

Building Your Company Differentiators to Win Big

Moderator: **Whitney Stowell**, CEO & Founder, Cribworks

Speakers:

- **Anna Urman**, Director, Strategic Outreach and Communications, OSDBU, Dept. of Veterans Affairs
- **Bree Beal**, Vice President, Dir. of Government Business Development, HKS, Inc.
- **Ed Chamberlayne**, P.E., Ph.D., F.SAME, Sr. Vice President, Federal Programs, PRIME AE

May 14, 2024, 10:30 a.m.



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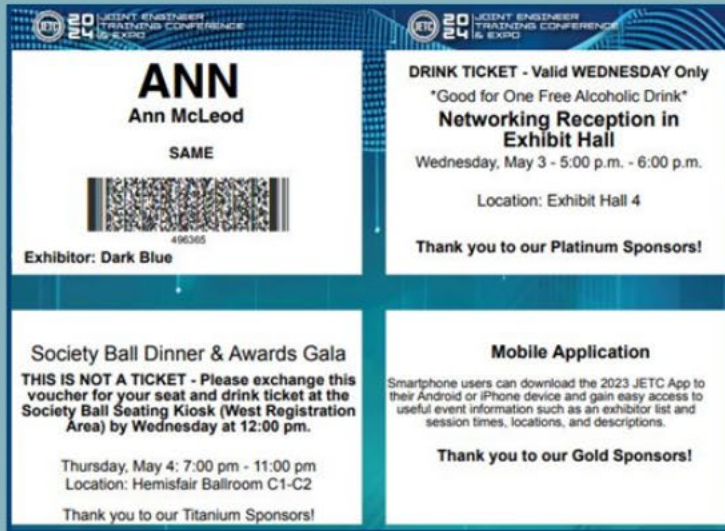


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MODERATOR



Whitney Stowell Cribworks

CEO & Founder

Fun Facts

- Boston Celtics, South Africa National Rugby Team, and the Flying Fijians
- Favorite Places: Italy, Tulum, Peru
- Grew up on farm in Western Maine, went to a 2 Room Schoolhouse
- Have trained with, competed against, and managed Olympic athletes across 2 Sports (Rugby & Freestyle Skiing)
- Disney Fun Fact: Fell off the Mad Tea Party Ride

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SPEAKER



Anna Urman

Department of Veterans Affairs
Director, Strategic Outreach and
Communications

Fun Facts

- Bishop Ireton HS Crew (Go Cardinals!)
- Norway, castles, and cannons
- English is my 3rd language
- Disney Fun Fact: my 4 year old daughter running away screaming from all the characters

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SPEAKER



Bree Beal

HKS, Inc.

Vice President, Dir. of Government
Business Development

Fun Facts

- Air Force Brat (DC is the longest location I've lived anywhere)
- Majored in French to live in Paris for Study Abroad (LSU - Geaux Tigers)
- 5th Generation Colorado Native
- Former Walt Disney World Cast Member in "Merchertainment"

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SPEAKER



Ed Chamberlayne

PRIME AE

Sr. Vice President, Federal Programs

Fun Facts

- Go Hokies!
- EF4 Tornado in Kansas
- Solar Eclipse Totality Junkie
- Current Hobbies include SF330 preparation... but I my wife & I like to travel as often as we can
- Disney Fun Fact: Been to Disney World, Disneyland, and EuroDisney (and now I'm done!)

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Poll: What Size Company are You?

Live Content Slide

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**Poll: How Confident are You in Your Company's
Differentiators?**

Outline for the Session

- Why You? The Importance of Differentiators
- Perspectives from:
 - Government, Large, Medium, Small Business
- Company Differentiators vs Opportunity Differentiators
- Building Your Differentiators
- Recommendations
- Conclusion & Key Takeaways

What is a Differentiator?

A differentiator is:

- Any characteristic of your firm that **separates you from key competitors** and gives you a **perceived advantage** in the eyes of your target audience

A valid differentiator should be able to pass 3 tests

- It must be true
 - Does it accurately represent who you are?
- It must be relevant to potential customers
 - Does it directly speak to your customers' needs and problems?
 - Different customers will have different needs and problems
- It must be provable
 - Is it supported by strong evidence?
 - Do you have metrics to back this up
 - Prove it



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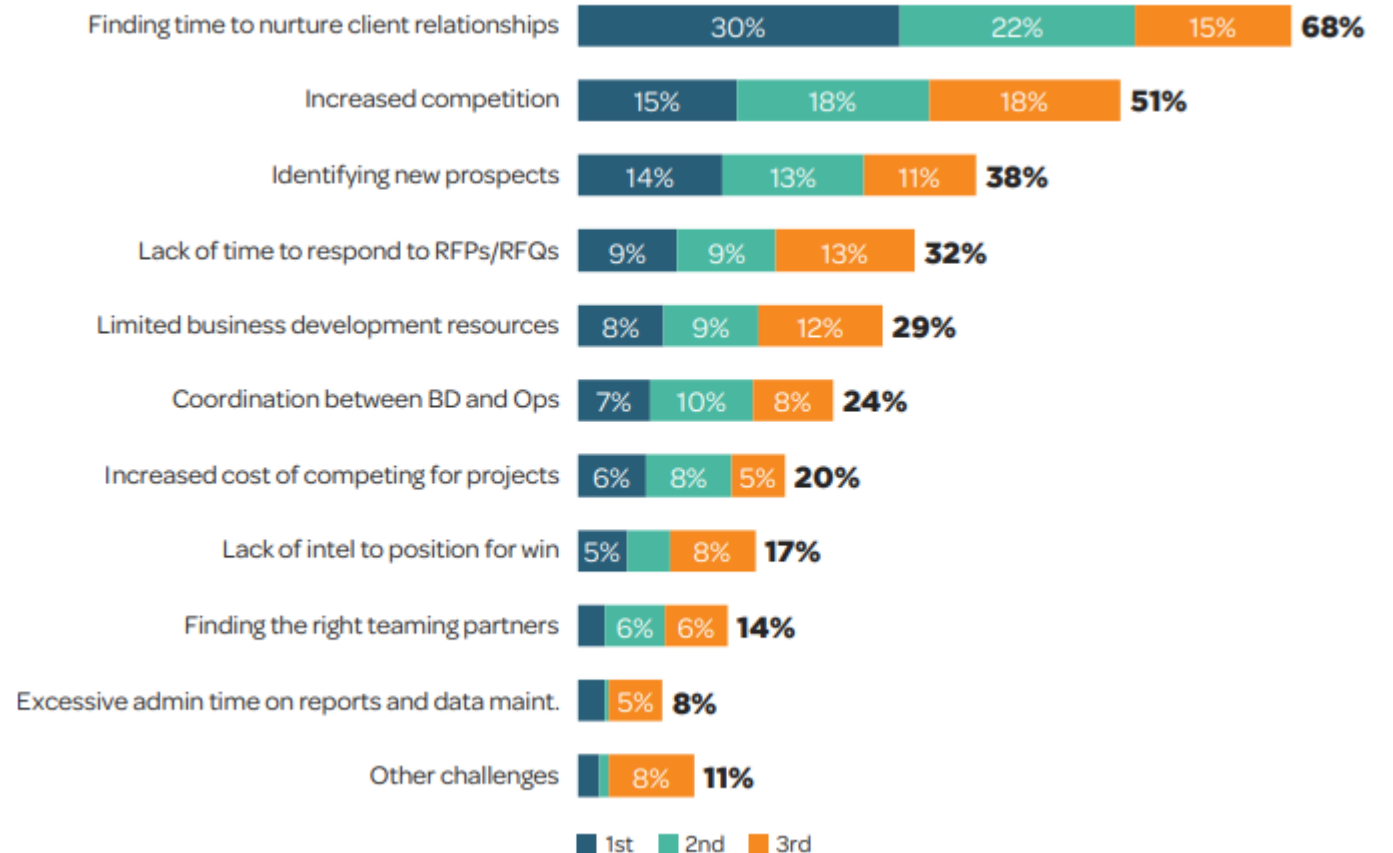
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Why You? The Importance of Differentiators

- Differentiators play a crucial role in business success by setting you apart from competitors
- 3 Things to consider on building Differentiators
 - Key part of your capture and early business development plans
 - Niche down and tailor to your audience
 - This helps reduce competition and increases the chance that you can convert leads into projects.
 - The best differentiators...come from your customers

Looking into 2024, 2025, and Beyond

- Differentiation is the 2nd biggest Business Development Challenge among A&E Firms
- Small Business Opportunities – New regulations on 8(a), more opportunities going small
- Leveraging Technology – AI applications will be front of mind
- Strengthening Internal Systems – Cybersecurity, CMMC all are critical issues to make sure you are compliant to deliver on projects



Reference: *Deltek - 44th Annual Architecture & Engineer Industry Study*

Understanding the Competition & The Customer

The Competition

- Tight understanding on the landscape, key players, strengths, and weakness, financially capability, etc.
- Relationships that they have with the customer -> from key decision makers down to subcontractors
- Why would a Prime/Customer switch up from an existing provider, and go with you?
- Do you know your competition?
 - General and opportunity-specific

The Customer

- Can they trust you? (i.e., to perform, to manage, to avoid bad press, etc.)
- Do you stand out in a stack of business cards / proposals?
- Utilizing uniqueness to justify “Other than full & Open Competition”

Government Perspective

- Good:
 - Tailoring your solution to the customer’s technical and MISSION need, “It’s never just a database” - what strategic problem can you solve?
 - Don’t boil the ocean, focus on the sand grains
 - Help us advocate for set-asides by demonstrating uniqueness + usefulness + responsiveness
 - Faster ways to buy (i.e. vehicles, sole source) = easier for everyone
 - Assume that you are not unique in your NAICS code. How do you stand out? (for example, “So What” Exercise)
 - Geography, team skill sets, clearances, knowledge of verticals help you FOCUS and SELL

Government Perspective

- BAD:
 - I am a small / set-aside business
 - I sell anything, to anyone



When your capabilities statement



“It’s Toasted” - Mad Men S01E01

It’s the 1960s, cigarettes are starting to lose favor because of growing health concerns. They can’t market as healthy anymore, but how to differentiate the Lucky Strike Brand from the competition?



Large Business Perspective

- Differentiators by Phase
 - Long Lead - plan ahead (recompete, unseat, new project)
 - Sources Sought - shape the RFP
 - Teaming - set the team early
 - Qualifications / Proposal / SF330 Submission
- Teaming Partner Differentiation
 - Value Proposition
 - Client knowledge, location knowledge, project knowledge, selection team knowledge

Medium Business Perspective

- Sources Sought & Go / No-Go Differentiators
- The Medium-Sized Business Curse (and Blessing)
- Mentor Protégé JV Differentiators
- Don't overthink differentiators (or let them paralyze you)
- Knowledge of Client and Pain Points
- Debrief the Differentiators

Small Business Perspective

Overall

- Two Primary Aspects to Focus on
 - Prime
 - Teaming
- Differentiate Yourself in Each Market
 - Niche down
 - Focus on where you are the strongest
 - Personalization is key
- Focus early in your sales process, not at the Go / No-Go so you can have a strong understanding of why you are pursuing opportunity
 - Increase win rate

Competitors

- Who are my competitors in my markets?
- Who are my competitors for this opportunity?
- Who are my competitors on this IDIQ/BPA/etc.?

Small Business Perspective

Prime

- Focus on core competencies
- Differences in your solution and the competition that are directly linked to the customer issues are the foundation of your differentiators
 - Including your sales strategy, messaging, etc.
 - Integrate these differences into your overall capture plan
- Get alignment on your differentiators early
 - They will pivot throughout the sales process

Teaming

- What do you bring to the table?
 - Build your point of differentiation
 - Build relationships & networks that are driven towards attracting the right customers
 - This is an ongoing process, not a one-hit wonder
- What does the Prime need you?
 - What gap(s) are you filling?
 - Show me how you can enhance my team
- How well do you know the end customer?
 - If you're an expert on the customer - position yourself as the driver
 - The deeper you know the customer, the more institutional knowledge you have, the impactful this can be to a Prime

Wrap Up

- Differentiators - 3 things to build an effective differentiator
 - Must be true, relevant, and provable
- Government - What strategic problem can you solve?
 - Don't boil the ocean, focus on the sand grains
- Large - Differentiation is critical for developing a strong team
- Medium - Leverage customer relationships to build effective differentiators
- Small - Bring value and expertise to your potential teammate. Be effective for Prime, not just another number



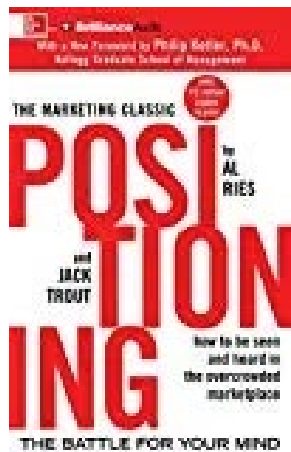
Books on Differentiation



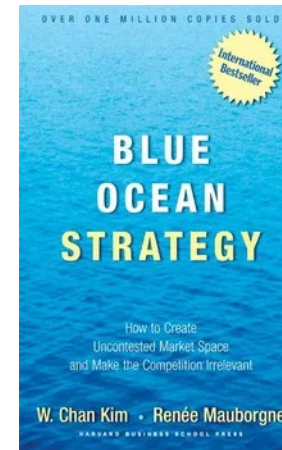
Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable
Seth Godin
ISBN: 978-0970309976



Hook Point: How to Stand Out in a 3-Second World
Brendan Kane
ISBN: 979-8425205179

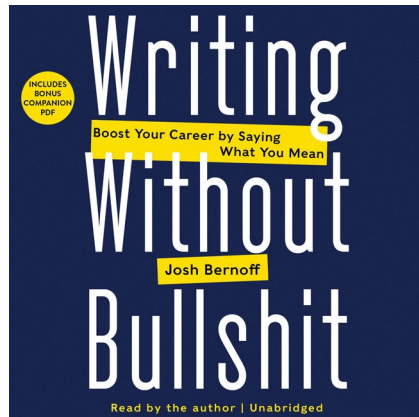


Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind
Al Ries, Jack Trout
ISBN: 9781491580936



Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant
W. Chan Kim,
Renée Mauborgne
ISBN: 9781422147986

[more] Books on Differentiation



Writing Without Bullshit:
Boost Your Career by
Saying What You Mean
Josh Bernoff
ISBN:9780062477156



A Study in Contrasts
Anna Urman
(NCMA Magazine May 2024 Issue)

https://ncmahq.org/Shared_Content/CM-Magazine/CM-Magazine-May-2024/Subcontracting--A-Study-in-Contras-c-ts.aspx





Podcasts on Differentiation



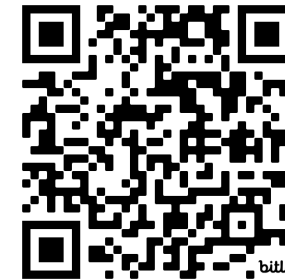
**Game Changers for
Government Contractors**
RMS Federal



<https://spoti.fi/3URIJM1>



HBR Idea Cast
Harvard Business Review



<https://spoti.fi/44Coh5I>

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Q&A

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- Bree Beal, bbeal@hksinc.com
- Ed Chamberlayne, ed.chamberlayne@primeeng.com

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Building Your Differentiators

- Value - Sell it
 - Value proposition of a bid goes beyond mere cost considerations
- Get Specific
 - Don't just say "knowledge gained from 15+ years of experience..." or "we are a WOSB and SDVOSB engineering firm that..."
- Communication - Add Context to Your Differentiators
 - "So what do you do?"
 - We all know we are going to be asked this
 - More dialogue...more conversations (Questions!)
 - The person who asks the question -> in control of the conversation
 - A question to the question
 - Keep it simple
 - "I work in XYZ, would it help you if I gave you an example of the kinds of things that I do?"
- Leverage AI
 - Check out these tailored AI prompts here to help you build your differentiators, engage, and reach out to your customers directly or through social selling
 - [Click here](#)

Building Your Differentiators

Break them Down into 3 Categories

1. Unique
 - a. Not available from others
2. Comparative
 - a. Describe Your offerings are superior or different than competitive alternates
3. Holistic
 - a. Not offerings, more about company (i.e., financial stability, share in marketplace, knowledge of customer, etc.)

Differentiate in the Right Areas

- End Customer
 - What does success look like for them? Strong ROI? Less Risk? Help them meet certain goals? Etc.
- Teaming
 - What are you helping the customer ultimately achieve?
 - What are you helping the Prime ultimately achieve? How are you different from the other companies?
- Who You're Speaking to?
 - Conversation is different from an Executive, Business Development Manager, etc.
- Build Credibility - Build Relationships First

Building Your Differentiators

Factors to Build Out Your Differentiators

- Metrics
- Past Performance
- Quality
- Value
- Visuals
- Customer Feedback/Quotes



Factors to Take into Consideration

1. Value - Are the benefits exceeding the cost
2. Importance - Is this important to the customer? If so, what and where?
3. Distinctive - Is this unique to the customer at all?
4. Communication - Does the customer know we have this capability in our offerings?
5. Customer - Do I have the right people in the room?