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How To Procure Print in the Empire State

By Leela Moore

Interview with K.Y. - GM printing

New York state spends \$10 billion on print procurement every year--\$3.1 billion goes through the office of general services (OGS). With that amount to spend, OGS has more procurement power than many small countries. In addition to this budget, print purchasing in New York has been largely decentralized with agencies practicing autonomy over their own print buying. The legislature does its procurement through the finance office for bills and journals; the departments handle preprinted forms, offset books, pamphlets, newsletters, brochures, stationary, and envelopes.

"The first place [to find government purchasing opportunities] is through OGS for centralized contracts, things that are used by multiple agencies and authorities," says Jamie Nussbaum, purchasing officer for OGS. New York state welcomes print bids and has well-defined rules for selecting bid winners. They must have multiple submissions, and they outreach for a viable market. A printer's role is to provide information and samples to create a relationship.

An example of a new bid request is on OGS' Web site, effective March 31. The project is for 41,000 copies of a monthly newsletter for a two-year term. Featuring Medicaid updates, it will range from four to 40 pages.

Part of the bid form is designed to assess a vendor's authorization to do business in New York. Questions are aimed at finding out a business' integrity, financial and organizational capacity, and performance history. Mr. Nussbaum explains that printers must submit equipment lists and capabilities, as well. According to New York law, at least three bids should be solicited and the lowest price is awarded.

You can register to be notified of bids at www.ogs.state.ny.us. Under "For Business," select "vendor registration for bid notification, new vendor registration." Printers can choose from a list of product or service classifications, including office equipment and supplies, published products, and editorial and design services. The system automatically e-mails notifications with hyperlinks to the bid documents.

You can identify government opportunities by subscribing to the New York State Contract Reporter (NYSCR) to see who has purchased what in the past. A subscription is \$175 a year at www.nyscr.org. You will find that many purchases are cyclical. Look for jobs that fit your business.

State agencies are required by law to notify the NYSCR and go through the bid process. Agencies making smaller purchases are

required to get three quotes. They submit either an RFP (request for proposal), IFB (invitation for bid), or an RFEI (request for expression of interest).

Jeff Boyse, deputy commissioner of OGS, administers the NYSCR. He explains that working with the minority- and women-owned business enterprise (MWBE) benefits state agencies because a discretionary spending window usually set at \$15,000, increases to \$50,000 when working with an MWBE. No sub-contracting of actual printing is allowed, and the certification process includes a site visit. Small business, minority- or women-owned businesses have a percentage of bids set aside to be marketed to them so state agencies can meet anti-discrimination goals.

Do-It-Yourselfers

The New York State Tax and Finance Department runs its own print facility in Albany as a non-profit. They utilize it for bulk printing and forms that are mostly one- or two-color where quick turn-around is most important. They contract out glossy work.

Much of the state university work is done on campus. Individual schools make decisions on a case-by-case basis, and are responsible for their own budget.

David Schillinger, director of the design and printing department, SUNY System Administration, explains how they award jobs. "We put out all the publications from a notepad to an annual report for the University System," he says. "I keep a print bid list of acceptable printers I have worked with. There is a state contract list for all business cards, all forms, etc. We send our smaller jobs to the department of tax and finance under a central contract. We have the ability to go to OGS for big jobs, but a lot of the things we bid out ourselves." When a printer calls, Mr. Schillinger requests samples and an equipment list. He adds, "If it's someone we will use, we do a site visit first."

According to John Heiser, director of graphics and printing services at Hudson Valley Community College, "The main determining factor for bids is whether we can do it ourselves. There is a break-even point for four-color printing."

The college maintains a small print shop with two-color offset presses and a Canon color copier, and cutting and bindery equipment. Anything larger than 12x18" or in full color is not cost effective, and pocket folders or embossing cannot be done in-house.

The college purchasing office coordinates requests for proposals from a prior vendor list. These printers have had competitive pricing with a quality product. Bid requests go out several times a year. The college purchasing may carve up the award based on lowest pricing.

Other great places to start learning about selling to the government include: New York City business solutions training and seminars (www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/nycbiz/html/selling_to_govern)

ment/training.shtml); The City Record: Official Journal of the City of New York (www.nyc.gov/html/cityrecord/home.html); Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, which are federally funded, locally based centers; and the New York State Department of Economic Development, Small Business Division. This last resource hosts workshops in New York City, which includes information on the process from both state and federal perspectives.

At a recent event, awarded companies talked about successes and lessons learned in bidding. Purchasing representatives from various agents and authorities in the city were also present, which provided opportunity for one-on-one interaction.

Participating in the NYSCR's March 29 procurement workshop in New York city was K. Y. Chow, of GM Printing in Chinatown. Recently, GM Printing was certified by New York state as a minority printer business.

For three years, Mr. Chow bid on a project for the Unified Court System. He explains what he learned: "In 2001, I went to see the opening of the bids. We were very far off and it seemed that other people knew the system. I thought my price was pretty good in 2002, but again we did not get the job. I asked, 'why?' They might have doubted my ability. I am in Chinatown where we print take-out menus. They never thought a good printing company would be located [there]."



Mr. Chow changed his strategy to prove he could do the finest work. He did an RFP for the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., and was selected as the official printer on behalf of the World Trade Center.

He sent the court purchasing agent samples, which included a tour book of Chinatown in full color--124 pages created for the Asian American Business Development Corp; a book of vintage postcards for the Bronx County Historical Society; and a full-color leather corner desk calendar produced in partnership with Fox River paper mills and Lindenmeyr Munroe, a paper distributor. The calendar featured different colored paper for each month in a limited edition to show designers the impact of paper usage.

Mr. Chow says, "I started sending them all these nice projects and I kept getting in touch with them so they could get used to me and my good [work]. I got a little closer to them. Also...we work on weekends to deliver a job on Monday. Most print shops are not competing with me on the weekend."

Mr. Chow also notes that he competes by using good management techniques. He stores more than 100,000 lbs. of paper, bought in bulk from overstocked items. In Hong Kong, he did work in merchant banking, so he understands how to leverage cash flow. Thanks to a low-cost loan, he has the purchasing power to buy in bulk. This speeds up the operation by eliminating delays caused by waiting for a paper delivery. Jobs go on press at night and are ready in the morning.

The court system awarded him the job for its annual report in June 2004. However, he did not get the material to begin the job until December 2004. Since it was six months after he was awarded the job, and the court was in need of a quick turnaround, Mr. Chow made an 8.5x11" test proof on the GTO press to show how the difficult screen tints would actually appear. The job was specified for a 40" Speedmaster. The document was prepared by the court's in-house design group. Mr. Chow explains, "Sometimes it looks good on a computer, but the dot gain can change the print. We made some recommendations for design changes for a better [end] result."

Before Christmas, the court received the finished job and asked Mr. Chow to quote on 100,000 newsletters. More work came quickly. "On the 27th [of December] I gave them the cost, and right after the new year they gave me the job," he states. More recently, he printed 600,000 public image bookmarks for the court to use to promote to potential jurors and judges and court employees the correct role of each in the legal system.

Mr. Chow also was involved in the distributorship of the bookmarks to 88 locations throughout New York. Here, he says, organization is paramount. "We are not just printing," he contends, "we are trying to help [the court] build a system of information distribution."

By looking for opportunities, getting to know the buyers, and impressing them with samples, Mr. Chow got the job, undoubtedly with more to come. He also continues to find ways to compete on price. To keep the business, he provides quick turnaround. Look into working for the state of New York; the work is there for the bidding.

Local Printer Joins Chinatown Board of Directors

The Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corp. (LDC) announced that K.Y. Chow, president of GM Printing, joined its board of directors, which is leading the effort to advance Chinatown's interests by improving business conditions and strengthening the community as a regional center for commerce and culture.

"Mr. Chow has worked extraordinarily hard to improve the cultural, economic, and social environment in Chinatown," said Amy Chin, interim executive director of the LDC.

GM Printing is a recently certified Minority Business Entity (MBE) by New York state and New York City, and the official printer of the Lower Manhattan Development Corp.

With a master's degree in business administration from the Asian Institute of Management, Manila, and more than 10 years of merchant banking experience, Mr. Chow has overseen the financial operations of major commercial buildings in Chinatown.

"With thousands of businesses employing tens of thousands of people, Chinatown is an engine that is helping drive the New York City economy," said Mr. Chow. "I am proud to be a part of this effort, and honored to have been asked to serve on such a prestigious board."