

# To Tender or not to Tender – that is the question!

The all-island public procurement market worth £10million/€12.5million represents a huge opportunity for SMEs to win steady business and is a market worth considering.

Whilst some SMEs are already tendering into this market, there are still opportunities for those companies who may not have tendered before either because they do not know where to begin or may have been unsuccessful on their first attempt and have not tendered since.

Grant Gilmore, Operations Manager at InterTradeIreland with responsibility for Public Tendering Supports answers some of the more frequently asked questions by SMEs in relation to tendering in general...

## **Should SMEs tender?**

It is becoming critical for SMEs to look at the tendering process to secure new business. It is not only public sector companies who issue tenders, as private businesses are realising that through the tender process, they can get better value for money and that it can become a means of cutting costs and resources. The all island public sector market is worth a staggering £10million/€12.5million and is still very much underexploited by SMEs.

## **Do SMEs stand a chance when it comes to tenders?**

There are significant opportunities for small organisations to break into this market but these can be improved with tendering support and guidance. Sometimes for SMEs the requirements can be off-putting- for example, minimum turn-over or insurance provisions. The process may feel like it's designed for someone else. However applying guidance such as Circular 10/14 allows Buyers to make tenders more accessible for SME's. The big change recently is the release of aggregated contracts – and SME's are still perfectly placed to tender by forming consortia as well as Tender calls being released in smaller lots.

## **Should I consider forming a consortia?**

Yes, particularly as a growing trend is for large high value tenders being issued so consortia building is a sound approach for companies to ensure that all elements of the required specification are addressed. Partnering with another company can be daunting but InterTradeIreland support services are in place to help SMEs across the island take advantage of the opportunities presented.

## **What sets a tender submission apart from others?**

A clear demonstration from the outset that your company understands the client needs. This involves an SME really and truly analysing its USP, ensuring it is clear to the reader and how the proposed solution will add value. Only submit a tender if you believe you can and should win it!

## **How much time should be dedicated to tenders?**

The entire process, from accessing and receiving the tender, pulling together costs and liaising with colleagues for relevant information to submitting the bid can average around three weeks. InterTradeIreland's advice is that SMEs should have one central control point for the tender. In many cases, this will be an internal bid manager but for smaller organisations, this may fall under the remit of senior person. We would also recommend that a tender should be submitted 24 hours prior to the time stated for submission. This demonstrates your competency as a company who respects deadlines and can deliver on time.

## **Even if unsuccessful, can we learn something from the process?**

Good companies seek feedback and build this into their approach for the next tender. Reviewing a tender document after a win or a loss is equally important and this can be done internally by the company or by independent mentors or consultants. Support is out there for SMEs, it just needs to be accessed.

#### **How can InterTradelreland help?**

Whether you are new to tendering and bidding for public sector contracts for the first time or very experienced in tendering and looking to refine and hone your skills further and keep up to date with the latest developments, InterTradelreland can help.

[www.intertradeireland/tendersuccessfully](http://www.intertradeireland/tendersuccessfully)

#### **About the Author**



Grant Gilmore has been with InterTradelreland since 2002 and is currently responsible for the management of InterTradelreland's suite of Public Tendering programmes including Go2Tender, Consortia Facilitation and Meet the Buyer events. These programmes are aimed at helping SMEs and micro-businesses to identify new market opportunities on the island of Ireland. Prior to this, Grant led the development of InterTradelreland's INNOVA programme, a large scale Collaborative R&D programme and developed a number of Business Networks in Software & Life Sciences.