

MYTH BUSTED

PEO STRI dispels doubts about industry days to achieve closer communication, more responsive acquisition

by Jeffrey D. Claar



The Discovery Channel's Emmy-nominated series "MythBusters" aims to uncover the truth behind popular myths and legends by mixing scientific methods with gleeful curiosity and plain, old-fashioned ingenuity. A misconception or myth in acquisition has been that industry days and similar events attended by multiple vendors are of low value because the government does not provide useful information and vendors are reluctant to engage with government representatives in the presence of competitors.

To dispel this belief, the Acquisition Center of the Program Executive Office Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation (PEO STRI) has taken on the role of "myth buster" with the creation of PEO STRI Acquisition Center Procurement Administrative Lead Time (PALT) Industry Days.

On Feb. 2, 2011, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a "myth-busting" memorandum in an educational campaign addressing misconceptions and facts surrounding communication with industry during the acquisition process. The memorandum (online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/procurement/memo/Myth-Busting.pdf>), identified common "myths" that were hindering agencies and directed the removal of unnecessary barriers to reasonable communication, promoting responsible and constructive exchanges with industry.

MATCHING REQUIREMENTS WITH SOLUTIONS

The monthly Procurement Administrative Lead Time Industry Days sponsored by Program Executive Office Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation (PEO STRI) help match critical, emerging requirements with innovative acquisition and technology solutions, such as for medical simulation. Here, SGT Nicholas Kleem of the 215th Medical Company applies an occlusive dressing to treat a simulated casualty's chest injury during medical sustainment training Jan. 15 at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center, IN. (Photo by SSG David Bruce, Camp Atterbury Public Affairs)

In August 2011, PEO STRI hosted its inaugural PALT Industry Day. The Acquisition Center's Principal Assistant Responsible for Contracting (PARC), Joseph A. Giunta Jr., noted that it was "a means of providing ground truth and situational awareness of PEO STRI's Acquisition Center procurement process and ongoing procurements."

MONTHLY INDUSTRY DAYS

Since then, PEO STRI PALT Industry Days have grown exponentially, serving the contracting community, requiring activities, and industry partners alike. The now-monthly PALT Industry Day provides more than 200 industry representatives with the status of PEO STRI programs and ongoing procurements, and the opportunity to request updates on specific procurements of interest in a question-and-answer forum.

These types of venues enhance communication and enable PEO STRI to respond faster to critical, emerging requirements with innovative acquisition and technology solutions, thereby putting the power of simulation into the hands of America's warfighters.

One clear example centers on the Assistant Project Manager for Medical Simulation (APM MedSim) office, chartered to deliver medical training technology to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines for the application of medical interventions under combat conditions. APM MedSim, assigned to Project Manager Combined Arms Tactical Trainers (PM CATT),

is the Army's primary acquisition program management office for medical simulation and training products, specifically the Medical Simulation Training Center (MSTC) Program. These Army training assets deliver effective medical training using a standardized platform for both classroom and simulated battlefield conditions.

The MSTC Program supports training for medical and nonmedical personnel including active-duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, with priority given to deploying units. MSTC systems are operating in both CONUS and OCONUS locations.

The APM MedSim has used the PALT Industry Days extensively, specifically with regard to the MSTC Program, for active dialogue with potential contractors, creating a much clearer understanding of the government's material requirements and schedule. At the same time, our acquisition teams have gained a better appreciation of what products industry has to offer and any associated programmatic or technological constraints.

FREE TO ASK QUESTIONS

The PEO STRI PALT Industry Day sessions are driven by industry's questions, not a fixed government agenda. Industry attendees routinely ask questions about contract types and PALT milestones associated with a specific procurement, enabling them to better allocate resources and make investment decisions.



KEEPING SKILLS SHARP

The Medical Simulation Training Center (MSTC) Program supported by PEO STRI delivers effective medical training using a standardized training platform for both classroom and simulated battlefield conditions. Here, SSG Teresa Greening and SGT Joshua Long, MSTC instructors, prepare to lift a stretcher with a simulated casualty March 8 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Loren Cook, 20th Public Affairs Detachment)

Small business strategy is also a topic of discussion, leading to better teaming opportunities. PEO STRI’s PARC, Deputy PARC, Division Chiefs, Program Managers, Legal and Small Business offices, and a host of contracting officers attend so that they can respond readily to industry’s requests. In this unscripted setting, our industry partners have been more open and comfortable with sharing information. In turn, “We obtain better information for the acquisition community,” Giunta said.

That said, “We do have the ability to push specific information to industry at these

venues, leading to an educated partner on our own internal processes and policies,” Giunta noted.

For example, the PEO STRI Acquisition Center recently implemented an Acquisition Instruction (AI) outlining internal policies and procedures on fostering productive exchanges of ideas with industry. True to the intent of vanquishing old myths, industry partners received access to the Acquisition Center’s “Communication with Industry” instruction, AI 016, immediately after its full implementation across PEO STRI.

Through the use of PALT Industry Days, the consensus is that PEO STRI has been better able to address the industry perceptions alluded to in OMB’s myth-busting memorandum.

BUILDING TRUST, KNOWLEDGE

Industry seems to agree. As David Manning, Founder of StrategyONE Services LLC, said, “Communication has improved to the point where we now are beginning to build a more trusting relationship between the government and industry.” He added, “It validates that PEO STRI senior leaders

are committed to addressing industry's concerns and issues."

Senior leadership at PEO STRI hears industry loud and clear. Fran Fierko, Deputy PM CATT, acknowledged, "Indeed, an element of trust is now building between the government and industry. We understand their concerns, and they better understand our constraints."

Giunta also noted an unexpected benefit from the PALT Industry Day sessions. "At the end of the sessions, the gatherings have evolved into a sort of extended market research venue for our requiring activities," leading to potential teaming opportunities for industry partners.

Market research is used to determine whether industry can support the acquisition "needs" of the government. It is a continuous process for gathering, analyzing, and documenting information about products and services available in the marketplace, and includes determining product characteristics, suppliers' capabilities, and business practices.

The PALT Industry Day venue brings together program managers and industry monthly to share new technologies and business approaches. This not only helps the program manager better define requirements, but ultimately also lends itself to better framing the requirements for our industry partners.

Matt Fair, Vice President of Orlando-based operations at Tactical Micro Inc., agreed. "Not only have the PALT Industry Day sessions led to improved communication with the government, but the secondary effects have also been significant," specifically industry-to-industry communication.



INVITING DISCUSSION

The PEO STRI Acquisition Center's monthly Industry Day, called the Procurement Administrative Lead Time, facilitates discussions between the government and industry on business opportunities, program status, requirements, and contracting actions. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of PEO STRI)

CONCLUSION

Facilitating better communication with industry partners through forums such as the PEO STRI PALT Industry Days can and does shape how we get technology to the warfighter.

"Training is a team sport," noted Dr. James T. Blake, Program Executive Officer STRI. "The tremendous technological advances we are making in simulation, training, and testing reach far beyond just benefiting our Nation's warfighters.

Through the affiliations that we form in the military, government services, industry, and academia, we are able to have a significant impact on the training of not only our own military forces but also that of our coalition partners."

So while we may not be solving age-old myths by answering questions such as, "Would a bull really cause destruction in a china shop?" we are, with

forums like PEO STRI's PALT Industry Days, diffusing old communication myths by changing a culture within our acquisition community and restoring credibility and transparency to the procurement process in the eyes of our industry partners.

For more information, go to <http://www.peostri.army.mil>.

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