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CAPS
COMPETITIVE ARMENIAN PRIVATE SECTOR

Request for Proposals
Firm-level assistance for
Vis-à-vis Tour

Date of Issuance: **February 26, 2010**

Due Date for Proposals: **6:00 PM on March 15, 2010**

SECTION A. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF WORK

Background

The Competitive Armenian Private Sector project (hereinafter CAPS or the Project) is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by several U.S. and Armenian consulting firms, including: Nathan Associates, Inc, J.E. Austin Associates, Inc, Emerging Markets Group, and EV Consulting. The goal of CAPS is to increase employment by stimulating growth and increasing the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Currently CAPS is working with the growing Armenian information technology, tourism and pharmaceutical clusters to identify globally competitive products and services and to help build robust companies around those products and services. CAPS technical assistance takes many forms and includes: firm level consulting, business association capacity building, policy research and advocacy, public education, work force training and development of public / private initiatives.

Under the project's Business Development Services component, CAPS helps companies in the targeted clusters obtain the services of qualified local consultants or Business Service Providers (BSPs) to help them solve various types of business development problems. CAPS covers part of the costs for such consulting assignments and helps clients select and contract with qualified service providers through a competitive procurement process. Typically CAPS covers 50-75% of the costs of individual assignments, with client firms responsible for paying the balance. CAPS staff and consultants are also available to work with clients and the BSPs selected for such assignments to ensure that services satisfy client needs and meet professional standards.

Within the framework of the Firm Level Assistance program, CAPS stresses the importance of promoting local IT solutions to selected cluster companies. This RFP focuses on assisting the Vis-à-vis Tour in the area of website optimization.

Description of Proposed Activity

The purpose of this Request for Proposals is to obtain the services of a qualified local BSP (IT Company) to assist Vis-à-vis Tour (the client) to develop their company website into a major marketing and sales tool. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) will allow the company to increase its market share of individual and group travelers. The funding arrangement of the assignment will be made on a cost sharing basis with the client company.

Company Background

Vis-a-vis Tour is an Armenian Incoming Tour Operator established in 2006. The company has three distinct product offerings: General, soft adventure and regional tours. The general packages include religious, cultural and historical tours in Armenia ranging from 3 to 14 days. Soft adventure tours offer city breaks and bird watching. The regional tours include visits to Armenia, Georgia for cultural and historical tours.

All company tours are led by bilingual Spanish, English, German & French-speaking professional guides. The company's programs include visits to cognac & wine factories, hand-made carpet factories and other national attractions.

The company also provides services for business travelers, discount hotel accommodation, transfers, interpreter provision and conference/event organization.

More information about Vis-à-vis Tour can be found from their website: <http://www.visavistour.com>

Problem/Needs Definition

The company presently receives business through partners/tour operators. Although the website is being actively improved, it is yet to bring any significant business to the company. Both group and individual bookings occur through partner companies.

Due to the increasing importance of the Internet as a marketplace, Vis-à-vis Tour intends to convert the website from just a presentation to an effective marketing and sales tool, and increase the number of bookings by 30%. Even though the website content is up-to-date, the website is not well-positioned and doesn't take advantage of SEO tools to bring relevant and convertible traffic to the site.

Vis-à-vis Tour is looking for a SEO company to improve the return on investment of their site.

Tasks

Specific tasks for the assignment include:

STAGE 1

1. Understand company niche, positioning and target market strategy in relation to the website
2. Establish current number of website visitors and conversions
3. Identify current activities towards increasing site visitors and conversions
4. Perform detailed site audit to identify problems which hinder the website from becoming a productive marketing tool for the company
5. Establish measurable goals, such as:
 - a. Increase in number of relevant visitors to the site, time spent on the site, pages viewed, etc
 - b. Increase in conversions
6. Prepare Website Diagnostic Report, including the methodology used to perform the diagnostics tests, descriptions of the problems, conclusions and SEO recommendations, which then will be implemented during the project. Recommendations should include:
 - a. Onsite optimization suggestions, such as
 - i. Optimizing meta tags

- ii. URL structure
 - iii. Content and keyword density
 - iv. Internal link architecture (anchor texts)
 - v. Accessibility
 - vi. Usability and navigation
 - vii. User engagement features
 - viii. Website response time
 - ix. Website visitor tracking and analytics
 - x. Other suggestions, if necessary (such as News, E-newsletter, RSS feeds, etc.)
- b. Offsite optimization suggestions, such as
 - i. External link building strategy, including
 - 1. Press releases
 - 2. Articles
 - 3. Blogs and blog commenting
 - 4. Forums posting
 - 5. Bookmarking
 - 6. Social media engagement (such as Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, SlideShare, Twitter, etc.)
 - ii. PPC strategy
 - iii. Email campaigns with signature
 - c. Offline marketing strategies, including:
 - i. Using URL on the brochures, business cards and all the promo materials of the company

7. Prepare Vis-à-vis Tour Company Website Optimization Strategy

STAGE 2

- 8. Implement Vis-à-vis Company Website Optimization Strategy together with the active involvement of the company marketing staff and programmer
- 9. Prepare one interim and one final report on the outcomes, emphasizing activities performed per each strategy points, and the results

NOTE: It is vital that company marketing personnel and programmer be involved in the project and during the consulting period implement the recommendations of the consulting company in order to achieve the highest possible results.

Technical Approach

The business service provider will describe in their proposal the approach they will take to implement the tasks described above, including the description of the specific subtasks to be carried out during each phase, the required level of effort, the proposed timeline for completing tasks, and the expected results from each phase of the assignment.

Expected Outcomes

- 1) Increased website visitors and conversions
- 2) Increased sales through Website

Expected Deliverables

1. Website Diagnostics, Report
2. Vis-à-vis Tour Website Optimization Strategy
3. 1 press release
4. List of PR sites
5. List of relevant article sites
6. List of forums and blogs
7. Final Report
8. Website article for CAPS

Timeline/schedule for completing assignment

The service provider should specify in their proposal the schedule for completing the deliverables included in this RFP. The assignment should be completed no later than May 31, 2010.

Eligible Applicants:

Any legally-registered Armenian entities are eligible to submit proposals. Government-owned organizations are not eligible to apply.

SECTION B. INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Instructions for preparation of technical proposal:

In responding to this RFP, bidders should prepare a brief technical proposal that describes their approach for conducting this assignment, including carrying out the tasks specified in the RFP and producing the required deliverables. The technical approach section should also address the issues outlined in the following section that describes RFP selection criteria. In addition, the technical proposal should provide a brief summary of the company's management plan for carrying out the assignment and provide a summary of past performance and relevance experience in areas directly related to the scope of work for this RFP. The technical proposal (excluding resumes and summaries of relevant experience) should not exceed 10 pages. Resumes and summaries of relevant experience should be included as an attachment to the technical proposal.

Proposal Selection Criteria

Technical proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Relevance & Clarity: (10 points)

- Proposal outlines in detail the nature and scope of services the contractor is prepared to offer
- Proposal meets the overall objectives of the activity, is clear, well laid out, and concise

2. **Technical Approach:** (25 points)

- Technical approach provides a useful, concise description of the methodology and strategies to be employed for implementing the current assignment
- Technical approach provides evidence that the bidder is able to provide effective solutions to help the company achieve the assignment objectives.
- Technical approach should provide the time frame for completing each individual deliverable of the assignment.

3. **Management Plan** (10 points)

- Company has adequate management capacity to carry out the tasks outlined in the scope of work and assure the delivery of high quality services that meet client requirements.

4. **Past Performance and Consultant Qualifications** : (25 points)

- Company is able to demonstrate that it has an established track record in providing the types of services specified in this RFP.
- Company is able to provide specialists with strong capabilities that are required for conducting the assignment.
- Company should submit a summary of references of past and current performance including examples of similar assignments the firm has conducted, relevant reports and materials, and resumes of proposed consultant/s as attachments to their technical proposal.

Instructions for preparation of Cost Proposals

Cost proposals will receive a relative weight of 30 points and will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Total cost proposed to conduct the assignment
- Proposed consultant rates for firm-level assignments are reasonable in relation to local market conditions (assuming CAPS cost-sharing of approximately 75%)

Note: CAPS will cover 75% of the costs of consultants. The client will pay the remaining 25% plus 100% of any other direct costs (transportation, communications, etc.) that may be required to complete the assignment. In addition, the client will be required to pay 20% VAT for their portion of the costs. No VAT will be required for the CAPS share of the costs.

Decision making process

Procedures for selecting a BSP to conduct the assignment will be conducted in compliance with CAPS policies. Receipt of proposals will be acknowledged by CAPS. Within 10 days after the RFP deadline, a CAPS Evaluation Committee will review completed proposals. Once the top bidder is selected other applicants will be notified on the status of their bid.

SECTION C. PROPOSAL FORMAT

In order to participate in the competition, all eligibility requirements, as outlined above, should be met. The technical proposal submitted to CAPS should not exceed 10 pages and should include the following sections:

1. A title page that lists the title and number of the procurement
2. Table of contents
3. Introduction
4. Company profile
5. Project implementation strategy (technical approach, timeline, project outcomes, other)
6. Management Plan
7. Summary of Past Performance and Staff Qualifications (short summaries of relevant assignments completed in the past and staff qualifications). More detailed descriptions of relevant experience, samples of written products produced for clients, and CVs of proposed staff and consultants can be included in an annex to the technical proposal.
8. Additional information that you feel is relevant to your technical proposal

The cost proposal should be prepared as a separate document and should include the following:

1. The title of the proposal
2. A budget for the proposed assignment. This will provide details of the proposed level of effort to carry out the assignment; including the time that will be allocated to different staff members or consultants and their proposed daily rates. Other direct costs required to carry out the assignment can be included in the budget but will be covered by the client with no cost-sharing from CAPS.

Proposals received late or incomplete shall not be reviewed. Bidders may send questions to Susanna Ayyazyan: sayvazyan@caps.am by 5:00 PM, March 9, 2010. Questions received after this date will not be accepted. Answers to questions received will be sent via email to ALL bidders on March 11 without indicating which firm asked each question. Instructions and information in addition to this RFP are only official if provided in writing. No verbal requests will be accepted.

The purpose of seeking this volume of information is to make certain that the CAPS has conducted sufficient due diligence to enable it to determine whether applicants are likely to fulfil the goals of the competition.

CAPS will make every attempt to maintain confidentiality of the information submitted by applicants. The Project does not use information presented by applicants for purposes other than review by its own and USAID.

CAPS is not required to return documentation submitted in the process of application. CAPS reserves the right not to award a contract for this RFP.

SECTION D. SCHEDULE AND LOGISTICS

This Request for Proposals is effective February 26, 2010. **The deadline for submission of proposals is 6:00 PM on March 15, 2010.** Proposals should be submitted to the CAPS Office at: 26/3 Sarian Street, 002, Yerevan, Armenia in both hard AND electronic copies in two separate envelopes (financial and technical) (CD/DVD) by regular pouch or hand delivery. Contact person: Susanna Ayyazyan. Proposals must be submitted in English and should not exceed 10 pages excluding attachments (CVs, sample reports, references). Preferred font: Arial, size 11, single space. Acknowledgement of receipt will be provided once the pouch is registered at CAPS reception. Only one successful applicant will be chosen to conduct the assignment.