

Kevin Minor: 0:01

Hey Paul Stickers and welcome to our Supplier Engagement Miniseries. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and in this seven-part miniseries, I interview suppliers live at the 2023 NASPO Exchange in Salt Lake City, Utah. We discuss forming relationships and how to make the contracting process smoother. Today we're talking with Jennifer King, president of Discount Cell Inc. Give us a like and follow us wherever you get your podcast and enjoy the show.

Jennifer King: 0:35

Hi, my name is Jennifer King and I am president of Discount Cell. We are a small woman-owned business that is on the NASPO Value Point Wireless contract alongside the carriers, and my role is that obviously, as president I kind of do a bit of everything, but I do manage and look at all our contracts and work with state agencies on our contracts that we hold.

Kevin Minor: 1:04

You say you do a little bit of everything. Do you have a favorite thing that you like to do?

Jennifer King: 1:08

Contracts actually is something that I really do like doing and working with state agencies, and I guess part of it is that on the wireless contract we provide solutions to public safety agencies a lot and I really enjoy finding solutions that fit the public safety needs because I feel like that they provide safety to us out in the communities.

Kevin Minor: 1:33

Right, yeah, well, your contracts and state agencies, you're in the right place. Yeah, so that's actually a great segue into my first question for you. I want to talk about relationships a little bit. How do you introduce yourself to a chief procurement officer and how do you build and maintain those relationships with public procurement professionals?

Jennifer King: 1:57

Well, Discount Cell is not a well-known name like maybe Dell or HP or something like that, and so part of it is that I have to go in when I speak with them and tell them a little bit how I, what I do, what our company does and what we provide. But I think part of that also is that I, when I go in to meet with a procurement official, I go in prepared, like you do when you're trying to sell anything and in this case I'm trying to sell my company and to get a contract in the state is knowing what we have that can be a benefit to their agencies. And I prepare in doing that and know how much they say use NASPO in the state of wherever I'm talking to. And then basically I introduce myself and what contract we hold, which is that NASPO ValuePoint wireless contract. And then I go on to explain the benefit of signing a contract with us. We work very closely with the carriers that are on the contract, which are much bigger companies than we are, and yet we provide a value add and I think that's the biggest thing is just trying to portray that value add to the carriers and to the state agencies within that state.

Jennifer King: 3:20

And then, as far as maintaining relationships, I try to keep in touch with the state procurement officers, contract reps that we work with on our contracts, and at events like NASPO Exchange is a great place to do that. Even though we already have a contract with them, I like to sit down and say, hey, how do you feel like things are going with our contract? Can we do anything better? You feel like things are going with our contract, can we do anything better? And how can we better communicate with maybe some of the agencies that we're not doing a lot of business with, so that they're aware of what we can provide through the state contract? And so I think it's important not only to just get that contract in place but to maintain that relationship with that state contract rep so that they know that they can come to me if there's ever any issues. I want to have open communication. If there's concerns that are expressed to them about what is being done on our contract, I want them to be able to come to us, and vice versa.

Kevin Minor: 4:21

Sounds like a very open door policy, right, and I hear you mention you're smaller or less.

Jennifer King: 4:29

well, we do If you have a larger name and you say that company name, like I said, dell or something like that you know exactly what they do and what they provide. When we say discount, sell, then people don't necessarily know what that means. Now we had developed, I think, a good relationship in the industry, in the IT industry and, um, I know that we have with the carriers and so the carriers know who we are. When we say our name, you know, and things like that. Um, so that is getting easier, but as far as an advantage, going in with them not knowing our name, it's it actually it is hard.

Kevin Minor: 5:24

A little bit of a challenge.

Jennifer King: 5:26

It is.

Kevin Minor: 5:27

I'm going to shift gears just a little bit here. Have you, what's your experience working with state legal departments, and have you ever successfully worked with government attorneys?

Jennifer King: 5:37

Well, we're not like a large company where we have a large legal department that every contract has to go through. So for me it's just understanding what the pieces of the contracts mean and going through that. And if I have questions, the thing I like about NASPO contracts or state contracts versus maybe something a contract that you would deal with another business or something is I feel like the states aren't trying to rip us as vendors off. They're not trying to take advantage of us in any way.

Jennifer King: 6:15

It's not their money, no but they do want to make sure that we're not taking advantage of their agencies, and they want to make sure things are fair to their agencies. So I feel like I can go through the contract with confidence that there's nothing that's really going to try to rip me off or be unfair to me.

Jennifer King: 6:35

I just need to make sure that I can fall within those guidelines and follow those guidelines, and so I have worked with legal agencies, state agencies, but it hasn't really been a big deal because I feel like that again, I can go in with that open mind that you mentioned earlier and understand that it's a mutual good relationship and the contract is for the benefit of us as well as their agencies to get what they need.

Kevin Minor: 7:12

And you can correct me if I'm wrong, but that almost sounds like an advantage in and of itself of being a little bit smaller. You go in with that open mind. It is much more of a personal touch. I'm not talking to some faceless team, legal team. So that's interesting. No, it's good to hear the comparisons too.

Jennifer King: 7:27

Yeah, so my partner happens to be an attorney, who is also my husband. But the truth of the matter is it's really funny because we'll have contract reps that say, oh, so you must say to my husband, because he's the attorney, oh, you must handle the contracts. And he's like no, she's the one that handles all of them.

Kevin Minor: 7:45

And I do?

Jennifer King: 7:45

I handle all the contracts, and part of it is because we've been doing this since 2012. I'm familiar of what I should be looking for and what I shouldn't be and that kind of thing, and if I need to pull an attorney in, I can do so. But again I feel like muscle memory at this point.

Kevin Minor: 8:02

Yes, so, in a shift, just a little bit more and talk about education and this is the part where I would like you to be able to speak directly to our listenership and what is the best way for public procurement officials to educate you on the procurement process, and that's including changes and updates.

Jennifer King: 8:24

So that question is an interesting one to me, because I think that there could be lots of different ways, and part of it is that you know when I'm really busy, extra emails, you know, sometimes clog my inbox.

Kevin Minor: 8:39

Yeah, we've all been there.

Jennifer King: 8:41

Yeah, for sure, and so but I think that. But then also, if I get an email from a state contract rep in a state where we have a contract and it comes from that rep that we know, if it says changes in procurement updates or things, maybe if it's communicated through common communication channels, then I tend to look at it, whereas if it's coming under a different head or something like that, I hope that makes sense.

Kevin Minor: 9:21

Yeah, yeah.

Jennifer King: 9:22

You know, obviously these NASPO conferences are a great way to do that as well, but obviously that is a general thing and it's not specific to certain states. So you know, obviously, the certain states and that's where I like going to like the vendor expos and sometimes, if they can provide more information when they're holding vendor expos within their state, when they're holding vendor expos within their state, if they could, you know, provide information that way as well, if you know, for those that are attending those expos.

Kevin Minor: 9:54

So and this is kind of redundant, but roll with me on this. So what's something that you, what's maybe a suggestion or something that you would say to you know one of our primary members, a chief procurement officer, to help you, help you, help them.

Jennifer King: 10:17

If they so OK, I tend to you know, I tend to work with the IT procurement officials.

Jennifer King: 10:23

And so if there are needs that come up within that category, then it would be helpful for them to reach out to us and say, hey, can you guys? You know, is this something that you guys do and you can help with? I know that there's times where I have had agencies that said, oh, I didn't realize that this was available on your contract. And when I reach out to the state rep they go, oh well, yeah, they reach out to me but, like, our contract is a little bit different because it's scope based.

Kevin Minor: 10:53

Yeah.

Jennifer King: 10:53

And so. So I think part of it is having the contract reps aware of what is being offered, you know, and being able to portray that message to the government agencies. And I will say that when we got our first contract, there were some states where, immediately, the agencies knew that we had a contract and what it included, and then there were other states where three years later, they still had no idea about our contract. Helpful is to perpetuate the information on contracts that are available and the type of items that are available through the contract to the state agencies. Because again, here we are, probably, you know, I mean, we're 10 years later and we still have some agencies at certain points where we meet them at an Expo and they're like oh, we had no idea, this was available on state contract, you know.

Kevin Minor: 12:00

That's interesting.

Jennifer King: 12:01

Why is that, you know? Why is that not being perpetuated through the states? And so that's probably the number one thing I'd suggest.

Kevin Minor: 12:10

Why is that indeed? No, it's an interesting thought and it's a question that needs to be asked, and I'm glad that the flow and the conversations be of a podcast. I'm glad that we arrived at it. Great, excellent. So it's 2023 exchange. Jen. What do you got going on? What are you hoping to walk away with from this conference?

Jennifer King: 12:32

I'd like to have conversations with some of the states, maybe, that we haven't been involved with in the past, and then I again touching base with those contract reps that we currently work with and finding out what we can do better or that type of thing. But developing relationships with some of the states that we don't have a relationship with would be, you know, a good thing for us. Absolutely yeah.

Kevin Minor: 13:01

Jennifer King for Discount Cell. It has been a pleasure speaking with you today. Thank you so much for joining us.

Jennifer King: 13:07

Thank you.

Kevin Minor: 13:10

Thanks for stopping by today, Pollstakers. If you enjoyed this episode, we have many, many more resources. Just like it on our website. That's naspoorg. Again, make sure you leave us a like, a follow, a comment. Whatever it is you do, I'm Kevin Miner. Until next time.