**Digital Certificates**

To meet the government mandates on sustainability, the GSA Schedules have gone green to reduce their reliance on paper.  This means that GSA has mandated the usage of eOffer/eMod for all Schedule contracts and the submission of new offers. Paper Offers or modifications previously submitted via email through the Central Intake Desk (CID) are no longer being accepted.  All contractors must submit their Offer (proposals) and any contract modifications through GSA's eMod/eOffer system at <http://vsc.gsa.gov>.

 A digital certificate is an electronic credential that:

1) asserts the identity of an individual;

2) enables eOffer/eMod to verify the identity of the individual entering the system and signing documents;

3) encrypts or decrypts data to ensure that it is securely transmitted;

4) is a packet of information that is stored on a web browser or on a token; and

5) creates a digital signature which is verifiable.

For the GSA contract(s), the digital certificates must be from either of two companies:  IdenTrust or ORC. The security set-up within the website for eOffers and eMods is only compatible with recognizing digital certificates from IdenTrust and ORC.  It will not recognize any digital certificates from other vendors such as VeriSign.   **However, effective January 1, 2013, if you have a DOD ECA Digital Certificate, you can use it to access GSA’s eOffer/eMod application system. You no longer need to maintain two separate Digital Certificates.  GSA will allow you to use the DOD ECA Digital Certificate in lieu of purchasing or renewing the ACES Business Representative Certificate.**

Here are the websites for these two companies:

•      IdenTrust  [www.identrust.com/GSAeOffer](http://www.identrust.com/GSAeOffer)

* Operational Research Consultants (ORC) <http://www.aces.orc.com>

**For IdenTrust**

For IdenTrust, it has been taking between 5 and 14 days (business days) for a digital certificate to be issue. My digital certificate is from IdenTrust.  I have found them fast and easy to work with. They also have a good system to notify you when your digital certificate is about to expire to allow you plenty of time for renewals. If you decide use them, the paper work is straightforward and can be download from the following website:

<http://identrust.com/certificates/buy_aces.html>

You would choose the ACES Business Representative Certificate - 2-year certificate. The subscription is $119.00 for two years. There are two documents to be completed 1) Part I - Sponsoring Organization Authorization Form - You have an organization Officer sign it; and 2) Part II - Notary Form - You take the form along with two forms of ID issued by a state or local government. One must be a photo ID.  I used my state driver's license and passport.  Others have used their Social Security Card.  There are other acceptable IDs such as a birth certificate or government-issued ID card.  If you have a passport or other federal government issued photo ID, you should not need two forms of IDs.

When you are approved, IdenTrust will email a message indicating the approval of your application and steps necessary to retrieve the ACES certificate.  An approval letter is mailed that contains an activation code that you use to retrieve the certificate. It states that you need to keep track of your passphrase in order to retrieve your certificate.  The digital certificate is a legal form of identification, similar to a passport, driver license or even a Social Security Card, so it is important that you are the only one with access to this passphrase.

TGG is not endorsing this vendor, but we have found IdenTrust extremely helpful and responsive during all phases of the digital certificate process for our consultants.

**For ORC:**

•             ORC recommends the use of the Firefox web browser during the application process.

•             Before you start the process, download the Firefox web browser, <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/upgrade.html> - According to ORC, once you receive the digital certification, you must transfer it to Internet Explorer (IE), since as of right now, the eMod system only works with IE.

•             If you come to a point where you are unsure of the process, ORC offers customer service support by submitting an online inquiry only.

•             “Proof of Affiliation Letter” (template is given during the online process) is required for individuals who do not have a company badge with photo ID.

•             When you import (or retrieve) your digital certificate you must use the same computer, same web browser version, and same profile (or username) you used during the on-line application process.

•             Online registration and print out necessary forms

•             Mail forms and other necessary documents (two photo IDs) to ORC

•             Online verification and certification

**IMPORTANT - Key items you should know:**

•             Your digital certificate must be updated every two (2) years.  It is imperative that you keep your digital certificate current.  An expired digital certificate will delay the ability to submit an electronic eMod/eOffer.

•             GSA has indicated NOT to use any special characters such as , / \* and periods after initials in names in any of the fields.

•             The digital certificate will reside on one computer.  If you upgrade or change your computer, you will need to copy your digital certificate to the new computer or contact IdenTrust or ORC to download the certificate onto the new computer.

•             Designated contract administrator must obtain a digital certificate.

•             Any authorized negotiators listed on your contract must have a digital certificate or the GSA eMod system will not recognize them.

•             **Two individual from your organization MUST obtain digital certificates and have signing authority** for the company.  It protects the company if someone should leave the organization and for time sensitive acceptance of modifications to the contract if someone is on vacation, medical leave, etc.

•             Finally, and very important, the way your name is listed on the digital certificate must be exactly the same way you are listed as an Authorized Negotiator or the Contract Administrator.