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WAYS TO ACCELERATE GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT



C M T S
Case Management & Tracking System

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GSA Contract Holder
Contract # GS -35F- 0218X

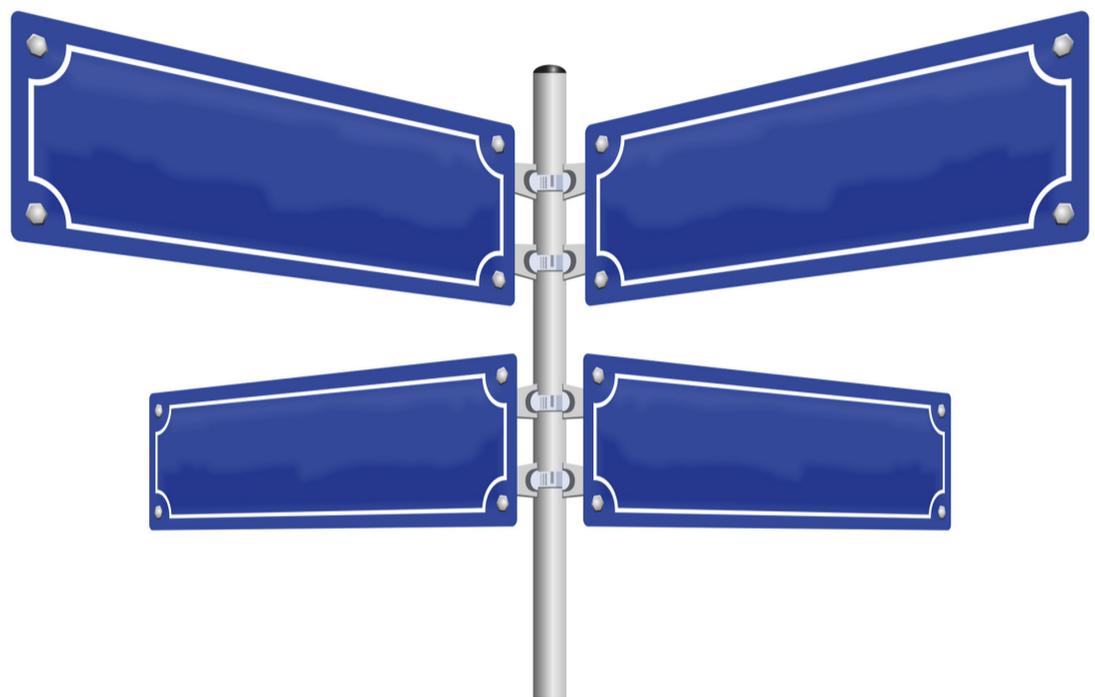


A TONGUE & CHEEK PARABLE

This is the story of four organizations that are customers of WingSwept's Case Management & Tracking System (CMTS). All of these organizations are happily using the software, but they each took a different path to becoming customers. These are their stories...

It was time for the annual Association of Inspectors General (AIG) conference in Seattle, WA. This conference gathers together prominent leaders in the IG community for educational sessions as well as to meet vendors who serve the community. Mark, Kate, David and Paul had all met at the conference the previous year. They had developed a bond which was formed after seeing a demonstration of the Case Management & Tracking System (CMTS) developed by WingSwept despite working for different agencies. After seeing that demonstration, each of them could clearly see the benefits that software would reap for their organizations, mainly in modernizing their processes and reporting capabilities. Also, the software would help strengthen various weaknesses in their current systems—weaknesses that needed to be addressed."

The four had lunch together on one of the first days of the conference. After a brief chat about the last session, Kate asked if everyone had moved forward with implementing CMTS. Each of the four indicated that in fact they had become CMTS customers and were happily using the product. Well, everyone except for Paul, an employee for a large municipal investigative agency. Paul indicated that they had just finished purchasing the software earlier in the month.



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"Wow," Kate indicated, "we've been live for more than 9 months now."

"How in the world did you do that!" exclaimed Paul. "It took us pretty much the entire last year just to procure the software to get started."

David and Mark had a similar experience to Kate, conveying that they had been live for about six months. Naturally, they were interested to hear what took Paul's agency so long to get started.

Paul, of course, was interested in how Kate was able to procure CMTS so quickly and get it into use in their agency.

"Can you tell us how you were able to pull that off, Kate?"

"Well," Kate began, "I started off by going to the procurement office for our agency and speaking with a contracting officer (CO). I let them know that our current system was difficult to use and didn't allow us complete the necessary tasks to efficiently run the investigative process."

REACHING YOUR PROCUREMENT GOALS

The CO responded with several questions about Kate's current system as well as whether they had done an analysis of what they needed in a new system. Kate worked with her team to ensure all of the CO's questions were answered.

"None of the questions were particularly hard," Kate commented. "We simply focused on quickly moving the ball forward rather than putting it on the back burner. We knew that the efficiency gains we would attain would be worth the time we spent fast-tracking the procurement.

Another question Kate's CO asked her is as follows: "Is the system that you believe would benefit us the greatest available through the GSA contract?" It was a quick check of WingSwept's website to find out that in fact they do have CMTS available through the GSA contract.

"We quickly gathered a group of experts in our organization so we could begin the process," Kate continued. "We needed members from our budget office, our procurement office, and our information technology team. Our CO was quick to point out that since we were procuring software, we needed to include the IT people upfront. The horror stories we heard about other groups who didn't include their IT teams early on and, therefore, were unable to make the procurement due to a lack of required security controls were thankfully avoided. On a positive note, CMTS already had FedRAMP® authorization, which was most impressive to our IT team, so after asking a few questions about hosting and access, they were fully on-board.

"Once everyone had asked their questions and we completed some market research

on other products, including demonstrations of those platforms, I was back in our CO's office for the next steps."

Together, Kate and her CO agreed that CMTS, the most used software in the Federal OIG space, was the clear winner to meet their needs.

"Our CO started the process for us to procure the system using a GSA purchase." She continued. "In our case, it was a direct purchase which involved us sending the team at WingSwept a request for a quote (RFQ) which was based on a quote we had already received from them as part of our market research phase.

After two weeks of sorting through the details, we issued a purchase order using their GSA schedule. The entire process from start to finish only took us about a month of time. This accomplishment was only possible due to our involvement with others early on and determination to stay on top of our schedule, following the steps recommended by our CO. After completing our purchase, we scheduled our kickoff call with the WingSwept team and finished up our on-boarding within two months. We only had a question or two along the way which they were happy to answer as part of the on-boarding."



That process was quick as well, and we made sure that we did what we needed to in terms of homework between the sessions. We were able to get an export of our data from our previous system and very easily use the pre-built import within CMTS to input our case data in for the previous years without additional support from the CMTS team. They did let us know they were happy to help us with the process upon request, but we did not find outside help necessary. We only had a question or two along the way which they were happy to answer as part of the on-boarding.”



Paul sat there speechless with his mouth agape. It was obvious to Kate, Mark, and David that his process was not as easy-going through the rigors of an RFP.

Kate decided to take the pressure off Paul and asked Mark how his process went. Mark worked for a state agency that conducted investigations. They weren't an inspector general office, but their processes and mandates were very similar to those of an OIG. In fact, Mark had previously worked for an OIG, which led him to become an AIG member.

“Well, our process was a bit different, but not fundamentally”, said Mark. “I went through a lot of the same steps as you, Kate. I talked to our procurement office and a contracting officer, but it took me a bit of bumbling to figure out who I should speak with. I started with the IT people since they had experience in purchasing and I wanted to buy software. Some of them took me down the weird path, believing they could build me a system. A few weeks flew by before I realized we didn't need to be in the business of developing software.

“None of the folks on our investigative team had ever done a procurement since we don't use many outside vendors. To obtain advice on this topic, I reached out to other agencies in our state that use CMTS and asked them how they went about the process. One of them had done an RFP; after hearing that story, I wanted to die a little. Another agency, who had procured the previous year in an expedited fashion, enlightened me on using a direct purchase option. Basically, they did the market research on competing systems to make a justification for a sole source. “In our state, there are certain thresholds where you can justify that route and the total cost for CMTS was under those thresholds for both the initial year as well as the out-year costs. That allowed us to simply issue a purchase order to WingSwept to buy CMTS.

“We did a review of the CMTS terms and conditions and realized they were the same T&C’s used on the GSA schedule. Our CO let us know that those had already been vetted as part of the GSA contracting process and were likely sufficient for our needs. We knew we could have gone through a full-blown contracting process, but I pushed back on legal and we were able to avoid it. That was easily one of our finest moments.

“One area where we didn’t do nearly as well as Kate was keeping it on the front burner. We had a lot of other things going on so our process still took us several months to get through. In retrospect, we could have gotten it done a lot faster, but in the end we got it done in a way that was within the boundaries of our procurement processes and limits without anything remotely shady.

Since we normally do investigations on procurement activities, it was important to us that we do things the right way. It turns out that the right way doesn’t mean that you always have to do a full and open competition. Our CO was very helpful in guiding us through the process.”activities, it was important to us that we do things the right way. It turns out that the right way doesn’t mean that you always have to do a full and open competition. Our CO was very helpful in guiding us through the process.”“Well, our process wasn’t quite the same as yours, Mark, but it was pretty straight forward. We started by calling another OIG office at the state level that was already using CMTS and had been for many years. After ensuring they were satisfied with the system and watching them hold a demonstration of their system setup, we were hooked.



DRAWBACKS OF USING AN RFP

“I had never done a software procurement before,” David admitted, “so I asked them how they went about buying CMTS. It turns out that our state has a state contract for purchasing IT items such as hardware and software. The state contracts are done at a high level so that any agencies of the state government, and apparently even municipalities, are able to leverage the contract. We worked with our procurement office to put out a request for a quote to buy CMTS through that state contract. The contract holders then reached out to the CMTS team and got quotes of their own directly from them. They presented us with quotes and we were able to choose the lowest cost. Our CO let us know that it was perfectly fine to use this option for procurement since we met the requirement of completing the procurement through multiple state contract holders. Each of the contract holders had their own markup on the price they received from WingSwept, but the time savings was well worth the monetary difference. We also didn’t have to go through any legal reviews since that was already established by the setup of the state contract that we used. We did have a few delays in our process because, like Paul, we let our day jobs get in the way of moving the process forward. In the end, though, we got it procured within a few months, but took longer on the on-boarding than what Kate described. Mostly our issues there were not involving good core team to make implementation calls with the CMTS team as a result of not getting our homework done on time.



In retrospect, we could have avoided that if we had a good cross functional team pulled together for the implementation up front. The CMTS folks were great at walking us through things, but we needed to be able to make decisions and we just didn’t have those folks in the room when we needed them.” As David finished up his comments, everyone naturally turned to Paul who was starting to rock back and forth in his chair.

“Paul, would you like to share your process?” By the look on his face, it was clear his process was different—agonizingly different. “We don’t want to make you re-live the trauma, but if you can, maybe tell us what you guys went through.”

Paul started off slowly, but gradually got more comfortable as he described their process.

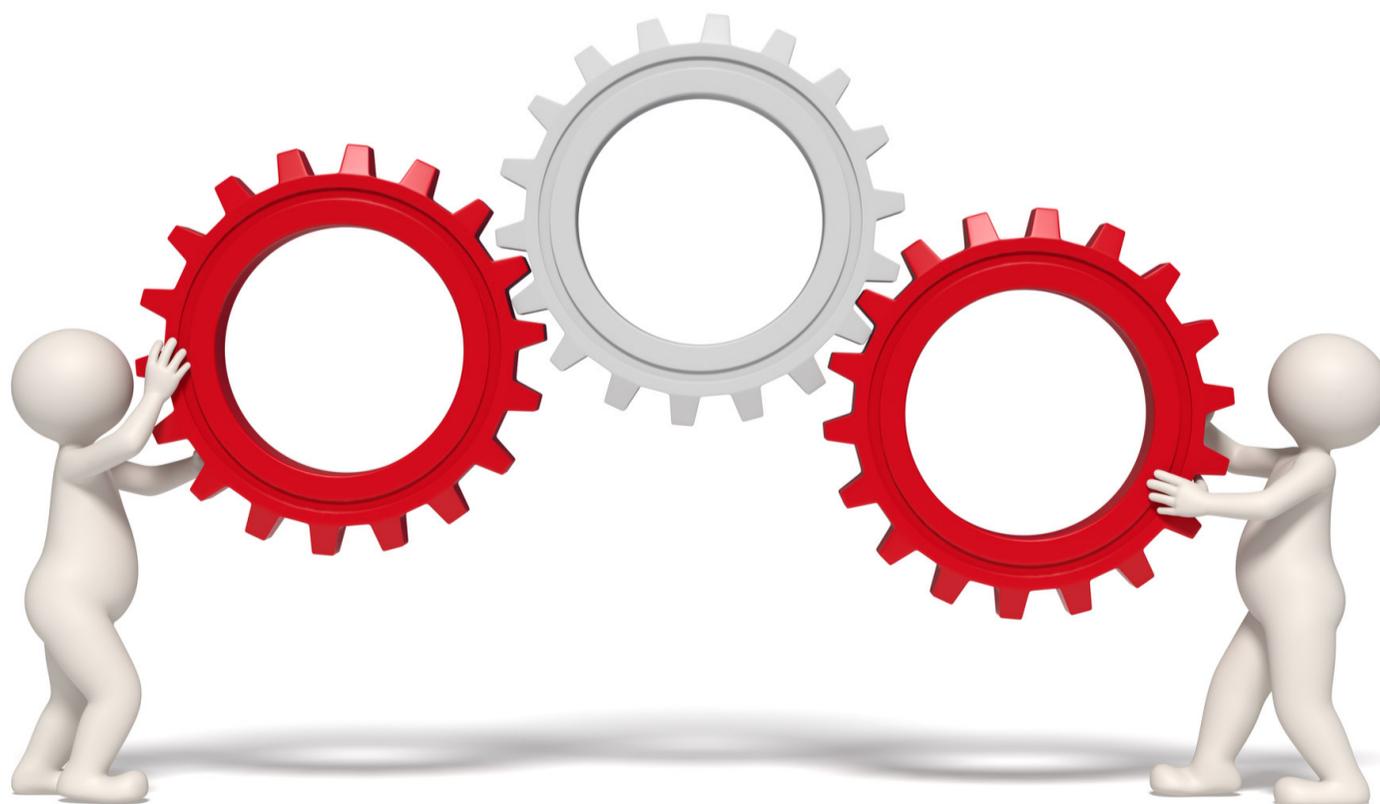
Paul worked for the OIG of a large county government who had been using spreadsheets to track their cases. They knew they needed to switch to something more modern.

“We started off the same way as some of you guys did by asking questions of the various folks. Our contracting officer listed several reasons why RFP was the only route we could go. In retrospect it may have been due to the scathing report our office had issued on the procurement office the week before. Things are starting the line up now....

“We had a lot of steps in our process, and we knew that the CO wasn’t pleased with us so we had to follow his advice. First, we were told we had to write a request for information (RFI). We had never written one before so we looked at samples provided by the contracting office for other systems and adapted them for our use. Not only was that a time-consuming process due to our lack of experience, but also a lengthy one since we didn’t know all of the questions that we wanted to ask. Once we finally had our RFI completed, we reviewed it with the CO, got comments, and went back to the drawing board. That went through several iterations of the process.

“Once we finished that, the CO released the RFI, allowing vendors to ask us questions as a first step. Our RFI wasn’t super specific so we had a lot of interest in our RFI. In all, we got questions from a dozen possible vendors for the project and each of them asked us about 20-30 Questions. With that many vendors, we had to answer several hundred questions just in the early stage of the RFI. We were forced to extend the deadline for submission of the RFI since we couldn’t get all of the questions answered fast enough. Many of the questions were near duplicates, but we had to answer each one individually since they weren’t exact copies of each other. After we crafted our responses, the CO sent the answers out to the potential vendors who had two weeks to submit their responses. Out of the 12 vendors who submitted questions, only about 10 of them submitted RFI responses. Each of those was approximately 50-100 pages in total length. We didn’t realize until after the fact that we could have been specific on page count requirements. So, we had about a thousand pages of responses we had to read through as a result. Reading those responses gave us our sense of what was out in the market. It took us several months as six different people in our office working on the procurement had to read through all of the RFI responses individually, further elongating our timeline.

From there, our CO told us that we needed to write up a Request for Proposal (RFP) which we felt only slightly more prepared to handle. There was a lot more legalese and contract speak in that document. Our CO provided us with samples and left us to the process. We mainly had to make up requirements for a theoretical system. Since we had done demos with CMTS and several other vendors, we pieced together elements from their RFI responses to Frankenstein the requirements together. (While a good idea at the time, it would come back to bite us later.) Just like with the RFI, we went through several iterations of the RFP with the contracting officer.





About the time we thought we had it done, we found out that the CO was busy with other procurements trying to hit an end of fiscal year deadline, and we were told we would have to wait. This caused us to lose the funding we had earmarked for the initial year.

We did finally get the RFP released and went through the whole question process again. We had less vendors this time as we had learned to be specific, but since it was an RFP and not an RFI, they asked a lot more questions this time around. Overall, we had to answer another several hundred questions which were overflowing with details.

It was clear from reading some of the questions that we would have to amend part of our RFP since we have asked for something that didn't exist in the market. It was also clear that our requirements were going to drive the price higher, although I don't think we appreciated at that point the magnitude of what that meant. "We got the questions answered, but then had to write some amendments to the RFP to send out with the questions. Naturally, that process took consumed time, so we had to do a quick amendment to push out the timelines. We ended up having to do that twice, actually. By this point, we had about six months invested in the process. Once we finally got the questions back out, we just had to wait a few weeks to get the responses back from the vendors. We were smart enough to use

page counts for some of the sections, but we missed giving them a clear method for laying out their responses. Unfortunately, that led to further analysis as a review committee since we had to try and figure out how to compare the responses to each other. As expected, even more time was wasted. We had to read through several hundred pages of responses. Our CO had already let us know that if we had a mistake in our procurement process which was unfair to one of the vendors, it was likely we would face a protest from one of the vendors which could seriously delay or even cause us to have to cancel the procurement altogether. So, we took our time and went through the process of evaluating the bids methodically. "The pricing swings were huge between some of the vendors. We had everything from ten fold our budget to people that clearly didn't understand our proposal's financial needs. The CMTS offered evidence of their ability, but some of the requirements we had put in actually drove their pricing higher than we had expected based on the RFI responses. We ended up writing requirements using several different vendors capabilities, and as it turns out, no one vendor had all of those unique attributes. Those requirements had to be added into the responses as custom development. That was a travesty since we didn't actually need all of that functionality, we just thought it sounded good in the write-up.

“Our CO suggested that we have formal demos with each of the providers as part of the process, so we had to write a script for that with expectations. Each of the respondents was given a few hours of our time to discuss those demonstrations. Since we had already seen most of the products in the market research part of our work, this was highly redundant and time-consuming for everyone. Once we finally had our process finished and our reviews done, we started on contract negotiations. This is where our legal and risk departments got involved. They threw out some boilerplate contracts and we began the process of trying to make one fit our situation. Much of the legalese was more appropriate for other types of contracts, so we had tons of editing to do. In the end, the legal contract ended up being more than 100 pages on its own. We had to send that to the WingSwept team, somewhat sheepishly, for review. I don't think I had as much appreciation as I should have for what we were asking them to accept. Effectively, we had given them a set of requirements to write a proposal for and then gave them a contract to review that added a whole new set of requirements for them as part of the process. We had several back and forth legal reviews before we finally got to the point of signing a contract. There were points in the review where we thought our lawyers were being a bit heavy-handed in the process with the WingSwept team. We finally got the contract signed off by the WingSwept team, but we still had to go through about five more steps in our county government to get things signed off by the appropriate parties so we could proceed.



“As I sit here and examine all of this, I wonder why the Federal government can procure something so easily but us, as a county government, makes it so complicated.”

“You do know that state and local governments are allowed to purchase off the GSA schedule right?” Kate informed him. Paul was holding his head in his hands at this point. People from other tables were starting to stare.

“Well, we got there I guess. We did finally get the agreement signed by all the parties, and we held the kickoff with the CMTS team last week. We still have a long way to go before we can go live, but I'm definitely going to take your advice, Kate, on that part so we don't waste any more time than we already have.”

Kate, Mark, and David all felt sorry for Paul but were secretly glad they avoided all of the work his agency went through.

At the end of the day, all four of them would be using the same system; however, Kate, Mark, and David saved countless hours in the procurement process and procured the system for less money than Paul's agency.

As their conversation came to a close, the conference announcer reiterated that the next session would be starting in a few minutes. All of them chuckled when they realized it was a session on the various ways to navigate procurement and how to do so ethically. Kate, of course, was one of the speakers on the panel, and Paul... Well, he concluded his best contribution to the topic would be his cautionary tale.

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