

## SEAMS, CAR Tackle Procurement

With a myriad of challenges facing small manufacturers looking for government contracts, Clemson Apparel Research (CAR) and SEAMS have joined forces to create a Web site and database that helps cut through the red tape. A little more than a year ago, SEAMS formed a committee to work on ways of obtaining new business for its members. The idea started out focusing on federal military business but quickly evolved into all new government business at the federal, state and local levels.

"We've identified the problems; we've now got to find the solutions," says Bill Kernodle, site director, Clemson Apparel Research (CAR) and a SEAMS member. He notes that while the federal procurement process is very fair, companies that are manufacturing federal items are well entrenched, making it difficult for smaller companies to get into the business. On the other hand, he remarks, state and local procurement processes "are absolutely horrible and tax payers are not getting fair value." This is because procurement officers either are uninformed or already have a pre-selected winner for a given contract, he says. "They are simply going through the motions of getting competitive business."

Furthermore, there are the problems with the law. For example, explains Kernodle, some state laws give preference to bidders from within a particular state, but interestingly, these same laws offer no restrictions on where the product is to be manufactured. A company in a "preferred" state, but that is sourcing offshore, for

example, will receive an advantage over a company that may not be in a preferred state, but whose plants are located domestically, because the latter company often must pay a fee to bid that the "preferred" company does not. "What has happened is that when the laws were written, manufacturing offshore was not a viable option, so protection for domestic manufacturers was not a consideration," he adds. Reworking these laws to reflect current realities will require political action, Kernodle emphasizes.

Even when a contact looks promising, the time-sensitive nature of the business combined with varied state requirements means yet another barrier for the small apparel manufacturer. Once a company finds something that's promising, it then must locate the individual state's requirements to determine if it meets them. Beyond that, some states charge quite a bit of money to bid on their items, Kernodle explains. "You can literally spend hours and hours chasing promising leads that end up nowhere. So we're trying to remove that frustration," Kernodle notes.

Overcoming these barriers for small manufacturers would be an important step in the right direction, but the issue remains whether small businesses can locate potential government manufacturing opportunities in the first place. "What we've found in doing the research is that small [apparel] businesses are spending a lot of time on the Internet looking for business with very little success," Kernodle adds.

SEAMS and CAR are on the verge of having a project funded that will build a database and an accompanying Internet site that any association can use to connect to members who have capacity and capability to make specific items easily and efficiently. "The entire summer we've had someone working with the Web site and trying to go after solicitations. Some of our members have definitely responded and are working on it," notes Sarah Friedman, executive director, SEAMS. "The good thing is, it's for U.S. manufacturers," notes Friedman.

The project will be run at Clemson by its computer science department and SEAMS will be the pilot organization with its members initially benefiting from site usage. "Ultimately, we hope any trade association will be able to use the site to bring value to their members," notes Kernodle. In terms of the timeline, Kernodle notes that the project, whose funding has received verbal approval, should be up and running by May 2004.

**TRACY HAISLEY is associate editor of Apparel and may be reached at [thaisley@apparelmag.com](mailto:thaisley@apparelmag.com).**

### **formoreinformation**

#### **SEAMS**

Sarah Friedman • 803-772-5861  
[www.seams.org](http://www.seams.org)

#### **Clemson Apparel Research (CAR)**

Bill Kernodle • 864-646-8454  
<http://car.clemson.edu>

## “ QUOTABLE ”



**"I moved [sourcing] completely out of Mexico two years ago. The quality was not even remotely close to what I was getting in Asia. Control [was also an issue]. I can bring a container from 15,000 miles away safer than I can 500 miles out of Mexico. I had containers hijacked, disappearing goods — it was a never-ending issue."**

Alden Halpern, President, 4whatitworth