

# The Differentiator Difference In Government Contracting



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## Introduction

Differentiators are used to promote the areas in which a company truly excels, and how it sets itself apart from its competition. With differentiators, the government can quickly identify how contractors differ from one another, and who is able to offer the best solution possible to meet their needs. Because of this, companies should develop a strong list of differentiators in order to be competitive on schedules and categories that oftentimes contain hundreds of contractors.

Why is your company the strongest in your field? What makes you different from others that sell similar products or services? What can you offer that no one else can?

Differentiators make it easy for the government to recognize why you are the best choice for them to award a contract to – other than the fact that you offer a strong product, of course. The government might understand the basics of what you are selling, but they can get their desired solution from a range of providers – they want to know why your company offers the *smartest* solution.

### What Makes a Poor Differentiator?

A good method for eliminating possible differentiators from your list is to think of the following phrase: "Can a fast food chain offer it?" If it can, it does not qualify as a good differentiator.

Consider the following differentiator example: "Our company has excellent customer service." There might be no doubt that your company has good customer service; if it didn't we doubt you would still be in business. However, good customer service isn't something that sets you apart from other companies. It is just a skill that every qualified company should possess and is expected to offer.

Remember, your company is special in one way or another – you are different from your direct competitors. Saying that you just are really great at what you do isn't enough. However, while it is difficult to find a way in which your company distinguishes itself with its services, that doesn't mean you can't find other areas in which your company excels.

For example, what is your story? Are your values the most important thing to your company that you would like agencies to know about? Maybe none of your competitors stress their passion and knowledge like you do, and you can sell that enthusiasm and dedication to the agencies. Government contracting essentially comes down to people talking to people, and by making your values and passion key parts of your company's message, you make the other party feel good about how you do business.

### How to Choose Good Differentiators for Your Company

Choosing good differentiators to market to the government can be difficult, but there are ways to hone in on the ones you should be focusing on as a government contractor. Begin by making a list of everything you believe your company does differently than others in your field or on your schedule. Follow up by asking yourself, "How special are each of the items on that list?" If you think that all of the companies in your field can offer the same, cross it off. It doesn't distinguish you in the eyes of the government.

Really focus on what you specialize in within a government agency, as well as what credentials your staff has that others might not. Also, consider if you have any exceptional, generally well-known team members, whose name agencies would recognize, or any noteworthy accomplishments that set you apart.

While you want to be different than your competitors, it will help to know what they consider their differentiators to be. Get to know their weaknesses, as well as their strengths, and try and figure out why your company can do business better than them.

It will help to turn to your internal team, ask your coworkers what they see as your company's differentiators. Your sales team probably sees your company as being special in one way, while marketing might see your differentiators as being completely different. Working on differentiators as a team can help bring together a better and more robust list of differentiators than one perspective on its own.

As with coworkers, successful clients are a wealth of information as well. Turn to clients that your company has strong and positive relationships with and see what they think sets you apart. Maybe they chose to do business with you because they saw x, y, and z as important factors in their decision making, and they couldn't find those traits anywhere else.

### **Factors to Remember**

- When writing down your differentiators, it is tempting to stretch the truth a little. However, your differentiators must be 100 percent true.
- You must be able to prove that you are capable of any claimed differentiator. You cannot make a claim that you are unable to backup with facts on how you are able to accomplish your differentiator.
- It must be a valuable trait in the eyes of the government. Unless your differentiator is something that is valuable to the government, it should not be promoted as a skill that sets you apart from other contractors.
- Don't forget to market your differentiators once you decide what they should be. Make sure that agencies can easily identify what makes you stand out, and that they are each around one to two sentences. (You want them to be able to remember them, and part of that is not needing long explanations for each item).
- Make sure to continuously update your differentiators. You wouldn't sell the same product for years without updating it to meet new demands and challenges, so why wouldn't you with the factors that make you stand out?

As the market changes and global values shift, so will your differentiators as they go in and out of relevance. Imagine when email and instant access to internet didn't exist. Fast response times were something to boast about – but in today's world, that timeframe becomes almost irrelevant, as instantaneous responses are extremely common.

## Final Thought

Every company has something that makes it special, and while it is difficult to determine exactly what that is, finding it will help you market yourself to the government with increased efficiency and ease. When all is said and done, investing in creating strong differentiators will prove to the government that you are a strong, qualified contractor who knows how best to market themselves to the government's needs.

After all, government contracting comes down to competition, and your company needs to do everything possible in order to ensure that the scales are tipping in your favor.



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