Contrasting marketing approaches to winning public contracts: Comparative study of two Algerian contractors – public and private

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Abstract

Our research aims to examine the contrasting marketing approaches employed by private and public companies in their pursuit of public contracts. We conducted qualitative research, utilizing semi-structured interviews with executives from two construction companies in Algeria, of which one is a private company while the other is owned by the state. The findings reveal that private and public companies employ distinct marketing-sales strategies, albeit with certain shared elements. Private companies tend to adopt more assertive solutions. Both companies invest significant efforts in marketing and sales, both before and after submitting a tender. These efforts include advertising and promotional campaigns, as well as consistent public relations endeavours.

Keywords: Public procurement, marketing approach, prime contractors, Algeria.
JEL classification: M20

1. Introduction

After achieving independence, public procurements emerged as a pivotal factor in driving the economic progress of newly established nations. Public procurements encompass the purchases made by governments and public entities to meet the requirements of their citizens. These encompass a wide range of needs, including infrastructure development, delivery of public services, and acquisition of goods and services for government
institutions. These procurement activities serve as catalysts for progress and contribute to the overall development and well-being of the citizens in these countries. Both private and public enterprises are afforded an equitable opportunity to secure public procurements, as procurement regulations are applied uniformly to all participants. Engaging in the bidding process necessitates access to information, enabling organizations to mobilize their resources and formulate a competitive strategy that maximizes their chances of success. Regardless of their sector, organizations must navigate the procurement procedures diligently, leveraging available information and deploying efficient strategies to enhance their competitiveness for lucrative procurement contracts.

The primary aim of the proposed study is to elucidate the marketing-sales approach adopted by both contractors to following their response for tender, with the intent of influencing the decision-making process of public owners -clients- in Algeria. Secondary objectives encompass conducting a comprehensive review of specialized literature, studying the marketing-sales practices of two distinct companies—one public and one private—and evaluating their operational dynamics. Additionally, the study seeks to analyze the competitive landscape within which these companies operate and investigate the constraints they encounter in their respective contexts. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the marketing-sales strategies employed in the public procurement domain and shed light on the challenges and opportunities encountered by organizations operating within this sphere.

This study focuses on understanding the methods employed by private and public companies in developing their marketing and sales approaches to secure public procurement contracts. Additionally, it aims to investigate the differences between private and public entities in their marketing and sales strategies, specifically designed to meet the needs of public owners -clients-. The study conducts a detailed analysis of the marketing and sales approach utilized by BATIMETAL E&C, a public company, and HASNAOUI BTPH, a private company. By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide insights into the distinct dynamics and strategies employed by private and public organizations when navigating the public procurement landscape and tailoring their approaches to effectively engage with public clients.

2. Literature Review

In the realm of public procurement, the concept of “digital networking” emerged in 2009 and has since encompassed various elements, including partnerships, information systems, sustainability, supplier management, technology and public finance transparency. This concept is being introduced in the Maghreb region, which is trying to move towards a new public management. The official portals become the main source of information because they provide the opportunity for citizens to follow public organizations, especially through financial transparency. However, the transparency on the official portals remains at the first stage of development in the Maghreb, for example, a study has revealed the limits of Algerian local authorities in terms of sharing significant information on public procurement (Feroukhi 2022).

In the Maghreb region, the context of public procurement is intimately linked to interconnections with global companies. In fact, we have witnessed SOME economic dynamic in public procurement in Tunisia, where Tunisian small and medium enterprises
(SMEs) have successfully formed global partnerships and expanded their presence in international markets (Habhab-Rave, 2009). This approach draws inspiration from successful practices in Europe (Bertacchini, 2012), where strategic networks have empowered businesses to establish crucial alliances, explore new growth avenues, and engage in collaborative ventures. In Tunisia, public authorities actively promote the advancement of digital networking to foster innovation and enhance the competitiveness of SMEs. By facilitating their integration into international networks, the authorities aim to stimulate the development of Tunisian SMEs and unlock their potential on a global scale.

In today’s competitive business landscape, the importance of public tenders cannot be overstated. They provide opportunities for small private sector firms and foster increased competition among industry actors. With each call for tenders, the stakes are higher than ever before. In this dynamic environment, companies must strive to stand out from the crowd and demonstrate their ability to deliver exceptional results. This requires a deep understanding of the tendering process, meticulous preparation, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. By embracing these principles, businesses can position themselves as strong contenders in the world of public tenders, opening doors to new possibilities and growth (Craye, 2013).

The introduction of strategic networking has opened up new opportunities for companies to implement more effective growth and development strategies. The adoption of strategic networking occurs in two distinct stages: first, companies establish their own socio-professional network (SPN), and then they pursue collaborations with public networks (PN) (Chérigny, 2012). SPN refers to a company's own socio-professional network, which involves building connections and relationships with relevant stakeholders, including suppliers, partners, industry experts, and potential clients. This network allows companies to tap into a pool of resources, knowledge, and expertise that can contribute to their growth and development. By embracing this approach, companies will be able to leverage the power of networking, cultivating valuable connections and forming alliances that facilitate their progress and expansion. This strategic networking framework empowers companies to optimize their growth trajectories and unlock enhanced opportunities for success.

After establishing their own socio-professional network (SPN), companies can leverage the benefits of public networks through shared resource systems to collaborate with other companies on joint projects. Public networks refer to a system where companies can access shared information and resources within larger public networks (Chérigny, 2012). By embracing (PN), companies can enhance their capabilities, expand their reach, and unlock synergies through collaboration, ultimately fostering innovation and driving overall growth.

Within the realm of strategic networking, companies often shape their strategies based on valuable information shared within the network. This information serves as a crucial resource for identifying business opportunities, establishing key partnerships, and fostering collaborative projects. By leveraging the insights provided by the strategic network, companies gain a deeper understanding of their business environment, identify
emerging trends and opportunities, and devise strategies to maintain a competitive edge in the market (Fréry, 2005).

Two primary strategies commonly employed by companies within strategic networking: (1) the defensive strategy; (2) the offensive strategy (Bertacchini, 2012). The defensive strategy focuses on securing information and ensuring its dissemination without encountering issues, particularly in the public sector. On the other hand, the offensive strategy revolves around leveraging information and formulating communication policies to enhance its value, ultimately creating a competitive advantage. Another study contributes (Mamavi, 2015) to investigate the relationship between companies' relational environment and their performance. The study provides valuable insights into organizing effective cooperative strategies to secure bids and introduces an innovative solution for utilizing open and large-scale data. Furthermore, it presents a framework that elucidates how alliance networks influence the allocation of public contracts. Through its exploration of these aspects, the study offers valuable knowledge and strategies for navigating the dynamic landscape of public procurement (Mamavi 2015).

Significant improvements have been observed in Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which have made notable strides in various areas. The United States, for example, faced challenges when standardizing public procurement processes, which raised transparency and competition within public markets. Consequently, comprehensive reforms were implemented to enhance accessibility for small businesses and local entrepreneurs in public procurements by streamlining bidding procedures and minimizing bureaucratic obstacles (Matthews, 2005). More recently, public procurements have become more strategic and flexible, aiming to complement both the private and public sectors. Even if in some countries such as the United Kingdom, the attempts to create public-private partnerships (PPPs) have mixed results due to associated risks, high implementation costs, and a lack of transparency (Guarnieri, 2019).

In summary, public procurement continues to follow new requirements of economical, technological, and societal challenges. Collaboration or competition between the public and private sectors, as well as the integration of new technologies, are key trends in this field. Transparency and competition remain significant challenges, requiring innovative approaches such as strategic network management to improve performance in public procurements. Companies are obliged to win public contracts by their innovative capacities (Mamavi, O., 2012).

3. Methodology

In order to analyze the contrasting marketing approaches to winning public contracts, between private and public contractors, we have selected two Algerian companies. Our study aims to investigate the strategies employed by both public and private contractors operating within this specific domain, winning public contracts under the specific rules of public procurement.

Studying the marketing strategies utilized by public and private enterprises in public procurement markets, we have employed a comparative study approach focusing on two prominent companies. The first company under scrutiny is BATIMETAL E&C Engineering
& Construction, a member of the EPE SPA BATIMETAL E&C within the IMETAL Industrial Group. BATIMETAL E&C specializes in the construction of buildings and public works. The second company is HASNAOUI BTPH, a private enterprise engaged in construction, public works, and hydraulic activities within the construction sector. Through this analysis, we aim to gain insights into the distinct marketing approaches employed by both companies.

Our study is based on a qualitative approach aimed at analyzing both strategies employed by contractors with the objective of securing public procurement contracts. This led us to opt for a qualitative study that focuses on gaining a deep understanding of individuals’ opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of managers. After conducting the study at both BATIMETAL Engineering & Construction and HASNAOUI BTPH, we collected a significant amount of information. The data gathering process involved three methods: semi-structured interviews with two executives from each company, collection of relevant documentation, and observation of the internal environment of each company.

We organized our study into three main analysis stages. The first stage examines the organization, nature of the company, and target market. The second stage involves a comparison of the processes employed by BATIMETAL Engineering & Construction and HASNAOUI BTPH. The third stage focuses on analyzing the interviews. In this stage, we conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews with the four participants.

We created several tables covering various themes such as business networks and sourcing, company attractiveness, the advantages of partnerships and alliances as a means of accessing public contracts, the attractiveness of company offerings and their influence on project owners, the competitive environment of public procurement markets, barriers to public procurement, and the company’s advantages. These themes are significant factors in the marketing approach of enterprises. Analysis and results are generated at the completion of each analysis stage.

4. Results

4.1 Factors influencing the development of the marketing and sales approach:

• Nature of the company:

Private contractors have the freedom to choose their actions, while public contractors are subject to strict regulations, particularly in matter of partnership strategy. Unlike private contractors, public contractors must go through a bidding process to choose their suppliers. However, the public status offers certain advantages, including privileged relationships with the government. An example of this is BATIMETAL E&C, which has established agreements with institutional investors and national companies such as SONALGAZ and SONATRACH.

• Environment and competition:

Private contractors have greater flexibility to adapt environmental changes. An example of this is HASNAOUI BTPH, which decided to focus more on public procurement markets under the economic recession - COVID-19 pandemic- while maintaining the commercial aspect of their offerings.
4.2 Key success factors of the marketing approach:

- Business network and sourcing:
  
  This factor describes two different approaches to seeking opportunities. HASNAOUI BTPH utilizes a proactive approach by subscribing to Algeria Tenders, employing a marketing prospecting officer, and maintaining good relationships within their business network. BATIMETAL E&C, on the other hand, adopts a more reactive approach by responding to public tenders and actively seeking consultations under a stable cooperation framework.

- Company attractiveness:
  
  This factor describes how both companies seek to strengthen their brand image and reputation using various communication channels such as company presentations, professional events, certificates of good performance, and online communication through social media and websites. HASNAOUI BTPH uses specific references to convince project owners towards their products and services, while BATIMETAL E&C directly sells to clients during events and conferences.

- Benefits of Partnerships and Alliances in Public Procurement Access:
  
  The third aspect explores the collaborative nature of both companies and their recognition of the significance of partnerships in broadening their areas of expertise. Nevertheless, their approaches to subcontracting exhibit slight differences. HASNAOUI BTPH views subcontracting as an essential component of their operational approach, whereas BATIMETAL E&C leans towards internal handling of all tasks to minimize expenses associated with subcontracting. Nonetheless, BATIMETAL E&C does engage in subcontracting for specific tasks that demand specialized expertise.

- The Impact of Company Offerings' Attractiveness on Project Owners:
  
  Both companies seek to differentiate themselves among project owners. HASNAOUI BTPH focuses on company presentation and an effective marketing strategy, while BATIMETAL E&C emphasizes the quality of their technical and financial offerings. BATIMETAL E&C also highlights the importance of preparing detailed specifications document with clear estimated cost and information.

- Competitive environment of public procurement markets:
  
  The competitive strategy orientation of the two companies is different. HASNAOUI BTPH adopts a proactive approach by staying abreast of trends, innovations, and competitive practices to maintain its position in the market and considers large state-owned enterprises as its main competitors. BATIMETAL E&C, on the other hand, is more critical of private companies offering questionable project and low prices, BATIMETAL managers are wondering about the ability of private contractors to deliver quality services.
Company advantages:

The advantages of a company can play a crucial role in its ability to win public contracts. HASNAOUI BTPH stands out for its technical expertise and effective communication with public clients. HASNAOUI BTPH specializes in justifying prices based on the expected quality of the project, allowing it to compete with public clients and bid for large-scale projects. BATIMETAL E&C, on the other hand, is a leader in turnkey projects with strong technical expertise in the field of building, civil engineering and hydraulics, specialization in metal structures and boiler-making, and a powerful and efficient multidisciplinary engineering office. It also has the capability to win significant contracts through well-designed cost and quality offering services, as well as competent and experienced teams.

4.3 The marketing approach of the two companies

4.3.1 HASNAOUI BTPH

- **Sourcing:** Based on the analysis, we have identified three ways in which HASNAOUI BTPH utilizes sourcing for its business development. Firstly, the company employs a commercial sourcing approach to attract potential suppliers and subcontractors by highlighting its proposals and disseminating relevant information. Secondly, the company uses sourcing as a competitive differentiator to maintain market competitiveness by offering innovative products and services. Thirdly, the company uses sourcing as a growth driver by identifying opportunities for expansion through its in-depth market knowledge, actively seeking new suppliers and subcontractors, staying up-to-date with the latest trends and technologies, and actively participating in professional events.

- **Market intelligence:** HASNAOUI BTPH utilizes market intelligence as a prospecting tool by monitoring tender notices on the website - tenders.dz - and newspapers. The selection of bids depends on the projects and the company's size. HASNAOUI BTPH also considers strategic intelligence as a competitive tool, allowing monitoring technological innovation standards, regulations, and competitive practices, as well as customer needs. Strategic intelligence enables the company to adapt quickly to market developments and meet customer expectations.

- **Professional network:** The findings underscore the significance of business networks in acquiring pertinent information for professional endeavors, along with the benefits of collaborating with other firms to enhance market penetration and fortify competitive standing. HASNAOUI BTPH is also emphasized for its ability to work in groups, which can enhance its competitive position and increase business opportunities. Furthermore, the company’s image can be strengthened through effective communication, a clearly defined expansion strategy, and socially responsible projects, with an active presence on social media.

- **Tender selection:** The selection of tenders depends on the project and the company's size. Public owners may require certain categories or minimum requirements to retrieve the Request for Proposal (RFP), and the company needs to evaluate if these requirements suit them. Some requirements may include having previously completed similar projects, and the company may decide to subcontract those projects to a
specialized company rather than executing them themselves. A timeframe of one month is generally considered sufficient to respond to a tender.

- Offer construction: HASNAOUI BTPH stands out by offering high-quality products and services, considering quality as essential to differentiate itself from competitors and improve its position in the market. However, it faces strong competition from other companies offering more competitive prices. The company has a quality assurance policy that involves the use of superior-quality materials that comply with the specifications of the RFP and prevailing standards.

- Offer marketing: HASNAOUI BTPH employs an offer marketing strategy to differentiate itself from the competition by emphasizing the quality of its products and services. This strategy includes innovation in the design of their products and services, adapting to market changes and customer demand, promoting their expertise, and justifying their prices by highlighting the advantages of their offering. They use technical memoranda and quality certifications to support their offer.

4.3.2 BATIMETAL E&C

- Sourcing: BATIMETAL E&C adopts a strategic approach to sourcing that is centered on attracting and engaging clients, partners, and suppliers. To effectively engage with public clients (owners), BATIMETAL E&C employs various methods, one of which includes promoting its wide range of products and services through informative presentations given. As a public company, BATIMETAL E&C has a preferential position compared to other construction companies, thanks to framework agreements with several major public owners which give them more access to public procurement and preference with public contractors, additionally BATIMETAL E&C prioritizes market research and in-depth study for future implementation.

- Market intelligence: BATIMETAL E&C's market intelligence includes tools monitoring and strategic intelligence. The company designates a specific person to prospect websites such as tender.dz, BOMOB, and BAOSEM. The company's executives primarily target the domains of buildings and civil engineering in their search and screening of tender opportunities. In addition to online prospecting, they also conduct traditional prospecting through newspapers. Strategic intelligence helps BATIMETAL E&C to adjust its marketing and sales strategy to remain competitive in the market. This involves renewing memberships in chambers of commerce, seeking new local or foreign partnerships beneficial to both parties, and assessing the company's financial capacity.

- Professional network: BATIMETAL E&C benefits from its networking with other companies as a subsidiary of public holding. The company aims to enhance its collaboration and partnerships with other businesses, thereby improving its image. BATIMETAL E&C utilizes various communication channels, establishes participation committees, social welfare committees, as well as joint committees (HSE and discipline) at the central level, and gives a national corporate image.

- Tender selection: BATIMETAL E&C selects tenders based on two factors: the project domain and the project size. BATIMETAL E&C prefers to bid on projects within their areas of expertise, specifically metal structures and boiler-making. Project size is crucial, as a large company like BATIMETAL E&C prefers projects that require significant resource capacity.

- Offer construction: BATIMETAL E&C prepares precise and well-established bids in terms of cost and quality. The experience and profiles of their engineers enable them to
study the bid and understand the client's needs. They then develop a detailed offer using price databases. However, being a public company, they need to follow the tender procedures for supplier selection. This can be a positive aspect as they choose suppliers with precision. However, it can also be a negative aspect due to the time-consuming procedures that may overlook the quality of materials in the case of the lowest bidder.

- Marketing strategy (offer): BATIMETAL E&C implements a marketing strategy to promote its offer and maximize its chances of success. This includes using innovative technologies and materials to stay at the innovation forefront. They conduct a thorough and competitive pricing study to demonstrate the value of their services. Internal and external communication is facilitated through the publication of an annual information bulletin distributed to all staff, clients, and suppliers via printed materials to showcase the company's quality of service and achievements.

4.4 Comparison between the two approaches:

After analyzing similarities and differences in the strategies and practices. The results were categorized into four main themes for each company:

- Sourcing strategy and practices for accessing public markets
- Promotion of corporate image and marketing strategy
- Value of the offer
- Competition and partnership culture

4.4.1 HASNAOUI BTPH:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Defensive</th>
<th>Offensive</th>
<th>Proactive</th>
<th>Reactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sourcing strategy</strong></td>
<td>The sourcing approach used by the company is aimed at commercial purposes, focusing on enhancing their image and promoting products and services to encourage choosing their company over competitors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing strategy</strong></td>
<td>The company is highly active on social media platforms and participates in events related to product and service promotion to achieve their business objectives.</td>
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<td>×</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Offer and value</strong></td>
<td>Establishing a justified quality-price ratio.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The HASNAOUI BTPH Group of Companies (HGC) provides added value to the company in terms of supply and promoting a collaborative culture.

Source: Authors.

### 4.4.1 BATIMETAL E&C

#### Table 2: the marketing approach of BATIMETAL E&C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Defensive</th>
<th>Offensive</th>
<th>Proactive</th>
<th>Reactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sourcing strategy</strong></td>
<td>Based on the reputation of the executives and the public status that reflects a certain sense of responsibility.</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing strategy</strong></td>
<td>Intensive contribution at events and conferences creates an impression of professionalism.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>×</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offer and value</strong></td>
<td>Technical value proposition and expertise in pricing studies.</td>
<td>×</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competition and partnership</strong></td>
<td>Strong relationships with various institutional investors and large national companies in the country</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A rich institutional and business network.

Source: Authors.

The marketing strategy adopted by HASNAOUI BTPH is primarily offensive, with a strong presence on social media and an effective communication policy. This approach can influence the choices of public owners (clients) for their technical and financial offerings. Additionally, the company has implemented a proactive monitoring strategy to better adapt the new requirements of environmental changes. On the other hand, BATIMETAL E&C has opted a defensive strategy, prioritizing information control among public buyers in order to win public contracts (projects). This strategy explains their reactive approach to competition, maintaining a reciprocal informational position with public owners, such as a large company with significant resources for complex projects (contracts).
5. Conclusion

In this comparative study, the objective is to examine the strategies employed by both private and public companies in securing public contracts. The focus is on analyzing the marketing approach in two key stages: accessing calls for tenders and responding to them. To achieve this, we adopted a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with executives from two companies. Additionally, they thoroughly examined the companies’ processes, procedures, organization, and financial performance. The findings reveal that the companies utilize various methods such as sourcing tools, strategic monitoring, and professional social networks to gain access to calls for tenders. The process of responding to a call for tender involves three distinct stages: selecting the appropriate call, constructing a comprehensive response, and effectively marketing the offer.

We can take the marketing-sales approach of BATIMETAL Engineering and Construction as an example of the marketing-sales approach of public companies.

BATIMETAL E&C’s approach is solid but requires improvements. The findings on this company’s access to calls for tenders show that sourcing in this company is primarily concerned with the company’s relationship with other public owners (compagnies), maintaining that relationship within the framework of events and conferences. As a design and construction company, BATIMETAL E&C has many opportunities to access calls for tenders by participating in international business meetings, conferences, forums and events.

Through adapted monitoring, BATIMETAL E&C uses three tools for prospecting calls for tenders. There are procedures and processes that can be somewhat lengthy, especially since the last process of the commercial marketing department was established in 2013. They have a significant professional social network with public project owners and other public companies, which can provide relevant information for finding business opportunities or professional advice. However, BATIMETAL E&C needs to focus on partnerships and collaborations with private companies, national and international companies.

The company’s image relies on internal and external communication by establishing annual reviews and events for its employees. Thus, BATIMETAL E&C puts a lot of effort into establishing a good company image. The marketing-sales approach of BATIMETAL E&C involves selecting offers that fall within its expertise, namely, structural work and metalwork, as well as large projects. However, it is rare for BATIMETAL E&C to win open tenders due to competition from small and medium-sized enterprises with fewer overhead costs.

Most of the projects won are under consultation procedures or negotiated contracts under specific framework agreements with state project owners and restricted tenders where the competitors are similar companies. This indicates that BATIMETAL E&C follows a defensive strategy that requires presenting an offer that meets the project owners’ needs. However, BATIMETAL E&C should strive to work more on its offer to win open tenders and compete effectively.
For proposal writing, BATIMETAL E&C focuses on the technical offer by preparing a precise and well-established proposal in terms of project costs and quality. However, in addition to the technical documentation, BATIMETAL E&C should also focus on the informal documentation, which includes company presentations, etc., as it can influence the project owner's choice of company.

Finally, BATIMETAL E&C promotes its work through effective marketing of its offer. Additionally, external communication through its website and communication tools can be effective. However, in the current era, it is necessary to utilize new promotional and communication tools for maximum success.

We can take the marketing-sales approach of HASNAOUI BTPH as an example of the marketing-sales approach of private companies.

The marketing-sales approach of HASNAOUI BTPH aims to strengthen its reputation and brand image by exploring new opportunities to increase its market influence, engaging in socially responsible projects, and maintaining an active presence on social media. However, its approach is less focused on project owners, which may decrease its presence in the market.

It is possible to criticize the marketing-sales approach of the company, as it seems to be more focused on sales rather than satisfying the needs of project owners. This excessive focus on presenting products without sufficiently considering market expectations could result in a long-term decrease of its presence in the public market.

However, it is an honorable approach that seeks to strengthen the company's reputation and brand image, highlighting quality and social responsibility while exploring new opportunities to increase its market presence.

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