



A guide to setting a

Public Sector Sales & Marketing Strategy



Why is there such a need for a public sector sales and marketing strategy?

Selling your products or services to government agencies and organisations can be lucrative. But this doesn't come without unique challenges.

The public sector represents a vast market with diverse needs and complex decision-making processes. The commercial climate is quite different to that of the private sector; departments need to meet the needs of the whole of society, not a specific target market. They face markedly different challenges and must abide by different processes, especially in the procurement of goods and services.

Suppliers often ask us why they do not see results when selling via frameworks or similar channels. It's important to note that simply being listed on a framework does not guarantee a flood of inbound leads or immediate sales. In reality, it rarely works that way. Various factors can contribute to low sales, but one of the main reasons is often the lack of a clear public sector sales and marketing strategy. To achieve success, it is crucial to understand the intricacies of the market and tailor your sales and marketing strategies accordingly.

This guide will provide you with actionable tips and strategies to market and sell to the public sector successfully. You'll learn how to:

- Understand the buyer and their problems
- Plan for the right opportunities
- Integrate public sector-specific tactics
- Build an effective online presence
- Leverage events
- Piece together a social media strategy
- Refine your pitch
- Cultivate partnerships
- Navigate public sector culture

Understanding the buyer and their problems

Every successful strategy begins with a deep understanding of your audience and their problems. This is even more important for the public sector, as they are accountable for spending public money and every procurement decision must be justified in the eyes of the user. To start, use the G-Cloud sales figures to narrow down your target public sector market to one or two departments - this will be your audience.

“Start low and aim high. If you are just starting to build your public sector portfolio start with smaller departments and lower contract values. Build your portfolio gradually and show it to your potential buyers.”

Jos Creese

former Hampshire CIO renowned for his pioneering and innovative work in the local government sector

Understanding the buyer and their problems

Now that you have identified your audience, gaining a deep understanding of their problems is essential. While passion for your product is valuable, a 30-minute presentation solely focusing on its attractive user interface won't hold much value unless you can demonstrate how it specifically addresses a particular challenge the buyer is facing. Conduct thorough research to inform your Sales and Marketing strategy. Here are a few tips on where to start:

1

Explore their websites

Visit the websites of your target departments to find out about their ongoing projects and initiatives.

**2**

Stay updated

Set up Google Alerts for department names and keywords to receive notifications about relevant news and articles written about your buyers.

**3**

Initiate conversations

Reach out and call them! Inquire about the projects they're currently working on, the challenges they're facing, and the steps they anticipate taking next.



Understanding the buyer and their problems

4

Attend supplier webinars

Keep an eye on Crown Commercial Service's (CCS) LinkedIn and Eventbrite pages, as they often organise webinars for supplier engagement. These provide a platform for you to ask questions, better understand their requirements, and even contribute to shaping their initiatives.



5

Offer innovative solutions

Recognise that many departments operate with aging IT infrastructures. They rely on suppliers like you to step in with your expertise and alleviate these burdens by empathising with their situation and suggesting alternative approaches.



Learning about your buyers' problems not only helps you gain insight into the market you're selling to but also demonstrates a genuine interest in helping them overcome challenges. This understanding will be the foundation of your sales and marketing efforts.

Planning for the right opportunities

Once you have the right attitude towards selling to the public sector, it's important to focus your efforts on prospects and projects that align with your expertise and have a higher likelihood of conversion. Here are practical strategies to help you identify and pursue the right opportunities:

1. Utilise Contracts Finder

Contracts Finder is a valuable resource where public sector contracts are published. And it's easily accessible for SMEs! Take advantage of this platform to search for past, present, and future contracts worth over £10,000. By exploring sector-specific contracts, you can gather market intelligence and gain insights into ongoing projects within agencies, enabling you to identify potential opportunities.

2. Leverage the sales data

The G-Cloud sales data is a valuable resource, but under-utilised! Dive into the data by filtering it based on agency, Lot, year, or supplier. You can conduct very good competitor analysis this way and understand the purchasing behaviour of agencies. Who is selling what to whom? How much is being spent? Are they procuring from SMEs?

Planning for the right opportunities

3. Stay informed on the Procurement Pipeline

More and more public sector buyers are relying on frameworks to streamline the procurement process. It's much faster to buy goods and services from suppliers who have already gone through checks and signed a contract, not to mention the required information is all there onscreen! But that will only benefit you as the supplier if you're on the right frameworks. Stay updated on the procurement pipeline and identify frameworks that are suitable for your services. This will give you a head start in preparing to tender for relevant opportunities and increase your chances of securing contracts.

By integrating these practical strategies into your sales and marketing strategy, you can actively seek out the right opportunities in the public sector. This targeted approach will help you focus your resources, increase your competitiveness, and improve your chances of success.

Integrating public sector-specific tactics

If you have been successful in your private sector sales, there's no reason why you can't devise an effective public sector strategy. However, your tactics should be tailored following your audience research. The whole market has unique requirements and dynamics, and each public sector body even more so. If you have done your research, you will know how to tweak your tactics to be more public-sector specific.

Case Studies

One of the most effective tactics you could use is writing public sector-friendly case studies - or better yet, have your buyers write one. While G-Cloud might not generate inbound leads, your public sector case studies can be valuable resources when contacting and meeting potential buyers. Encourage buyers to share their stories, highlighting how your offerings address public sector challenges.

Obtaining a case study can be challenging as public sector servants need to maintain impartiality. Instead of simply asking for a case study, make it clear that the focus will be on publicising the outcome rather than promoting the product. Collaborate with your customers from the beginning, involving them in the drafting and approvals process and offering full editing rights. Engage their press office to build trust and address concerns. Many press offices, particularly within central government, live in fear of a tabloid headline.

If you're still facing difficulties in obtaining customer collaboration, consider approaching CCS. They have more credibility with public sector departments and are more likely to succeed where you might not. We have heard of this approach being successful in the past, so it is well worth a try.

Integrating public sector-specific tactics

For those lacking experience in the public sector, leverage your private sector work! Analyse existing case studies for relevance to public sector challenges. Look for connections and demonstrate how your solutions can address the specific needs of public sector buyers. Even when you have no customers, there are still plenty of other tactics you can employ...

Messaging

Craft your messaging to resonate with public sector buyers. Highlight the value and benefits your products or services bring to the public sector, such as cost savings, improved efficiency, or enhanced public service delivery. Emphasise how your offerings align with their goals and objectives, addressing their unique challenges and pain points.

Thought Leadership

Showcase your expertise and knowledge through thought leadership content. Create informative articles, whitepapers, or industry reports that address relevant public sector challenges and offer insights and solutions. Ensure visibility through appropriate channels to reach the individuals or departments you are targeting.

Collaboration

Consider partnering with industry experts or public sector organisations to conduct joint research or pilot programs. This can generate valuable data and insights for future case studies. Though, we understand this is a perpetual cycle and if you're in this position you're finding it difficult to get in without a case study in the first place!

Collaboration may also come in the form of strategic partnerships with other trusted suppliers. Identify potential partners whose offerings complement yours and explore opportunities for joint bidding or subcontracting. Collaborative efforts can enhance your capabilities, increase your competitiveness, and open doors to larger contracts.

Integrating public sector-specific tactics

Demonstrate your commitment

There are a number of ways that you can demonstrate you're reliable and committed to supplying the public sector:



Monitor relevant news and issues:

Stay informed about news and issues that are pertinent to the public sector. Identify opportunities to contribute to ongoing debates or include them in your campaigns. Stay engaged and demonstrate your understanding of the sector's challenges and concerns.

Address security and data protection:

Public sector organisations place a high priority on security and data protection. Demonstrate your commitment to these concerns by implementing robust security measures and complying with relevant data protection regulations. Showcase your experience in handling sensitive data and reassure buyers of your ability to safeguard their information.



Provide after-sales support:

The public sector values long-term relationships and ongoing support. This might include training, maintenance, and helpdesk support. Demonstrating your commitment to customer satisfaction and continued assistance can differentiate you from competitors and increase customer loyalty.

Building an effective online presence

In today's digital age, a strong online presence is crucial for public sector suppliers. It not only helps establish credibility but also enables you to reach a wider audience, showcase your offerings, and generate leads. It serves as your virtual storefront, allowing potential buyers to learn about your products or services even before engaging with your sales team. With more public sector professionals turning to the internet for research and procurement, a robust online presence ensures that you are discoverable and competitive in the digital landscape.

Content

Content creation is a powerful tool for showcasing thought leadership and expertise. Consider the following strategies:



Blogging

Maintain a blog on your website to regularly publish articles addressing public sector challenges, share insights, and provide solutions. Be sure to optimise your blog content for search engines to attract organic traffic!



Thought Leadership Pieces

We've spoken about this already, but positioning yourself as a thought leader in your knowledge area really does make for a great strategy! Offer in-depth analysis and innovative perspectives on public sector technology trends and opportunities.



Video Content

Explore the use of videos to demonstrate your solutions, share customer success stories, or provide instructional guides. Videos are engaging and can effectively convey complex information in an easily digestible format.

Building an effective online presence

Website

Your website is the cornerstone of your online presence. Ensure you have a branded digital space that is specifically aimed at public sector buyers. You planned all this great content, naturally, it needs a central place to live in. If you have a lot of content think about creating a microsite; almost like a 'daughter company' website, specifically aimed at sharing public sector content. It doesn't need to be anything fancy, just a simple website with a Service page, Meet the Team page and a central page for your public sector-specific case studies would do.

If you are reluctant to build a new website or just haven't grown the public sector market to a large enough size to justify the investment, you can plan on having a G-Cloud landing page on your website. The page should link to your listing, make it clear how to buy your service and provide information for a point of contact. There you should also link to any public sector-specific content pieces - such as case studies.

With this in mind, you want to make sure your website has a user-friendly design. Ensure that it is visually appealing, accessible, and takes into account SEO. A responsive design will allow your site to be viewed from various devices whether it be a desktop computer, a laptop, or a mobile phone for instance. You want your customers to have a seamless browsing experience. Create a clear sitemap with easy navigation, relevant headings, and keywords.

Leveraging Events

Become part of the conversations – offline and online! You need to be visible to potential buyers. Participating in relevant industry events, webinars, and conferences can provide exposure to a large audience of public sector decision-makers. Some events are a no-brainer to attend. Perhaps one of the best investments you can make is to become a member of techUK. They work very closely with government and organise numerous Meet the Buyers/Suppliers events throughout the year.

Other organisations that offer good platforms are Socitm and Cloud Industry Forum. With G-Cloud sales rising by billions each year, and face-to-face networking returning post-COVID-19, it's no wonder that more organisations are jumping on the bandwagon. There are numerous events out there that claim to have the most relevant audience for you and promise leads. Some deliver, others don't. If you are just attending your risk is not too great, a few hundred pounds at most. But the money spent on a ticket and a day out of the office is still an investment. Here's how to get the most out of the events you are attending:

Leveraging Events

Networking

You can learn a lot through networking and there are endless benefits to becoming a familiar face in the crowd. Take advantage of the opportunity to connect with public sector professionals and be proactive in initiating conversations. Engage in meaningful discussions, listen to the challenges and needs of attendees, and explore potential collaborations or partnerships. Here are a few tips to help you:

1 Do your homework on the delegates

Use social media such as LinkedIn and see if you have any mutual clients, connections or partners. This will give you a starting point to guide the conversation and avoid any initial awkwardness.

2 Listen and ask questions

Networking is not just about pitching your product or service to every person in the room. Take the time to listen and ask questions to learn more about the person, their role, and identify potential areas of collaboration. Exchange business cards or contact details to facilitate further communication.

3 Follow up

After the event, continue fostering relationships and exploring collaborations by following up with the people you met. Send an invite to connect on LinkedIn along with a personalised message. This increases the chances of your connection being accepted and opens the door for further engagement.

Leveraging Events

Sponsorship and Exhibiting

Consider sponsoring industry events to increase visibility and brand awareness. You can showcase your products or services directly to attendees. Exhibiting provides an opportunity to engage with potential customers, demonstrate your solutions, and collect leads for follow-up.

If you'd like to beef up your event strategy and start sponsoring, you do need to be aware that your costs can rise to thousands of pounds. To know whether it's worth it, you can do a couple things:



Research past sponsors

Check if the event has been run before and who the previous sponsors were. If all sponsors change with each event, it may indicate that the event does not deliver on its promises. Contact past sponsors via social media or email to get reviews of an event!



Evaluate pre- and post-event promotion

Ask the event organisers for examples of their pre- and post-event promotion, including emails, social media campaigns, and website promotion. This will give you an idea of the quality of their event promotion efforts and help you assess their effectiveness in promoting your brand effectively.

Leveraging Events

Conference Speaking Engagements

Apply to be a speaker at conferences or events where public sector professionals gather. Depending on the event organisers and plan for the day, you may have your own short speaker session (typically 30 minutes - 1 hour) or the event may be organised as a panel discussion or roundtable. Any of these options can be beneficial in contributing to the public sector community while gaining visibility and credibility. Delivering informative and engaging presentations can position you as an industry expert and attract attention to your brand. Again, think thought leadership!

Pre- and Post-Event Marketing

Maximise your event presence by promoting your participation before and after the event. Utilise email marketing, social media, and your website to inform your audience about your involvement, highlight your speaking engagements or booth location, and encourage them to connect with you at the event. After the event, follow up with leads, share key takeaways, and continue the conversation with attendees.

Thoughtful Follow-Up

Don't underestimate the power of follow-up after an event. Send personalized follow-up emails or messages to individuals you met at the event, referencing your conversation and expressing your interest in continuing the discussion. This personalized touch can help solidify connections, nurture relationships, and convert leads into customers.

Integrate a Social Media Strategy

There is no doubt that social media is a very useful tool to get your message out there. Even the best public sector marketing strategy would be nothing without considering some use of social media. It's widely used by almost every marketing team in the private sector, so why wouldn't this translate to public sector markets? After all, almost everyone uses it! Yet, it is often overlooked in the public sector as many overcomplicate the market and see it as entirely different. Here's why a fine-tuned social media strategy is beneficial:

1 Public sector bodies are using social media!

The public demands transparency and many government departments have been looking to social media recently to gain the trust and respect of UK citizens. According to a [2021 Agility survey](#), since the COVID-19 outbreak, 83.5% of public sector bodies are finding themselves with better-informed citizens through the use of social media, and 60% can control rumours. They're engaging with their private sector suppliers, too - the same study found that 61.4% of school district and higher education responders had an increase in followers and 60.9% saw enhanced engagement for their social media presence.

2 Demonstrating awareness

Social media is the fastest mass communication tool, which means through correct use and social listening, your organisation can stay ahead of the curve in industry news and public sector news. You should also use this in the reverse, showcasing your knowledge and understanding of emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities within the public sector. Posting the right things creates discussion, and can position you as a thought leader. You can get involved in other real-time discussions, too, showcasing active involvement in your industry and in the public sector.

Integrate a Social Media Strategy

3 Increasing brand visibility

The digital world is constantly evolving, and with it, social media has become more easily accessible. Your organisation can use social media as a cost-effective tool to attract customers to your brand. Through updating your audience with important news and updates, and networking with prospective buyers, you can develop a brand image that encapsulates trust.

4 Competitive Advantage

All the above contributes to giving you, as a public sector supplier, an edge over competitors. So, with all this in mind, we'll look at some strategies to integrate social media into your online presence.

Choose the right platforms

Identify the social media platforms that are most relevant to your target audience. LinkedIn and Twitter are popular platforms among public sector professionals, but research where your audience is most active and tailor your approach accordingly.

Sharing content

Regularly share informative and engaging content related to public sector challenges, trends, and solutions. This can include blog articles, industry reports, videos, infographics, and thought leadership pieces. Encourage discussions and interaction by asking questions and responding to comments.

Engage and Collaborate

Actively engage with public sector professionals, industry influencers, and relevant organisations on social media. Participate in discussions, share their content, and collaborate on projects or initiatives to expand your network and enhance your credibility.

Integrate a Social Media Strategy

Listening

Use social media to understand and listen. All too often vendors are guilty of shouting into a chasm on social media and not really using it to listen to the audiences/individuals/departments they are trying to reach. Keep an eye on what content they are sharing and the provenance of that content.

The term 'social listening' typically refers to keeping an eye on how your audience is engaging with your brand. This isn't necessarily your own content but might be what people are saying about you or even just the current goings on in your industry.

Paid Advertising

Consider using paid advertising features on social media platforms to reach a wider audience. You can target specific demographics, interests, and job titles to ensure your content reaches the right people.

Monitor and Analyse

Monitor social media analytics to track engagement, reach, and the effectiveness of your campaigns. Adjust your strategies based on the insights gained to optimise your social media presence.

The above just gives a snapshot of some of the various tactics that form your overall social media strategy. You can find more in-depth knowledge about these and more methods to enhance your social media game in our latest [Social Media Guide](#).

Refining your Pitch

Crafting an effective pitch is crucial for engaging public sector buyers and showcasing the value of your offerings. You might think by the time you get to the pitch you should know all the answers and have everything ready for your buyers to just relax and listen. After all, you've conducted thorough research to understand the buyers' needs, challenges, and goals. It's true that by tailoring your pitch to address their pain points, you can demonstrate how your products or services provide effective solutions. But this is just the foundation of your pitch.

No matter how prepared you think you are and how well you think you know their problems, you need to remember that you are talking to the experts here. They want to hear that you understand but don't want to be talked at the whole time, so keep it clear and concise. Public sector professionals are often pressed for time, so avoid using unnecessary jargon. Think of it like an interview and show that you're interested in your potential client, their work and their motivations. Ask questions that show you know their problems but still value their expert opinions.

A good practice is also to introduce your team. Offer to send in the team who will be delivering the solution and working closely with the buying department. Show them how your product can meet their needs by focusing on benefits and outcomes. Public sector departments want to deliver a choice of technologies, as they recognise that users have different needs and it's not appropriate to just deliver a one-size fits all solution. Whether it's cost savings, improved efficiency, or enhanced public service delivery, emphasize how your solutions align with their objectives and deliver tangible value. Understand that there are a range of roles within each body and new ones are being created all the time.

Remember that refining your pitch is an ongoing process. Continuously seek feedback, adapt your message to align with market trends and buyer preferences, and refine your pitch to make it compelling and persuasive.

Cultivating Partnerships

Building strong partnerships is a crucial aspect that should never be overlooked. By collaborating with trusted suppliers and industry experts, you can enhance your capabilities, competitiveness, and access to larger contracts. To effectively cultivate partnerships, it is important to follow key strategies.

Start by identifying potential partners whose offerings align with your solutions and have a strong presence in the public sector. Take the time to draft a list of potential partner organisations that can help you provide a more holistic solution to the problems your target public sector buyers face. A good place to start is G-Cloud itself, where you can analyse the data and search for suppliers who can fill the gaps you have identified. Use the same search as your buyer would, thinking about the keywords they would use. You will find other suppliers to partner with who can fill the gaps you detected!

Attending events is also a great way to find partners. For one, Advice Cloud organises regular supplier events which have proven to be very beneficial to those involved. However, instead of rushing into a partnership, focus on building relationships with other suppliers first. You need to know, will you be the right fit for each other? Conduct thorough research to assess their expertise, track record, and shared values. Look for ways you can offer something back and create synergy.

Cultivating Partnerships

Once you have identified potential partnerships, it's time to explore the different ways to partner. Consider joint bidding or subcontracting opportunities, which allow you to present comprehensive solutions to public sector buyers. Collaborate on proposal development, leveraging each other's expertise to increase the chances of winning bids.

When entering into partnerships, make sure that agreements clearly define roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Address key aspects such as revenue sharing, intellectual property, and dispute resolution. Well-structured agreements minimise conflicts and provide a solid foundation for collaboration.

Lastly, foster ongoing collaboration with your partners. Regularly assess the partnerships, seek further opportunities for collaboration, and explore joint marketing initiatives. Co-develop solutions, share best practices and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Remember, cultivating partnerships is a long-term commitment. Invest in building strong relationships which will contribute to the success of your public sector endeavours.

Navigating Public Sector Culture

The public sector operates within a unique set of values, regulations, and decision-making processes. Understanding and adapting to this culture can greatly enhance your chances of securing contracts and building long-term relationships. A good Marketing and Sales strategy will ensure that all team members understand this culture before they start engaging with public sector buyers.

Demonstrating your commitment to public service is a key aspect of navigating public sector culture. Buyers often look for suppliers who share their mission of delivering value to the community. Showcase your understanding of their goals and the importance of public service in your interactions and communications.

Patience and persistence are also essential. Pushy sales tactics won't work. The procurement processes and bureaucratic procedures in the public sector can be complex and it may take time to navigate and secure contracts. Be prepared for a longer sales cycle and take the time to build relationships, address concerns, and meet the requirements of public sector buyers. Don't disappear, but don't pressurise! Here are a few courtesy rules to abide by:



Send emails sparingly, and always have the option to unsubscribe at the bottom of your emails. This is not only polite, but a GDPR must-have.

Don't send calendar invites to buyers, unless a meeting has actually been agreed. This is the quickest way to get yourself blacklisted - it's a real pet peeve for buyers!



Navigating Public Sector Culture



Calling a department to enquire about what projects they are working on is fine, within reason. However, do not pretend that a staff member has requested your call if they haven't! We see this all too often being used as a terrible way in.

Be considerate of your prospect's diary, it's unlikely they will be able to drop everything and speak to you that minute. Suggest a few weeks down the line and give them time to digest the information given.



Building trust is paramount in the public sector. Civil servants rely on suppliers with a track record of delivering high-quality solutions and meeting regulatory requirements. Highlight your experience, certifications, and successful case studies to demonstrate your trustworthiness and ability to deliver. As an SME, emphasise that you are there to listen and work together as partners, rather than commoditise ideas the way some public sector organisations are worried a bigger company might do.

Being open and sharing knowledge can further build trust with public sector buyers. Many departments have outsourced for so long that there's a severe lack of internal technical capability. More often than not these public sector bodies are aware of the need to upskill their employees, but there are time and money constraints to training. By passing on your skills and knowledge, you can establish yourself as a standout supplier. Consider offering training or educational resources to help civil servants better understand the digital ecosystem.

Navigating Public Sector Culture

Adapting your communication style is also crucial. Public sector buyers may have different communication preferences and expectations compared to the private sector. Be mindful of the language you use, ensuring it is clear and concise and avoiding unnecessary jargon. Your focus should be on providing comprehensive and transparent information.

Lastly, staying informed about the evolving public sector landscape is essential. Government policies, regulations, and priorities can change over time. Stay updated by monitoring government announcements, engaging with industry associations, and participating in relevant public sector events. Adapting your strategies according to the latest developments will help you navigate the public sector culture effectively.

We have covered almost everything we know about drafting an effective Sales and Marketing Strategy. It's important to tailor your approach to the specific needs and preferences of public sector buyers. Ultimately, it's up to you to make it a success.

Remember that success won't come overnight, and setbacks should be viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement. Seek feedback, adjust your strategy, and stay engaged with public sector organisations even in the face of initial rejections. Don't disappear if you get a 'no'! This just means you're one step closer to a successful sale. Building lasting relationships and positioning yourself as a trusted partner will ultimately lead to long-term success in the public sector market, so stay on buyers' radars!

We hope this guide has been useful and can help you improve and refine your public sector sales and marketing strategy.

Good luck in your public sector endeavours, and may your marketing and sales strategy pave the way for meaningful connections and successful business opportunities!

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