

# VENTURES

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR SMALL, MINORITY- AND WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

## Designing and Developing Your Strategic Direction

By Jeff Parks and Ellen Gray, Performance Breakthroughs, Inc.

*Second in a four-part series.*

**S**pecifying the strategic direction for your business includes your vision (picture of success for three to five years ahead), mission (why you exist) and strategies (levers for accomplishing the vision). It also contains clearly articulated core values that describe your behavioral and social norms that become institutionalized through their use in the recruitment, screening, hiring, orientation and performance management systems.

Early in our firm's history, we were "selling" our knowledge at a lunch meeting when our contact abruptly stopped us and said, "That's nice, but what can I buy from you?" It was a transformational moment that left us asking:

- What do you bring to the table (knowledge, skills, contacts, etc)?
- What does your potential customer need and do they realize/believe it?
- What are they willing to pay for?

Asking yourself these questions will help develop the beginning stages of your strategic directions and help you put your energy into developing and marketing your products and services.

A clear strategic direction helps focus your budget and workforce while facilitating better management. People will feel connected and energized, and performance expectations will drive higher productivity and increased delegation, as well as leverage employee commitment. Finally, your organization's measurement systems can only track progress and accomplishment of your strategy effectively when they are articulated in specific, measurable terms.

How does one define this strategic direction? We believe in correcting or eliminating organizational weaknesses as well as identifying breakthrough opportunities to evaluate and pursue. Create a group of seven to 10 people that provide representation for all key voices and have the group define the organizational weaknesses. The first formal step of the process is to define the month and year for the end point of

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your vision. We strongly believe that without specificity here, you will struggle with a lack of urgency and accountability.

Then, conduct an environmental scan, which defines your best estimation of the landscape for your industry at your chosen vision timeframe. Wayne Gretzky once said, "I'm a winner, not because I skate to where the puck is, but because I skate to where the puck is going to be." Winning organizations do the same. The environmental scan looks at your landscape with categories such as demographics, competition and workforce. We have found this step to be a difficult, yet, rewarding part of the planning process for most groups.

A fun step in the process is defining the organizational strengths and celebrating those that are special or particularly important in going forward. These organizational strengths are then projected into the environmental scan to come up with breakthrough opportunities. It is critical that this be "out of the box" thinking. These sessions are probably the only time in the year that's set aside for dreaming. Think beyond the current constraints toward something bold and energizing. Later, you will test the feasibility and narrow the list to the two to three ideas that deserve more research and testing.

The packaging of the vision is most important. You will need to communicate properly to have it understood, owned and acted upon. We like to categorize the vision under headings that start with the four perspectives of the balanced scorecard (customers, financial, internal processes, organizational capacity), but morph into those that work for you. Underneath those headlines, write commitments in a visible and outcome-based manner and in the "we have achieved" past-tense.

Your vision is the "what" with the strategic plan being the "how." With clarity and specificity on the vision, you can now define the building block steps, timelines, and responsibilities for executing your vision. Implementing and sustaining the vision to become part of daily life requires a serious commitment.

The potential results of the high performance organization framework described at the end of last quarter's article are a good starting point to assess your vision and what it will bring you. Your goals of organizational excellence and business success will be advanced if your strategic direction is clearly defined and understood. ■

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### ENTREPRENEURSHIP 101 2012 WORKSHOP DATES

The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) released the 2012 schedule for the Entrepreneurship 101—Starting a Business in Fairfax County workshops: January 10, February 7, March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5, September 11, October 2 and November 6. Workshops are generally held on the first Tuesday of each month. There is no charge, but pre-registration is required. For more information or to register, visit [www.fairfaxcountyeda.org/starting-business-seminar](http://www.fairfaxcountyeda.org/starting-business-seminar).

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# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

## Public Relations: the Five “Ws” for a Positive Reputation

By Marion C. Myers, Myers Public Relations, LLC

*First in a three-part series.*

I can't tell you how often I've been asked, "What is PR? What is it that you do exactly?" I guess you could say that public relations (PR) helps you manage your reputation—what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Whether you are marketing a product, a service, an organization or yourself, a positive reputation is a key component for success.

### What is PR?

Effective PR is a thoughtfully planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain a positive reputation with your customers, clients, employees, investors and/or the general public. PR will allow you to:

- Enhance or correct your reputation both inside and outside of your organization
- Build support for your product, your project or your cause
- Create customer loyalty and strengthen employee retention
- Public relations is flexible, creative and the most responsive component of marketing. But be aware that flexible does not translate to haphazard, creative to untrained, or responsive to non-proactive.

It takes a plan.

**Establishing and administering an effective PR campaign is not something done quickly or without considerable thought and planning. But, the results will be well worth it!**

### Where do you start?

Many tools are employed in a PR campaign, but the best place to start is with a good, hard look inside your own organization. Take an inventory of what you are doing well and, more importantly, where you are coming up short. Who is your competition, and where are your opportunities?

An effective tool for this is a SWOT—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats—analysis. This will help you form the foundation for your PR campaign.

Next, identify where you want to be in a year or two years. What are your specific goals and what are the steps needed to reach them? This should be laid out in an action plan—month by month with specific activities and deadlines. This will provide you with a timeline to follow and help you stay on track.

### Who is going to develop and execute this PR campaign?

You may choose to go it alone, work cooperatively with a professional or turn it over entirely to a PR firm. There are advantages to having a professional get you started and lay out the groundwork for you. A professional can help you work through the analysis and planning process and bring to light issues that you may be too close to recognize. For instance:

- A Web site facelift
- Better internal communication
- More consistent client outreach
- Message development
- Community outreach
- Perhaps an awards strategy or a corporate philanthropy plan

You may be advised to add speaking opportunities, beef up your media outreach, create a crisis communications plan and perhaps initiate or integrate a social media plan. These will become the bones of your long-range strategic plan. You can choose to execute on your own or move forward cooperatively with a professional at that point.

### Whom should you rely on?

If you work with a PR professional, it's a real advantage to work with someone local, who is well ingrained and respected in your community. There is a level of access they can provide with which out-of-town firms can't

compete. A well-connected professional has established relationships with the media, and can provide high-level influence introductions. An assignment editor is much more likely to respond to someone they know and trust to bring them a good story.

Local community leaders and elected officials are more inclined to listen to and support an initiative when presented by an active member of their own community. After all, it's all about relationships.

### What's the bottom line?

Establishing and administering an effective PR campaign is not something done quickly or without considerable thought and planning. But, the results will be well worth it! The time and effort invested in enhancing your reputation will have a direct and positive impact on your bottom line. Consumers are naturally inclined to work with/buy from/listen to people they know, respect and trust.

The advantages of using a PR professional versus "do it yourself" are the time saved and the results achieved. I can't tell you how often we've been called in to "rescue" a PR effort that was being led by a busy CEO or had been tacked onto someone else's existing job description. It's never a first priority, rarely planned out in advance and the results reflect the lack of attention.

A good PR professional will provide the structure, the creative thinking and the discipline necessary to stay on track and make sure what's being done is working. Reputations are not built overnight, and they certainly don't build themselves!

Future articles will discuss integrating social and traditional media for an effective PR campaign and corporate philanthropy and PR. ■

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The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) promotes Fairfax County, Virginia, USA, as a world-class center of commerce and trade and the technology hub of the east coast. The FCEDA assists businesses interested in locating, relocating or expanding their commercial office or industrial operations in Fairfax County. Services are available on a confidential, no-cost basis. As an independent authority created under state law, the FCEDA operates under the direction of seven Commissioners appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Its activities are funded by Fairfax County.

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### UPDATED FAIRFAX COUNTY PROFILE BOOKLET PUBLISHED

The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) has released a newly updated edition of its Fairfax County Profile booklet, which gives a general overview of Fairfax County and includes sections about the business community, technology industry, demographics, quality of life and transportation. Visit the FCEDA Web site at [www.fairfaxcountyeda.org/publications](http://www.fairfaxcountyeda.org/publications) to download a PDF of the booklet or to order a printed copy.



## The Importance of Protecting Confidential Business Information

By Brian Darville, Brocadiant IP PLLC

*Second in a two-part series.*

It is critical that every business establish a plan for the protection of confidential business information including all company trade secrets. A trade secret protection plan ensures that a business is mindful of its proprietary, confidential information, and that it places itself in the best position to redress anticompetitive behavior involving misappropriation of its valuable trade secrets.

A trade secret protection plan should include the following elements:

### Employee Orientation

From the beginning of the employment relationship, proprietary information should be protected. An employee orientation should:

- Inform each employee of company policies relating to use of business equipment, monitoring, confidentiality, and appropriate employee behavior concerning proprietary information.
- Require written acknowledgement of an agreement to the company's confidentiality policy

### Employee Handbook

- Have employees acknowledge review of the employee handbook to give notice of corporate trade secrets.
- Include preventative trade secret guidelines, such as limiting trade secrets to employees who need access for employment purposes.

### Employment Contracts

Where employment contracts are used, they should include:

- Covenants not to compete and non-disclosure agreement
- A clause requiring employees to return all company property upon separation.
- A clause requiring the employee to assign to the employer any trade secrets that were created by the employee in the course of employment.
- An arbitration clause should be considered to require the employer and employee to waive their right to trial and to submit any disputes to binding arbitration. However, the employer should preserve its right to seek injunctive relief in court for misappropriation of trade secrets.

### Proprietary Information Agreement

A Proprietary Information Agreement, which can be added in an employment contract, should include:

- An acknowledgement that confidential or proprietary information (defined clearly in the agreement) belongs to the employer
- A commitment that the employee will not use, disclose, or assist in the use or disclosure of such confidential information without the employer's express authorization
- An assignment of rights, patents, inventions, and other intellectual property created within the scope of employment to the employer
- A promise to disclose all other discoveries and developments to the employer
- An acknowledgement that the employer is entitled to injunctive relief

### Day-to-day operations

Confidentiality procedures should be apparent in the day-to-day operations of the business. These procedures should include:

- Reminding employees to maintain confidentiality at or outside of work
- Restricting visitor access to sales and administrative areas
- Keeping customer information in locked files
- Marking proprietary information confidential
- Copy-protecting and using embedded codes to trace proprietary information
- Requiring confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements before sharing proprietary information with third parties

### Exit Interviews

For each departing employee an exit interview should be conducted and should:

- Explain the ongoing legal requirement of maintaining confidentiality.
- Require return of all company documents, including proprietary information.
- Review any employment or proprietary information agreement signed by and binding upon the employee. ■

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## FYI . . .

**... Looking for a business event or class in Fairfax County?** The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority produces a small business calendar of events designed especially for small, minority or women-owned businesses. Local chambers of commerce and business organizations also host events open to members and non-members. The online calendar of events is online at [www.fairfaxcountyleda.org/small-business-datebook](http://www.fairfaxcountyleda.org/small-business-datebook). If you would like to submit a business-related event, please contact the FCEDA at 703-790-0600.

**... The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) provides business-counseling services through an arrangement with SCORE,** Counselors to America's Small Business. SCORE is a U.S. Small Business Administration initiative dedicated to entrepreneur education and the formation, growth and success of small business nationwide. More than 11,200 volunteer counselors provide individual mentoring and business workshops for aspiring entrepreneurs and small

business owners. A SCORE counselor is available every Wednesday at FCEDA headquarters in Tysons Corner, Virginia, by appointment only. Sessions are one hour in length. To schedule an appointment, contact the FCEDA at 703-790-0600.

**... The National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) annual conference** is scheduled for October 30-November 2, 2011, at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta. The conference theme is "Raising the Bar through Sustainable Strategies." NMSDC focuses on providing a direct link between corporate America and minority-owned businesses with the primary objective of increasing procurement and business opportunities for minority businesses of all sizes. For more information or to register for the conference, visit [www.nmsdcus.org](http://www.nmsdcus.org).

**... The Women's Business Center of Northern Virginia will host the 11th Annual Women Entrepreneurs' Expo** on October 28 at the Waterford Conference Center in Springfield, Va. The 2011 conference, "Seize the Opportunity," will offer workshops focused on various aspects of business opportunities and a keynote address by Mary Grate-Pyos, a local entrepreneur and author. The Women's Business Center

of Northern Virginia is a program of the Community Business Partnership. For more information, visit [www.cbponline.org](http://www.cbponline.org).

**... The Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprise (DMBE)** is the state agency dedicated to enhancing the participation of small, women- and minority-owned businesses in Virginia's procurement opportunities. DMBE is responsible for the administration of two certification programs: the Small, Women- and Minority-owned Businesses (SWaM) Procurement Initiative and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program. For more information, visit [www.dmbv.virginia.gov](http://www.dmbv.virginia.gov).

**... The Fairfax County Grants Research and Training Center (GRTC)** is a community resource for nonprofit organizations, students, artists and other individuals seeking foundation grant opportunities. Supported through a partnership between the Fairfax County Public Libraries and the Fairfax County Office of Public Private Partnerships, the center provides access to databases that identify grant opportunities, as well as workshops and resources on how to use Foundation Center tools and apply for grants. For more information, visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/research/grantsresearch.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/research/grantsresearch.htm) or call 703-324-8343. ■

## FCEDA Procurement Academy Charting a Course to Successful Government Contracting

By Karen Smaw, Fairfax County Economic Development Authority

**M**ore than 700 business owners made business accelerator TeqCorner a collective classroom from September 2010-June 2011 as they attended the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority's (FCEDA) 10-part Procurement Academy workshop series.

The objective of the series was to assist entrepreneurs engaged in government contracting, as well as those seeking to enter the contracting arena, in gaining a better understanding of the procurement process and devise strategies for building capacity. A diverse group of presenters spoke on topics that included: strengthening corporate infrastructure; real estate leasing, logistics and location; legal aspects of government contracting; federal mentor protégé programs; capture planning and uncovering contract opportunities; effective communication and marketing strategies of federal procurement landscape; small business legislative update; business

resources and planning for growth; and successful strategies for government contracting.

The inaugural workshop, moderated by FCEDA President and CEO Gerald L. Gordon, Ph.D., featured keynote presentations by three CEOs from companies headquartered in Fairfax County: Dr. Joseph Fergus, founder and CEO, Communication Technologies (COMTek), Tony Jimenez, president and CEO, Micro-Tech, LLC and Lani Hay, president and CEO, Lanmark Technology, Inc. The workshop series concluded with a keynote address by Bridget Bean, District Director, U.S. Small Business Administration, Washington Metropolitan District Office.

Attendees were able to network with each other and with presenters, which provided many opportunities to establish strategic alliances and joint ventures. Samir Sankaran, director of Federal Operations and Energy of Chantilly-based Ampcus, Inc., said, "The Procurement Academy gave us a different perspective on how to create

a collaborative team." As a direct result of participating in Procurement Academy, Ampcus established a contractor teaming agreement with another company that also participated in the workshop series.

The FCEDA presented the workshop series in collaboration with the Community Business Partnership, the Fairfax County Department of Purchasing & Supply Management Agency – Supplier Diversity Program, the Fairfax County Small Business Commission, George Mason University's Procurement Technical Assistance Program, the Northern Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce, Teqcorner, Veterans in Business, the Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Women's Business Center of Northern Virginia. ■

For more information about Procurement Academy and upcoming workshops, visit [www.fairfaxcountyeda.org](http://www.fairfaxcountyeda.org).

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