

Winning Defence Contracts

By David Byrne

When you talk about Defence Contracts everyone thinks wow, must be big money, big opportunities and will last for years and yes there are some very significant contracts in Defence and big opportunities that come with it. However, there is a significant amount of lead time that comes with a Defence contract. Defence notoriously don't rush things and they are very prudent in how they procure and how they go to market.

I would like to share with you a story of naivety, misconception or just a lack of business acumen. I was asked to provide support to a company that wanted to Tender for a major Defence Contract. They had been emailed the advertisement by a friend and the tender was closing in two weeks. The company had performed no lead in work and had no prior Defence experience. I gave them a fairly robust response to this and advised if they were going to enter into this market it will require a considerable amount of work to win the Defence contract. It requires long lead in time to allow working with Defence personnel and understand their requirements. It is not unusual for companies to employ a retired Two Star General or Colonel to represent their organisation so they have more of an "in" to the business and they understand the "Defence speak".

You also need to understand who is in Politics at the time and maybe have a retired Parliamentarian represent your company. I know Paul Keating, a former Prime Minister has represented an IT company in the past and this can come in very handy when presenting to the Government. You will also need to employ ex Defence personnel within your tender group so when writing the document they ensure they focus on the Defence speak along with understanding the terminology for Defence.

Defence is different, they are a boys club to a degree and can be a closed shop and you will need to appreciate this and take the necessary steps to gain access for your organisation. Don't be concerned you are not recognised but strive to be worthy of recognition and this will take time and effort.

If the first time you are aware of a tender opportunity is by reading it on a website or receive it in an email it is not impossible to win that tender but the numbers will be really stacked against you. You would of needed to have performed all of the lead up work which is the key to winning major tenders.

To be honest, it is fairly naive to think you can pull a rabbit out of your hat and win a major Defence contract without having done the necessary work. This just doesn't happen, you need to of been very prudent and work through and commit yourself long before the tender comes out to be in a suitable position to actually win the tender. It takes real effort and commitment by an organisation for a long period and long lead up time to actually win the piece of Defence work. However, when you do win the work, yes they are good contacts as they generally go for long periods of time and Defence buy their kit and keep it for a long period. They will maintain it and the contract can continue for years and years for some pieces of their kit. This is just the way the Defence operate.

Looking from the outside and thinking you can just step in and win something, it is never that simple. Defence go through a very robust process of selecting suppliers that are suitable and have an indepth approach on how they work with their people in analysing who will actually be doing the work for the Defence. The security checks around this can be quite rigorous, therefore you need to be well versed in Defence speak to actually win those contracts.



I wish you all the best for those future Defence Contracts. Please remember to take the time to prepare and understand that is you are wanting to win Defence work you need to be in it for the long haul and don't play the short game. Set aside the relevant resources and prepare to win the contracts.