Report of the Information Technology Sub Committee on Monitoring and Tracking Software and estimate for "In house built system" and on-going support by Computer Services

Evaluation of Request Tracking and Monitoring Packages

Background

The Cayman Islands Government will be implementing the Freedom of Information law in January 2009 requiring Government agencies to provide the public access to information. The law states that this must be done within a certain time period and compliance with this requirement can be monitored and tracked. To facilitate these requests it has been decided that a centralised Request Tracking and Monitoring system should be used. An exercise was undertaken to identify and evaluate software packages for this purpose.

The two main sources for determining which packages warranted inclusion in the evaluation were a document produced by the UK FOI Office entitled 'Management of Freedom of Information Requests in Other Jurisdictions' and recommendations from the FOI co-ordinator.

Potential Packages

Five systems were identified for potential evaluation. AccessPro, Deltascheme, SISI, FOIAxpress and Vredenburg.

AccessPro is marketed by a company called Privasoft and is used extensively by the Canadian Government as well as a number of other jurisdictions. The BBC uses the Deltashceme package. SISI is utilised by the Mexican Government. The FBI use the system developed by Vredenburg.

Unfortunately all attempts to contact Vredenburg were unsuccessful and that company had to be removed from the shortlist.

The BBC provided a detailed and informative summary of the process they undertook to determine the solution they eventually chose. At the time they were about to introduce an Electronic Document Management system (EDMS) called Livelink that was supplied by a company called OpenText. The Deltascheme solution is an extension to Livelink. Coincidentally the Cayman Island Government is about to implement an Electronic Document Management system. We however, have selected the UCM package from Oracle. Unfortunately the Deltascheme module is specifically written for Livelink and is not compatible with UCM. The feedback from the BBC suggests that whilst the package is generally robust and reliable they had a number of issues regarding requests for changes to the system. As the Deltascheme module is only available for the Livelink EDMS it could not be considered any further.

Privasoft were contacted and a demo of their AccessPro Case Management application was arranged. Their solution appeared to be well designed and worth further consideration. It was also noted that the system was used in the UK whose system requirements are similar to ours.

The Mexican Government has developed a system in-house called SISI to handle their FOI requests. All requests for information have been responded to promptly. A representative from the Mexican FOI office (IFAI) informed us that whilst the software could be provided free of charge it is not currently available in English. Provision of an English version would be charged for, as well as any customisations that may be required. The SISI package has received positive reviews and was determined to be worth further investigation.

FOIAxpress was developed by the US company Ains. It is predominantly used by US Government agencies and is designed around the US Freedom of Information act. It can be integrated with either the EMC or Open Text EDMS. Unfortunately it could not be integrated with the EDMS that the Cayman Islands Government has chosen. Because of this and the fact that it was based on US law it was not considered further.

Summary

The availability of suitable, purpose built request tracking applications is poor. Whilst the two selected vendors' solutions appeared to be reasonable a number of compromises would have to be made. The technology used for the user interfaces in both cases is MS .NET, which we don't currently support. There are concerns about the level of support that we would receive for the SISI solution. AccessPro is only available as client-server, which is awkward to administer and not generally recommended.

Both solutions appear to be functionally sound. Ad-hoc reporting capabilities are included, although it is not clear how this is achieved with SISI.

An in-house built application would have both a better functional match and cost less. The time to build and implement this option may be longer, but this could be achieved before the current deadline. Support costs would also be lower and provided locally.

Conclusion

Based on our evaluations AccessPro would be the favoured package solution.

The in-house built solution however, appears to be better option in terms of functionality, cost and support. It would also be based on supported technology.