

## MARYLAND BUSINESS Champions 2009

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MARYLAND BUSINESS CHAMPIONS

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# An Advocate for Small Business

## Michael Bowlds Helps Firms Win Government Contracts



**Michael Bowlds**

President  
Mountaintop Marketing Group

"This is a dynamic time for folks who sell to the government. Any time the administration switches over, it's a big deal. But when the administration switches over after eight years, it's a humongous deal," said Michael Bowlds, president of Mountaintop Marketing Group in Silver Spring.

"It's those contractors who are getting out in front, who know where things are needed, who will be successful," he said. "We want to make sure that all of our clients are at the front of the line, providing those necessary and innovative services that will help the country move forward."

Founded by Bowlds in 2002, Mountaintop Marketing Group ([www.mountaintopmarketing.com](http://www.mountaintopmarketing.com)) is a full-service marketing, advertising and business-development firm that represents small businesses interested in procuring government contracts. To better help its clients, Mountaintop employs seasoned business development professionals who, Bowlds said, "know their way around the government and have existing relationships. We have the best people and that really sets us apart."

The recent economic downturn has increased the need for Mountaintop Marketing's services. "The federal government is one sector that has money available. Contractors that want to do business or increase their business with the government really need to improve their business-development efforts," said Bowlds. "We offer that expertise. Under these conditions, our expertise really shines and the differences are pretty clear."

For the past several months, Mountaintop Marketing has been helping clients "readjust and reassess their strategic focus to match the Obama administration's planned initiatives," he said. "We're also working on a major project to help small businesses nationwide."

"One of the biggest issues we face is that information is currently limited to those folks who are here in the headquarters region," Bowlds said. "Gov Tube will change that." Expected to be operational this spring, Gov Tube is an online video portal that will allow vendors to access contracting intelligence through their computers.

For example, Mountaintop Marketing will soon stream video from its monthly breakfast series to a nationwide audience. "Each month, we bring in the chief information officer - typically the person in a federal agency with the largest budget - to address our audience of small businesses. Now businesses throughout the country will be able to receive these direct presentations from top agency executives," he said.

Gov Tube also will provide business-development and marketing training via the Web and stream video from a bimonthly discussion of legal issues. "'Issues and Answers' is a forum in which a couple of major federal contracts attorneys will address important regulatory and compliance issues and court cases that affect and impact the government contracting community," Bowlds added.

Bowlds' passion for helping small businesses comes from years of watching his mother, whom he describes as a "serial entrepreneur," struggle to succeed. "There wasn't any help or assistance for her as the owner of a small business. Because of that, she had to work so much harder. Her struggles and ultimate success inspired me - both personally and professionally - and instilled a passion to help small and women- and minority-owned businesses," he said.

Giving back to the community is important to Bowlds. "Those businesses that are benefiting from direct government dollars have an obligation to support their community," he said. As a deacon at First Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Bowlds participates in a number of outreach programs. He also serves on the board of directors for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. "We were one of the financial underwriters for GovConNet, a program designed to bring contracting opportunities and better information to Maryland-based firms," he added. "I'd like to think we are not only helping the community on a personal level but stimulating economic development within the community as well."

One of Bowlds' more rewarding experiences is serving as chairman of the board of advisors of the National Capital Area Minority Business Opportunity Center. "The previous board chairman, Verl Zanders, was my mentor. I watched how much he did to impact the small and minority business community," he said. "I am honored to sit on a board with some of the mostly highly-visible and successful individuals in government and industry and to be named board chairman. Following in Verl Zanders' footsteps is extremely rewarding and extremely challenging."

A native of Indianapolis, Bowlds was a computer science major at the University of Maryland. He holds two engineering certifications and is a U.S. Air Force veteran.

When time permits, Bowlds enjoys playing pool and chess. "Chess is the best getaway," he said. "I can't think about anything related to business when I'm playing." The most recent book to join his read-and-recommended list is *The Audacity of Hope* by Barack Obama. "Even if he hadn't been elected president, I would still have very high expectations for him to do something extremely powerful after reading his book." Bowlds said that when it comes to advice, the best piece he ever received was, "Pray a lot." The best advice he can offer other prospective entrepreneurs: "Be an expert and find experts. Just because you're really good at something doesn't make you good at running a business. If you're really smart, you'll focus on what you do well and surround yourself with experts to handle the other areas."