

Report to Council



Date: June 24, 2024
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Awards for City chatbots
Department: Information Services

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from Information Services regarding the awards received for the City's chatbots.

Purpose:

To inform Council of the awards from MISA BC, IABC and MSDO for the City's work on chatbots.

Background:

MISA Spirit of Innovation Award

The Municipal Information Systems Association's (MISA) annual conference Municipal Showcase provides an opportunity for Canadian municipalities to share ideas that allows other members to benefit from the collective experiences and innovations of each other. The Spirit of Innovation Award recognizes the local government whose showcase presentation provides the most beneficial, innovative, and valuable solution to any obstacle faced by local government.

Previous winners include the City of Burnaby (2022), Town of View Royal (2021) and City of Delta (2020). The last time that the City of Kelowna won this award was in 2018 for Information Services' presentation about *Predictive Analytics for Emergency Operations Centre*.

IABC Gold Quill Award

For more than 40 years, the International Association of Business Communicator's Gold Quill Awards have recognized and awarded excellence in strategic communication worldwide. Gold Quill is the only awards program that honors the dedication, innovation and passion of communicators on a global scale.

All IABC Gold Quill Award entries are evaluated by a blue ribbon panel of international senior professional communicators. Many are either IABC accredited or certified by the Global Communication Certification Council. All entries are evaluated against established criteria aligned to IABC's Global Standard of the communication profession.

In 2024, [awards were given out in 29 categories](#) and were selected from 378 entries from 17 countries. This year, an additional category was added to the awards program to address the strategic use of Artificial Intelligence.

MSDO Excellence Awards

In 2024, the Municipal Service Delivery Officials (MSDO) launched its inaugural awards, aiming to recognize and celebrate the achievements of MSDO members in service delivery excellence. The awards highlight excellence among Canadian municipalities in innovation, transformation, service delivery, access, equity and human rights, and lifetime service. Six winners received awards at the May 2024 MSDO National Conference awards gala in Kelowna, BC.

Discussion:

Spirit of Innovation

The City of Kelowna received the Spirit of Innovation Award on Wednesday, Oct. 4, 2023 for a presentation on *Service and Efficiencies with AI Chatbots* delivered by Mason Buettner, Innovation Consultant, Summer Effray, Innovation Consultant, and Kevin Wang, Business Systems Analyst.

The presentation explored the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) powered chatbots within municipal settings by sharing our experience at the City of Kelowna. The trio shared the history of chatbots at the City, from the proof of concept for Kelowna International Airport to our current state with multiple web- and voice-based chatbots. They discussed our topic-specific chatbots and outlined the service-enhancing integrations with internal and external systems. The team also introduced and provided a demonstration of our building permit chatbots and how they were designed to integrate with a generative AI webservice and our GIS system map overlays to provide a higher level of service. To wrap things up, they outlined the technology stack that makes our chatbots work, providing a quick overview of the solutions we have adopted.

After the Municipal Showcase, the MISA BC membership voted on their pick for the award out of three municipal presentations, resulting in the City of Kelowna win.

Strategic Artificial Intelligence

In April 2024, IABC announced its 2024 Gold Quill winners, which included the Intelligent Cities submission titled *AI Chatbots: transforming the City building permit process* in the the brand new Strategic Artificial Intelligence category.

The Building Permit AI Chatbot project was undertaken in 2023 through a Local Government Development Approvals grant Kelowna received from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, administered by UBCM. Embracing innovation and digital transformation to improve service to fast-track housing development in the community, the City launched an artificial intelligence-powered chatbot, KAI (Kelowna AI) that provides 24/7 information and guidance on the building permit process for homeowners, contractors and homebuilders. The chatbot, available on kelowna.ca, helps users navigate the complex and varied requirements, bylaws, fees and processes for different permit types, from signs to swimming pools, sheds to secondary suites. It does this by removing barriers (time, process, paperwork, business hours, inperson contact) to delivering housing in Kelowna by providing faster and more efficient support through AI.

Excellence in Innovation

On May 16, 2024, City staff received MSDO's first award ever as part of its inaugural awards program, in the category of Excellence in Innovation for the City's Building Permit AI Chatbots.

The Building Permit AI Chatbot, with support from UBCM, received accolades for its innovative method of supporting both residents with little exposure to the building permit process and contractors with familiarity but immediate questions - at any time of day, wherever they are in the permitting and application process.

With over 60 municipalities in Canada represented, the MSDO Board scored the award entries to come up with their pick for the award, resulting in the City of Kelowna win.

Submitted by: Andreas Boehm, Intelligent Cities Manager

Approved for inclusion: L. Corcoran, Acting Divisional Director, Corporate Strategic Services