

“The SBTDC went to bat for us”

Exploring government markets

United Packaging and Industrial Charlotte, NC

Counseled by
the SBTDC office in Charlotte

Sponsored by
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

“Two-thirds of our ten employees are family,” says Andrew Hough, president of employee-owned United Packaging and Industrial (UPII) in Charlotte.” “Andrew and I are cousins,” adds Brent Barbee, UPII’s engineering VP. They provide specialized protective packaging solutions — from customized cell phone shipping containers to rotor blade covers and tear-away windscreen film for military helicopters. They designed, built, and patented a continuous motion pillow-packaging machine which they hope to export to Eastern Europe and the Far East and are commercializing a room-temperature diamond coating process (developed by UNC Charlotte) for military applications.

Brent and Andrew started the business in 2000. At first, UPII provided innovative packaging solutions for such major private-sector businesses as Wal-Mart, General Electric, Purina, and Home Depot, but they were interested in expanding their markets radically. They were referred to the SBTDC by the North Carolina Department of Commerce in late 2001, and because of their manufacturing and technology-based business potential, were assisted by technology commercialization counselor Carl Beal. Carl’s first task was to evaluate accounting software systems: Andrew and Brent’s accounting software was not capable of performing tasks required by their clients, and they were afraid they’d have to use three different systems to extract the necessary information. Carl recommended the one which they now use successfully.

Carl also guided their investigation into obtaining Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants. Each year, the federal government awards thousands of R&D grants and contracts to small technology companies like UPII to perform innovative research. The kind of research typically supported by the program is vast. Successful applicants have enhanced our nation’s defense, protected our environment, improved our ability to manage information, and advanced health care. Brent and Andrew participated in the SBTDC’s statewide SBIR conference where they were able to meet representatives from the various federal agencies responsible for awarding these government grants. After significant work and with Carl’s assistance, they submitted their helicopter rotor blade protection concept (“Bladesock”) to the US Department of Defense (DoD). “They received 3,000 applications, and we made it to the final five,” says Brent. After passing two technical reviews, they did not make the final cut, but the DoD encouraged subsequent proposals. “Carl went to bat for us,” says Andrew.

Procurement Technical Assistance

Entrepreneurs follow a wide range of strategies to help their companies succeed. One approach is to sell products and services to the government — annually a \$200 billion marketing opportunity that many small to mid-sized businesses have not explored. While not right for everyone, accessing the government market either directly or through sub-contracting can help build successful, fast-growing companies.

The SBTDC hosts the state's Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) in partnership with the Department of Defense – Defense Logistics Agency, and as such provides comprehensive assistance with government contracting for federal, state, and local governments. We help client companies determine if they are good candidates for government contracting and if so, advise them on how to best pursue and perform in the government market.

*Specific areas of assistance include researching contract award histories, identifying contracting opportunities, registering with Centralized Contractor Registration (CCR), understanding solicitation requirements and terminology, preparing bids and proposals, searching out opportunities for small and disadvantages businesses, and contract performance and dispute resolution. In addition, the SBTDC offers **PROBID**, a computerized bid matching system that electronically searches for targeted bid opportunities.*

To help business owners better understand the procurement process, the SBTDC provides introductory “how to” information on doing business with the State of North Carolina and local governments on its website (www.sbtcd.org). The SBTDC also sponsors both introductory and advanced workshops on procurement-related topics and has joined with several members of North Carolina's US congressional delegation to offer statewide conferences on procurement opportunities. In 2002 alone, the SBTDC helped client companies obtain over \$750 million in government contracts.



They developed the product on their own, and are awaiting word on a \$2.2 million appropriation from the US Armed Services Committee for their product. The success of this and other military contracts led them to open a Washington, DC office, and they are moving to larger facilities in Charlotte to house their staff and their \$350,000 inventory. UPII doubled sales in 2002 to \$3 million and were recognized by *Entrepreneur* magazine as the 105th fastest growing company in the United States.

