. Snider is a graduate of Central Penn Business College and has headed Government Print Management and its predecessor since 1984. Government Print Management represents the majority of successful printers that work with the United States Government Printing Office (GPO). The firm is commission based and specializes in helping printers to smooth their way to GPO related profitability. Government Print Management is exclusively endorsed by Printing Industries of America (PIA). Mrs. Snider can be reached at 888-876-5432, through the web site at [www.GovernmentPrintManagement.com](http://www.GovernmentPrintManagement.com) or at [Deborah.Snider@GovernmentPrintManagement.com](mailto:Deborah.Snider@GovernmentPrintManagement.com). e-LYNXX is recognized as the North American procurement authority.



### About e-LYNXX Corporation

e-LYNXX Corporation, the North American procurement authority, is exclusively endorsed by *Printing Industries of America (PIA)* and *Educational and Institutional Cooperative Purchasing (E&I)*. Founded in 1975, e-LYNXX has three divisions. ● American Print Management provides enterprise print procurement solutions and patented competitive methods to reduce costs for direct mail, marketing materials, packaging and other procured print. Results include enhanced quality and service levels, efficiencies, process control, transparency and procured print cost reduction of 25% to 50%. ● Patented Procurement Method grants patent licenses for supply chain optimization. Results include substantial reduction in existing costs of competitively procured goods and services. ● Government Print Management offers U.S. GPO bid services, access and assistance. Results include filled downtime, operational stability, improved cash flows and increased profitability. [www.e-LYNXX.com](http://www.e-LYNXX.com) – 888-876-5432

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