

NIKKI M GROUP CASE STUDY



Having identified government work as a good fit for her expanding design studio, Nicole Melbourne attended Small Business Victoria's Winning Government Business workshop to increase her understanding of tendering and pitching for government work. Implementing the workshop learnings has helped Nikki M Group win government contracts Australia wide and internationally.

The Business

Like many creative enterprises, Nicole Melbourne's Nikki M Group started out as a home based micro-business some 18 years ago.

"I started out freelancing with an emphasis on typesetting and design, consistently expanding the business over an eight year period before we outgrew our home office."

Specialising in educational publishing, specifically the complex area of print and online mathematics publications, Nicole was aware that while Nikki M Group's specialisation was one of its biggest assets, it was also a potential threat.

"We built a really good reputation in a very small competitive field, almost a niche of a niche sector. As the business grew and we took on more people, I became increasingly concerned about the risk of having all our eggs in one basket. We really focused on identifying other sectors that would benefit from our expertise."

The Challenge

With Nikki M Group's work in the science arena growing, and an expanding corporate client base, Nicole's attention turned to sectors that had similarities in terms of complex reporting, structure and technical requirements.

"Government work was high on our list. Our structure, systems and the way we work seemed almost tailor-made for it. Identifying this as an area of focus was the easy bit. The question soon became how do we do it? How do we get past the gatekeeper? What's involved?"

With a clear vision of the type of government work her business could undertake, Nicole was aware that there would be a protracted procurement process to navigate over and above the intricacies and complexities of marketing her services to government departments.

The Assistance

Beginning her new business research on the Business Victoria website, Nicole found the Winning Government Business workshop, part of Small Business Victoria's Workshops Program.

"The Winning Government Business workshop seemed almost tailor-made for our needs. We knew that we had the technical expertise and skill set to deliver on government projects, but everything about the pitching and tendering process was very different to the commercial sector, even down to the language used by government."

Over the course of the half day session the workshop leader and specialist government business consultant, explained the different ways in which government purchases goods and services and discussed different government engagement strategies with the workshop participants.

"Listening to Deirdre speak I quickly realised that she was talking the language of government, and the way she was speaking was how we needed to write our tender responses. I really think this is one of the biggest barriers to small businesses trying to pitch for government business."

"The other area where the workshop really helped was with understanding the extensive government reporting and administration requirements, essential for retaining your hard won new government business."

The Business Today

While aware that building a government client base would be a gradual process, a focus on this new business area over the last twelve months has seen some significant wins for Nikki M Group.

"Our first government win, responding to a request for expression of interest, was with the World Bank through its Sydney office to develop learning materials for developing Asian Pacific countries. Since then we have been approved by the Northern Territory Government for education graphic design projects and have been appointed to the Victorian Metropolitan Planning Authority panel."

"We've also developed an invaluable relationship with Deirdre, working together on networking opportunities and selected projects. My objective now is for Nikki M Group to work across all Australian governments – a big goal but one that I now believe we can achieve."

Discover Small Business Victoria's 23 low cost, practical, convenient and expertly facilitated workshops, all of which can help you plan, start and grow your business.

Visit business.vic.gov.au/workshops or phone **13 22 15**.