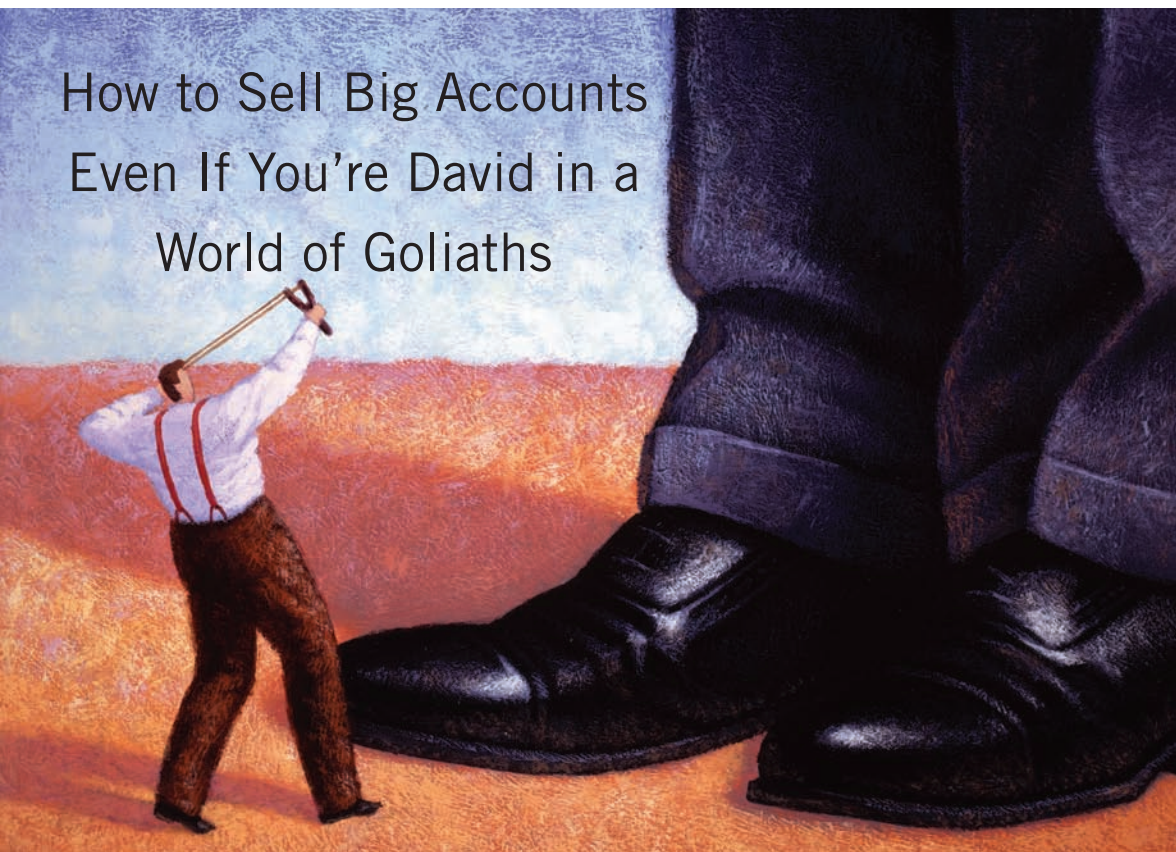


PLAYING BIGGER THAN YOU ARE

How to Sell Big Accounts
Even If You're David in a
World of Goliaths



William T. Brooks &
William P. G. Brooks

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**WILLIAM T. BROOKS
WILLIAM P. G. BROOKS**



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This book is dedicated to the memory of its biggest advocate: my late father, Bill Brooks. It was a great pleasure to finish his final book. This book is also dedicated to The Brooks Group's committed staff members, without whom we never would have been able to "play bigger than we are." I'd also like to thank Jeff Davidson, who was a strong contributor to this book. Corrie Lisk-Hurst also deserves much credit for helping us publish this book, as she was instrumental in its development.

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Preface

There was only one thing Bill Brooks loved more than winning a big deal: hearing about another salesperson scoring an even bigger one (unless that person was competing for the same business, of course!).

He would have been thrilled to see this, his final work, come to fruition. *Playing Bigger Than You Are: How to Sell Big Accounts Even If You're a David in a World of Goliaths* is a book designed to show you how to win the biggest deals—and why you should go for them—no matter how small your operation is.

There are two kinds of Goliaths.

First, they're corporate behemoths (and even governments). A "small" expenditure by a Goliath might make your (or your company's) decade. But Goliaths are also your larger competitors—those who have bigger budgets, more staff resources, and demonstrated expertise in supplying products or services for giant corporations.

Take heart, all you Davids out there. This book outlines strategies and specific techniques that will help Davids—like you and us—gain opportunities with the Goliaths of business. This book is also about holding your own against your most sophisticated competitors by playing bigger than you are—and smarter than they are.

Too many small businesses pay attention to the reasons they *can't* make deals. This book forces readers to focus instead on the

many reasons major corporations prefer smaller vendors and how to take advantage of this preference.

Everything in this book comes from experience. The Brooks Group is a small business by virtually any definition. By employing the ideas in this book, we've become the sales training provider of choice for many Goliaths. And we've beaten the Goliaths of our industry at the sales and sales management training game, time and time again.

How do you know if you're ready to sell to Goliaths? The answer to this question is in the first chapter of this book. You'll also learn why small businesses are uniquely qualified to sell to giants and find out not only which giants are the right ones to pursue but also where to find them.

Once you know whom you're pursuing, you need to know how they buy. Large corporations and government agencies often have complex and mysterious purchasing processes. This book discusses how corporate buyers make purchasing decisions and then turns to the topics of making successful sales presentations and eventually building on your successes.

If you're like many salespeople, you're preventing yourself from winning business from the giants, feeling daunted by the challenge. The middle chapters of this book will help you understand your own potential barriers to success, then show you how to position yourself properly to sell to giants.

The book investigates the ways Goliaths approach the process of making purchasing decisions. Many relatively recent shifts in the purchasing—or supply management—arena favor the Davids, if they understand how big companies think.

So, dive in. And start winning bigger accounts.

WILLIAM P. G. BROOKS
Greensboro, North Carolina

About the Authors

Author of dozens of sales and sales management training, hiring, and selection articles, Will Brooks has worked with hundreds of companies across dozens of industries to help them improve their sales and sales management training, development hiring and retention practices. Having worked closely with his father, the late William T. “Bill” Brooks, for more than a decade, Will is now carrying forward many of Bill’s time-tested and proven consulting theories and practices into the 21st century. Will continues to work with clients to develop and test new concepts and theories relative to the sales improvement arena. *Playing Bigger Than You Are* is a prime example of how looking at a sales strategy from a different angle can open opportunities for sales-driven companies of any size. The Brooks Group, Brooks’s 20-person sales consulting company, currently works with several branches of the military, as well as many large, well-branded and nationally known companies to help them drive more sales, more strategically.

1

Selling to Giants Will Transform Your Business

The Business Is Out There, Waiting for You

Do you know that only a tiny percentage of the United States' 23 million small businesses currently serve the nation's largest corporations and organizations? That's really amazing, because small companies just like yours (and mine) offer products and services that huge organizations can—and do—buy! Unfortunately, the vast majority of us not only lack a system for successfully marketing to major corporations, we also don't display the personal confidence in our own abilities that will satisfy these corporations' requirements.

Most small businesses don't see it, but it's a fact: Your biggest competitors are seizing business opportunities that absolutely, positively could be ours.

If you're part of the sales effort for a small to mid-sized organization and you want to win the kind of big, profitable accounts that the giants in your industry do, this book is written for you.

Read over the following statements and ask yourself if any of them resonate with you:

- My biggest competitor has “least-risk” status in the minds of my prospects and customers.
- Our biggest competitors all have far more advertising dollars and marketing “waffle,” and as a consequence, they are better positioned in the marketplace to win the bigger accounts than we are.
- My competitors have huge sales forces; they've cornered every market and built relationships, and I can't find a way in.
- My biggest competitor is always willing and able to compete on economy of scale and purchasing power, but I can't!

If you can identify with any of these statements, it's likely you are feeling overwhelmed, powerless, frustrated, and

pressured when it comes to becoming the vendor of choice for the large accounts in your target market. Perhaps you're feeling as though the deck is stacked against you. So how can you compete?

Here's the short answer: It's all about positioning—your company's positioning and the positioning of your sales force. The slightly longer answer: You must be able to speak the language of corporate executives and buyers, understand and honor their rules and protocols, and possess an unwavering belief in the quality of the products or services you sell. Selling to the giants is not a game for the faint of heart, but if you play it right, you'll win big.

As you're carefully developing your overall sales strategy, consider some of the following reasons to market your company's products or services to giant corporations (and government entities):

- Larger, longer-term contracts make your cash flow and revenue more predictable.
- Fewer, but more valuable, contracts enable you to construct a stable business built on true core competencies.
- Your overhead is often lower when you are strategic about the accounts you pursue. A new contract will benefit from the systems and personnel dedicated to an existing agreement. Depending on your margin structure, supporting a large account may cost the same as supporting a smaller one.
- Enterprise-wide growth can be tremendous. A piece of business with one unit or division of a large company can lead to opportunities in other areas of the organization that you may not even target initially.
- Potential for referral-based business is huge. A recommendation from an executive at a giant corporation is worth its weight in gold!

Many Giant Organizations Will Make It Easy for You

We often hear salespeople ask, “Do corporations help small, developing businesses seeking to do business with them?” The answer is a resounding “Yes!” Small domestic suppliers who can meet the challenge of serving as a key supplier to corporate giants will discover that many corporations exhibit strong commitment to employing and supporting qualified small suppliers.

Corporations with strong small business supplier policies typically

- Maintain a separate small business program office.
- Use external small business supplier directories.
- Provide information on goods and services purchased.
- Provide names and phone numbers of plant purchasing agents.
- Offer special assistance (management, financial, or technical) to small business suppliers.
- Maintain a directory or file on small business vendor capabilities.
- Set dollar or percentage goals for small business vendor use.
- Provide incentives to their purchasing staff to make use of small business suppliers.

Some corporations—Todd Shipyards and Honeywell, for example—have established aggressive small supplier procurement goals. Additionally, the federal government establishes formal goals for awarding prime contracts to small businesses. These goals typically provide a target for expected performance as well as an indicator of actual performance based on percent of purchases, contract dollar values, number of contracts, quantity of small vendors used, or a combination of these. Other goals might

include metrics for visits to vendor sites, new vendors used, and contracts over a certain size awarded to small vendors.

According to a personal interview with a purchasing officer with FMC, a Chicago-based chemical manufacturer, “When dealing with small suppliers, a distinction must be made between qualified and qualifiable.” What’s the difference? Initially, many small businesses cannot meet the prospect’s specifications; however, with some assistance from the larger corporation, they can become qualified suppliers.

Not all corporations are prepared or willing to make this effort, but purchasing coordinators in some more progressive corporations are willing to assist small suppliers by

- providing technical, managerial, and financial assistance.
- allowing longer lead times.
- arranging special payment terms.
- broadening product specifications.
- supplying information on pricing practices, bid preparation, production, sales, and servicing.
- assisting in developing a quality-control program.

Small Business Purchasing Programs

Large corporations that develop and offer small business purchasing programs are demonstrating their commitment to increasing growth and marketing opportunities for smaller businesses like ours. Now the ball is in our court. We must be sure our small businesses provide maximum economic return, participating in capital formation and enhancing productivity.

In our area of North Carolina, we see firsthand how major corporate activities directly affect their respective business communities. FedEx is opening a major hub in Greensboro, and with its arrival comes a huge variety of industrial distribution opportunities and incentives for major corporations to relocate to the

area. From the repercussions of the closing of Ralph Lauren's international fulfillment division in the Triad to the boon of the opening of a new HondaJet facility, we're seeing the ripple effect of major corporate activity on our community.

Corporate public relations officers know well that using small business suppliers helps offset some negative attitudes the public may have regarding a corporation's social responsibilities, especially in the economic environment of 2009. Large corporations and government agencies' involvement in small business can translate into investment opportunities for local residents, new construction and renovation of commercial property, boosts in purchasing and leasing of equipment, increased employment opportunities, and expansion of the local tax base, which will increase overall revenues to the municipality while easing the burden on individual taxpayers.

There Are No Insiders: Everyone Starts as Strangers

I've heard it from countless entrepreneurs and salespeople: They know that what they have to sell is in demand, but they don't take the first step because they feel like outsiders. One salesperson I know named Matt told me about going to a trade show in Chicago and seeing one of his competitors smiling and joking with the corporate purchasing agent of a firm to which Matt wanted to sell. A few days later, Matt read a press release in his local newspaper detailing how another small firm in the next county grew 23 percent in one year by acquiring several large clients.

Matt's mental receptors were set to see, hear, and receive messages indicating that everyone knew everyone else. Consequently, he felt that efforts to win new business with major corporations would be fruitless because he didn't know the "right people." His story is not unique. Let's look at the fundamental question his story raises: Do others have inside connections they can bring to bear to help them experience superior sales results?

The answer is “yes and no.”

It’s “no” from the standpoint that everyone in this world starts off as a stranger to everyone else. Few of us were born well-connected in the business world. Instead, we have had to make most connections on our own. It’s so easy to forget that the people we know in this world and the connections we have developed are largely the result of our own choices and actions.

Now for the “yes” answer. Some of your competitors will maintain an advantage over you simply because of whom they know. That’s a fact. But let’s return for a minute to Matt’s situation and consider this: The one competitor he saw laughing and joking with a corporate purchasing agent must have invested her time calling on and getting to know that purchasing agent. Along the way, luck certainly could have played a part in her success. In the long run, however, those who are “wired” or have the inside connection usually earned it by allocating time, energy, and money toward the cultivation of key introductions, presentations, and follow-ups. You can do the same, can’t you? Winning big business for your firm will be directly tied to how well you position yourself with key employees of giant corporations and to how well you manage the sales process with these people.

Every so often I hear about a middle or high school coach who makes it known that everyone who shows up at tryouts will make the soccer (or baseball, or cheerleading, or basketball) team. In fact, I’ve discovered that in the early weeks of the preseason, the teams usually have many more kids at practice than will be needed by the opening game. So what’s a coach to do? Actually, he or she is betting on a sure thing: The final team roster will largely result from a self-selection process. Those athletes who truly want to play will stick it out all the way. The only players cut are those who cut themselves—they stop coming to practice and quit on their own.

Becoming a supplier to a giant corporation is also largely a self-selection process. To be successful, you have to show

up—show up at their plant; visit them at trade shows; mail them relevant, valuable information; and speak to them by phone. As actor Woody Allen says, “Just showing up is 80 percent of everything.”

One of my friends and colleagues posed a question at a regional meeting of the White House Conference on Small Business: “How many of you, right now, can tell me the name of at least one purchasing agent from a major corporation?” He said everyone in the room was silent. That sounds a lot like those folks were cutting themselves off of the team. Therefore, if you’re willing to do your own research, make your own connections, and make the most of these efforts, your competition is limited to a few other brave souls.

Why It Makes Sense to Pursue the Giants

A few years back at the Brooks Group, we hired a brilliant marketing expert named Mike Delaney. During his career, Mike has literally transformed companies such as Volvo Trucks NA and Unifi, to name just two, through skillful, research-based marketing. We figured that if we wanted to grow our own company, we could learn a lot from companies that are already huge. I’ll be honest—he nearly drove us crazy with requests for data and countless interviews with staff and clients. But in the end, we had a corporate “A-ha!” moment that shaped how our company has grown since then: We discovered we had too many eggs in too few baskets.

Here’s a brief overview of what we discussed:

- Too much of our business was generated by our founder through speaking engagements and personal contacts.
- We had one or two major (approximately million-dollar) clients every year, and they accounted for as much as half of our company revenue.

- We were spending—wasting might be a more appropriate term—a lot of time bidding on low-potential accounts, and when we won them we were investing a disproportionate amount of time and effort on servicing them.

That said, in my opinion, you don't have the time or money *not* to pursue big business, especially when you have the ability. I suspect you're probably like a lot of professionals in small business, and you're spending a lot of time working "in" your business, fighting fires, trying to maintain your hard-earned gains. You're interested in selling to the giants, but you just don't think you have the time, the ability, or the marketing dollars. Here's an old saying: It's time to stop working *in* your business and start working *on* your business.

Think about how much time you've spent over the last year being nickel-and-dimed by your clients, many of whom have budgets about the same size as yours. Every hour of staff time, every phone call or e-mail, and every conference about an account has monetary value—it's not just about the check you get from your client. But you know that already, right? At one point at The Brooks Group, we figured out that we were spending as much time servicing a low-dollar client as we were investing in one of our largest accounts. Yet if we had lost one of our biggest clients, we'd have been up the creek without a paddle.

In response, we made a conscious decision to focus several of our salespeople on earning big-dollar accounts: for example, one invests his time exploring private-sector potential, and another is dedicated to earning government business. This isn't to say we ignore our smaller clients—not by any means. Other salespeople are focused on building and maintaining our customer base with smaller and midsized organizations. It's just that we now manage our smaller accounts differently from our larger accounts so that our time is properly leveraged and all of our clients are best served.

So far, it's working beautifully. To get to this point, we had to take the time to work "on" our business, thinking strategically

and making plans for getting to where we want to go. We had to stop being reactive, going after every piece of business. We committed to investing the time, effort, and financial resources to winning the kind of contracts we knew would be best for our company. In many ways, it's required a paradigm shift for us: to stop thinking about the immediate term and start looking long term; to hold out for business that earns us high margins versus business that would bring cash in the door at low margins. We now target very specific types of clients with a very precise message rather than marketing too broadly and watching for what sticks.

Why am I telling you all this? To make this point: It's a great idea to pursue business from the giant corporations and organizations, and I believe it should be part of your business strategy but not your entire business strategy. We now have a great mix of clients across many industry sectors—from industrial distribution to financial services to health care to the U.S. military. We have large contracts from small companies and small contracts from large ones. We have small contracts from small companies and large contracts from large ones, too. What we've done is figure out where our “sweet spots” are and concentrate on them; our clients are well-served and happy, and we're satisfied with the returns, no matter how large the organization we're serving.

Why Some People Should Not Sell to the Giants

Now that we've looked at some of the many benefits of selling to large corporations and government entities, I think I'd better caution those of you who really *shouldn't* try to sell to the giants:

- Are you extremely risk tolerant? Selling to the giants requires a lot of time, effort, and other resources. Furthermore, the payoff is almost never immediate.