

Gov't Distribution

## Westcon Programs Benefit Government VARs

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**Gov't Distribution** A couple of years ago, an outfit headed by former Nortel executive Stuart Chandler was still putting final touches on its business plan, collecting capital and plotting its future as a solution provider. Chandler saw tremendous opportunities for network communications and security in the commercial and government markets, and he knew his expertise could help solve many business problems. And that was before Sept. 11 and the nation's stark realization about the importance of network, data and personal security.

Today, Optivor Technologies, based in Jessup, Md., offers network communications, engineering and security solutions for various major government agencies, such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Army and National Institute for Health. Optivor is even handling cybersecurity for the nation's strategic petroleum reserve. Those projects and more put Optivor on a \$7 million to \$10 million run rate for calendar year 2003.

But all that momentum hasn't come without help. Chandler, president of Optivor, credits a lot of the company's success to the executives and technical engineers at Westcon, a division of Westcon Group. "They do things for us because they want to see us succeed," Chandler says. "I feel like they're rooting for me." Optivor participates in Westcon's GSA Agent Program, which enables solution providers to get leads and sell to federal government end users.

"We can sign resellers up to the GSA Agent Program and give them the contract vehicle they need to be successful in the federal market," says Stuart Schwartzreich, director of strategic accounts at Westcon. The distributor backs up its GSA program with its Federal Edge program, which provides presales technical support, RFP and RFQ assistance, marketing resources, table-top shows and sales seminars.

Optivor recently tackled a lead from Westcon to strengthen cybersecurity for the FAA. EDS was the primary contractor on the project, but Optivor was brought in to secure the FAA's network from internal and external intrusion. "The FAA's cybersecurity was just ghastly," Chandler says. The FAA runs separate networks for the ground and air communications, neither of which communicate with the other, he says. The FAA also didn't know what technology it had. Some systems were plugged in, while others were not. Of all the systems on the network, some didn't even belong there and others were past warranty. "We came in and provided sanity to that," Chandler says.

A self-described "geek boutique," Optivor installed a security solution composed of Check Point and Nokia products. The solution provider tapped its technical team -- which has an average of 14 years of engineering experience -- and partnered with Westcon to assist on the project. "Westcon was integral because they were kind of my back-office," says Chandler, adding that Westcon engineers possessed the high-end expertise that was needed.

Westcon has positioned itself to also help other solution providers and integrators that want to tackle the burgeoning federal government IT market. The federal opportunity was \$45 billion for the year ending Sept. 30, Schwartzreich says. This year, Westcon believes the opportunity will grow to \$53 billion, and \$60 billion in 2004. The security segment alone was \$1 billion in 2001 and should top out at \$4 billion in 2006. "I don't think there's that many markets out there growing at that rate," Schwartzreich says.

The distributor also sees the federal market changing the way it buys technology. About eight years ago, more than two-thirds of federal IT purchases occurred in the Beltway. Today, that trend has reversed, and two-thirds of federal IT purchases occur outside the Beltway, in states like California, Texas, Colorado and Florida. "More and more federal IT business is being decentralized," Schwartzreich says.

The so-called federal buying season is also changing. In the past, the majority of federal purchases occurred in August and September, making business very frustrating for suppliers. But under President Clinton, the Federal Acquisition and Streamlining Act attempted to smooth out the buying season. Today, the majority of federal purchases take place in the third and fourth quarters, and more and more of it is occurring year-round, Schwartzreich says.

Westcon believes its government experts have the knowledge and expertise to help solution providers work within the ever-changing federal IT market. And those VARs who are new to the market can get whatever training and certifications they need from Westcon as well. Westcon offers training via TeleTrack conference calls, on-site half-day courses, vendor-focused FastTrack training, and self-paced online training via WebTrack.

"We're not just fulfillment here at Westcon. We really take it to the next step. We really take a proactive approach to the federal government market," Schwartzreich says. "We want to go to work for our resellers."