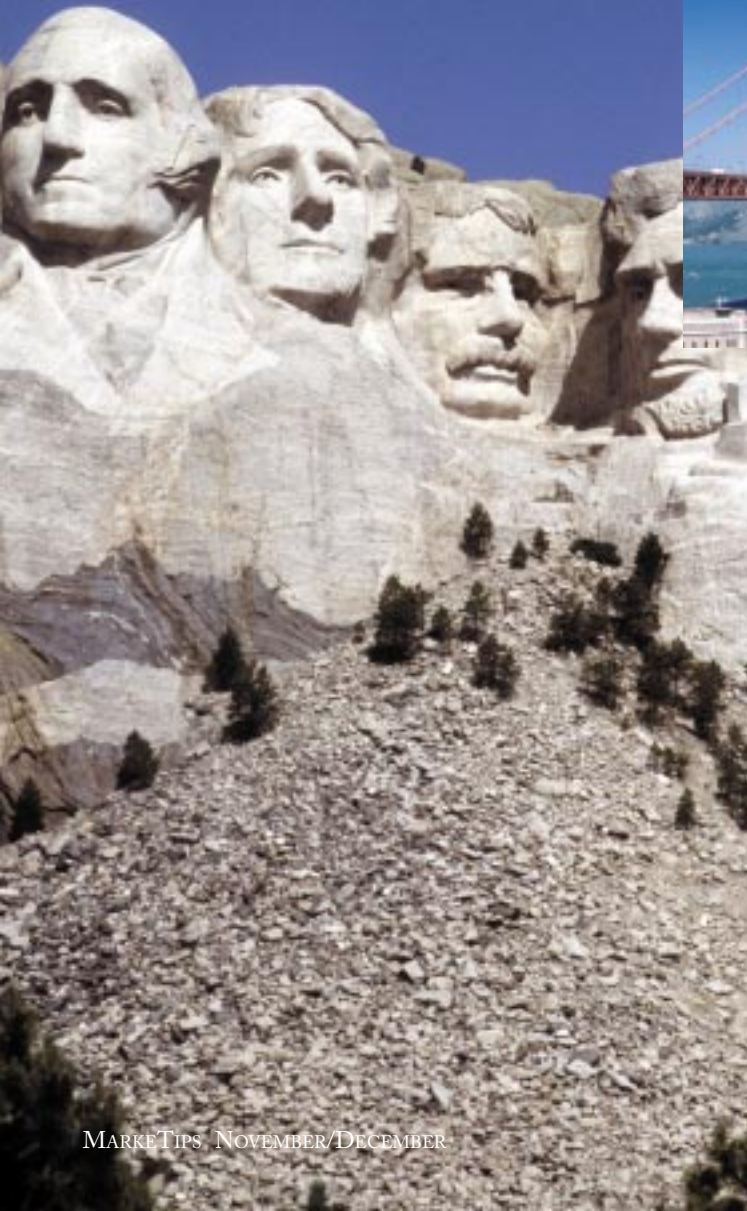


GSA plays an important role in helping protect the homeland. With nearly 11,000 contractors in place to support a wide range of security related products and services, GSA is the government's reliable procurement source.

gsa supports
homeland security

protecting what matters

by Todd Posey



The Department of Homeland Security relies on GSA for its information technology products and services, furniture, and professional services. The Department of Defense uses GSA to help protect critical infrastructure, services covering chemical/biological threat reduction, and disaster preparedness modeling and analysis. Whatever the need, GSA stands ready to support to protect the homeland by providing quality products and services in the following areas:

preparedness and supporting first responders

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- Human Resource Solutions
- Law Enforcement, Security, and Training Solutions
- Financial and Business Solutions
- Logistics and Travel and Travel Transportation Solutions
- Management Consulting Solutions
- Engineering Solutions
- Scientific, Environmental, and Medical Solutions
- Communication Solutions

defending against bio-terrorism

- Scientific, Environmental, and Medical Solutions
- Communication Solutions
- Furniture and Furnishing Solutions

securing america's borders and buildings

- Building Operations and Facility Management Solutions
- Office Solutions
- Law Enforcement, Security, and Training Solutions
- Furniture and Furnishing Solutions
- Communication Solutions

information technology to secure the homeland

- Information Technology Solutions
- Management Consulting Solutions
- Financial and Business Solutions
- HUBZone, 8(a) FAST, 8(a) STARS, ANSWER, Millennia, Millennia Lite, ACES, Smart Card, Disaster Recovery, and Virtual Data Center Governmentwide Acquisition Contract Solutions

When it comes to protecting the homeland, GSA is there every step of the way. Take time to learn how GSA can support you by visiting www.gsa.gov/homelandsecurity or by calling 1-866-GSA-1177. GSA has the people and contract in place to provide you with expert solutions. You can also order our free *Protecting What Matters – Homeland Security Solutions* catalog by requesting Publication Code 5-3-00175, by phone at the number above, or by contacting:

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gsa enhances online acquisition tools

*customer-requested revisions blend
ease-of-use with compliance*

Federal buying should not be a difficult task, especially with the purchasing convenience offered by the Internet. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is making point-and-click purchasing easier than ever with the upgraded online tools now available to government buyers.



New enhancements, effective in August 2004, encompass the agency's entire suite of e-Tools: *GSA Advantage*® for direct purchase from the Multiple Award Schedules, e-Buy for issuing Request for Quotes (RFQs) and e-Library for researching contract information. Last year, government purchasing via *GSA Advantage*® reached new heights. GSA realized over \$221 million in sales for fiscal year 2003, which equates to a sales increase of more than 20 percent that was realized during the previous year.

Furthermore, by building in web-enabled compliance, GSA has turned this challenge into an incentive for online acquisition. "We want our customers to get their products and services quickly and easily, and we also want to help them comply with regulatory requirements. That means both getting it and getting it right," said Neal Fox, Assistant Commissioner for Commercial Acquisition at GSA. "The new upgrades to *GSA Advantage*® help customers search for and locate what they need faster than ever. And our e-Buy tool for online purchasing of both products and services helps customers quickly reach vendors, and helps ensure regulatory compliance, including compliance with the tougher DoD rules for acquisition of services over \$100,000."

To ensure ongoing success of the online tools, GSA conducted surveys of government contracting specialists and end-users to find out what functions they wanted to improve their online purchasing experience.

GSA responded to the survey results and has instituted new changes that enable users to more easily ensure regulatory compliance when they research sources or purchase services and products online. New features will also help agencies and programs obtain items more easily and increase savings to the taxpayer. Ultimately, GSA's online tools accelerate fair competitions that result in best value purchase decisions.

These new changes reflect GSA's continuous expansion of e-business since the inauguration of *GSA Advantage*® nearly a decade ago.

"The web was only a year old when we launched *GSA Advantage*®," added Fox. "Amazon had yet to sell a book or e-Bay hold an auction. Now that the majority of government employees are savvy Internet shoppers, we continue to modify the online tools to meet their expectations. We want to optimize self-service procurement that meets customer needs while also making regulatory compliance easy. GSA handles many of the regulatory issues for the customer, and we make it easy to comply with the remaining ones such as adequate competition and using contracts within scope."

GSA has steadily developed and expanded its e-business approach. In 2002, the agency introduced e-Buy, an Internet-based RFQ solution. In FY2003, e-Buy saw a 345 percent increase in RFQs posted. This year will see another huge increase in usage. Another expansion, complementing the shopping and ordering functions of *GSA Advantage*® and e-Buy, is e-Library. It provides an online source for Federal Supply Schedule contract information, keeping buyers and vendors up-to date about GSA's Multiple Award Schedules and Governmentwide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs).

Advantageous benefits

FY2003 research results gathered from usability focus groups, classroom training attendees, surveys, emails, and helpdesk calls showed that government purchasing agents and program managers desired more features and operating ease on *GSA Advantage*®, the online shopping portal for the GSA Multiple Award Schedules. GSA responded by simplifying access to the site. Users no longer need to enter logins or ZIP codes to browse. They can simply access the website and begin their search.





facilitate searches. The UNSPC is a global hierarchical convention for classifying all products and services.

These improvements in usability aim to accelerate the progress *GSA Advantage*[®] has already made in attracting users, whether they browse or complete a transaction. By the end of fiscal year 2003, *GSA Advantage*[®] had 279,000 registered users, 114,000 of whom had signed on that fiscal year. As of July 2004, that number has climbed to more than 360,000. The year also saw a 21 percent increase in sales. Accordingly, GSA believes that the improvements in *GSA Advantage*[®] will see a significant return on investment.

A more efficient e-Buy

Before e-Buy, RFQs often remained the domain of the open market. Then, e-Buy changed the procurement landscape for any federal employee with a .gov or .mil email address. The system allows federal agencies to leverage the communications capabilities

Government employees were especially concerned about improving their facility for browsing among the more than 7 million items and 13,000 vendor catalogs on *GSA Advantage*[®]

GSA Advantage[®] is one of the most comprehensive shopping sites in the world. It offers a wide variety of products and services, everything from office products and furniture to paints, testing equipment, and professional services. For example, the search term 'hardware,' could refer to computers or electric drills. GSA's objective has been to simplify the experience so that buyers can immediately find what they're seeking.

As a result, buyers now have new searching options. Al Iagnemmo, director of e-business for GSA's Federal Supply Service explained, "Buyers can perform a keyword search against all products. They can browse by category. Or they can refine searches within results lists to more easily zero in on exact purchase item matches. So, if you put in the keyword 'coffee', you used to get 2,500 hits. You would retrieve everything from coffee pots and coffee tables to coffee services. With the new enhancements, this will no longer happen."

As a further improvement, GSA has adopted the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code[®] (UNSPC[®]) to

of the Internet to obtain quotes from GSA Schedule contractors. It thereby helps customers facilitate a "best value purchase decision."

A driver behind e-Buy's growth has been Department of Defense's compliance with Section 803 of the 2002 Defense Authorization Act. Presently, the law requires all DoD contracting officers to compete any procurement more than \$100,000 via notification to as many Schedule holders as practicable, consistent with market research. The GSA RFQ online tool expedites this process by informing the relevant vendors electronically.

GSA intends for the new e-Buy enhancements to improve the RFQ environment for both buyers and sellers. All users can now navigate the logon page more easily. Once on the site, users can manage their RFQs with greater facility throughout the life cycle of the solicitation.

The buyer enhancements make it easier for federal purchasers to manage complex Multiple Award Schedules service and product acquisitions from their desktops. For example, buyers no longer face the confusion of Award/No Award buttons when they are simply looking for sources or seeking information. They can

better organize their RFQs by manually moving them to “history” after the RFQs have closed and the acquisition has been completed. They can also add an internal reference or control number to the RFQs, which will remain throughout the creation process, and then appear to sellers for easier identification.

When assigning an RFQ category, buyers have an improved searching capability to help locate GSA Schedule contractors that offer the specific services or products they seek to purchase. They can reissue a previous RFQ without starting from scratch. They can also manually designate a closing time outside the 48-hour minimum open to conform to the buyer’s timeframe for a particular acquisition.

“We have explored many avenues for making e-Buy more efficient and user-friendly,” said Iagnemmo. “We even found a way to simplify the shipping address function to make it easier to change on the site.”

GSA has also focused on seller enhancements. Vendors can access RFQs under all of their contracts with a single ID/password. They can designate a specific point of contact (POC) for RFQs if more than one person is listed. Like buyers, vendors will find the site easier to use: from greater clarity and legibility in attachment listings, to an extension of the default “Your quote is good until date” message to 30 days with an option for 7 days.

Access to information and training – e-Library

Managing paper-intensive contracts can challenge even the most organized office and staff. Agency contracting shops and especially small firms may struggle with finding the data they need within volumes of legal documentation.

GSA’s e-Library provides buyers and sellers with a convenient research tool. The tool can be used to find sources by searching via a Schedule or Special Item Number (SIN), keyword, company, or category. Buyers also have access to basic ordering and guidelines as well as complete vendor information. Meanwhile, prospective sellers can research Schedule information to find the best contract fit for their service or product offering and locate contact information for the GSA Contracting Officer for that Schedule contract.

New enhancements make it easier for stakeholders to access all this information.

“We’ve improved the search function, added new category listings, and made it easier to find contractors,” said Iagnemmo. “Agencies and vendors can also conveniently download Schedules files in PDF format.”

Beyond the step-by-step guidelines on the e-Library website, GSA conducts training in the use of online tools. For example, the FSS Center for Acquisition Excellence provides online training in the use of GSA Schedules and how they can be used online. The free Virtual Campus offers self-paced instruction 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. federal employees can also opt for nationwide in-classroom instruction on the proper use of GSA’s entire suite of online acquisition tools. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are awarded by certificate for both *GSA Advantage*® and e-Buy.

Excellence in acquisition

Through the most recent enhancements to online acquisition tools and comprehensive online training opportunities, GSA aims to make federal buying just that much more effective and efficient.

According to GSA’s Administrator Stephen Perry, educating customers how to properly use the online tools for compliant acquisitions is critical to their success and builds on GSA’s reputation for procurement expertise.

“Excellence in acquisition is a top priority at GSA,” said Perry. “There is nothing more important than providing acquisition services to our federal agency customers. And, it must be in a way that delivers best value to support the achievement of their missions of service to the American people, while adhering strictly to federal acquisition policies, regulations, and best practices.”

According to GSA, they will continue to survey users of its online tools and continue to make enhancements to make the federal online buying experience better and better.