Review Comments for NSF SBIR proposal # 0946146:
Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium

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Available on-line at:
http://www.neda.com/Records/200911031

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1 About this Document

On June 9, 2009 we submitted SBIR proposal number 0946146, titled "Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium," to the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program of the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The proposal was declined by the NSF. We received notification of this decision, along with the review comments, on November 02, 2009. This document is a record of the review comments, as taken verbatim from the NSF FastLane system.

We examined the NSF review comments closely, subjecting them to our own internal analysis and discussion. Our conclusion is that they are almost entirely incorrect, representing a near-total lack of understanding by the reviewers of the substance of the proposal. Based on this and our subsequent interactions with the NSF, we also believe there are serious process issues regarding NSF evaluation of non-proprietary SBIR proposals such as ours.

Complete details of our analysis of the NSF review comments and process are provided in a separate document titled, "A Live Case Study for NSF SBIR Proposal No. 0946146," available online at http://www.neda.com/PLPC/110016.

The proposal as originally submitted is also available online at http://www.neda.com/Records/200906091.

2 Proposal Status

Proposal Information

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Proposal Number:  0946146

Proposal Title:  SBIR Phase I: Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium

Received by NSF:  06/09/09

Principal Investigator:  Mohsen BANAN

Performing Organization: Neda Comm
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This Proposal has been Electronically Signed by the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR).

NSF Program Information

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NSF Division: Division of Industrial Innovation and Partnerships
NSF Program:  Small Business - Phase I
Program Officer:  Errol B. Arkilic
PO Telephone:  (703) 292-8095
PO Email:  earkilic@nsf.gov
Review Information:  External Peer Review began on 09/10/09
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Proposal Status

Status As of Today Dated: **11/03/09**

This proposal has been declined by NSF.

Reviews

All of the reviews of your proposal that have been released to you by your NSF program officer can be viewed below. Please note that the Sponsored Project Office (or equivalent) at your organization is NOT given the capability to view your reviews.

Document:	Release Date:
Panel Summary \#1	Sep 18 2009 11:27AM
Review \#1	Sep 18 2009 11:23AM
Review \#2	Sep 18 2009 11:23AM
Review \#3	Sep 18 2009 11:23AM

3 Proposal Summary #1

Panel Summary #1

Proposal Number: 0946146

Panel Summary:

What is the proposed innovation?

This SBIR project proposes to develop an open source architecture for wireless messaging.

What are the broader/commercial impacts of the proposed innovation?

If successful, this proposal would introduce competition and innovation into the wireless messaging industry.

Strengths:

+ Team's domain knowledge of networking and messaging technology

Weaknesses:

- Fails to demonstrate compelling need not already addressed by competing proprietary protocols

- Does not articulate a credible path to commercialization

- Despite some technical development, this proposal primarily requires a demonstration of business feasibility

Suggestions:

* None

The summary was read by/to the panel and the panel concurred that the summary accurately reflects the panel discussion.

4 Review #1

Proposal Number: 0946146

Performing Organization: Neda Comm

NSF Program: Small Business - Phase I

Principal Investigator: BANAN, Mohsen

Proposal Title: SBIR Phase I: Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium

Rating: Fair

REVIEW:

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?

The technological innovations involved, overlay network wireless access, novel texting protocols, integration into MTAs, etc. in order to support an open architecture idea for messaging

What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

Compared to proprietary texting solutions such as Blackberry, the proposal puts forward an open system model and associated technologies for texting. Like Linux versus Windows, this may present a competition to proprietary solutions. Look out - Apple and Research in Motion.

Summary Statement

This is a radical idea attempting to transform the Hi-tech industry into an "open everything" paradigm. I personally do not favor breaking every Hi-tech solution into microbes. To be fair, my main concern is this proposal does not really have a sound justification for NSF funding. It make little sense to propose a first phase which, although entails some technical developments and technical feasibility and validity evaluation, amounts to a business feasibility study.

5 Review #2

Proposal Number: 0946146

Performing Organization: Neda Comm

NSF Program: Small Business - Phase I

Principal Investigator: BANAN, Mohsen

Proposal Title: SBIR Phase I: Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium

Rating: Poor

REVIEW:

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?

Proposals like this one to develop open source versions of existing applications raise interesting questions about intellectual merit. Neda Communications proposes an open source alternative to the proprietary wireless messaging systems available today. In theory, society would benefit from the increased innovation and offerings enabled by an open platform, however, in practice it is not convincing that the wireless messaging market is too closed or too uncompetitive today. Indeed, the market has become increasingly competitive and fragmented over the last five years. This is partly b/c interoperability is already pervasive at the end-user application level Ã¿¿ they can send messages from any device to any device. Opening the lower layers of the messaging stack would indeed be interesting, but seems to lack the compelling intellectual merit.

What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

Open source software business models have been validated, however, successful businesses typically rely on a heavy professional services component. It is not clear that wireless messaging will enjoy a strong services component. While the PI may have other revenue models in mind like licensing, they are not sufficiently developed in this proposal to evaluate their potential. The other commercial concern is the broad ambition of this proposal which necessitates significant changes across the messaging architecture

Summary Statement

While this proposal would attempt to introduce competition and innovation to the wireless messaging market, given the existing competition and interoperability in the industry, it is not convincing this solution offers sufficient intellectual merit or commercial value

6 Review #3

Proposal Number: 0946146

Performing Organization: Neda Comm

NSF Program: Small Business - Phase I

Principal Investigator: BANAN, Mohsen

Proposal Title: SBIR Phase I: Libre Texting: A Reshaping of the Medium

Rating: Poor

REVIEW:

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?

The applicant proposes to examine the feasibility of large-scale deployment of the various technological components of “Libre Texting,” a new model for text messaging on mobile devices. For the purposes of this project, the applicant proposes that the viability of Libre Texting – both the architectural and economic viability, presumably – should be taken for granted.

The proposed activity puts the cart before the horse. The applicant hardly makes a strong case for the inevitability of Libre Texting: Technology questions aside, there’s no evidence offered of user demand, nor is any revenue model proposed for existing or new industry players (apart from the applicant). The size of the texting market is cited, but it is based on a model that the applicant seeks to overthrow.

There are some statements about the greater efficiency of Libre Texting, and its ability to deliver long-discussed features, but the proposed activity does not seek to verify this claimed superiority. Indeed, the applicant states that AT&T abandoned this general approach after massive investment; that various standards groups are likely to reject the Libre Texting model; and that competing approaches already have been adopted by players including Apple and Yahoo!

In this context, it’s unclear why the viability of Libre Texting should be assumed, let alone why its scalability should be investigated at taxpayer expense.

What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

The applicant proposes that the project, if successful, would help lead to more efficiency, interoperability and competition in mobile texting – and an end to hegemony by existing players.

Summary Statement

The “Poor” rating is based on a lack of evidence that Libre Texting is a viable approach, an assumption that the applicant presents as a necessary condition for the proposed activity.