

Match Up with Big Buyers

By: David Ormerod, MBA, SCORE Small Business Counselor and Agent, NYLife Securities LLC

It can be frustrating for a small business trying to land its first sale to a public institution, government agency or major corporation. One of the most helpful steps—meeting personally with the right person—is often the most difficult to take. But a fast-growing program from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering hope to small business owners.

Donnie McDaniel was once frustrated trying to “break in.” His Arlington, TX-based industrial products distribution business was looking to sell more to big customers. But the right doors weren’t opening. So McDaniel attended an SBA-sponsored Business Matchmaking event.

Business Matchmaking, launched in 2003, is a series of regional events that bring corporate and government buyers face to face with small business owners. So far, business owners have landed over 20,000 one-on-one appointments with key government and corporate officials from hundreds of major corporations and agencies. Matchmaking was so successful that the program was expanded in 2005 to include more regional events.

For McDaniel, a single meeting led to a contract potentially worth \$1 million in new sales. “To do business with any large buyer almost takes an act of Congress,” says McDaniel. “These companies are busy focusing on their core businesses, but they take the time to attend these events to meet with potential vendors in person and that’s a chance we won’t pass up.”

Business Matchmaking doesn’t promise you’ll snag a deal, but it does give you a chance to state your case directly to decision makers. If you’ve never sold to large corporations or government agencies, this is an excellent starting point. Business Matchmaking levels the field, allowing every small business an equal opportunity to learn about selling to big business, public institutions (like universities) and government entities at local, state and national levels.

If you aren’t sure how to prepare your pitch, Small Business Procurement Workshops held a month in advance of each Business Matching event could help you:

1. Identify potential buyers of your product or services.
2. Write and submit successful proposals.
3. Plan your marketing and sales approach, and line up financing.

The workshops and matchmaking events are free. You can register, set up to three appointments and get all you need to participate online. Slots at Matchmaking events are limited so sign up early. The Matchmaking Web site at www.businessmatchmaking.com has a calendar of events and information on how to participate.

For more help identifying potential business opportunities, contact SCORE “Counselors to America’s Small Business.” SCORE is a nonprofit organization of more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors who provide free, confidential business counseling and training workshops to small business owners. Call the Greater Woodinville Chamber of Commerce at (425) 481-8300, or 1-800/634-0245 for the SCORE chapter nearest you, or find a counselor online at www.score.org.