

All Foam Products Company Inc.

Buffalo Grove based, All Foam Products Company Inc.'s recent growth spurt has been fueled by selling to the military as a supplier on the federal GSA Advantage! web site.

Marvin and Myrna Steinlauf have been married for 46 years and business partners since 1977 when they started All Foam Products Company Inc., a Certified Woman-owned firm. Mrs. Steinlauf is the President and oversees the administration and financing of the company. Mr. Steinlauf is Vice President of sales and marketing. The company began by fabricating cellular foam cushioning products used principally in the bedding and furniture industries. As the technology within the foam industry evolved, the firm turned to an expanded range of products for the military, commercial/industrial manufacturing, and retail store chains. Today the firm makes advertising specialties, engineered protective and decorative packaging foam, retail packaging foam and military specification cushioning.

The most popular product that All Foam sells to the military are tool box foam linings. Since the advent of Air Force requirement in the 1970's that mandated that all hand tools have a specific location or "home" within the larger tool storage cabinets, military personnel in all branches have sought a variety of fool proof methods to ensure that expensive and easily misplaced hand tools end up in the proper place. All Foam sells a two-layer foam pad that is custom cut for an individual hand tool drawer. The shape of each tool to be placed in the drawer is routed out of the top (black) layer of the foam. When the tool is out of the drawer, the lower (blue) layer of the foam is exposed thus identifying which tool is missing. This simple inventory control method assures the security of military equipment, is cost effective and promotes overall safety in an often chaotic workplace. "If a hand tool is missing within an aircraft hanger, that \$30 to \$40 million plane is grounded" states Mr. Steinlauf.

Marc Violante, the Director of the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at the College of Lake County encouraged Mr. and Mrs. Steinlauf to compete for military contracts. The College of Lake County's PTAC is supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the federal Defense Logistics Agency. Mr. Violante had worked with the Steinlauf's for several years and suggested they change their corporate structure to identify their business as a woman-owned firm. Once the paperwork was approved for this certification, Mr. Violante recommended that All Foam consider becoming a government supplier under the federal General Services Administration (GSA) general schedule or catalogue of products available to all government agencies.

The GSA Advantage! Web site is the federal government's vast on-line shopping and ordering system. All federal government agencies can quickly order supplies on-line. When placing orders, government buyers no longer need to seek further competition, gather requirements or make a separate determination of fair and reasonable pricing. Government buyers benefit by getting the best value and lowest overall cost alternative from suppliers listed on the GSA Advantage! Web site.

The paper work involved to sell to the government is formidable, and "Marc helped us through the process" said Mr. Steinhau. "The government solicitation for foam products alone was 111 pages long" said Mr. Steinlauf. "We found it boring and overly technical to read through. But Marc insisted that we read only a few pages each day, so that we could really understand what we were committing to if we became a government supplier." After mastering the technical language, the Steinlauf's decided to go ahead and submit the paperwork to become a federal contractor. With Mr. Violante's help and support, they received their first five-year GSA contract in April 2003. "Working with PTAC and Marc Violante is like "having an expert consultant on the payroll at no charge" states Steinlauf.

Since being listed on the GSA Advantage! schedule, All Foam's sales of tool box foam to military bases around the world has increased four fold. This thirty-person firm has annual revenues of just under \$5 million. "Our initial contract is for five years, and has three, five year renewal clauses subject to the government's approval, which amounts to a twenty year contract with the government. The government pays on time, allows you a profit, and mandates that the businesses put their GSA price list on their worldwide GSA Advantage! ordering web site. Mr. Steinlauf added "where in the USA can a small business get a better deal than this one? The web site is easy to navigate." "Our overall business has increased three times since we began selling on the GSA site" added Mr. Steinlauf. "In addition, we are now subcontractors to eleven prime contractors who service the military. Some of this is a result of being a Certified woman-owned firm, and on-going and other prime contractors come to us because we have our own GSA contract. They feel since we have been vetted by GSA, they feel comfortable that we can deliver for them."

In 1999 All Foam Products Co. received an award from Governor George Ryan as one of the Top 100 Small Business in the State.

Earlier this year Mr. Steinlauf started giving speeches to small businesses throughout the United States that produce products, explaining All Foam's success in selling to the government as a GSA scheduled contractor. Mr. Steinlauf believes, based on his experience, that mid to long term, selling to the government could make the difference between a business flourishing or a business struggling. Clearly All Foam has made a success of this venture and he encourages others to become involved with their local PTAC center.

The Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) of the College of Lake County is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the US Small Business Administration.