

Optimal Technologies International, LLC

Charles Daniels, President and CEO of Optimal Technologies International (OTI), was facing a squeeze. He had founded the company in 2002 to provide IT product solutions, support and consulting services to government agencies and commercial businesses. Daniels built his business with the assistance of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and its 8(a) Business Development Program which is designed to help small, socially and economically disadvantaged businesses compete in the marketplace.

As a starting point, the 8(a) Program was brilliant for Optimal Technologies International. It allowed the company to gain a foothold in government contracting by enabling them to win bids and deliver services. OTI was very successful and won a significant amount of government business; too much, it turned out.

The SBA's 8(a) Program's long term goal is to graduate 8(a) firms and enable them to go on to thrive in the broad competitive business environment, both government and commercial. And there was the rub for OTI; they had been so successful in the government sector that it was dominating their customer base and there was a significant imbalance between commercial and government contract work.

In cases like this, the SBA exercises its oversight function to help 8(a) companies remain program compliant. Failure to comply is a mark on a company's record in the federal database which can lead to being put on a suspended list where it cannot even bid on government opportunities. This would have been disastrous for OTI.

Fortunately, the SBA was proactive and jumped to help OTI. Edward "Ed" Ramos, U.S. SBA North Florida Senior Area Manager based in Orlando contacted the Florida SBDC at UCF's Government Contracting Service unit and its' Government Contracting Specialist Frank Germonto. Germonto immediately connected with OTI and President Daniels to produce a corrective action plan to address the missed Business Activity Target (BAT) issues raised by the SBA.

Germonto conducted a full business assessment and determined that Daniels and OTI had the business acumen and previous business success to address their problem. It also became apparent that OTI was a victim of government-mandated sequestration, the subsequent government shutdown, and the absence of a fully-effective sales and marketing campaign aimed at non-federal and commercial customers.

Together, Daniels and Germonto developed a corrective action plan that provided access in the Bid-Match system sponsored by the Florida SBDC that gave OTI access to commercial, state and local contract solicitations, expanded marketing to the commercial sector as well as the opportunity to team with partners and subcontractors.

And it worked! The combination of successful action plan implementation and additional management consulting assistance from Germonto and the FSBDC enable OTI to achieve the necessary 45% BAT of non-8(a) activity by the end of the program year and positioned it for future compliance.

"Our work with the Florida SBDC's Government Contract Services people and especially Frank Germonto has been all positive for us," concluded President Daniels. "We were able to bring ourselves back into balance for the 8(a) program with their help. Since then, we've diversified and expanded our non- 8(a) revenue and grown revenues overall. Today, we are a small, economically disadvantaged business that can say it is a proud graduate of the 8(a) program thanks to all the SBA and the FSBDC at UCF has done for us."



MEET CHARLES DANIELS

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