

# Stalking the elusive purchase order

by Marlene Orton

## IT vendors hunt government business

A website address that reads “sell2US gov”, and promises business development support and networking opportunities might sound like a spammer’s pitch. Not so. Welcome to the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, which offers core services to Canadian businesses that are either export-ready or need help getting there.

The Canadian Embassy in Washington provides information on American public sector markets through its own services

and those of the Canadian Commercial Corporation. Trade Commissioner Services are available through offices in Canada as well as Canadian Consulates in the US and around the world.

It makes sense for Canadian information technology exporters to take full advantage of these services. In the IT sector alone, the US federal government plans to spend nearly US\$45 billion this fiscal year on hardware, software, telecom, integration and professional services. The US govern-

ment is expected to increase spending on outsourcing and electronic commerce by up to 10 percent over the next five years. The trade commissioner’s website, [www.can-am.gc.ca/sell2usgov](http://www.can-am.gc.ca/sell2usgov), provides details on how to pursue those Yankee dollars.

“Companies that are not yet doing business abroad can make an appointment to meet with their sector specialists in the International Trade Centres where they can find out not only about services abroad but business development services available in Canada to help them get ready to successfully offer their goods and services outside Canada,” says Judy Bradt, director of Business Development (Aerospace, Defence & IT) at the Canadian Embassy in Washington.

“We are part of Trade Team Canada, which coordinates the efforts of a number of government departments, which helps companies market and sell effectively abroad.”

The team, part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) also organizes one of the most effective business development activities in Washington: workshops geared to security in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack. The *Partners in Trade and Security* series is geared to specific US government market sectors. By invitation, Canadian companies make presentations and offer business solutions to a wide spectrum of the American government market for security products. The audience includes government purchasers and policy makers, American private sector contractors, as well as the US media.

“The policy theme keynotes allow us to bring in some senior people but we try to get a good collection of people on the [US] government side who are involved with making decisions about what kind of tech-



nology will be required and what kind of programs will get money," says Bradt. "The people who attend these workshops are the ones who know where the money is as well as those who are making decisions about what direction will be taken when choosing the technologies necessary to solve their problems."

One workshop entitled *Emergency Preparedness of Wireless Infrastructure in Times of National Crises* attracted a reporter from *National Defense* magazine, considered the most prominent military publication in the US. The reporter followed up a presentation by Profilium, a small Montreal-based IT company ([profilium.com](http://profilium.com)) by writing a profile of the company. Profilium's technology can provide data on the individual interests and habits of mobile telephone subscribers, which is useful in determining subscriber preferences and demographics along with dynamic mobility patterns. Turn the technology towards the intelligence community and the market potential shifts altogether.

"What the workshop allows us to do is really leverage the incredible networking capabilities of DFAIT," says Alexandre Legendre, Profilium president. "You can only imagine an embassy with trade officers specializing in your field and this makes it very efficient to be able to present to a room full of people that under normal circumstances you would have to run after in a convention type setting."

The embassy workshops are an extremely effective business development activity for the defence, aerospace and IT sectors, says Bradt. "One of the reasons the events tend to be successful is that we've learned that in Washington not only do we need to have a mix of issues and solutions

very careful about that. Washington audiences are especially receptive to hearing about innovative insights into current issues and problems and the companies that do [this] find they are successful and get good leads because they agree to come down and share their insights and their wisdom."

In Canada, large Canadian IT companies have dedicated teams geared to public sector selling. Among the many IT vendors, Xerox Canada Inc. and Adobe Systems Inc. have a similar agenda – reducing government paper burden. Both provide document and content management technologies and work flow automation, with Adobe focusing more on data capture applications.

As the largest provider of online services by virtue of size and budget, the federal government is driving the technology, particularly as the Government On-Line initiative gathers steam. Still, the amalgamation of municipalities into larger entities and integrated provincial services present interesting challenges for IT companies.

Sydney Sloan, a member of Adobe's Group Support Solutions team for government, said federal governments tend to purchase different types of solutions than smaller governments. The national level is typically looking for larger enterprise solutions.

"Provincial and local governments are purchasing more for a target application rather than an infrastructure purchase," Sloan said. "State, local, provincial type governments purchases are generally more application based and they tend to be more ahead in the deployment of server-based products and a little more advanced in government-to-citizen type solutions."

In Ottawa, Adobe has a Solutions Marketing team with five staff devoted to

when they first start out. It tends to be a lot more complicated environment in which to launch a new process."

Xerox's public sector team is called Public Sector Operation or PSO, with a field organization staff of 14 and marketing personnel spread across the country. The key federal team of seven people is located in Ottawa, with additional staff in Toronto and federal reps in offices throughout the country, says Mel Thompson, vice president and general manager, Xerox Global Services.

"Our technology side of business, which would be more hardware centric, is declining. However, the services aspect of our business are the consultants, system integrators, and people who procure and deliver software solutions – that is growing very rapidly and that is the case with the federal government as well."

Xerox is also positioning itself to work with the provinces and municipal spinoffs such as the Toronto Public Library, in switching paper and slide visuals over to digital storage.

"We also work with several provinces in particular," Thompson adds. Xerox has just completed a workflow application involving the BC Ministry of Finance to streamline and automate the process of issuing news releases.

"It was very manual, with multiple levels of approval, all kinds of security implications and requirements," Thompson said. "To manage that through paper was very time consuming [and] extremely expensive and what we've been able to do now is to automate their news release process down to a matter of very short periods of time through five and six levels of approval and paper doesn't even come into play. It's all electronic and formatted in a consistent manner with seven levels of security."

Across the border, across the country or across town, governments are now a major focus for IT vendors fighting their way through a severe economic downturn. While businesses have been cutting back, the public sector is planning ambitious new projects. Not only do they have a large and increasing need for cost-cutting, citizen-pleasing electronic solutions, but governments are also reliable customers that never go out of business. *MM*

## ...governments are now a major focus for IT vendors

but Washington audiences seem to have a focus on policy topics. So in a number of cases, we'll find keynote speakers from Canada and even ones from the United States, who will lead off the session first thing in the morning by talking about key policy and direction which will be the theme of the workshop."

The workshops are not about making a sizzling sales pitch. "Canadian companies make a presentation on issues and solutions so it's not designed for a company to make a marketing pitch," Bradt said. "We're really

government sales. "The Ottawa office is supported by a whole infrastructure of individuals to make it successful," says Sloan.

Marketing to the Government of Canada is a special effort, says Paul Vaillant, Adobe's Government of Canada marketing expert. "Accountability is carefully scrutinized. They are making decisions that affect the economy, the citizenship as a whole, and there is a lot of time spent making sure the i's are dotted throughout the legal and vendor communities, making sure decisions they make will satisfy the objectives

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