

WashingtonTechnology

Domain expertise equals success

By David Hubler
10/06/08; Vol. 23 No. 15

Sentek Consulting Inc., an 8(a) small, disadvantaged business and a California-certified disabled veteran-owned business, ranks No. 33 on the 2008 Fast 50, having racked up \$4.1 million in government contracts in 2007. That's a 78.91 percent increase in five years.

"The meat of Sentek's work is services to the Navy's space and warfare organization in San Diego," said retired Rear Adm. Hamlin Tallent, partner and vice president of C4ISR systems at Sentek.

"If you're going to do technical work, at some point you need to have a feel for and a very good appreciation of exactly what [the work] is intended to do and whom this particular piece of technology is supposed to be assisting," he said.

Therefore, the San Diego company's management team includes retired senior military and government officials with decades of experience in information technology architecture, command and control systems, counterterrorism, special operations and military infrastructure.

Like many small companies, Sentek has grown by partnering with larger contractors and among them Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. is its major partner. Since

Tallent joined the company in 2005, Sentek has grown from 17 employees to almost 50.

"The company did not get its own [prime] contract until last year, when we won a \$20 million contract," Tallent said. Under the award, Sentek examines classified program documents for the Navy and certifies that they have the correct security safeguards. The company plans to use that expertise to pursue similar certification work for other branches of the military, he added.

Sentek is succeeding despite a good deal of local competition. "It's a crowded space," Tallent said, because "anyone who has a fax machine can call himself a C4I company." So Sentek is looking for new markets far beyond San Diego.

Tallent has created an international division primarily to win work in the Philippines and west Africa. "The things that are valuable to resource management in the U.S. of course would be valuable and are valuable to developing countries," he said.

The retired Navy flag officer said he would advise newcomers to the government market "to have the courage to go after your vision." For example, "to go to Africa from San Diego is a 32-hour plane ride, and you're not the same guy getting off [the plane] that you were getting on it, believe me."