



## **Information Technology Competition (ITC) XXIV 2020 - IT Strategy Case**

### **Request for Information (RFI) for Consulting Services for Development of Privacy Policies Governing Information of the Deceased**

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#### **Background Information**

www.iNOU.com (pronounced “I Know You”) is a social networking company. The social networking site was launched five years ago by two founders, a former law enforcement detective division commander and a former chief technology officer who specialized in financial services industry software. Both founders have more than 30 years of experience in their respective fields.

These two founders created a social networking site that achieves the synergy of their collective knowledge of understanding human behavior/relationships and leading edge financial services technologies. Unlike other social networking sites www.iNOU.com focuses on users creating private social networks of individuals they personally know and trust. www.iNOU.com has proprietary tools and capabilities that include a special “relationship discovery engine” which automates identification of known contacts via assimilation of disparate information sources and personal relationships. Additional unique features include the following:

- Single profile supporting professional/public and personal/private relationships to enhance personal privacy.
- Automated import of personal information from other social networking websites via web based interfaces which allow information capture when either data exchange protocols don't exist and/or information exchange is discouraged.
- Personal communications methodology with messaging limitations/budgets which reduce the amount of time required to update and communicate with contacts.
- Targeted advertising integrated into the overall user experience which allows advertisers to pay for advertisements only on a positive outcome basis. Payment of optional annual membership fee allows users to opt out of advertising.
- Extensible software architecture which facilitates continuous introduction of new features and capabilities users can easily follow and understand. Scalable hardware architecture supports rapid growth in users and activity.

These innovative features and capabilities have resulted in www.iNOU.com becoming one of the most valuable social networks. In just under 3 years www.iNOU.com grew to more than 150 million US users. During the last two years average revenue realized per user grew to \$39.85 with 45 percent of users paying the annual fee to opt out of advertising. Annual revenue is forecast to grow to \$6 billion with approximately 3,500 employees. Unlike other social networks www.iNOU.com has been able to lower its dependency on being an ad supported network and has almost tripled its revenue during the past two years. The company continues to grow and fund itself organically and thus does not have any outside angel funding or venture capital and publicly stated it intends to remain private. A recent article in *The*



*Wall Street Journal* speculated that if www.iNOU.com were to go public its market capitalization could be greater than \$850 billion.

### **Problem Statement**

During a recent www.iNOU.com hack-a-thon, an employee conceived the idea of developing a database and website that would collect and maintain data on the deceased. The website would be under the domain name www.digitalcrypt.com. Information on the deceased could be collected from a variety of public sources for very little cost and www.iNOU.com could be an additional source as users were changed to deceased or memorial status. Due to www.iNOU.com's terms of service, information on deceased members could be rolled forward into www.digitalcrypt.com without obtaining a user's permission. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning could be used to analyze the information and either deduce or find missing information in other public sources in an attempt to form a reasonably complete database.

Ideas for potential uses and monetization of information on the deceased included fraud and information abuse detection, extended access to information on the deceased, demographic and statistical studies, family genealogy research and location and/or disposition of remains (cremation, willed body programs, burial plot location, etc.). The Founders of www.iNOU.com considered the business idea to be unusual and innovative. They also recommended engaging marketing research specialists to determine if there might be other business applications for using information on deceased people which had not surfaced. Partnering with a DNA research company, such as 23andMe, was being considered as a way to further enhance genealogical research.

An executive sponsor was assigned to oversee and direct the development of www.digitalcrypt.com (DC). As a first step, DC had to undergo a business risk assessment by the Hack-A-Thon Governance Committee. This Committee was established two years ago, based on the recommendation of outside consultants, in response to the crypto mining project which almost resulted in charges for www.iNOU.com under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). The Executive Sponsor and his team argued that the legal and business risks associated with developing DC were minimal. Deceased individuals do not have a right to privacy. They are unable to develop lawsuits in a court of law or file criminal charges. To date National and State Governments have been unable to build consensus on how to address this issue. The Hack-A-Thon Governance Committee warned the Executive Sponsor and DC Project Team that lawsuits could still be attempted to establish legal precedent which the current body of laws don't address. Defending lawsuits costs money, resources and can be a distraction to other parts of the business. After some deliberation the Hack-A-Thon Governance Committee agreed to allow the DC Project to move forward and be developed into a business.

About six months after beginning the project an initial publicity campaign was launched to introduce www.digitalcrypt.com to the public. The public's reaction was not what was anticipated. Many people found the idea of "monetizing the dead" to be offensive and disrespectful of the deceased. It appeared that clergy from every religious denomination condemned the project from their pulpits. Even President Trump weighed in by tweeting "INOUE KNOWS TOO MUCH!!!" and indicated he was going to develop a bi-partisan initiative to finally achieve regulation on how social media companies such as www.iNOU.com collect and monetize information on private individuals and to treat social media users with R-E-S-P-E-C-T. In many ways the DC Project struck a nerve with the public. The fallout from the



publicity campaign launched social media campaigns on other social platforms to encourage users to close and delete their www.iNOU.com accounts. More than 10 million users closed their www.iNOU.com accounts within 45 days – an unprecedented departure of users in mass from a digital platform. *The Wall Street Journal* broke an exclusive story that www.iNOU.com had been planning an initial public offering (IPO) and started to make comparisons between the WeWork IPO and www.iNOU.com. The planned initial public offering (IPO) was put on indefinite hold until this situation could be addressed.

The founders and shareholders of www.iNOU.com are very concerned about these developments and do not want the social network's brand to be damaged or to be associated with the WeWork IPO debacle. Legal counsel has recommended to them that they should quickly address these public relations issues, avoid legal problems and develop better policies over how to handle and monetize information gathered on the deceased. Based on this recommendation the company has developed and issued a request for information to qualified consulting teams to assist with generating ideas on how to resolve the current public relations problem and for longer term developing and implementing stronger policies that can show www.iNOU.com can handle and monetize information on the deceased in a responsible and respectful way.

Developing and implementing privacy policies governing information of the deceased is complex and neither of the founders has the skill set to lead such a critical effort without competent outside assistance. The founders of www.iNOU.com have identified the following issues they would like addressed by resolving these policy issues and developing and implementing a policies for how information on the deceased should be handled and monetized:

1. What would be the best approach to resolve the current public relations issues? Should www.iNOU.com cease the DC Project? Or should this project continue with new policies, such as requesting permission from the deceased's next-of-kin when reasonable efforts have been made to identify them?
2. What should the scope of the new governance policies be over handling information for the deceased? Should the scope of governance restrict the types of uses for this type of information based on anticipated legal liability? Could a strong preoccupation with legal liability limit the opportunities to monetize this new kind of information?
3. How long does it take to develop and implement privacy policies governing information of the deceased?
4. What members of www.iNOU.com's management and staff should be involved in such an effort and how much of their time would be required?
5. How could developing and implementing privacy policies governing information of the deceased help to defer potential new social media regulations from being considered by the U.S. Government?

### **Request for Information (RFI) Terms and Conditions**

www.iNOU.com is requesting RFIs from qualified consulting teams to assess the practicality of obtaining consulting services to assist with resolving current public relations issues and developing privacy policies governing information of the deceased. In order to evaluate RFIs and to rank consulting teams the company has formed a Consultant Selection Committee composed of prominent IT and business executives from industry. The Consultant Selection Committee will review all RFIs submitted and rank



the consulting teams based on RFIs and oral presentations/interviews. ***The request for information should describe ideas and approaches for how privacy policies governing information of the deceased would be developed and implemented.***

It is recommended each RFI submitted contain at a minimum the following sections:

1. **Background Observations** – The consultants’ interpretation and understanding of www.iNOU.com’s problem (problem statement) and proposed assignment. Identify any special issues the consulting team believes the proposed consulting assignment should address as well as any potential risks.
2. **Scope and Objectives** – What are the objectives of the consultant team’s assistance to www.iNOU.com in order to develop privacy policies for handling and monetizing information of the deceased? What are the boundaries of the consultant team’s services, what areas won’t be covered and which issues may not be addressed?
3. **Proposed Policy Development Process and Implementation Plan** – What areas of information on the deceased should be addressed by the new policies? How will the new policies avoid limiting monetization of this new information? A high-level outline of the implementation steps (not too much detail) which will be completed by www.iNOU.com personnel and consultants together to develop and implement the new policies.
4. **Proposed Consulting Team** – Present the consultants to be assigned, identify their roles in the project and provide information on their past experiences as it relates to completing the consulting assignment.
5. **Timetable and Cost** – What is the schedule for developing and implementing the new policies governing information of the deceased, how long will it take to complete and what might the this project cost? www.iNOU.com is only interested in a very general estimate for cost and schedule, specific detail is not required at this time.
6. **Benefits to www.iNOU.com** – What business benefits (value) will www.iNOU.com receive in exchange for the fees spent to develop and implement new privacy policies governing information of the deceased?

Care should be taken with preparing the contents of the written RFI since it will be incorporated as part of a future contract between www.iNOU.com and the selected consulting team. All RFIs submitted become the property of www.iNOU.com and the company will not be responsible for any costs associated for preparation of RFIs or for attending the oral presentation/interview.

### **Oral Presentation and Interview**

The indigenous www.iNOU.com company culture does not have a tolerance for meetings longer than 30 minutes. Therefore, Consulting Teams will be given 20 minutes to deliver their presentations and then the Consultant Selection Committee will limit questions and answers to 10 minutes. In order for the Consultant Selection Committee to properly understand and evaluate your RFI, it will be very important for the entire oral presentation to be completed within the 20 minute presentation period.



### **Submission of RFIs**

It is the policy of www.iNOU.com to accept RFIs in electronic form only (Adobe Acrobat .pdf format). Proposing consulting teams are responsible for ensuring their RFIs are received by www.iNOU.com's Consultant Selection Committee by the date and time indicated below. Completed proposals shall be uploaded to Google Form and proposing consulting teams will receive an email confirming successful receipt by the Consultant Selection Committee.

### **Important Dates**

Prospective consulting teams should be aware of the following important dates. Failure to complete submissions or attendance at these dates will result in disqualification from being considered for final ranking:

- **April 5, 2020 – Proposals in electronic form due to www.iNOU.com by 11:59 P.M. Pacific Time via Google Form**
- **April 11, 2020 - Presentation slides due by 5:00 PM PST via Google Form**
- **April 11, 2020 – Live Video Presentation and Interview to www.iNOU.com Consultant Selection Committee**

www.iNOU.com's Consultant Selection Committee is looking forward to receiving your RFI and attending your presentation and interview.