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Business

Tech Companies Procure Federal Experts For Board Slots

by [Steve Seidenberg](#), For *Technology Daily*

A growing number of information technology firms that want to win homeland security contracts are naming board directors who have extensive experience in the federal IT procurement process.

The federal government spends huge amounts of money on technology to bolster security for military, government and major infrastructure sites, so IT companies that want to benefit from the spending are looking for people who know how to do business with the federal government.

It is a trend that began soon after Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, according to Evan Scott, head of executive search firm The Evan Scott Group International. He said companies of all sizes, from General Electric on down, are looking for executives with federal experience.

Such board members can mean the difference between success and failure in landing government work, said John Williams, a spokesman for the National Defense Industrial Association, whose 1,100 corporate members sell defense and national security goods and services to various departments of the executive branch. "These people provide invaluable information," he said.

"Firms are looking for people who have been in the acquisition community, who know what the agenda is for responding to an RFP [request for proposals]," Williams said. "There are code words in RFPs that indicate you must respond in particular ways to be taken seriously. These people know how to hold the RFP up to the light and see the code words."

The board members also provide vital information on seeking company partners. They know which prime contractor is likely to get the business, Williams said.

The personal connections the executives have with Washington insiders are another advantage. "Business is always done by personal relationships, and that's doubly true for Washington," Scott said.

Tom Hudson, CEO of Minneapolis-based Computer Network Technology (CNT), agrees that it is important for businesses seeking government contracts to have board members who know the peculiarities of the federal procurement process.

CNT recently added a director who was the chief information officer for several federal agencies. Hudson expects the director, Rene Dittimna, to "bring a good knowledge base to CNT that we hadn't had before."

For the moment, many IT companies do not have board members with federal experience. But Scott expects that to change.

"Too many companies still feel their products will be enough [by themselves] to make the sale to the federal government," he said. "But what they don't know [about the procurement process] will hurt them."