

Google Searches For Government Work

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Google, meet Uncle Sam.

The search engine giant showed off its ambition yesterday to expand its business with the federal government, kicking off a two-day sales meeting that attracted nearly 200 federal contractors, engineers and uniformed military members eager to learn more about its technology offerings.

Google has ramped up its sales force in the Washington area in the past year to adapt its technology products to the needs of the military, civilian agencies and the intelligence community. Already, agencies use enhanced versions of Google's 3-D mapping product, Google Earth, to display information for the military on the ground in Iraq and to track airplanes that fight forest fires across the country.

At the meeting, held over a breakfast of scrambled eggs at the Ritz-Carlton in Tysons Corner and attended by existing and potential clients, Google executives said they expected to see far more applications of the company's technology by the government.

"We're really in the beginning stages," said Rob Painter, director of the Google Earth federal effort. "Coming on the scene to the federal space, in many ways, it's brand new."

Google started selling products to the U.S. government about three years ago, company officials said. Its government sales and engineering team is relatively small -- 10 people in Herndon-- but it expects to grow to 15 by the month's end and to 20 by the year's end.

Google also has hired a team of Democratic and Republican policy staff members who work in an office in the District.

Although most of Google's services are offered free for Web users, the company sells enhanced versions of those services to its government clients. The enhanced versions of Google Earth allow government agencies to merge their data about a region with Google's satellite images and receive updated versions of images.

The company aims to sell three key products to government agencies: enhanced versions of Google Earth; search engines that can be used internally by agencies; and a new suite of e-mail, document and spreadsheet products similar to [Microsoft](#) Office but hosted on Google's servers.

Google declined to comment on which federal agencies it serves and would not reveal its revenue from government work.

But publicly available data indicate that the nascent business quadrupled in just one year, from \$73,000 in 2005 to \$312,000 in 2006, according to FedSpending.org, a nonprofit unit of OMB Watch, an advocacy group that tracks federal contracts.

Google said it has some contract work with many federal agencies, evenly spread among military, intelligence and civilian offices.

"Most federal agencies have trouble with information technology. They don't really talk about it very openly," said Stephen E. Arnold, a technology analyst and the author of "The Google Legacy." "Google is in a unique position to do these large-scale, back-office functions. . . . That's really what they're up to."

For Google's mapping product, doing more business with the federal government is like coming full circle. The technology behind Google Earth, which Google says has 200 million users, got its start in the intelligence community, in a CIA-backed firm called Keyhole. Google acquired Keyhole in 2004.

Yesterday, Google's partner, Lockheed Martin, demonstrated a Google Earth product that it helped design for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's work in Iraq. These included displays of key regions of the country and outlined Sunni and Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad, as well as U.S. and Iraqi military bases in the city. Neither Lockheed nor Google would say how the geospatial agency uses the data.

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