

ALBERTA SMALL BUSINESS FINDS GOVERNMENT MARKET NICHE

When a southeastern Alberta Chamber of Commerce invited businesses to an information session with government and economic development officials, the focus was on contract opportunities with the military.

Although Brooks Industrial Metals did not quite follow that script, there was a happy ending for the Alberta-based small business.

Oskar Bruk, of Brooks Industrial Metals, says that prior to the info session, he had no idea how to explore business opportunities with government. "Smaller businesses don't generally have the resources to wade through complex forms and processes," says Jerry Haley, Director of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises for the western region. "We're making the system much more accessible and we continue to look at how it can be improved."

At the info session, Fran Weekes, a colleague of Mr. Haley's, took the audience step-by-step through the bidding process. Although the information was available online, Mr. Bruk said that it was much better to review it live with an expert. He really appreciated the human touch. And the presentation inspired him to take a close look at MERX.

As it turned out, the company bid on something unrelated to the military – supplying square metal tubing to the Drumheller branch of CORCAN. This employment skills program, offered by Correctional Services Canada, sees inmates produce real goods and services for the marketplace. With about 40 employees, Brooks Industrial Metals wasn't the biggest of the 13 companies that downloaded bid information on this opportunity, but they did come out on top. The company has qualified to sell up to \$105K of tubing that CORCAN uses in the manufacturing of window security bars.

When Brooks Industrial Materials shifted its focus from the military to correctional services, it found an equally good business opportunity – same government, different uniform. Having succeeded on his company's very first bid, Mr. Bruk is now checking MERX daily. The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises has recognized that small business doesn't have time to weed through mountains of paper. So it has been rethinking government purchasing from a small business point of view and making changes so that smaller, innovative and flexible suppliers can play a greater role.

"We encourage small and medium enterprises to consider the Government of Canada as a potential market", concluded Mr. Haley.