



MARKETING STAR



Mark Amtower Brings Knowledge and Attitude to His Job as Founder and Senior Partner of Amtower & Company

[By Kenneth Davis]

Mark Amtower, a leading authority on federal marketing, discovered a largely unexplored area in the marketing field more than 20 years ago.

“I looked around, and I saw that pretty much nobody dealt with marketing to the government as a separate discipline,” Amtower said.

As a result, he established Amtower & Company, a marketing-to-government consultancy that helps companies shape their marketing and advertising messages for the federal market. Since its inception in 1985, Amtower & Company has provided critical marketing information to companies selling to the federal government.

Its services include government mailing list compilation and targeted database development, consulting, in-house seminars, strategic corporate introductions, and competitive assessments. Additionally, Amtower regularly advises senior management at a variety of companies on matters related to marketing, positioning, branding, press relations, and customer development and retention.

“I look at their go-to-market plans,” he said. “And I develop tactics to maximize either the dollar value of a contract that’s in place or to position them to get on a contract that is coming out or to bring into the market successfully.”

Amtower & Company, which is based in Highland, MD, has worked with hundreds of companies representing a broad spectrum of products and services (manufacturers, publishers, event producers, catalogers, resellers, software developers, associations, and others).

“They run the gamut,” he said, “from what we call in DC systems integrators—companies like Northrop Grumman or IBM that really go in and do all manner of things with and for the government—to small product companies or resellers like CDW or Dell. So it doesn’t really matter if it’s a product or a service or large or small.”

Q. Do you have any hobbies or interests?

A. I read a lot—marketing. And I’m also on a historical-fiction kick, of late. I also read a fair amount of biography, and I collect knives.

Q. What’s in your CD player now?

A. Waylon Jennings. I like country and I like attitude, and Waylon’s definitely got both.

Q. What’s the last magazine you read?

A. The last magazine I read was *Washington Technology*, and before that it was *Entrepreneur Magazine*.

Q. What’s your favorite show?

A. I watch Josh Bernstein’s show [*Digging for the Truth*] on the History Channel. He does this show where they go back and dispel historical myths. It’s cool, and my son loves it. And we watch *Mail Call*, also, on the History Channel. It’s a military-weaponry show and is hosted by a former drill instructor. It’s wild; it’s loud.

Q. Do you have a role model?

A. In history, people who rebel like Spartacus, but currently, no. I haven’t seen too many people worth emulating lately.

Some of Amtower & Company’s other clients have included Apple, Microsoft, and Loral.

Amtower is considered the most influential voice in the industry of business-to-government marketing. He is a popular speaker at various industry events and is a frequent contributor to a number of national business publications. His e-newsletter, *The Amtower Report*, is widely read by both the direct-marketing and federal-marketing communities.

In addition, he’s the author of *Government Marketing Best Practices*, which was published in January 2005. The book went into its second printing in March 2005. Amtower said the second printing has sold out, and he is going to revise the book before it goes back to press. His next book, *Why Epiphanies Never Occur to Couch Potatoes*, is set for publication in June of this year.

Amtower also has a radio talk show on Federal News Radio in Washington, DC, called *Amtower Off-Center* that is broadcast on Monday mornings. He previously hosted a radio talk show in Annapolis and started *Amtower Off-Center* just a few weeks ago. Amtower said the hour-long show allows him to share his views with a broader audience in a different medium. He added that his guests include “experts from every aspect of the field.” He also discusses hot government-related issues on the show.



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Amtower is known for his outspokenness and candor, which he said he brings to his radio show, his articles, and his books.

"I'm not afraid to take a stand, popular or unpopular," he said. "If I think it's right and can back it up, I will say it out loud, and I will say it in virtually any form possible. And in DC, there are so many untoward things going on at any given moment that it's not difficult to have something to say. And not all of them are germane to my business, which is good because I don't want to have to formulate an opinion every damn morning. That'd be a pain in the butt."

Amtower went to the University of Maryland, where he earned his B.A. in American Literature in 1974. He went on to earn his master's in American literature from the university in 1980.

He said he ran a bar while in graduate school, but after he broke his ankle and foot, he had to stop. As a result, he got a job at a telemarketing firm, and after he finished graduate school, he began teaching part-time at Montgomery College, a community college in Rockville, MD. There, he taught freshman English and logic. While teaching, Amtower continued working at the telemarketing firm.

"That turned out to make me a lot more money than teaching part-time did," he said.

In 1983, he began working for the Gary Slaughter Corporation, where he sold management training and team building to Fortune 500 and government organizations.

He then began selling the company's mailing list.

"And that's where I got my intro into government business," Amtower said.

Amtower remained at the Gary Slaughter Corporation for a year before joining *Government Computer News*. He was the circulation director for the newspaper and managed mailing-list sales. While working at *Government Computer News*, he decided to start his own company and founded Amtower & Company in 1985.

Amtower discussed the skills he believes a person needs to be successful in his field:

"The primary skill is the ability to communicate," he said. "The word-per-idea ratio of a lot of young people seems to be getting longer and longer, and maybe I just have a short memory; maybe mine was the same way when I was younger—probably was. But as you get older, if you cannot explain yourself quickly—who you are, what you do, what you're trying to accomplish—people are going to tune you out very quickly. So the communications skills are number one; having something to say is right there with it. So if you are not a student of whatever it is you do, you may be able to speak well, but if you're not saying anything, who cares? And I think what has separated me from anybody who does what I do in my field are those two things coupled with attitude."

Amtower said his biggest influence has been Lynn Bateman, who wrote a column for *Government Computer News* and had a consulting business called Government Counseling.

"She taught me by example and by hitting me in the head with bricks occasionally [...] to trust my instincts and to speak my mind," he said. "I would attend her events to learn about the procurement side of doing business with the government. And I would just go to her office to brainstorm about what my business should look like after I had left *Government Computer News*."

Amtower discussed the professional goals he'd like to accomplish in the next few years:

"I would like to have enough impact to make sure that mainstream media understands the nuances of the government business so they don't screw it up every time they write about it," he said. "Because the only time they look at it is when Jack Abramoff or something like that hits, and then they paint the picture like this is how all government does business, but it's not."

Amtower was born in Cumberland, MD, and when he was two, his family moved to Montgomery County. He is married and has two children: a daughter (13) and a son (10).

ON THE NET

Amtower has three websites:

Federal Direct
www.federaldirect.com

Government Express
www.governmentexpress.com

Government Marketing Best Practices
www.governmentmarketingbestpractices.com

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