



PSFPI – Events & Activities Research Project

“End of Term Report”

Report of findings from telephone research conducted June and July 2006



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Section 1: Executive summary

Objective

To call the 60 companies whom attended the 5 PSFPI events (2 Making sense of public sector contracts and 3 Meet the buyer) that were been held between Winter 2005 and Spring 2006, and ask a number of questions about their merit, as well as gaining a view on the business opportunities generated as a result of the events. Also to establish what support and sessions would be useful in the future.

Findings

- 58 In depth interviews achieved.
- 100% said that the events were enjoyable.
- 100% in agreement that the 'Making sense of public sector contracts' was useful and they learnt something. The majority said they learnt a lot.
 - Examples of what was learnt:
 - That their company is too small to supply the public sector currently
 - How to unravel the jargon and find the useful information!
 - How to fill in a tender and how they are scored
 - Staff need to be trained within the organisation to a. fill in the tenders and b. deal with the customer if a tender is won
 - Understanding auctions
 - Confirmed the suspicion that the public sector is hard to get into
 - Need plenty of resource
 - The differences between supplying private and public sector
- 95% agreed that the 'Meet the buyer' sessions were useful.
 - Negatives – some presentations were perceived as lacking in useful content and some buyers seemed rather negative about the opportunities available.
- 95% agreed that attendees learnt something at the 'Meet the Buyer sessions'.
 - Examples of what learnt:
 - How different it is to supply schools as opposed to hospitals
 - That their company is too small to supply the public sector currently
 - Can now understand what information the buyers need
 - How complex it is to supply schools

- That their products are too expensive for this sector
 - Facilities need upgrading to meet the required standards
 - To avoid contracts that are already with large companies such as Scolarest and focus on ones that are attainable and up for renew within a sensible time frame
- 6 companies have secured new public sector contracts or are in the process of securing a contract as a result of these sessions
- Many more of the companies have gained tangible benefits such as:
 - Now have meetings in the diary with the buyers they have met, or contacts they have now made as a result of increased confidence and information
 - Now know they are not right for supplying the public sector so will focus on developing profitable and better fit markets
 - Now know where to look for tender opportunities
 - Now aware of what technical standards and accreditations are required
 - Some companies have started trading with each other and found the networking opportunities very useful
- Requests for future events, activities and support:
 - More 'Making sense of public sector contracts' sessions
 - Workshops to actually help fill in the tender documents and on line applications
 - One on one support with filling in tender applications. Time and knowledge are a barrier to successful applications
 - Assistance with identifying tender opportunities – an e mail bulletin?
 - More 'Meet the Buyer' events for specific sectors – a very good way of getting direct contact and learning about the opportunities. Mini showcase appointments with the buyers
 - An event where suppliers could get together to discuss collaborative supply
 - Sessions with industry mentors and sharing of successful case studies
 - Networking opportunities
 - Support with audits and technical requirements
 - Regular updated information about the buyers contact details
 - Development of a 'hub' for smaller suppliers to deliver into
 - Support with getting product specifications and pricing right
 - PR support to raise the profile of East Midlands companies.

Section 2: Detailed findings by event

Summary of telephone research (conducted June and July 2006) following the series of public procurement events held in the East Midlands Winter 05/Spring 06

Detailed comments by event are listed below but overall the 58 interviews achieved gave a very positive appraisal of the events run. Some companies had attended more than one event whereas others had just attended one. Both types of events i.e. making sense of the contracts (informative) and meet the buyer sessions (contact) were well received. Companies learnt a lot and found that the honest factual information they received helped make judgements as to whether the public sector is an area they should aim to supply.

Many companies have decided after these events that they are not ready to supply the public sector and this will save them time and money. Others are raring to go and have learnt how to go about the process and have made lots of contacts, again saving them time and money.

Tendering comes through as an area that companies need support with. They need help identifying the opportunities, filling in the tenders and help in achieving the standards required. This is an area of opportunity for the future.

A few companies have started trading with each other which helps drive local supply. Lots of companies are now in contact with buyers and a substantial amount of business should come to fruition in the following months.

Making sense of public sector contracts 16.02.06 – Chesterfield

6 interviews achieved. Cow House Dairy wouldn't return numerous calls.

Was the event useful?

100% Yes

Was the event enjoyable?

100% Yes

Was anything learnt? And has their thinking changed?

100% Yes, some saying 'learnt lots'. Sometimes what learnt indicated that they weren't suitable for supplying public sector so useful in that respect.

Was any benefit gained from networking?

50% Yes, 50% No.

Has event resulted in any business or tangible benefits?

Yes. 50% of companies now have secured or are close to securing a contract.

If so what?

Field House Foods – now looking to supply public sector.

Buxton Spa Bakery – in talks with Derby CC.

Peak District Fine Foods – has found out that because she is a 'middle man' and supplying other people's products there isn't a market for her. The buyer would source direct and she needed to know this.

Northern Tea – Small contract in the pipeline with Derby CC. Find Jane Staley very helpful.

Dovedale Traditional Beef – Has taken on a lot of knowledge, re supplying public sector and now knows he is too niche & small, so will focus of restaurants & Farmers markets.

Owen Taylor – now supplying 80 schools in Derby.

If no business achieved – what steps are being taken to achieve this from findings?

Owen Taylor – tendered for 4 Notts schools and is approaching Notts City & University hospitals.

Is the public sector seen as an opportunity for their business?

Yes to the larger companies but small ones are now aware they are too small.

Are there any future events they would like to see as part of public sector supply projects?

All agreed, similar to this one. One mentioned a Losehill event – very good for getting into Health sector.

If not events, maybe activities i.e. identification of tender opportunities?

More direct contact with buyer.

Identification of possible tenders. This would really save the companies 'searching' time.

Would more contact with support agencies such as F&D Forum be appreciated?

100% Yes

What kind of support and contact would be suitable?

Telephone/email support

Meetings

We have achieved quite a lot of press coverage on the projects and events – has any of it been noticed?

No

Making sense of public sector contracts 02.02.06 - Northampton

9 interviews achieved. Nigel Phillips of GranoVita UK didn't return numerous messages.

Was the event useful?

100% Yes

Was the event enjoyable?

100% Yes

Was anything learnt? Has thinking changed?

100% Yes

Presenter very knowledgeable and lots learnt. Examples being:

- More staff training to bring them up to the required levels particularly if they are required to fill in tenders.
- How to find tender opportunities and auctions.
- Confirmed what they already suspected that the public sector is hard to get into!
- Need plenty of resource.
- The differences between supplying public sector and private sector.

Was any benefit gained from networking?

70% No, 30% Yes

Has event resulted in any business or tangible benefits?

No direct business but benefits as per the answer to the 2nd question.

If no business achieved – what steps are being taken to achieve this from findings?

Farmhouse Meats – Now knows he is not in a position to supply big contracts.

Fryers Catering Services – In talks with schools for supplying coffee machines.

Nice Bites – feels a lot more confident now in approaching people for new business so doing some prospecting.

Is the public sector seen as an opportunity for their business?

100% Yes.

Are there any future events they would like to see as part of public sector supply projects?

All agreed, more of the same. Possibly an event where suppliers could come together to discuss collaborative supply.

If not events, maybe activities i.e. identification of tender opportunities?

Meeting industry mentors.

Identification of possible tenders.

More networking activities.

More case studies and scenarios from people that have secured contracts.

Would more contact with support agencies such as F&D Forum be appreciated?

100% Yes

What kind of support and contact would be suitable?

Any!

Telephone/email support

We have achieved quite a lot of press coverage on the projects and events – has any of it been noticed?

No

Meet the Buyer 08.03.06 - Kegworth

24 interviews achieved. Couldn't contact:

Arnold Dairies

Easy Chef

Geary's Bakeries

Hammonds Farming

Hopwells

Howarth Wholesale

Saxby Brothers

Was the event useful?

96% Yes. One company was a bit concerned about some negative comments from the NHS buyers.

One ambient and frozen supplier felt that it leaned more towards fruit and vegetables. The statistics were useful though.

Was the event enjoyable?

100% Yes

Was anything learnt? Has thinking changed?

96% Yes and 1/3 spontaneously saying 'learnt lots'

4% No

The event was very informative. It was very well structured.

One stated that not as useful as other events.

One company already supplies schools but this event told him how different it is to supply hospitals.

A very small company learnt from the event that he is too small to supply.

Was any benefit gained from networking?

62% No, 38% Yes

One company have already started trading with some of the companies they met at the events.

Has event resulted in any business or tangible benefits?

Not much business but a number of benefits. A number of companies have since had meetings with NHS buyers in Nottingham and Lincoln. Lots stated that they

have now made good NHS contacts. Several state that they now know how to look for supply opportunities. One company indicated that despite previously supplying the public sector he learnt a lot more at this event.

If no business achieved – what steps are being taken to achieve this from findings?

Andronicus Coffee Co - Looking at websites

Augro Fresh UK – Looking at supplying HMP

Barrowcliffes – Now know he needs to get up to BRC & EFSIS standard now so will work towards this.

Country Enterprise Foods – using internet as step towards finding contracts

John Hayward – Looking to get audited.

Owen Taylor – has schools business and will be approaching both Nottingham hospitals after this event.

Is the public sector seen as an opportunity for their business?

Majority say yes with positive outlook.

Aware NHS is a particularly daunting area to supply.

Are there any future events they would like to see as part of public sector supply projects?

Similar to this one.

Would be good to have one aimed at smaller manufacturing companies.

More content on what is expected, i.e. accreditations etc

Small focus groups with the buyer themselves

More events like this but, whole Public sector explained not just NHS

More direct access to the buyers.

If not events, maybe activities i.e. identification of tender opportunities?

More networking activities

More direct contact with buyer.

Identification of possible tenders.

Case studies and scenarios

Regular update on what's happening in Public sector re closures etc

Getting help with audits.

Would more contact with support agencies such as F&D Forum be appreciated?

100% Yes

What kind of support and contact would be suitable?

Majority happy for telephone/email and postal support

Meetings

Help with funding to required level of accreditations

Simton Food Products – Would like F&D Forum to sponsor a hub for smaller producers.

We have achieved quite a lot of press coverage on the projects and events – has any of it been noticed?

No

Meet the Buyer 16.03.06 – Losehill Hall

10 interviews achieved. Couldn't contact Barrow Growers Ltd.

Was the event useful?

100% Yes.

One company thought the presentations were mixed.

Was the event enjoyable?

100% Yes

Was anything learnt? Has their thinking changed?

100% Yes

Some examples:

Can now understand what information the buyers need.

Gave an appreciation about how hard it is to get in to supply schools.

Made companies aware of the potential barriers.

One company realised that her products are too expensive for hospitals.

Was any benefit gained from networking?

100% Yes.

Has event resulted in any business or tangible benefits?

No not yet but made some useful contacts and lots of companies have already sent samples or requested meetings. John Mettrick's is in discussions with Derby County Council but has problems in the schools where kitchens have been taken out as they can't take raw meat.

Safe to Eat in talks with Derby County Council and is currently running a trial.

If no business achieved – what steps are being taken to achieve this from findings?

Looking at new premises/Southglade

A lot of positive attitudes and knowledge now of what they need to be doing.

Businesses are starting to target the relevant buyers.

Is the public sector seen as an opportunity for their business?

Again a lot of positive attitudes and generally yes.

Are there any future events they would like to see as part of public sector supply projects?

Similar to this one.

Several stating they would like more direct access to the buyers.

Similar to this but paying more attention to products & pricing.

If not events, maybe activities i.e. identification of tender opportunities?

More networking activities

More press & magazine exposure for smaller producers.

Help with legal side & tendering process

Workshops to help with administration & online applications

Identification of possible tenders.

Case studies

Help with getting audited

Would more contact with support agencies such as F&D Forum be appreciated?

100% Yes

What kind of support and contact would be suitable?

Postal and email

Occasional visit

More meetings / workshop days/networking events.

We have achieved quite a lot of press coverage on the projects and events – has any of it been noticed?

No

Meet the University Buyer Dec – Loughborough University

9 interviews achieved. Couldn't contact Tiger Tiger and Mike Maloney.

Was the event useful?

78% Yes

22% No

Was the event enjoyable?

100% Yes

Was anything learnt? Has their thinking changed?

89% Yes

11% No

Some examples:

Some buyers not interested when try to deal with them.

Malaysian Kitchen learnt that they will need to upgrade their kitchen.

Some contracts are already in place with large companies such as Scolarest so best to leave these and watch for when they come up for renewal.

Was any benefit gained from networking?

78% Yes, 22% No

GW Price has started doing business with a company he met.

Has event resulted in any business or tangible benefits?

Not as of yet. Farsan have presented to the University.

If no business achieved – what steps are being taken to achieve this from findings?

Sending emails to follow up discussions. Many disappointed they had received no response.

Presentation to buyers

Is the public sector seen as an opportunity for their business?

Yes, although couple not trading at present.

Are there any future events they would like to see as part of public sector supply projects?

Similar to this one.

Several stating they would like more direct access to the buyers.

Help with understanding the system and tender procedure

If not events, maybe activities ie, identification of tender opportunities?

Informal meetings to discuss, quality, prices – maybe mini showcase with buyer directly.

Help with paperwork and tendering process

Would more contact with support agencies such as F&D Forum be appreciated?

100% Yes

What kind of support and contact would be suitable?

More feedback

Postal and email

Put on more networking events.

Help in understanding and identifying to problems that are stopping him becoming a supplier.

We have achieved quite a lot of press coverage on the projects and events – has any of it been noticed? No

Appendix

May 2006

Telephone research brief – Public Procurement in the East Midlands project

Objective

To call the 60 companies whom have attended the 5 events that have been held during 2005 and Spring 2006, and ask a number of questions about their merit, as well as gaining a view on the business opportunities gained as a result of the events.

The results will be used to provide an end of project summary to Government Office East Midlands (GOEM) and defra as to the benefits of the initiative and to help shape future work.

We would like honest, constructive and informative feedback so please encourage people to open up and chat.

Questions:

Introduce as working on behalf of The Food and Drink Forum who have carried out the public sector procurement project on behalf of GOEM. Ask for feedback to help evaluate success and shape future work.

- Confirm what events they have attended
- Was the event/support useful?
- Was the event enjoyable?
- Did they learn something?
- Has the event changed their thinking about the market opportunity the public sector provides?
- Did they gain any benefit from networking with the other companies attending?
- Has the event resulted in any business? Or other tangible benefits? I.e. now know how to look for tenders and fill in the documents, increased confidence?
- If so what?
- If no business has been achieved yet what steps are they taking to develop future business from what they found out?
- Do they see the public sector as an area of opportunity for their business?
- What events would they like to see take place as part of any future public sector supply projects?
- If not events then what activity would they like to see happen I.e. help with tender applications, identification of tender opportunities?
- Would they like to have more contact with support agencies such as The Food & Drink Forum to enable them to win business in the public sector?

- If yes, can they identify what sort of support and contact?
- Any other general comments on the subject?
- We achieved quite a lot of local press coverage on the project and events. Did they see any?