

A View from Corporate America: Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Successful marketers share a common trait: an ability to put themselves in the customer's shoes.

It is with this aim that Development Counsellors International (DCI) first conducted the most comprehensive survey of corporate executives with site selection responsibilities in 1996. Our aim was to understand best practices in marketing places by going directly to the economic development world's "customer."

This report, *"A View From Corporate America: Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing"* is the fifth installment in a series of surveys of senior U.S. executives and their advisors. Similar surveys were conducted by DCI in 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2005.

Key findings, based on the aggregate responses of 281 participants in the survey, are presented below. The respondents are familiar with economic development agencies (with 65% of them reporting close working relationships with economic development groups):

- **The leading sources of information influencing executive perceptions of a community's business climate were "dialogue with industry peers," "articles in newspapers and magazines," and "business travel."** These "top three" information sources have remained unchanged since the survey was first conducted in 1996.
- **"Internet/website" advanced dramatically in the 2008 survey to capture the highest rating among all economic development marketing tools.** "Planned visits to corporate executives," and "public relations/publicity" ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively.
- When asked at what point in a site selection search they would typically contact an economic development organization, 40% indicated, "After we have developed a short list of potential communities." Twenty-nine percent selected, "During the initial screening of all possible locations, to request preliminary data."

- **Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated a strong likelihood that they would use an economic development organization's website in their next site location search.** The executives named "information on available incentives" and "demographic information" as the most useful features of an economic development organization's website.
- Asked to rate the importance of several common site selection factors, respondents gave the highest rating to "labor (availability, quality, cost)," followed by "overall operating costs" and "efficient transportation systems (highway, rail, air, port)."
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- **When asked to select the most favorable business climates among the 50 states, respondents gave Texas, North Carolina and Georgia the highest tally** (in order of selection). California, New York and Michigan were selected as the three states with the least favorable business climates.
- **China, India and Mexico were selected by U.S. executives as the three most favorable countries for investment.**
- When asked to identify the most likely candidate for their company's next move or expansion, respondents most commonly answered "manufacturing/ production plant," (particularly among midsize companies). This was followed by "corporate, division or regional headquarters" and "regional sales office or service center."