

Should suppliers receive help to get ready for e-procurement? If so, from who?

You said

William Sheridan, knowledge management advisor, Informetrica Limited says, “Yes, suppliers should receive such help, and the best source would be PWGSC [Public Works and Government Services Canada]. Sheridan also sees some urgency in the transition to e-procurement. “The quicker that more small and medium-sized businesses can get e-procurement enabled the better. They are the ones that are most in need of such help. The reason this is so desirable is that it is the Canadian government and the taxpayers that will reap the most savings from this arrangement – savings in bid preparation, processing time and transaction costs, all of which will translate into lower supply expenditures.

The entire procedure should be run over the Internet. Just as Symptico and AOL Online distribute a kit consisting of a manual and a CD with setup software, the PWGSC e-procurement setup, registration, authorization, and facilitation should be handled online. In a very real sense this technology is equivalent to the debit-card setup, but on the supply side instead of the demand side. Debit-card use would have spread much faster, and benefited small- and medium-sized businesses sooner if that kind of help had been available to them from the start.”

You said

Chris Baker, vice president, Environics Research Group, sees a rationale for government assistance in this particular endeavour. “Ordinarily, I think it is the obligation of suppliers to inform themselves about new opportunities for bidding and bidding processes. However, given the newness of e-procurement, and the rapid pace with which the federal government is taking up the possibilities of this medium, I believe that it would make sense to have some assistance available to suppliers to help them become more familiar with the various e-procurement sites and how to effectively use them. Although the MERX [web]site is possibly the most used e-procurement site, the sites for both Contracts Canada and the Canadian Commercial Corporation also provide information on procurement opportunities and contract awards. In addition to giving information about the various e-procurement sites, it might be a good idea to have a tip sheet on the various requirements and quirks of each site as well as a ‘heads-up’ on any foreseen changes to these sites.”

You said

Jean-Guy Desgagné, a prominent Ottawa communications consultant, believes business is already well equipped to deal with e-transitions. “As an advisor to private and public sector clients on their communications needs, e-procurement is a key factor for both me and

my clients. We have already had to adapt our systems and business practices to electronic ‘public’ notice boards like MERX. For the most part that has been relatively painless even though it is the supplier who has to pay extra to subscribe.”

Desgagné also thinks the answer depends on what kind of help is needed. “If the question is financial help, surely businesses of all sizes make the transition to e-procurement as they need to and as it benefits their business. Government is not the only sector using and adapting to e-commerce, including e-procurement. Generally governments should not use scarce public financial resources helping companies deal with the things they should be doing in the normal course of operation. If e-procurement makes sense for a supplier, it is simply a cost of doing business. In that context business can buy or get the help it needs from governments, experts or industry associations to retool for the e-world.”

“[However], governments may need unique or custom programs, systems or processes beyond those normally used by business. If governments insist on doing e-procurement differently than the marketplace or require specific adaptations, it should be the government that provides those tools to suppliers, clients or anyone else that needs them. In the long run, the marketplace will determine the nature and level of success of e-procurement in general and it had better be more effective, more efficient and cheaper or it won’t make sense anyway.”

The next question will be different

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