



To: Toronto Public Library Board – February 4, 2002

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Voice Based Application – Award of Request of Proposal**

Purpose:

To obtain Toronto Public Library Board approval for the award of contract for the Voice Based Application.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The purchase of the Voice Based Application has been accommodated within the capital project funding for Remote and Personalized Services.

The total cost of the Voice Based Application is \$321,208.50 for the contract with Talkingtech.com Ltd. and \$21,867 for related one-time equipment and installation costs. Taxes are included (GST 3%).

The annual maintenance costs are \$48,182. The annual operating costs are \$60,606. The maintenance and operating costs have been incorporated into the 2002 operating budget. There are no added staffing requirements.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board approve that staff enter into contract negotiations with Talkingtech.com Ltd. for the Voice Based Application at a price not to exceed \$321,208.50, taxes included (GST 3%).

Background:

CURRENT SERVICES

Toronto Public Library has been using a voice based application to notify Library customers of holds and overdue items and to offer telephone renewals of Library materials in conjunction with Dynix, the Integrated Library System (ILS), since amalgamation in 1998. The Dial-a-Story service (stories in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish or Cantonese for children 24 hours a day) was a product developed by the former North York Public Library and has continued since amalgamation. The voice based applications were used by most of the former libraries.

In 2000, the Library issued 516,000 overdue notifications and 2,000,000 holds notifications using our voice based application. To notify people by mail would cost \$1,207,680 per year in postage alone. In 2000, Library customers renewed 2,500,000 items by phone. Dial-a-story was used 176,000 times.

ISSUES WITH CURRENT SERVICES

There are issues with the current version of the application. The current vendor is no longer actively developing the Library telephony applications. The software runs using either DOS or OS2 as the operating system. These operating systems are considered obsolete within the information technology industry. There is very little IT departmental expertise with OS2. Neither operating system is the current TPL standard. The holds and overdue notification service has changed very little since 1999 beyond expansion necessary to accommodate the growth in the hold notification service. In technical terms, this means that more recent telephony equipment does not always work with the system and that no new functionality has been added to the service. The Library materials renewal service has not been completely successful in offering bulk and single item renewals. Calls are not always successfully picked up and dealt with by the service. The "non pick up" is random and the current vendor is unable to remedy the problem. The lines providing voice recognition for renewals do so with a very limited success rate (30%). Dial-a-story has been built up by the Library to offer stories in more languages to more categories of listeners.

There have been many customer concerns expressed to staff about the voice based services. The quality of outgoing recorded messages has been a source of complaints. Other notification concerns have centred around the amount of space taken up by the message left on answering devices, the desire to eliminate the repetition of the voice messages used when answering devices are the contact, confirmation that calls have been made, and the unnecessary calls made.

Concerns about renewals include the dropped calls, the lengthy wait for response especially in regards to bulk renewals (renewal of all borrowed items at one time), and the inability to check that an item has been renewed. The telephone lines providing voice recognition service do so with a very limited success rate. Public service staff report that there is some loss of confidence in the renewals service. Staff advise frustrated renewals customers to contact Library staff to effect the renewals or to renew Library materials using the web catalogue. The growing use of the web catalogue for renewals, the increasing number of staff-assisted renewals and the slight decline in the use of the automated renewals service support this observation.

In response to the technical and public services issues, the Library submitted a 2001 capital project for Remote and Personalized Services, that included a component for the replacement of the existing voice based applications. The business case for the capital project submission identified a budget of \$385,000 for hardware and software. The capital project was approved as submitted, with cash flow over 3 years, 2001-2003. The cash flow for the voice based application component was for 2001-2002.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The Library issued a Request for Proposal, which was advertised in the Commercial Daily News. Four (4) firms requested copies of the RFP. When the RFP closed on October 11, 2001, the Library received four responses. All responses met mandatory Purchasing requirements.

The responses were evaluated by Toronto Public Library staff based upon the specifications contained in the RFP and requested clarifications from the proponents. The evaluation procedure and scoring process used for this selection established best value, based upon criteria listed in the RFP and cost per point evaluation.

Comments:

The proponents submitting proposals were:

Bell Canada; epixtech, Inc.; SynreVoice Technologies Inc.; and Talkingtech.com Ltd.

The proposal submission prices ranged between \$29,850 and \$557,273.

Because of the significant variations in the proposals, all four vendors were included in the short-list evaluation.

The proposals were evaluated based upon criteria outlined in the RFP and cost per point evaluation.

Proposed solution
Functional requirements
Implementation plan
Technical requirements
Vendor considerations
Price

Based upon the evaluation, the proposal by Talkingtech.com Ltd. received the highest number of points and provides the best value for the Library.

Conclusion:

The Library recommends that staff enter into contract negotiations with Talkingtech.com Ltd. for the supply of a Voice Based Application, at a cost not to exceed \$321,208.50, taxes included.

Contact:

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Not applicable.