



Looming Insourcing Threat Forces Small Biz to Reposition Itself

Fast 50 company BayFirst Solutions overcame early obstacles to build successful business

By Tania Anderson

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One of the biggest challenges that BayFirst Solutions has had to overcome since its inception in June 2002 is the fact that its founder is deaf and only communicates through sign language and writing.

Since then, colleagues and customers have learned to not call Robert Rice, president and managing partner of BayFirst. He handles all communications through e-mail messages, including the interview for this story.

"My deafness is now inconsequential because our culture is one that strongly promotes people diversity, professionalism and mutual respect," Rice wrote in an e-mail. "Everyone has also quickly learned that the telephone isn't my forte and that they're better off using e-mail instead of voice mail."

The management and strategy consulting firm, based in Washington, D.C., now has a long roster of government clients, including the Education, Commerce, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs departments. It posted \$9.1 million in revenue last year and expects to see \$11 million by the end of this year. The company's compound annual growth rate over five years hit 66.29 percent, good for the No. 46 spot on the 2010 Fast 50 list.

Rice attributes the success of the 52-person company to hiring the right people who have backgrounds in government contracting and military service. He also has focused much of the company's strategy on making strategic partnerships with larger businesses, such as ABS Consulting, BAE Systems and Booz Allen Hamilton.

"We recognize the important need to team and develop relationships with large businesses who understand what it is like to be small," Rice wrote. "Successful teaming requires the ability to present viable business and value propositions."

BayFirst's relationship with ABS Consulting was beneficial when it won a subcontractor role on the new SeaPort-e contracting vehicle, the Navy's platform for acquiring support services, including engineering, financial management and program management.

The company's Deaf Access Solutions division, which focuses on communication accessibility to deaf and hard-of-hearing people, won the firm a DHS contract this summer to provide sign-language interpretation services.

One of the company's most significant contract wins was a hybrid risk analysis and software development contract with the Transportation Security Administration, Rice wrote.

Although the company has had some successful contract wins, it has customers that might do more work in-house.

"Government insourcing is becoming the more popular option, and while outsourcing will continue, there will be more contractual oversight and scrutiny," Rice wrote.

With that in mind, Rice is positioning the company to become a bigger player in risk and security management through partnerships with large and small businesses. Rice wrote that the company also prepared for further growth by getting ISO 9001 certified, which ensures that it meets certain standards for management systems.

“This quality certification will ensure that BayFirst has its act together and that internal processes and procedures are as buttoned down as they can and need to be,” Rice wrote. “Our ISO 9001 certification will also give prospective customers and employees the confidence they need to work with or join us as a small business.”

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