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Detroit Web site connects global water operations

August 11, 2007

BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Putting water deals together is an inexact, rarely examined business in which few people show an interest. That excludes Glenn Oliver, of course.

Oliver, a criminal defense attorney and onetime senior aide to former Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer, is the founder of a new business-to-business Internet clearinghouse that connects water and wastewater operations with companies looking to win contracts.

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H2bid.com is one of the few Web portals that bring together companies and utilities looking to do deals or sell equipment around the globe.

As a procurement portal with one of the most extensive databases of water and wastewater contract opportunities, Oliver considers his company the premier site selling information about the water industries in the world.

The Michigan-based dot.com venture also has gotten Oliver notice as one of 20 semifinalists -- and the only representative from Michigan -- for the Forbes Magazine annual Boost Your Business challenge. The contest involves 1,000 small business owners from across the country competing to determine the best business plan for a prize of \$100,000.

To win the contest, H2bid.com must be among the top five Internet vote getters on the Forbes

Web site. If he wins the contest, Oliver said he plans to use some of the money to improve access to fresh water throughout the developing world.

Filling a niche

Water utilities around the globe can go to H2bid.com and post contracting opportunities, requests for proposals and invitations to bid, as well as look for partnership opportunities. Oliver expects to coordinate online bidding on the site in early 2008.

One of the organizations that has posted contracting opportunities on the site is the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department.

There is no registration fee to access the site. But to get specific details about a procurement, it costs \$4.95 and \$7.95 per notice for H2bid.com subscribers.

"This is a self-funded project, and I want to take a long-term view of the business," said Oliver, who is also a former member of the Board of Water Commissioners for Detroit. "We want to provide 24/7 access to any water or wastewater contract opportunity anywhere in the world. We were first to market with a procurement portal that is serving a niche."

Redefining Detroit industry

Formed in January 2006, H2bid.com is headquartered in Detroit and employs 10 people. The company is one of the estimated 26 million small businesses formed in the United States last year.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

H2bid.com

H2bid.com is a Detroit firm whose goal is to become the largest online information clearinghouse for water and wastewater contracts. Detroit lawyer Glenn Oliver founded the company last year and is among the semifinalists in a Forbes Magazine contest for top entrepreneurs across the country.

- **Founder, president and CEO:** Glenn Oliver
- **Age:** 45
- **Occupation:** Criminal attorney
- **Education:** Michigan State University; University of Michigan law school.
- **Extras:** H2bid.com offers an industry blog on water and wastewater policy issues, free water industry news alerts and free industry periodical subscriptions.
- **Quote:** "We're a homegrown information technology company that presents Michigan in a different light than as an auto-driven economy."

Source: Free Press research

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H2bid.com is getting praise from some marketing experts, who see business to business as a natural fit for start-up companies looking to make a splash online.

"The continuing plea to redefine Detroit, metro Detroit and Michigan is a high note in this plan," said Mike Bernacchi, a marketing professor at the University of Detroit Mercy. "H2bid.com certainly connects well with the Michigan Economic Development Corp.'s philosophy of trying to market the intellectual assets of the area in terms of trying to redefine the role of e-marketing and e-business."

MEDC's 21st Century Jobs Fund was designed to diversify Michigan's economic foundation by promoting the growth of high-tech companies across the state.

"I'm excited about representing Michigan in general and Detroit specifically," Oliver said. "We think this is a plus when you can grow a high-tech company like this, because the world is moving to an information economy and Michigan must be a player in that economy."

Contact **ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA** at 313-222-5008 or abodipo@freepress.com.

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