



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 21, 2008

Ms. Ashley D. Fourn
Assistant District Attorney
Tarrant County, Justice Center
401 West Belknap
Fort Worth, Texas 76196-0201

OR2008-02386

Dear Ms. Fourn:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 302518.

The Tarrant County Purchasing Department (the "department") received two requests for the responses received by the department for Request For Proposal Number 2008-009. You state that you have released portions of the requested information. Although you take no position as to the disclosure of the submitted information, you state that it may contain proprietary information subject to exception under the Act. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, that you notified Quintel, SAP Public Services, Inc. ("SAP"), SEAL Consulting, Inc ("SEAL"), Next Generation Technology, Inc. ("Next Generation"), Universal System Technologies ("Universal"), HCL America, Inc. ("HCL"), Adea, Inc. ("Adea"), Sage Group Consulting, Inc. ("Sage"), and Comsys Information Technology Services, Inc. ("Comsys") of the request for information and of each company's right to submit arguments to this office as to why its information should not be released. *See Gov't Code § 552.305(d); see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from Sage and Comsys. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305 (d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why requested information relating to it should be withheld from disclosure. *See Gov't Code § 552.305 (d)(2)(B)*. As of the date of this letter, Quintel, SAP, SEAL, Next Generation, Universal, HCL, and Adea have not submitted to this office any reasons explaining why their information should not be released. Therefore, Quintel, SAP, SEAL, Next Generation, Universal, HCL, and Adea have not provided us with any basis to conclude that they have protected proprietary interests in any of the submitted information. *See* Open Records

Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, we conclude that the department may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest Quintel, SAP, SEAL, Next Generation, Universal, HCL, and Adea may have in the information.

Sage and Comsys claim that portions of their information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects: (1) trade secrets, and (2) commercial or financial information the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. Gov't Code § 552.110(a), (b). Section 552.110(a) protects the proprietary interests of private parties by excepting from disclosure trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *See id.* § 552.110(a). A "trade secret"

may consist of any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives [one] an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business, as for example the amount or other terms of a secret bid for a contract or the salary of certain employees A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. Generally it relates to the production of goods, as for example, a machine or formula for the production of an article. It may, however, relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex. 1958); Open Records Decision Nos. 255 (1980), 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

There are six factors to be assessed in determining whether information qualifies as a trade secret:

(1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company's] business;

- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and to [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing this information; and
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also* ORD 232. This office must accept a claim that information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for exemption is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. ORD 552. However, we cannot conclude that section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown that the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.* § 552.110(b); *see also Nat’l Parks & Conservation Ass’n v. Morton*, 498 F.2d 765 (D.C. Cir. 1974); Open Records Decision No. 661 (1999).

Having considered Sage’s and Comsys’s arguments, we conclude that each company has established a *prima facie* case that a portion of its submitted information, which we have marked, constitutes a trade secret. Therefore, the department must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. We note that Sage has published the identities of some of its customers on its website. Thus, Sage has failed to demonstrate that the information it has published on its website is a trade secret. Further, both Sage and Comsys have failed to demonstrate that the remaining information at issue constitutes trade secrets; thus, the remaining information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

Comsys, however, has established that release of some of its remaining information at issue would cause it substantial competitive injury; therefore, the department must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. As noted above, Sage published the identities of some of its customers on its website. Thus,

Sage has failed to demonstrate that release of this information would cause it substantial competitive injury. Additionally, we find that both Sage and Comsys have made only conclusory allegations that the release of the remaining information at issue would result in substantial damage to each company's competitive position. Thus, neither Sage nor Comsys has demonstrated that substantial competitive injury would result from the release of any the remaining information at issue. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 661 (for information to be withheld under commercial or financial information prong of section 552.110, business must show by specific factual evidence that substantial competitive injury would result from release of particular information at issue), 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts is too speculative), 319 at 3 (1982) (information relating to organization and personnel, professional references, market studies, qualifications, and pricing are not ordinarily excepted from disclosure under statutory predecessor to section 552.110). Accordingly, the department may not withhold the remaining information under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code.

We note that portions of the remaining information are subject to sections 552.101 and 552.136 of the Government Code.¹ Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information made confidential by other statutes. Prior decisions of this office have held that section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code renders tax return information confidential. Attorney General Opinion H-1274 (1978) (tax returns). Section 6103(b) defines the term "return information" as "a taxpayer's identity, the nature, source, or amount of income, payments, tax withheld, deficiencies, overassessments or tax payments . . . or any other data, received by, recorded by, prepared by, furnished to, or collected by the Secretary [of the Internal Revenue Service] with respect to a return . . . or the determination of the existence, or possible existence, of liability . . . for any tax, . . . penalty, . . . or offense[.]" *See* 26 U.S.C. § 6103(b)(2)(A). Federal courts have construed the term "return information" expansively to include any information gathered by the Internal Revenue Service regarding a taxpayer's liability under title 26 of the United States Code. *See Mallas v. Kolak*, 721 F. Supp 748, 754 (M.D.N.C. 1989), *aff'd in part*, 993 F.2d 1111 (4th Cir. 1993). Thus, the department must withhold the tax return information we have marked pursuant to federal law.

Section 552.136 of the Government Code states that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential." Gov't Code § 552.136. Upon review, we find that the department must withhold the insurance policy and account numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

We also note that a portion of the submitted information is protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are protected by copyright. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of materials protected by copyright, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

In summary, the department must withhold: (1) the information we have marked under section 552.110, (2) the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code, and (3) the insurance policy and account numbers we have marked under section 552.136. The remaining information must be released, but any copyrighted information may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

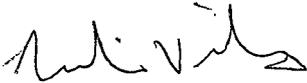
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can challenge that decision by suing the governmental

body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Melanie J. Villars
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MJV/jb

Ref: ID# 302518

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Claudio Coppoli
Director of Business Development
Quintel
5910 South University, C18-193
Greenwood Village, Colorado 80121
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Roger Cornett
Universal Systems Technologies
1307 South International Parkway
Suite 1051
Lake Mary, Florida 32746
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Robertus Aarts
SEAL Consulting, Inc.
105 Fieldcrest Avenue
Raritan Plaza II
Edison, New Jersey 08837
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Charles Rich
Business Development Manager
4400 Post Oak Parkway, Suite 1800
Houston, Texas 77027
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Salil Sharma
Director
Sage Group Consulting, Inc.
100 Wood Avenue, Suite 119
Iselin, New Jersey 08830
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. David J. Patterson
Director- Professional Services
Adea, Inc.
7701 Las Colinas Ridge, 3rd Floor
Irving, Texas 75063
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Neeraj Arora
Business Development Manager
18301 Von Karman Avenue, Suite 590
Irvine, California 92612
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Mary Beth Hanss
SAP Public Services, Inc.
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, North West
North Tower/Grey/Suite 600
Washington, DC 20004
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Dheeraj Vangala
Next Generation Technology, Inc.
116 South Arlington Heights Road
Suite 301
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60005
(w/o enclosures)