



BENCHMARKS



Top 5 Ways to Lose the Deal

Site selectors have spent quite a bit of time in Indiana lately, with very good reason. The state has consistently ranked in the top 10 in the last two years when annual top business climate reports are given.

Indeed, the Tax Foundation ranked Indiana 8th in the nation for its business tax climate in 2014. Area Development Online placed Indiana 7th in the nation for top states to do business.

The state consistently receives high marks for its geographic location and access to interstates, recent corporate tax reforms, water availability and cost, and commitment to being a “pro-business” state.

While these are very apparent and easy to define factors, there are five areas in particular that site selector’s look at in determining the best places to do business.

1. Responsiveness: Site selectors routinely comment on the responsiveness of a community when discussing the final reasons for choosing a site. Jason Fuller, GE Aviation, spoke highly of the state and the local response from the City of Lafayette when choosing to build their new plant in Indiana. Fuller spoke about his experience with the state during the Indiana Economic Development Association’s spring conference. He appreciated the state with their prompt response to their queries and the city’s “one source of connection” with the LEDO, the Greater Lafayette Commerce, siting the value of having one source to answer questions. Communities that do not respond quickly to projects are giving a site selector a reason to take them off the list of sites.

2. Available Data: With the use of technology, a site selector can sit in an office in Atlanta, Georgia and research a community in Indiana without actually going there in person. Site selectors routinely express the value of a quality, easy to use, website when they are beginning the initial search for a company. Many times, a community has been placed on a short list, or unfortunately taken off a list, without having any contact with a company. The Mid America Economic Development Council surveys site selectors yearly and consistently see the quality of an

economic development website and the ease of access with this site listed in the top three critical factors in site selection.

3. Cooperation: Site selectors want to see community officials as well as state officials working together and supporting one another. Seeing partners sitting at the same table supporting a project lends credence to the pro-business message from the state. Chad Sweeney, Director of Business Development at Ginovus, a site selection firm, spoke to a recent Leadership Johnson County class for their March program day which is the economic development day underwritten by JCDC. Sweeney gave an anecdotal story about a community he recently worked in that brought a large number of stakeholders to a site visit. He initially was concerned that this would become a difficult conversation, but instead, the level of cooperation among the various partners and organizations gave a level of comfort to the company and was a final factor in their location decision. Companies routinely want to hear from the subject matter experts, and want to know there are no conflicts that will cause their project to be delayed.

4. Site Readiness: While many companies suffered downturns during the previous recession, the recent economic uptick has expansion discussions growing. Companies today are ready to move forward with their plans at the speed of business, which means they are not willing to wait for a community to prepare a site. Site selectors want to work in communities that have a solid plan for growth and have sites ready to go, whether that is an existing building or a greenfield, undeveloped, site. Ted Seger, Farbest Foods president, spoke at the Livestock, Forage, and Grain economic development forum in Indianapolis and reviewed his reasons for choosing Knox County in Indiana for his business expansion. Seger was very firm that the county had land with utilities to the site, a ready workforce, and a strong supply chain, all of which were deciding factors in their decision. Communities that are prepared for growth with a well thought out plan and sites that are ready for use will see the most interest.

5. Ready Workforce: Companies realize that while they may have the best product on the market, without a skilled workforce, their product will ultimately fail. Communities that invest in their workforce and support educational opportunities for them will see that investment pay off. The new reality today is that young workers are determining where they want to live first and then finding a job in that area. These workers determine the community they want to live in based on the quality of life they want. The communities that work to develop a high quality of life and provide welcoming amenities draw the workers and thus the companies.

So what are the top five ways to lose a deal? Don't respond with correct data on time, don't have a vibrant, positive internet presence, remain in our separate silos, don't prepare sites and communities for growth, and don't invest in the quality of life for your residents.

Johnson County and the communities in it understand these factors very well and continue to work to bring even more economic growth to the county. In fact, this is the reason JCDC spent a considerable amount of time and effort to revamp the [JCDC website](#), adding up-to-date features such as a searchable database of inventory and a strong demographic dashboard.

Communities such as Whiteland are working with their partners, such as Duke Energy with the Site Readiness Grant, to prepare raw ground for development and infrastructure. The county-wide initiative [Aspire Johnson County](#) also is a tool to improve our opportunities with site selectors, as the members work to bring a stronger work force and better quality of life to the table.

For Johnson County, the goal of staying in the mix of the site selection process is one that we intend to meet.

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This article is courtesy of Johnson County Development Corporation.