

An Interview with SMI Senior Advisor Doug Freitag
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What is your background, and what led you to work in business development/advanced materials field?

I have degrees in automotive technology and mechanical engineering. While still in college, I started working at Ford Motor Company in experimental engine development. After college I was hired by Bendix to perform materials research followed by Lockheed Martin managing an advanced materials engineering group. I have always enjoyed working in cutting edge technologies which the automotive and defense industries allowed. The defense industry and need to sustain the cost center I managed lead me into Federal Business development.

How would you characterize your relationship with the public sector as you interact with them through the private sector?

I was fortunate to work with people in the defense industry early in my career who were very active with the public sector at the highest levels and they served as mentors to me. They frequently took me to meetings in Washington DC where I was able to observe, and at times participate, in the entire process and not just the business development portions. I found the process to be very interesting and learned to appreciate how many in the private sector fail to take advantage of what can be achieved by working with the public sector. My perspective of public servants also changed and I found them in general to be good stewards of taxpayers money, sincere when considering my requests, and willing to think out of the box if my request can benefit their mission.

What does your work as an Advisor to SMI involve and how have you been able to use your expertise to assist SMI clients?

I primarily support SMI helping to identify business opportunities in the agencies but once identified get involved with teaming and proposal development. I have been fortunate that my network across the agencies and in industry is very broad after 30 years of working projects in many technologies. Working at a DOD prime also provided significant experience into working on all aspects of the Federal Business process.

What was a favorite project that you have worked on as a SMI Senior Advisor and why?

It is hard to just pick one. I enjoy the breadth of clients SMI supports which allows me to get involved with many interesting and challenging projects. Each one is unique both in the nature of the request and the company being supported. I would have to say those which involved disruptive technologies are the most interesting.

What has been your biggest accomplishment as an SMI Senior Advisor?

I would have to say supporting USACA as the Technical Director. I have been part of USACA for the past 25 years serving in various capacities and have seen many changes in the industry and association over that period of time. USACA was on life support prior to SMI taking over management but now under SMI leadership, USACA is starting to regain the influence in DC that it once held and the growing membership reflects that change. I feel that I have helped with this transition.

Do you foresee any future challenges or opportunities in doing business with the Federal Government?

I always work on the basis that you need to consider the entire toolkit of opportunities available for Federal Business, including earmarks. While priorities change, the toolkit generally remains the same. If a project is a good candidate for an earmark it should still be considered as part of an overall strategy. Academic technology transfer offices are struggling with few making money. Now is the time for technology transfer offices, industry, and the Federal Government to work together and use non-profit lead earmarks to more effectively transition technology to the benefit of everyone involved. Also keep in mind that overall investment in R&D is increasing throughout the federal government. So even though the use of earmarks is declining, when combined with increasing R&D budgets, there should be more funding available for competitive

procurements. The easy low hanging earmark fruit has been picked, but as a company has a good product to sell and a good firm in DC that knows the landscape helping them sell it, there are still plenty of opportunities.

What advice would you give SMI clients hoping to conduct business with the Federal Government?

Make sure you know what you are asking for. The Federal Government cannot respond without a request and the nature of the request will drive who you need to be marketing to. Make your request stand out. The Federal Government sees many requests and has to somehow pick the best requests to support. Seek help from a firm with expertise in all aspects of Federal Business development, not just lobbying, and with as much breadth across the government agencies as possible to insure all opportunities are captured. Be prepared to participate in the business development process. No one sells your request better than you. Be willing to listen to guidance from the experts. That is why you hired them. Most of all, be patient. Business development with the Federal Government is not a short term investment. It has a long lead time but once successful it can also have a long lifetime.

Do you have any other recommendations or helpful hints for SMI clients?

Try to filter the media. Bad news sells better than good news. There is plenty of good news in working with the Federal Government. If you are a startup looking for seed capital, an emerging company looking for non-dilution investment, or a large company looking to do more R&D with less, there is no better source of funding than the Federal Government.