



WBEs In Technology Are Surviving & Thriving

ActioNet Works With Government Departments



Ashley Chen.

ActioNet, Inc (Vienna, VA) provides two high-profile Microsoft SharePoint systems for the U.S. Department of State (Washington, DC). Both are collaboration software programs the agency uses to enhance its internal and external communications. The project has been so successful that the State Department nominated the company for an award of excellence in 2009, says ActioNet president and CEO Ashley Chen, who has a 1992 BSCS and 1993 MSCS from Binghamton University (Binghamton, NY).

Founded in 1998, ActioNet provides IT services in program management, process improvement, software development, systems integration, security and training for several government agencies. In the beginning the company also did commercial work in the telecom industry, but now Chen focuses primarily on federal contracting.

At first her toughest battle was, as you might expect, simply getting her foot in the door in pursuit of federal contracts. "When you try to do business with the feds they always want to look at your past performance," says Chen. "They want references!"

For Chen the way in was to start small. "Our very first project was a Y2K independent verification and validation project for the Department of Transportation," she says. "It was for five months and brought in less than \$50,000, and we had to subcontract under a larger company."

Today the Department of Transportation is ActioNet's biggest client. More than 200 of the WBE's 500-plus employees are assigned to that account.

Chen's relationship with the State Department began in 2005, when she met with Patricia Culbreth of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization after another contractor suggested they connect. She recalls that Culbreth was very welcoming, offering advice and encouragement about the contract procurement process, and the next year ActioNet landed its first contract with State.

Chen notes that her company's slogan, "turning vision into action," is posted on its website, on marketing materials and even in the elevator. And Chen's willingness to put her entrepreneurial vision into action has certainly paid off. Asian Enterprise magazine named her its Asian Entrepreneur of the Year in 2004, and today Chen is extremely proud to have earned "outstanding" award fee ratings on several recent federal contracts.

Despite the rigors of the process, she thinks other MBEs should not hesitate to go after federal contracts if they think they can do the work. "My philosophy is, 'If you don't bid, you will certainly never win,'" Chen points out with a smile.