

Francis Irving
By email: request-bounce-70-
53f045fd@whatdotheyknow.com

4 April 2008

Your Ref: 15 Mar 2008
Our Ref: 37-200445865

Dear Francis

Re: Request for information – VI Group (Vero Software)

I am writing in response to your email request for information dated 15 Mar 2008, and reproduced below for ease of reference:

"In the "Annual Report & Accounts 2004" of "VI Group Ltd" (released 2005-01-23) it is reported on page 4 that: [1]

"The Department of Trade & Industry awarded a grant of £81,000 for the development of modelling technologies particularly applicable to areas of mould design that are not easily accessible to users of current precise modelling techniques. It is anticipated that this project will come to fruition in late 2006."

BERR have told me "The grant was administered by the South West Regional Development Agency, who hold the records relating to the grant scheme in their region". [2]

Please can you send me all details you can about this grant in terms of its application and any reports done afterwards."

I can confirm that Vero International Software were awarded a SMART award on 7 May 2003 for the development of modelling technologies particularly applicable to areas of mould design that are not easily accessible to users of current precise modelling techniques. In total they received £143,805.35 between 7 May 2003 and 8 Feb 2005. The South West Regional Development Agency holds a project file concerning this SMART award.

SMART (now re-branded as Grant for Research and Development) was a national Department of Trade and Industry product to help individuals starting up businesses and small and medium sized enterprises already based in England carry out research and development work on technologically innovative products and processes. By offering a grant towards the costs of carrying out the research and development work, the scheme encouraged businesses to carry out projects that they would not necessarily undertake without the grant.

Details of the project are published in the Directory of SMART and Grant for Research and Development Awards July 2002 – June 2003 at the following link:

<http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file39973.doc>

The entry is also reproduced below:

Vero International Software UK Limited	
Gloucestershire	
Contact:	Gerard O'Driscoll
Tel:	01453 732900
e-mail:	Gerry@vero.co.uk
Website:	www.vero-software.com
SIC Code:	7220
Project type:	Development Project
Virtual Modelling (VISI-VM)	
This project will provide an intuitive interface to conceptual design by allowing the designer to create solid models using a natural approach. By moving his hand in 3D space the designer will receive feedback from a virtual solid in terms of surface texture, density and position, which will then enable him to modify the model in an aesthetically pleasing manner.	

The work carried out in SMART projects is often genuinely confidential and may lead to patentable ideas. In other cases the know-how developed is a trade secret. Following your request, Vero Software were contacted to see if they would agree to the release of any of the project information that we hold. They considered all the information to be commercially confidential. Our Freedom of Information (FOI) Decisions & Appeals Board then met to consider whether or not an exemption applied to this information.

Section 43 of the Act sets out an exemption from the right to know if:

- (i) The information requested is a trade secret, or
- (ii) Release of the information is likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person.

In this particular case the FOI Decisions & Appeals Board decided that Section 43 (i) trade secrets and (ii) prejudice to commercial interests applied. The information about the project, the markets and areas of interest could be advantageous to rivals and is not already known. Competitors could use the information to reproduce the technologies. They could also discover possible markets and details of successes and failures. Releasing the information requested could also affect the wider commercial interests of the company. For example, the company's market research could be used by competitors unfairly.

Whether the information requested forms a trade secret or relates to another type of commercial interest, a public authority considering the Section 43 exemption must consider whether there is an overriding public interest in providing the information. In the

case of Vero Software, the FOI Decisions and Appeals Board identified the following factors:

Factors for disclosure

- Details of how public money has been spent would be fully available

Factors for withholding the information

- Commercial competitors to Vero Software could benefit unfairly.
- Trade secrets would be released into the public domain.
- Other companies might be reluctant to use government grants for research and development if they thought the information might be released in this way – this could have an adverse effect on business and the economy.
- Release of the information could damage Vero Software's business.

The FOI Decisions and Appeals Board decided that it is not in the public interest to release the information we hold about this project.

If you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your request, or if you are unhappy with our response, you can appeal via our Freedom of Information Complaints Procedure, a copy of which is available on request or on our website at www.southwestrda.org.uk/complaints. If you are still dissatisfied after following our complaints procedure, then under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act you are entitled to appeal to the Information Commissioner (Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545700, fax: 01625 524510).

Yours sincerely

Alison McCarthy

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