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SSI Micro wins web contract

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE - Yellowknife-based Internet provider SSI Micro has won a contract to rejig the way Government of Nunavut (GN) employees handle and transfer data on the web.

The company learned it had successfully bid on the \$5 million contract a month and a half ago, said Ryan Walker, CEO of SSI Micro.

"Basically we're putting in communications infrastructure to carry all of their data," he said of the contract, which is currently slated to last seven to eight years but could extend beyond that based on the company's work.

"This project is basically interconnecting to the GN in 25 Inuit communities via fibre link, giving them a real high speed link to us and then transporting government data wherever they want (it) to go."

To develop a new platform, SSI Micro commissioned Cisco System Inc. and iDirect, both of which travelled to Yellowknife for a week-long work session at SSI's headquarters on Old Airport Road.

"We told them that we basically wanted to come off our existing platform onto a new one," said Walker.

"The network, as we built it, kind of hit capacity. Not full capacity, but there's a lot of opportunity for growth there that the network just couldn't do.

"When you're talking about satellite, the more space you need to buy from a provider, the more expensive it is. The network that we've architected makes very efficient use of that space, so you get a lot more bang for your buck."

The system hatched by the companies – which Walker hopes to have in place a year and a half from now, possibly earlier – will produce higher speeds and transfer rates not only for GN employees but all users of the Qiniq system in Nunavut, said Walker.

"Transferring a file that used to take 10 minutes will take more like 20 seconds," he said.

Two or three Yellowknife employees will be kept busy working on the contract, he added.

"We are bringing on a couple of extra people for this contract, but our hiring was certainly in place before the award of this contract. We're just growing."

The GN's information technology system was previously administered by NorthwesTel, which also bid on the contract.

"It's not our biggest contract, but it is nice to be able to work with the Government of Nunavut," said Walker. "It's apparent just how hampered they are by poor connectivity. So it's a very exciting one for us, for sure."

NorthwesTel spokesperson Anne Kennedy could not specify precisely how many Yellowknife-based Northwestel employees work on the GN file. She also said it's too early to assess what economic impact the loss of the contract will have on the company.

NorthwesTel still has a year to go on its contract, during which it will work to ensure a smooth transition, added Kennedy.

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