

VENDOR RECOMMENDATION
for
A Statewide Resource Sharing System
for Public and School Libraries

Submitted by the
RFP Evaluation Team

Introduction

This Report summarizes the Procedures, Evaluation Criteria, and Conclusion of the RFP Evaluation Team. The formal recommendation of the Team concludes this Report.

Procedures

The State Library of Ohio received four responses by the June 1, 2000, deadline. Responses were received from the following vendors:

1. Auto-Graphics, Inc.
2. epixtech, inc.
3. Fretwell-Downing, Inc.
4. VTLS, Inc.

As outlined in the "Proposed Evaluation Process" (RFP Section 10.0), a review of the mandatory format and section requirements was completed by a subcommittee of the RFP Evaluation Team (Carol Roddy, Executive Director of OPLIN; Pete Bates, Deputy Director for Automation, State Library of Ohio; and Greg Byerly, RFP Consultant.

All four submissions were judged to be responsive, as outlined in the RFP, and all four vendors were invited to make presentations to the RFP Evaluation Team on June 7, 2000. Responses from all four respondents were distributed to members of the RFP Evaluation Team on June 5th. RFP Team members were asked to generally familiarize themselves with the responses before the vendor demonstrations on June 7th.

Each vendor team was given 1 ½ hours to demonstrate their products to the RFP Evaluation Team on June 7th and to respond to questions about their proposals.

After the conclusion of these presentations, the members of the RFP Evaluation Team were directed to individually and independently evaluate responses from all vendors for each specification based on a Q-SPAN (Question, Superior, Positive, Available, Negative) scale.

As outlined in the RFP (10.2), the following criteria were used for this initial scoring:

A Vendor received a “**Q**” or “questions” rating for a response to a specific specification which was unclear and may need a clarification from the Vendor. A **Q** was also given for those specifications which were unclear or because the evaluator wanted to ask a question at the next committee meeting.

A Vendor received an “**S**” or “superior” rating for a response to a specific specification which, when compared to other responses, was clearly superior, more innovative, or exceptional.

A Vendor received a “**P**” or “positive rating for a response to a specific specification which clearly met or exceeded the specification (e.g., the capability is available with few or minor deviations or variations).

A Vendor received an “**A**” or “available” rating for a response to a specific specification which was available, but which was not clearly superior or better than other responses. **A** could also be considered “average” and was given across the board to all Vendors who routinely meet a specification with no real qualitative differences.

A Vendor received an “**N**” or “negative” rating for a response to a specific specification which did not meet the requirements of the specification. The response may have simply been unsatisfactory, unworkable, unresponsive, or inferior to other responses.

The results of these individually completed Q-SPAN ratings were received by the RFP Consultant and compiled by June 19th. As previously agreed by the RFP Team on June 7th, these initial Q-SPAN ratings were reviewed by the subcommittee (Roddy, Bates, and Byerly). It was determined that two vendors (Auto-Graphics and VTLS) would not be invited to make second presentations based on their Q-SPAN scores. Two vendors (epixtech and Fretwell-Downing) were tentatively invited to make follow-up presentations on June 27th, pending approval of the RFP Evaluation Team at its meeting on June 22nd.

The RFP Evaluation Team met on June 22nd to continue the formal review process. The compiled Q-SPAN scores were distributed to the members of the RFP Evaluation Team. Each vendor’s proposal was then individually considered and discussed.

After discussing the proposal from Auto-Graphics and its compiled Q-SPAN scores, a motion by Ben Rule to eliminate Auto-Graphics from further consideration was unanimously approved.

After discussing the proposal from VTLS and its compiled Q-SPAN scores, a motion by Don Yarman to eliminate VTLS from further consideration was unanimously approved.

The proposals of epixtech and Fretwell-Downing were individually discussed and the decision of the subcommittee to invite both to make follow-up presentations on June 27th was affirmed by the Team. Questions and issues to be addressed by the vendors on June 27th were compiled and provided to them on June 23rd.

Each vendor was given 3 ½ hours on June 27th to demonstrate their product, respond to the questions and concerns provided to them in advance, and to clarify additional points raised by the Team. After the presentations the Team members were directed to revise their Q-SPAN ratings for these vendors, as necessary, based on what they had learned and observed.

These revised Q-SPAN ratings were sent to the RFP Consultant by July 9th and compiled. The Q-SPAN ratings were then weighted and scored following the guidelines included in the RFP (10.2).

The results of the numerical Q-SPAN ratings are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1	
QSPAN Numerical Ratings	
Auto-Graphics	2,999
VTLS	3,104
epixtech	4,402
Fretwell-Downing	4,742

Evaluation Categories

Scores were calculated for the specifications included in seven sections of the RFP and represented: (1) Authentication; (2) Patron Interface; (3) Library Functions; (4) System Functions; (5) Management and Support; (6) Training and Documentation; and (7) Plans for Development. These scores are presented in Table 2.

A brief summary of the ratings in each of the seven RFP sections is presented below. All quotations are from members of the RFP Evaluation Team, as included with their Q-SPAN scores.

TABLE 2
Q-SPAN SCORES

	TOTAL POINTS	epixtech	FDI--VDX
3.0 AUTHENTICATION	640	433.	464.5
4.0 PATRON INTERFACE	3240	1499.	1535.4
Searching	400	202.	260.2
Displaying	810	478.	483
Requesting	1390	817.	792.2
5.0 LIBRARY FUNCTIONS	1130	711.	733
Borrowing	420	263.	264.6
Lending	640	405.	423.3
Mediation	70	41.	45.1
6.0 SYSTEM FUNCTIONS	1940	1089.	1257.7
System Functions	1580	865.	992.4
Standards	360	223.	265.3
7.0 MANAGEMENT	630	40	423.3
8.0 TRAINING	250	153.	187.3
9.0 PLANS	170	112.	140.7
Sections 7, 8, & 9	1050	668.	751.3
TOTAL	7360	4401.	4741.9

(1) Authentication [3.0]

This was one of the most technically complicated, but crucial sections of the RFP. FDI was a clear winner in this section, both by Q-SPAN scores (465 for FDI vs 436 for epixtech) and by comments from the Team members. FDI was judged to offer a wide variety of workable authentication options and to have the flexibility to authenticate patrons from many different library automation systems.

Both the written RFP response and the presentations by the company representatives on June 7th and June 27th were well done and communicated a strong desire to work

cooperatively with Ohio to address any authentication issues.

The members of the Evaluation Team were impressed with Fretwell-Downing's ability to explain the technical requirements in a fashion which demonstrated a complete and realistic understanding of the complexity of the situation. The Evaluation Team feels strongly that the ability of the selected vendor to apply standards (both current and forthcoming) to meet the authentication requirements is crucial to Ohio's efforts to successfully implement a statewide resource sharing system (see also Standards below under System Functions).

(2) Patron Interface [4.0]

The Q-SPAN scores were very close in this category, although FDI's score of 1,533 was slightly higher than epixtech's score of 1,517. FDI was given very high marks for searching capabilities (260 points vs 205 for epixtech). Scores in the other two categories, Displaying (483 for FDI and 478 for epixtech) and Requesting (792 for FDI and 818 for epixtech) were statistically ties, varying by less than 2% between the two vendors. However, FDI's ability to allow patrons to be authenticated at the time of their making a request was cited as an advantage.

FDI received high marks for its web-based interface and its ease of use. The biggest advantage cited for FDI was its speed of retrieving and displaying results: "The FDI system returns items immediately rather than waiting for a long (screen-scraped) search to complete" and "What makes VDX stand out here is the system speed: VDX returns results from its broadcast searches immediately, and provides live information to the patron about the progress of the search."

FDI's user interface was judged to be "attractive and intuitive" and one that would be a "very familiar interface and approach for the users." Specifically, it was judged to be "reminiscent of the e-commerce shopping sites currently on the web" and, as such, "should not require any patron training to use." All Team members judged FDI to be superior to epixtech in this category.

The Team is convinced that the patron interface proposed by FDI will meet the needs of users (and librarians) and that all three areas of the patron interface (searching, displaying, and requesting) are acceptable. One Team member concluded: "Preferred FDI to epixtech hands down. No comparison between the two."

(3) Library Functions [5.0]

The Borrowing capabilities were statistically a dead heat (264.6 for FDI and 263.6 for epixtech). FDI was found to be somewhat superior in Lending ((423 for FDI and 406 for epixtech) and Mediation (45 for FDI and 42 for epixtech).

One significant advantage for FDI, perhaps not adequately delineated in the RFP, was its ability to build its lending string by systematically searching all libraries, not just those identified by the patron. All in all, both epixtech and FDI were viewed as having the necessary functionality to provide the required library capabilities, with FDI having a slight edge.

(4) System Functions [6.0]

This section was divided into two areas: system functionality and standards. All members of the Team were impressed with the system architecture proposed by FDI, especially its more centralized approach. This approach was viewed as having significant cost, efficiency, maintenance, and support advantages. The general view seemed to be that “FDI appears to be much cleaner and compact” and that “FDI’s system components are modular in design which should result in fewer system outages.”

Q-SPAN scores reflected the strong support for FDI’s system functions: 992 for FDI and 866 for epixtech.

Although questions about standards were reflected in a relatively small portion of the RFP (6.23–6.27), the Team quickly realized that adherence to national (and international) standards and the use of standard protocols will be essential to the successful implementation of this project. Consequently, both vendors were asked to clarify their use of and position on implementing standards during their second presentation on June 27th. The Q-SPAN scores submitted after these presentation clearly demonstrate that FDI is viewed as the best vendor to work with Ohio’s libraries to implement a standards-based resource sharing system. FDI received 265 points, while epixtech’s points totaled 224.

The Team recognizes that Ohio libraries may have to acquire and install new protocols, often at an additional expense from their library automation vendor, to interface with the system proposed by either FDI or epixtech. Library automation vendors may not have yet developed the required protocols. However, the advantages of having a standards-based system outweigh any immediate implementation problems. Nothing in either proposal showed any clear cost advantage to local libraries in acquiring or installing new protocols.

(5) Management and Support [7.0]

While FDI received more points in this category (423 for FDI and 402 for epixtech), both potential vendors have good track records of supporting major resource sharing projects. However, the size and scope of the Ohio project is of crucial concern. Based on responses in the RFP, statements made to the Team during the presentations, and comments from current customers, the Team concluded that FDI is better positioned, at this time, to provide the necessary management and support to make this is

successful project.

The Team believes that FDI has a strong support organization and a product that is supportable. In addition, staff from OPLIN and the State Library felt that FDI would be a good company to work with as this project is implemented. In the opinion of the Team, FDI appears able to not only support the initial implementation, but also to provide smooth upgrades to new versions.

(6) Training and Documentation [8.0]

Members of the RFP Team were clearly impressed with the proposal by FDI and the Q-SPAN scores reflect this opinion: 187 for FDI and 154 for epixtech. FDI commitment to provide appropriate levels of training was evident in their formal response and in statements made during the presentations.

(7) Plans for Development [9.0]

The three questions in this section were designed to give respondents an opportunity to “sell” their system by demonstrating what they have accomplished in the past year, to indicate what their future plans are, and to outline how they would work with the public and school libraries in Ohio to make statewide resource sharing a reality. By a large margin, Team members reacted more positively to the responses of FDI: 141 points for FDI vs 112 for epixtech.

The centrality of the resource sharing system in the FDI product line was viewed very favorably: “They don’t have anything else to sell us.” FDI clearly demonstrated a strong vision of their future as a document delivery and resource sharing system. In addition, it is clear that FDI views their product as modular, consistent, and standards-based.

It is significant that FDI is enhancing and customizing an existing and successful product. Each of the other three vendors which responded to the RFP are primarily library automation companies who are adding, either by acquisition or non-exclusive partnerships with smaller, more specialized resource sharing application vendors, a resource sharing component to their existing library automation product.

Other Factors Considered

Even though there was a clear winner when the Q-SPAN scores were tabulated and a unanimous agreement that Fretwell-Downing best met the overall objectives of the RFP, the Evaluation team also assessed the other factors listed in the RFP (9.2). These factors were: (1) Experience of the Vendor; (2) The Vendor’s financial condition; (3) The Vendor’s conduct and performance on previous contracts; (4) The Vendor’s facilities; (5) The Vendor’s managerial and operational skills; and (6) The Vendor’s ability to execute the contract properly. There were no reservations or concerns about these factors for Fretwell-Downing.

Conclusion

The RFP Evaluation Team conducted a thorough and complete evaluation of the responses to the RFP and carefully followed each of the steps in the evaluation process outlined in the RFP. Each member of the Team individually and independently submitted Q-SPAN scores which had FDI numerically superior to epixtech. Concluding comments about FDI from Team members were very positive:

- FDI's products look to have an exciting future as the company positions itself for the digital age
- FDI appears to be a forward thinking company, quick to embrace new emerging standards
- FDI comes closest to the central system we originally envisioned
- FDI's vision of the future "sold me".
- FDI is a better designed product; it's not patched together
- I love how they've been able to develop and implement things rapidly over the last few years
- The search approach in VDX is excellent and should provide good performance and ease of upgrade and scalability.
- FDI's commitment to software standards and willingness to be as truthful as possible during their Questions and Answers clearly scores them points with me.

After receiving a draft copy of this report, the Team members unanimously agreed that Fretwell-Downing best met the overall objectives of the RFP.

Therefore, the RFP Evaluation Team strongly recommends that the State Library of Ohio enter into negotiations with Fretwell-Downing to provide the product and services formally proposed in Fretwell-Downing's response to the RFP.

The RFP Evaluation Team does feel that epixtech could be further investigated as a potential vendor if negotiations with Fretwell-Downing are not satisfactorily completed. However, the concerns and deficiencies evident in the Q-SPAN scores would have to be directly addressed. The Team does not feel that either Auto-Graphics or VTLS can meet the requirements of the RFP and the needs of Ohio at this time. Therefore, it does not endorse either as viable candidates.

Although the Evaluation Team ranked the vendors without considering the cost of the products, it must be emphasized that an analysis of the cost proposals for both vendors determined that Fretwell-Downing's proposal was substantially less expensive making it much more cost effective, although local libraries will likely incur additional expenses for interfacing with FDI..

Recommendation

The following electronic motion made by Peter Bates to recommend Fretwell-Downing was unanimously approved:

Be it resolved that the State Library of Ohio accept Fretwell-Downing's proposal and proceed to negotiate a contract with Fretwell-Downing which permits the public libraries and schools in Ohio to initiate a statewide resource sharing system.

Submitted by the following Members of the RFP Evaluation Team:

Tony Marshalek
Jean Banks
Lois Lequyea
Edrice Ivory
Ben Rule
Don Yarman
Carol Roddy
Ann Baines
Pete Bates