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STRATEGIES FOR SMALL COMPANIES TO WIN PUBLIC WORKS TENDERS IN BRAZIL

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Abstract: This article analyzes the main strategies that enable small companies to succeed in bidding processes in Brazil. It addresses legal, technical and operational aspects, based on practical experience of executing public contracts in various spheres, including works for the Army, city halls, hospitals, schools and federal institutions. The aim is to provide an accessible and objective overview of how to structure competitive bids, overcome bureaucratic barriers and ensure the efficient execution of contracts, promoting inclusion and business development in the public sector.

Keywords: bidding, small businesses, public contracts, public works, competition

UNDERSTANDING THE BIDDING ENVIRONMENT IN BRAZIL

The public bidding environment in Brazil is one of the largest and most structured contracting systems in the world. Every year, it generates hundreds of billions of reais in government purchases, ranging from small local acquisitions to large-scale contracts for infrastructure and strategic services. The legislation that regulates this system, now under the aegis of Law No. 14.133/2021, also known as the New Bidding and Contracts Law, has the central objectives of guaranteeing equality between participants, ensuring transparency, selecting the most advantageous proposal for the Public Administration and promoting sustainable national development.

This new legislation replaces previous laws, such as 8.666/93, 10.520/02 and the Differentiated Contracting Regime (RDC), and seeks to modernize and simplify procedures, while strengthening control and accountability mechanisms. One of the great advances brought about by the new law is the appreciation of prior planning, the digitalization of bidding processes and the professionalization of the public agents involved, creating a more predictable environment that is less vulnerable to

ambiguous interpretations.

For small businesses, a thorough understanding of this environment is essential. Despite the common perception that tenders favor big players, reality shows that there are several windows of opportunity. Public bodies at all levels (municipal, state and federal) contract routine services and products, such as building maintenance, school renovations, supply of materials, emergency works, signage, engineering services, among other activities that small companies are able to carry out.

However, entering this market requires technical preparation, legal compliance and knowledge of market practices. This includes understanding the types of tenders (such as competitive bidding, public tenders, competitive dialog and auctions), the judging criteria (lowest price, best technique, technique and price), the qualification requirements (tax, labor, technical and economic-financial qualifications), as well as the deadlines and contractual responsibilities.

Another relevant point is the diversity of digital public procurement platforms. The Federal Government mostly uses the Compras.gov.br system (formerly ComprasNet), but each state and municipality can have its own systems. These portals are updated daily with opportunities for suppliers of all sizes. Knowing how to navigate these systems and set up automatic bid alerts is a strategic differentiator.

The bidding environment is challenging, but also highly democratic. Companies that understand its dynamics and position themselves seriously and consistently gain ground and build a reputation. The process doesn't end with winning the tender, it extends through good execution, the generation of technical capacity certificates and the building of a solid image as a reliable provider to the public sector.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT LAWS

Public procurement represents one of the biggest windows of opportunity for small businesses in Brazil. Brazilian legislation has evolved significantly to allow micro-enterprises (ME) and small businesses (EPP) not only to participate, but also to have real conditions to win public tenders, including in direct competition with larger companies.

Complementary Law 123/2006, known as the National Statute for Micro and Small Businesses, was the starting point for this transformation. It created instruments that guarantee differentiated and favored treatment for MSEs in public contracts. This statute was reaffirmed and reinforced by Law No. 14.133/2021 (New Bidding Law), which incorporated specific provisions aimed at the competitive inclusion of small businesses in government procurement processes.

- The main legal mechanisms to encourage MSEs include:
- Reservation of exclusive lots: public bodies can (and should) allocate certain items or services exclusively to micro and small companies, especially when the value of the contract is up to R\$80,000 per item. This eliminates direct competition with large companies in these cases.
- Fictitious tie: if an MSE submits a bid that is up to 10% higher than that of the best-placed company (or up to 5% in a public auction), it will have the right to cover the winning bid and take the lead in the dispute, provided it meets the qualification requirements.
- Subcontracting or consortium contracts: the requirement that large winning companies subcontract part of the services to MSEs is allowed, which

generates indirect inclusion and fosters the technical specialization of small businesses.

- Preference for regional contracting: whenever possible, public bodies should favor local or regional companies, as long as their prices are compatible with the market. This stimulates local economic development.

These instruments are not just theoretical devices: in practice, thousands of tenders are won every day by small businesses all over Brazil, supplying everything from food for schools to engineering services, building renovations, system maintenance, urban signage, cleaning, painting, security and much more.

What's more, the form of tendering itself has come to favor simplicity and efficiency. Electronic tendering, now the most common method, is accessible, fast and has much lower operating costs. Well-organized companies are able to participate in several tenders a week, remotely, through platforms such as Compras.gov.br.

It is also important to note that the legislation requires full compliance with legal and tax obligations, which makes the environment fairer for serious companies committed to formality and quality.

Finally, encouraging small businesses to enter public procurement is not just a legal guideline, it is a public policy strategy to foster national development, strengthen local economies and promote economic justice. The small business owner who understands these opportunities, prepares their structure and acts with planning can turn working with the public sector into a recurring and solid source of income, with regular contracts, financial predictability and sustainable business growth.

DOCUMENTATION AND TAX COMPLIANCE

The basis for any participation in public tenders is the company's documentary and tax compliance. Regardless of the technical quality of the proposal or the competitiveness of the price submitted, the absence or irregularity of a single document can lead to immediate disqualification. For this reason, document preparation is not just a stage in the process, it is the foundation of all action in the public sector.

Law 14.133/2021 establishes four main areas of qualification for participating companies: legal, technical, tax and labor, and economic and financial. Each requires a specific set of documents that must be valid and up-to-date at the time of the tender.

LEGAL QUALIFICATION

The legal qualification proves the legal existence of the company. The main documents are:

- Articles of association or consolidated statutes, with amendments;
- Active CNPJ card;
- Business registration with the Board of Trade;
- Power of attorney or act appointing a legal representative, if applicable.

TAX AND LABOR COMPLIANCE

Tax compliance is one of the biggest bottlenecks for disorganized companies. However, companies that keep their accounts up to date, accompanied by an accountant, are able to gather the documents easily. The main ones are:

- Joint certificate from the Federal Revenue Service and the Attorney General's Office (federal taxes);
- State certificate for taxes on operations relating to the movement of goods

(ICMS) or ISS, depending on the industry;

- Municipal securities tax certificate;
- FGTS Certificate of Good Standing (CRF);
- Negative Labor Debt Certificate (CNDT);
- Certificate of absence of bankruptcy or judicial reorganization.

All these certificates are currently issued online, but have a limited validity (usually 30 to 180 days). Keeping track of deadlines and renewals is essential to avoid simple and compromising mistakes.

3.3 Economic and Financial Qualification

Although not required for small contracts, this stage gains importance as public contracts become more robust. Commonly requested documents include:

- Balance sheet and accounting statements for the last financial year, signed by a qualified accountant;
- Liquidity, solvency and debt capacity ratios;
- Negative certificate of bankruptcy or receivership.

For micro and small companies, the legislation allows for differentiated treatment, even dispensing with some of these requirements in certain calls for tenders, as long as they can prove they qualify as ME or EPP.

REGISTRATION AND STRATEGIC ORGANIZATION

A fundamental practice is to keep all documents digitally organized, clearly named (e.g. "Certidão_Federal_2025_05.pdf") and gathered in a specific folder. In addition, it is strongly recommended to register the company with SICAF (Sistema de Cadastramento Unificado de Fornecedores - Unified Supplier

Registration System), which makes it easier to qualify with federal agencies and simplifies sending documents in electronic tenders.

Another key point is having an e-CNPJ digital certificate, which allows you to participate in electronic tenders and sign documents with legal validity.

Maintaining fiscal and documentary regularity is a routine task for any company that wants to work with the public sector on a recurring and professional basis. Small companies that adopt good accounting and legal practices reap the rewards when it comes to bidding for tenders: they gain agility, the trust of the contractor and eliminate unnecessary risks.

IMPORTANCE OF SICAF AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

With the modernization of public tenders in Brazil, the use of digital platforms has become not just a facility, but a requirement. The electronic environment brings more transparency, accessibility and agility to government procurement processes, and has become one of the main gateways for micro and small companies wishing to operate in the public sector.

At the center of this ecosystem is SICAF - the Unified Supplier Registration System, administered by the Federal Government. SICAF functions as an electronic database that gathers all the documentation needed to qualify for tenders. It allows companies to bid for tenders more quickly, without having to submit the same documents over and over again for each new process.

WHAT SICAF IS AND HOW IT WORKS

SICAF is divided into five levels, and each level corresponds to a type of information:

1. Level I - Accreditation: Basic information on the company and legal representatives;

2. Level II - Legal Qualification;
3. Level III - Tax and Labor Compliance;
4. Level IV - Technical Qualification;
5. Level V - Economic and Financial Qualification.

The levels can be completed gradually, according to the type of tender the company wishes to take part in. Once the documents have been analyzed and approved by the enabling bodies, the company can be considered automatically qualified for several tenders, without having to resubmit all the files.

What's more, the system is free, completely digital and accepted by Federal Public Administration bodies, which broadens the scope of opportunities.

COMPRAS.GOV.BR - THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S MAIN PLATFORM

The Compras.gov.br portal (formerly ComprasNet) is the main tool for publishing public notices, bidding notices, contracts and access to the Federal Government's electronic auctions. There, registered companies can:

- Monitor new opportunities by area of activity;
- Access draft notices and attached documents;
- Send electronic proposals;
- Participate in real-time bidding in auctions;
- Follow up on appeals, qualifications and awards.

The portal's interface also offers segmented search tools, automatic alerts, access to previous contracts and transparency in tender results.

OTHER RELEVANT DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In addition to the federal system, there are state and municipal platforms that run their own tenders and publications. Examples include:

- BEC/SP - Bolsa Eletrônica de Compras do Governo de São Paulo;
- Licitações-e - Banco do Brasil's system used by several municipalities;
- Compras Públicas BR - Used by city halls and inter-municipal consortia.

Many of these platforms allow free registration and only require digital certification (e-CNPJ) to electronically sign documents and participate in processes.

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Companies that master these tools gain time, scope and competitiveness. In addition, the efficient use of these platforms makes it possible to:

- Participate in tenders anywhere in the country;
- Monitor competitors and study market strategies;
- Automate the search for tenders that match your area of activity;
- Reduce costs with travel and physical delivery of documentation.

Small companies that invest in SICAF registration, digital certification and familiarization with digital platforms have access to a universe of opportunities. Mastering these tools is now an essential condition for competing in a modern, agile and secure way in the public sector.

PRICING AND PROPOSAL PLANNING

One of a company's main competitive advantages in public tenders is its ability to put together solid, well-priced and strategically planned proposals. Unlike the private market, where there is room for informal negotiation, the public sector demands transparency, technical justification and budgetary rigor. A miscalculation can mean losing the tender, losses during execution or, even worse, termination of the contract.

UNDERSTANDING THE JUDGING CRITERIA

The New Bidding Law (Law 14.133/2021) presents different criteria for judging bids, such as lowest price, highest discount, technique and price, best technique or highest return. However, the most common criterion is the lowest price, especially in electronic auctions. For this reason, it is common for companies to try to reduce their prices to the minimum in order to win - but this practice can be dangerous if it is not backed up by good planning.

HOW TO STRUCTURE A TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL PROPOSAL

The first step is to read the entire invitation to tender. Many companies are disqualified not because of price problems, but because they don't meet the technical requirements, formats, deadlines or mandatory documents.

Then it's time to put together the budget spreadsheet with the following items:

- Direct costs: materials, labor, equipment, transport, inputs;
- Indirect costs: administrative, technical support, contract management, training;

- Social and tax charges: INSS, FGTS, ISS, IRPJ, CSLL, PIS, COFINS (according to tax regime);
- Compatible profit margin: a minimum profit is necessary to guarantee financial health and safety in execution;
- Reserves for unforeseen events: public contracts, especially works contracts, can change or require operational adjustments.

Organized companies use standardized spreadsheet models, such as those used by SINAPI (National System for Researching Construction Costs and Indices), or create their own internal models validated by engineers, accountants or specialist consultants.

ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL BALANCE

It is important that the amount presented is not considered “unfeasible” (i.e. so low as to indicate that it is unfeasible to execute). Public bodies may ask for price justification and proof of technical feasibility. If the price is too low without plausible justification, the bid may be disqualified.

On the other hand, bids that are too high drastically reduce the chance of winning - especially in public tenders, where the decisive factor is the final price. The balance lies in presenting a competitive price, but one that allows the contract to be carried out responsibly, with quality and a safe operating margin.

PARTICIPATION STRATEGY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Participating in calls for tenders outside the company’s specialty or without the minimum necessary structure can generate more risk than return. For this reason, planning should include:

- Studying the history of prices charged;
- Checking the location, deadline and delivery requirements;

- Calculation of the total cost per stage of execution;
- Analysis of operational and legal risks;
- Definition of a safe and sustainable margin.

Many companies make the mistake of considering only the gross value of the contract, without simulating scenarios of variable costs, payment delays or changes in scope.

A well-planned proposal is a direct reflection of the company’s business maturity and ability to execute. Small businesses that adopt structured pricing practices are able to compete with large suppliers on an equal footing, with confidence and professionalism.

TECHNICAL EXECUTION AND POST-CONTRACT

Winning a tender is only the first step. The real challenge, and also the main opportunity to consolidate the company’s reputation, lies in the technical execution of the contract and the post-contract relationship. This is when the company shows its real capacity, its commitment to quality and its professional attitude towards the public sector.

Contract execution requires operational planning, meeting deadlines, technical quality, team management, communication with the contract supervisor and strict cost control. Many companies stand out in their bids, but fail to deliver and this leads to consequences such as fines, warnings, suspension from contracting with the public authorities or even contract termination.

TECHNICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND QUALITY EXECUTION

For contracts involving works, renovations or specialized technical services, it is mandatory to appoint a legally qualified technical manager, registered with a professional council (such as CREA). This professional signs the ART (Annotation of Technical Respon-

sibility) and is technically responsible for the execution of the contract.

In addition, the company must guarantee

- Execution in accordance with the terms of the contract, basic project or budget spreadsheet;
- Use of materials in accordance with the tender specifications;
- Qualified and trained staff;
- Compliance with occupational safety and environmental protection standards;
- Continuous monitoring of the stages with photographic records and technical reports, when required.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONTRACT SUPERVISOR

Every public contract has a public servant designated as the inspector, whose role is to monitor, record and validate the execution of the contract. Maintaining a transparent, respectful and collaborative relationship with this inspector is one of the pillars for the smooth running of the work or service.

Companies that update the inspector frequently, demonstrate the physical and financial progress of the execution, notify any complications in advance and comply with what has been agreed earn respect and are usually invited to future contracts or amendments.

REQUESTING TECHNICAL CAPACITY CERTIFICATES

At the end of the contract, it is essential to request a certificate of technical capacity. This document, issued by the contracting body, confirms that the company has carried out the work as required, on time, with quality and without any outstanding issues. It is essential to qualify for future contracts of greater value or complexity.

Companies that collect good certificates build up a solid track record, which serves as a reference for new contracts, even with different agencies. It's a way of accumulating proven credibility, which is extremely valuable in a highly competitive market.

POST-CONTRACT: ACCOUNTABILITY AND CLOSURE

After the final handover, the company must submit the closing documentation, which includes:

- Invoices issued;
- Approved measurements (where applicable);
- Up-to-date certificates;
- Final (or provisional, where applicable) acceptance certificate;
- Technical reports, user manuals, guarantees and other items provided for in the contract.

This process must be treated with the same care and organization as the previous stages, as any failure at this stage can delay payments or compromise the release of funds.

Quality technical execution, combined with good contract management, is what turns a winning company into a respected and recommended company. In the public sector, well-executed contracts are the passport to new opportunities and sustainable business growth.

PRACTICAL SUCCESS STORIES

The successful participation of small companies in public tenders is not a theoretical hypothesis, it is a reality practiced by entrepreneurs who qualify, structure their processes and deliver responsibly. Below, I present real examples of contracts executed by my company, which prove the viability, scope and importance of small businesses working in the public sector.

MILITARY PROJECT: REFURBISHMENT OF THE 12TH INFANTRY BATTALION (12º BI) COURT

In São João del-Rei (MG), the company was contracted to completely renovate the sports court of the Army's 12th Infantry Battalion. The work involved restoring the structure, painting the floor with sports markings, finishing the bleachers and peripheral drainage. The project required execution within military technical standards, strict supervision and rigid control of the timetable. The contract was completed with 100% approval and a technical certificate issued by the Brazilian Army.

SESC PINHEIROS (SP) - PARKING LOT RENOVATION AND PAINTING

In one of the busiest units in the SESC network, the parking lot was completely renovated, with horizontal signage painted, joints corrected and high resistance coatings applied. The work was carried out while the areas were in operation, requiring logistical planning and non-intrusive techniques. The work was praised by the local management team and reinforced the company's portfolio of public works with large circulation.

EXTREMA CITY HALL (MG): MULTIPLE PUBLIC EXECUTIONS

Several interventions were carried out for the municipal administration of Extrema, including:

- ainting the Jair Aparecido Municipal Hospital (façade and interiors);
- Replacing the roof of the town hall (metal structure and sandwich tiles);
- Refurbishment of the local police station (adaptation of rooms, painting and installations);

- Work on schools and public squares, with structural repairs, cladding and waterproofing.

These works demonstrated the company's ability to work on different fronts with planning, skilled labor and compliance with technical and contractual standards.

UNIFEI - FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF ITAJUBÁ (MG)

Under a contract with the Federal University of Itajubá, seven institutional buildings were renovated and painted, including facades, courts, metal frames and exposed architectural elements. The intervention required the application of technical products (such as waterproofing and elastomeric paints), as well as differentiated logistics in an active university environment.

SÃO BERNARDO DO CAMPO CITY HALL SPORTS HALLS (SP)

Revitalization work was carried out on seven municipal gyms, including sanding, painting of courts, sports demarcation, restoration of bleachers and facades. Deliveries were made in stages, respecting school deadlines and planned sporting events.

These contracts illustrate how a small company, with a lean but professional structure, can carry out work of high technical complexity, institutional relevance and social impact, with full contractual compliance and the generation of recognized technical certificates. Based on these experiences, the company has consolidated its position in the public sector, demonstrating that competence and seriousness outweigh size.

THE ROLE OF TRAINING AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

For small companies to be successful in bidding processes in Brazil, continuous training and the support of public and private institutions are decisive factors. Familiarity with legal procedures, technical standards and bureaucratic red tape requires specialized preparation that goes beyond practical experience in the sector.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNICAL TRAINING

Training is the basis for micro and small companies to understand the workings of public administration, government procurement laws and the correct preparation of tenders. Courses on the New Bidding Law (Law 14.133/2021), on the use of the Compras.gov.br system, on SICAF and technical training related to the area of activity (such as work safety and ABNT standards) become competitive differentials.

In addition, entrepreneurs who keep up to date on a regular basis show themselves to be more prepared and more credible when it comes to the committees analyzing their proposals.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH SEBRAE AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE) offers free courses, consultancies and materials aimed at companies interested in selling to the government. Among the topics covered are price formation, mandatory documentation, planning for participation in tenders and strategies for winning public tenders.

Other institutions, such as trade associations, industrial federations (such as FIEMG) and professional councils (CREA, CAU, etc.), also promote events, fairs and incentive programs for the qualification and visibility of small businesses.

INTERNAL STAFF TRAINING

In addition to training the owner, it is essential that employees involved in bidding and contract execution are also trained. Knowing the delivery deadlines, measurement requirements, inspection criteria and payment methods helps to reduce errors and avoid contractual penalties.

Internal training also allows the company to act with greater autonomy, reducing dependence on third parties for administrative or operational tasks.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND FUNDING LINES

Small companies can count on support from bodies such as the BNDES, public banks and state and municipal development agencies to access credit, guarantees and financing for the execution of public contracts. The National Support Program for Micro and Small Companies (Pronampe), for example, can be used for working capital during the execution of public works.

In addition, initiatives by municipalities and states that promote exclusive public procurement for MSEs strengthen the environment of fair competition and increase opportunities for new entrepreneurs.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

Training is not an isolated event, but a continuous process. Companies that invest in technical education, strategic planning and process improvement stand out in any market, including the public sector. Mastery of bidding mechanisms, together with the support of reliable institutions, strengthens the presence of small businesses in the municipal, state and federal spheres.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPUTATION MARKETING

In a competitive market like public tenders, it's not enough just to offer the lowest price or meet the technical requirements. Building a solid and reliable reputation is a strategic differentiator that can open doors to recurring contracts and facilitate approval by new public bodies.

REPUTATION AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

A company's reputation is built on its track record, the quality of its service delivery and the way it relates to its contractors. In the public sector, this is reflected in certificates of technical capacity, the absence of sanctions on official registers and good relations with public managers.

Companies that have a history of strict compliance with deadlines, quality execution and ethical conduct stand out in selection processes, even when the competition is for the lowest price. After all, those responsible for contracting are looking for security, and reputation acts as an informal certificate of trust.

THE POWER OF FORMAL CERTIFICATES AND REGISTERS

One of the pillars of reputation marketing is obtaining and correctly presenting certificates of technical capacity issued by contracting bodies. These documents prove that the company has carried out services similar to those tendered for, with quality and in accordance with the contracts signed.

In addition, registrations with professional councils, awards received, training certificates and quality seals are instruments that add value to the institutional image.

VISIBILITY IN THE MEDIA AND DIGITAL CHANNELS

A presence in the media, local reports or specialized publications reinforces the company's visibility and attests to its relevant role in the sector. Small companies can take advantage of these opportunities through press relations, participation in events and sharing success stories on their social networks or institutional websites.

Social media have also become essential tools for disseminating good results and building authority in the market. An up-to-date website with a portfolio, client testimonials and institutional information strengthens the professional image and conveys trust.

REPUTATION AND BUSINESS SCALABILITY

Companies with a good reputation in the public sector can more easily expand their operations to new municipalities, states or even federal agencies. The trust built up over the years becomes reputational capital that enables sustainable growth.

This intangible asset is also a differentiator in partnerships with other companies, consortia and even in financing processes, where institutions assess the company's track record.

REPUTATION BUILDING AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

Just like training, reputation building requires consistency. Maintaining excellence in services, cultivating good relations with contractors and strategically recording each achievement allows the company to always be ready for new challenges and opportunities.

More than advertising, reputation marketing is about delivering value and leaving a positive mark on the institutions served, which over time translates into new open doors in the world of public tenders.

CONCLUSION

Participating in tendering processes is a real and accessible opportunity for small companies to grow in a sustainable, regular and strategic way. The advantages offered by the legislation, combined with technical training and responsible business management, make it possible for smaller businesses to operate

on an equal footing with large corporations. This article has sought to demonstrate, in a practical way, the paths and strategies that can be adopted by entrepreneurs interested in accessing the public market and building a track record of excellence and institutional recognition.

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