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Franklin County Employs Cutting Edge Process to Select Financial Package *Virtual IT Develops "Scripted Demos" to Put Vendors through Their Paces*

"The County and the schools were functioning on two separate systems that were written in-house 25 to 30 years ago, using COBOL and 'flat files,'" says Sandie Terry, Director of Information Technology for Franklin County in southwest Virginia.

A recent strategic technology assessment plan, prepared by Virtual IT, recommended that the County replace its core suite of financial applications. "It was perfect timing for me," she remembers. "The plan was presented on my first day of work."

She prepared an RFP, and the decision-making committee then narrowed the field down to three vendors. But then a challenge presented itself: "How do we use these software demonstrations to make the best decision? This was a huge purchase for the County, in breadth and investment (approximately \$200 thousand)," she says.

Terry realized that she needed some outside assistance – "Most of the committee had never seen commercial software applications before. They were accustomed to getting the bare-bones minimum." She was concerned that they would be dazzled by vendor "dog and pony shows."

Virtual IT was engaged to address the situation. "They created something I've never seen before – and I will never go through another selection process without it: they took the RFP and they created a scripted demo based on the RFP requirements."

Virtual IT created detailed scripts for: general ledger, budget preparation, accounts payable, HR general, HR payroll, HR risk analysis, HR applicant, and 'other' (Reporting, Security, Log-on). The whole set of scripts was designed to take eight hours – and the vendors needed every minute. "At the end of the day, eight grueling hours, you got to know these people – the salesman and the analyst – and you got a very, very good feel for what it was going to be like to use that system on a day-to-day basis," remembers Terry.

"After the three demonstration days were over, Virtual IT put together all the weighted scores and checked vendor references. It became clear who the winner was. I felt perfectly confident that we had done due diligence and that we had selected the best package," she says.

Virtual IT is a full-service information technology consultancy, providing high-level strategic and tactical support for businesses, contractors and government agencies. The firm provides services in the areas of business strategy, IT strategy, and enterprise application integration and development. Headquartered in southwestern Virginia, and serving the Mid-Atlantic and Southern regions, the company provides clients with high-quality corporate services within a small company setting.

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