



Washington TECHNOLOGY

Market Convergence: Part II- Chemistry of the Winners

Last issue, I wrote about the new convergence between the telecommunications and integrator segments of the federal marketplace. Now let's look at what it takes to win as the government asks for total, end-to-end solutions that wrap network and application requirements together.

First, the winners will be the companies that really see what's going on. The industry has been in big-time denial since the award of Navy-Marine Corps Intranet project to Electronic Data Systems Corp. of Plano, Texas. At meetings, luncheons and conferences, you hear the same questions: Will EDS fail on the implementation of such a large, complex program? Will the upfront costs on NMCI drive EDS into bankruptcy? Will the Navy user community sabotage and eventually sink NMCI?

The answers are no, no and no.

No matter how many problems NMCI encounters — and the program is certainly fraught with risks — the Navy will simply declare victory and move on. The big issue for our industry has little to do with whether EDS succeeds or fails as the contractor.

The real questions are these: Does NMCI represent the future? Will the other military services and civil agencies look for solutions such as NMCI? Will other military services and civil agencies be willing to hand over application and telecom responsibilities as a bundle to a single contractor?

These answers are yes, yes and yes.

The corporations and agencies that don't see this coming won't be able to make the right moves today to prepare to win tomorrow. The winners will be the companies that have developed integrated

application and telecom solutions for corporate America. Federal experience may help, but commercial experience is the real test that separates the wannabes from the winners.

You need showcase accounts where you're both running the networks and managing important utility applications for large commercial corporations. And you need to show your compensation on these accounts is tied to a well-defined set of service-level agreements that provide objective measures of system performance as well as customer satisfaction.

Whether you like it or not, the fate of your federal group is tied to the success of your sister divisions on the commercial side. If you want to win, suck it up and start working together.

Also, the winners will be the teams that can talk the talk as well as walk the walk. It's the business case, business process analysis and rational decision-making methodologies that now rule, not engineering. And with a Harvard Business School graduate in the White House, the importance of these methodologies will grow in all government decision-making.

Yes, your engineering must work. Your architecture must be robust. Your availability and reliability must be high. But your federal customer's top priority is not the most brilliant engineering or the ultimate technology. You've got to talk the talk that addresses their three main goals: Put the combined application and telecom monkeys on someone else's back; save money; and avoid problems in the process.

The winners also will be the competitors that think outside of the box. The first wave of opportunities that wrap together federal application and telecom requirements will focus on base-level and campus-level infrastructure upgrades with fiber and

copper connectivity. But just over the horizon lies the challenge of linking your solutions all the way into the tactical or field environment, where your customer will have to overcome serious bandwidth, interoperability and security constraints.

If you don't sell yourself as your customer's end-to-end, total solution partner, maybe your competitor will. Companies that make the commitment now to a strong, post-award marketing and sales plan also will be the winners. Look at NMCI as an example. Although the Navy may never let the program fail, that doesn't mean it will succeed.

The NMCI program must grapple with an organization steeped in independent, decentralized decision-making. It must overcome internal resistance from many organizations that have already championed and socialized their own solutions to the Navy's infrastructure problems. It must counter pressures from powerful incumbent contractors that will be displaced by NMCI.

The post-award sales effort may be less glamorous than the battle for winning the contract, but it is no less important. Companies that ignore the post-award sales challenges will look back to their victory parties as the beginning of the end.

Don't decommission your sales team after award. Don't shift all power and control over to engineers and program managers without checks and balances from sales and marketing. And, above all, don't approve your best and final offer without anticipating and making a commitment to the costs required to support post-award sales and marketing.

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