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FAKE NEWS

It's an Oxymoron that's Dangerous in the Defence Industry

BY LINDA WOLSTENCROFT

Looking south of the border to a country that is admirable in so many ways, we see that fake news is receiving significant airtime and discussion. For those of us who honour accuracy and honesty, this term simply doesn't make sense. To us, fake news is pointless news. News should be real and it should be accurate. Otherwise, what's the point of it? What's the point of knowing something that isn't real? Fake News, therefore, is an oxymoron.

This concept is especially dangerous for the defence industry. There are always those who push the envelope and interpret facts in ways to suit their own business objectives. Indeed, there are different ways of looking at the same situation (or the same defence requirement). For example, an aircraft maintenance log can be manual or automated; both options achieve the same objective but get there through different means. However, falsifying information puts equipment and lives at risk. Thus, the concept of fake news has no place in technical requirements.

When purchasing defence products and services, savvy customers are thorough and comprehensive in setting their requirements. They conduct due diligence by reviewing the market and then requesting proposals that clearly show how they expect their requirements to be met.

In response, when selling and marketing defence products and services, successful companies will not engage in fake news but rather will prepare themselves to execute a campaign that results in a sale and a contract.

First, they will examine their product or service offering and make sure it meets the customer requirement. If not, they will make

changes. And if they are aware that the customer requirement can be improved, they will let the customer know that.

Second, they will use a rigorous business development process to develop their selling strategy. Without this, it doesn't matter how good the product or service is - the sale simply won't happen. These companies will examine the characteristics of the customer, the competition, the evaluation criteria, the leanings of the stakeholders, the differentiators of their offer, the price to win and the risk elements. They will also expertly design the proposal and any other customer submissions. To execute this process they will put their "A" team on it, using outside help where gaps exist.

“In a major procurement, there are many moving parts. . . .”

Third, they will continuously monitor the customer's and competitors' actions, and continuously evaluate risk. In a major procurement, there are many moving parts and they are all moving very quickly, particularly if there are several contenders. As the procurement advances, more new issues require resolution that when resolved will continue to refine the solution offered.

SELLING AN EMPTY PROMISE

Companies who aren't so successful will cut corners and try to sell an empty promise. Here is where we run into fake news in the defence business, and here is where some companies have the opportunity to improve:

First, the product or service being offered isn't entirely suitable for the customer's

requirements, but is considered "close enough," and the plan is to "fix it after we win." These companies may even go so far as to believe that although the requirements are firmly set out, they will have the opportunity to convince the customer to change them after contract award. Or, even more unashamedly, expect the customer to pay them the additional cost to change their substandard offering.

Second, these companies will not properly invest in a robust business development process, thus leading to a poor proposal. Often, these companies prepare a skewed proposal that doesn't entirely meet what is asked for, but rather what is oriented to their own advantage. For example, if the product or service doesn't meet the requirements, but they can offer an excellent price, the proposal will focus on price rather than the solution offered.

The hope here is that once the customer sees the price, they will change what they have asked for. These companies may also pay less diligence than required to contract and industrial benefits requirements - again believing that after the contract is awarded they can convince the customer to change these to their benefit.

Third, as the procurement process unfolds, these companies stubbornly stick with their approach. Given the choice to invest in building a better solution or attempt to change the requirement or process, they will do the latter. They are also prone to challenge and complain when the award goes to a superior contender.

Which are you - the *Fake News* company or the *Real News* company? In defence marketing, *Fake News* doesn't work. Accuracy, reality and integrity is what matters most.

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