

Shelf Space Strategy: Getting Your Products into Military Exchanges

When we talk about government contracting, we usually mean B2B (Business to Government). But there is a massive B2C (Business to Consumer) market hidden inside the DoD: the Military Exchanges (AAFES, NEXCOM) and Commissaries. These are essentially retail chains—shopping malls and grocery stores—located on military bases. For women-owned brands selling consumer goods, from cosmetics to coffee, the **WOSB certification** is a powerful differentiator that can help get your product on the shelf in front of millions of military shoppers.

The military resale ecosystem is mandated by Congress to support small and diverse businesses. The Exchanges have aggressive supplier diversity goals. Unlike a Walmart or Target buyer who cares only about margin, a military buyer cares about margin and compliance. A certified WOSB brand offers the buyer a "two-fer": a great product for the troops and a credit toward their diversity scorecard.

The "Doing Business with Retail" Portal

Selling to the Exchange is different from selling to the Army. You don't usually bid on a contract; you pitch a product. However, the vendor onboarding process still requires federal vetting.

You must be registered in the federal system to be a supplier. The Exchanges check your socio-economic status in the database. If your brand is WOSB certified, you often get access to special "pitch days" or expedited review tracks. It gets you out of the slush pile.

Private Label Opportunities

The Exchanges also have their own private label brands (like the "Patriot's Choice" water or clothing lines). They contract manufacturers to make these goods.

This is a prime contracting opportunity. A WOSB textile manufacturer can win a contract to make the t-shirts sold under the Exchange's house brand. These are high-volume, steady contracts. The certification allows these contracts to be set aside, limiting the competition to other women-owned firms rather than competing against massive global textile conglomerates.

Commissary (DeCA) Brand Entry

The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) runs the grocery stores. Breaking into DeCA is notoriously difficult due to limited shelf space.

However, DeCA regularly holds "emerging brand" reviews. They are actively looking for healthy, sustainable, and diverse products to meet the demands of modern military families. A WOSB-certified healthy snack brand has a compelling story. Presenting your certification alongside your nutritional facts signals that your company aligns with the Department's broader values of diversity and health.

Service-Disabled Veteran & Military Spouse Synergies

The military community supports its own. If you are a WOSB that is also owned by a military spouse or veteran, that narrative is gold in the Exchange ecosystem.

Combine your WOSB certification with "shelf talkers" (marketing signage) that highlight your military connection. The shoppers (soldiers and their families) gravitate toward these brands. The Exchange buyers know this. They want products that resonate with their demographic. Your certification verifies your identity, making the marketing story authentic and compliant.

Conclusion

The military resale market is a \$12 billion industry. For women-owned consumer brands, it offers a unique entry point into the federal sphere—one that feels less like a government contract and more like a retail partnership, but with the added advantage of set-aside protections.

Call to Action

Get your brand on base by leveraging your WOSB status for retail success.