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Working with the GPO Successfully and Profitably Requires Expert Know How

By Deborah Snider, Senior Vice President, e-LYNXX Corporation

Printers large and small learn how to treat customers. Selling is requisite to gaining new business. Relationships are paramount. Pricing is based on what the customer is willing to pay. And when it comes to minor disagreements, the customer is always right, and if the relationship is sufficiently deep, even the cost for fixing the problem can end up in the next job.

GPO is different. To be precise, GPO is contrarian to everything printers know about selling customers. Gaining new business has nothing to do with selling. In fact sales persons need not call. Relationships don't count. Pricing is not based on what the customer is willing to pay, but on being the low price among other responsive, responsible, and qualified bidders. In fact the GPO customer is not always right, and there is no eye wink allowance to add the cost for fixing a problem into the next job. Rather, what defines and controls the relationship are the rules, regulations, paperwork and red tape. Dealing with the Federal Government and its GPO is not easy for novice want-to-be GPO printers. Having the skill to read and understand the subtleties of solicitations, specifications, contract terms, quality assurance guidelines, paper specifications, terms and conditions, and more is just the tip of the iceberg.

Instinctive decision making, commercial sales experience, good business sense... all have no place in the GPO marketplace. Working with the massive, complex and convoluted GPO is different. By not accepting this difference printers can expect burned fingers, work accomplished out of scope, reduced prices, and even rejected work. Some printers try to compensate for a lack of knowledge through over-caution. This, too, results in excessive production costs, paper bought at higher than necessary prices based on misinterpreted specifications, and frustration throughout the operation. .

That's why the majority of the 400 active GPO vendors use a government print management firm that provides full representational services, accurate information, market intelligence, past price histories, and access to all available GPO solicitations. With a government print management firm at your side, you receive assistance with paper work handling, specification interpretation, proposal preparation, bidding process management, the production process, change order negotiation, invoice preparation and collection, and cutting through the government red tape.

What potential hazards await inexperienced printers attempting to do GPO work?

One hazard comes from a lack of understanding as to who is the actual customer. Is it the Federal Agency (such as IRS, Air Force, or Interior) whose printing job is being procured? Or is it the GPO which is actually procuring the printing job? The answer is that the GPO is the customer of the printer. Acknowledging this then brings forth a second question. Should a printer call on the Federal Agency directly? This answer is a bit more difficult, as some printers do call on the Federal Agency and attempt to influence the specification writing process. These printers feel that this activity gains them an advantage in the bid process. The truth is that often times the work accomplished by the sales persons who attempt to gain this advantage is often for naught, as GPO will rewrite the specifications to allow for maximum competition. More likely than not, the sales expense generated by calling on the Federal Agency is money that could be better spent for real sales efforts in the commercial marketplace. Even then, when a job goes out for bid, printers that see that the specifications were written to favor a particular printer will often request that GPO take a second look at the specifications to make them more competitive and to issue an amendment before bid opening.

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Another hazard comes from a lack of understanding as to the nature of the relationship. Is it the right thing to do a requested favor for the GPO buyer or for the Federal Agency? For example, when a printer has won the job and the printer is asked to move up the schedule, is it OK to do so without compensation? The answer is that the printer is entitled to fair and just compensation for anything that the printer does on behalf of the GPO or the Federal Agency. Favors done for GPO on jobs for which printers do not receive just compensation represent money lost as GPO cannot return favors. Whenever GPO makes a change to an initial print job request, GPO is required to issue a change order, unless the printer waives its right to be compensated for the change.

One of the most frequent hazards comes during the bid process. Printers neglect to acknowledge bid amendments, which are changes to the initial bid solicitation that must be acknowledged by bidders in order for bids to be accepted by GPO. In other words, if an amendment is not acknowledged, the printer is not awarded the job, no matter how low its price or how capable its abilities. The problem is that amendments are not always handled by GPO bid services and are not always posted on the free GPO bid site. Seasoned government print management companies obtain amendments, ensure that these amendments are in the hands of their clients in time to be understood and acknowledged prior to bid opening. This is the only sure way of getting amendments.

Finally, there is the hazard of paper work. And there is a lot of it. The 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. 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. A Federal Agency representative – someone from the agency that has requested the work – may not be an authorized 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.

Understanding the complexities and subtleties of working with the GPO is critical to winning federal government printing jobs and being successful and profitable with them. V. G. Reed in Kentucky and Graphcom in Pennsylvania know it is important to have a government print management firm as a partner. They are among the most successful printers for the GPO. Not only do they understand the value of working with government print management experts, they know the importance of maximizing capacity on their own printing equipment. Printing for the government can fill an important gap for a printer and can generate income that otherwise would not be there. It is a win-win for the GPO and the printer.

Some call governmental rules, regulations, specifications, process, protocol and procedure red tape or bureaucracy. To those who know how the system works, it is called getting the job done.

About the Author

Deborah Snider is senior vice president of Government Print Management, a division of e-LYNXX Corporation - the leading print management firm in North America. 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 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). She can be reached at 888-876-5432, through the web site at www.GovernmentPrintManagement.com or at Deborah.Snider@GovernmentPrintManagement.com.



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)* and recognized as a top 100 procurement firm by *Supply & Demand Chain Executive*. 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 – 888-876-5432

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