AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDY OF HOW A NEW MOBILE APP CAN HELP MINORITY AND WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES WIN CITY AND STATE CONTRACTS

Challenge

The de Blasio and Cuomo administrations, like their predecessors, have set increasingly ambitious goals for the share of public contracts going to minority- and women-owned businesses (MWBE). The de Blasio administration has set a goal of awarding 30% of procurement dollars to minority- and women-owned businesses.

According to an October report from Comptroller Scott Stringer, only 4.8% of the city's procurement of goods and services went to MWBEs in fiscal 2016—or $728 million out of $15.3 billion. That marked a decline from the previous fiscal year, when the participation rate stood at 5.3%. Only 994 of the city's MWBEs got a piece of that procurement pie in 2016, the report said.

Solution

One government-relations firm, Capalino & Company, in partnership with an MWBE, Celeritas Digital Solutions thinks it has a way to ease the process for businesses and help government agencies meet their goals: a mobile application that can match a business owner's set of skills with the appropriate requests for proposal. The mobile app, called MWBE Connect NY aims to help MWBEs decode RFPs and navigate through New York's bureaucratic thicket. Every day MWBE Connect NY pulls data from the city and state on every RFP that's been published."

The app matches a subscriber—based on his or her outline—with a curated list of RFPs by employing an algorithm. The software also serves as an information hub on MWBE issues. MWBE Connect NY cost to subscribers is $225 per quarter or $600 for the year.

There's a big market for the app: In New York City alone, there are more than 4,500 certified minority- and women-owned businesses.

Image: Adding Cognitive Computing To App

Expanding the App by adding cognitive computing capability, such as IBM Watson and Bluemix services would expand the current capability of MWBE Connect NY. Cognitive systems understand concepts and are capable of reasoning – they understand underlying ideas and concepts and they form hypothesis, they infer and extract concepts. Cognitive systems learn from experience – improving with each new piece of information, interaction and outcome. They develop expertise. MWBE Connect NY would tailor its response to meet the special requirements of individual subscribers by learning what their interests and strengths are base on their experience using the App. IBM Watson would add a natural language interface permitting subscribers to communicate as though they were instructing a member of their staff to conduct and report on their research finding.