

Quaeris

Executive Summary

Introduction

Quaeris is a regionally based collaborative effort to attract and retain highly skilled and qualified talent to the region. It was started by a group of area employers and community development organizations in the fall of 2007 to more effectively organize and coordinate ongoing discussions and efforts to attract and retain talent to the region and keep them here.

The information that follows details the barriers related to the attraction and retention of talent and the initiative's strategies to address them.

Background

Today, employers in West Michigan find it difficult to convince candidates to relocate to the region and retain them when they do. In an environment where talent can move anywhere and then find employment, employers in West Michigan face many obstacles when competing with other regions of the country in search of the talent they need. When they do find talent, those they have recruited have a difficult time finding their "fit". Often, employers are also faced with assisting their new hire's trailing spouse or partner in finding employment. If this is unsuccessful, the couple is less likely to stay.

The net effect is a talent deficit among West Michigan employers. In a survey of West Michigan employers last year, 67% of businesses stated they would need to hire 100+ professionals over the next 5 years. The survey also identified that there are currently more than 750 highly skilled and high-paying positions open in West Michigan. While these numbers may have changed due to current economic conditions, the underlying problem will remain and will only get worse.

As a result, there is a recognized and growing need in West Michigan for a coordinated effort to market West Michigan to professionals, to share resumes of trailing spouses and partners among area employers, and to provide an effective orientation for professionals considering West Michigan for themselves, spouses/partners and families in order to keep them here.

Problem Statement

The challenges of attracting and retaining talent range from websites that offer a partial or fragmented perspective of West Michigan; realtors and executive search firms that lack the cultural competency to help prospective employees find their "fit" in West Michigan; and a patchwork effort to assist trailing spouses and partners find employment, to name just a few. If the region is unsuccessful in addressing these issues and others, then companies will continue to have a talent deficit; recently recruited talent will leave; and the region is likely to lose companies headquartered or with operations here to other parts of the country where talent is plentiful. The resulting cost to communities and the region would be far worse than investing today to coordinate a comprehensive effort to attract and retain talent to the region.

The Solution: Quaeris

Quaeris is a collaborative effort to represent the region's great communities and employers to candidates recruited to move to this area. The initiative will present a unified

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positive message on the web and in person to all prospective hires to the region. A web portal with public and member-only spaces will be the primary vehicle for these efforts. The public portion will highlight the strengths and offerings of our diverse region and the communities and companies within it with links to member companies and their employment opportunities, as well as links to the region's diverse living and recreational opportunities.

A members-only section will allow employers to share the resumes of trailing spouses, share best practices in recruiting and retention, coordinate a West Michigan presence at key trade shows, expos and conferences, and forums to encourage collaboration among area employers and specialty groups (e.g. information technology, human resources, finance, etc.) on various issues.

In addition, the initiative will provide training to professionals with activities related to attraction and retention (e.g. realtors, executive search firms, human resource consultants, etc.) to ensure a unified and coordinated approach to marketing and orienting the region to talented professionals. Quaeris will also provide a community concierge service that will "plug in" new residents hired by member organizations to the West Michigan community. This personal introduction to the region and its diverse assets will be based on the individual's interests and will serve as an innovative tool to retain this top talent recruited by Quaeris' members.

Population and Geography Served

Quaeris will serve two populations: area employers (for-profit companies, educational institutions and large community organizations) and talented professionals who are considering relocating to West Michigan. Presently, there are more than 17 headquarters of multi-national companies with sales of \$1B or more in the region. Quaeris will also serve as the resource for professionals considering West Michigan because they would like to move closer to home or move closer to their children and grand children. The geographical region served will include Kalamazoo, Kent, Ottawa, Barry, Allegan, Ionia, Muskegon and Newaygo counties.

Strategies

The initiative's approach to talent attraction and retention is innovative and unique in the country. A survey of best practices in the United States identified a variety of pioneering methods, these include:

- Promotion of the community or region with a website with emphasis on the quality of life offered
- Measurement of quantifiable workforce skill sets
- Marketing of the community or area to recent and late graduates of area colleges and universities
- Networking opportunities for young professionals
- Website listing employment opportunities in the area

Some of these strategies are already being addressed by other organizations. For example, a quantifiable set of workforce skills is being addressed by the West Michigan Strategic

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Alliance's Work Keys project. Quaeris has incorporated some of these best practices into a comprehensive effort to attract, orient and retain top talent that will focus several key areas:

Promoting West Michigan

- Present a unified and positive message on the initiative's website that promotes all that West Michigan has to offer with:
 - Good news messaging with news articles that tell positive stories about West Michigan
 - Links to regional and community resources like chambers of commerce, economic development authorities, city governments, school systems, entertainment venues, cultural attractions, family-friendly activities, recreational opportunities, etc. to showcase all that West Michigan has to offer
 - Tailored messages to local talent considering a career change, as well as recent college graduates
- Presence at employment fairs in the region and across the country to brand West Michigan as an attractive destination for top talent

Connecting to West Michigan

- Offer a "Community Concierge" service to candidates being recruited to West Michigan with:
 - Introduction to West Michigan and communities within in it with trained "Ambassadors"
 - Networking between candidates and individuals with similar interests
- Training to realtors, executive search firms, human resource consultants to ensure a common message about West Michigan and increase the rate at which these professionals help their clients find their "fit" in West Michigan

Employment Opportunities

- Provide a resource on the website that connects candidates to employment opportunities in West Michigan
- List positions in the region that qualify as new economy jobs
- Utilize technologies to facilitate collaboration within various constituencies (i.e. information systems, human resources, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, etc.) who have unique challenges for attracting and retaining talent

Collectively, these strategies will benefit the initiatives three publics:

- Member organizations
 - Information sharing and collaboration
 - Links to organizations and employment opportunities
 - Mashing of messaging about the region on various websites
- External partners
 - Enhanced cultural competency and awareness of assets in the region
 - Enhanced
- The Recruit

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- Comprehensive website that promotes the region with links to employers, communities, schools, churches
- Good news profiling the region
- Personalized space allowing the candidate to organize their research of the region
- Blogs and discussion boards

Phased Implementation

The initiative will be implemented over a two-year period. The key deliverables are described below:

Year One (2009)

- Create a website that promotes West Michigan's world class employers, outstanding communities and amenities found throughout the region
- Create the members-only portal to facilitate collaboration and information sharing among members
- Develop and pilot a training program for realtors, executive search firms, human resource consultants, etc.
- Build a membership base of at least 25 area companies
- Hire a director
- Research trade shows, expos and conferences for Quaeris to have a presence at

Year Two (2010)

- Launch training programs
- Enhance intra-member collaboration based on feedback
- Double membership
- Establish awareness of initiative across the region
- Participate in select trade shows, expos and conferences
- Begin measuring retention success

Year Three (2011)

- Double membership base
- Report success of attraction and retention strategies

Conclusion

This initiative has been a collaborative effort since its inception. In December 2007, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Holland Area Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids Convention and Visitors Bureau, The Employers Association, Lakeshore Advantage, The Right Place and the Center for Community Leadership funded a needs assessment and presented it in February 2008. Since then, a working group consisting of Amway, Davenport University, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Haworth, Perrigo, Priority Health,

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Spectrum Health, The Right Place, Inc., Southwest Michigan First, and Varnum Riddering Schmidt and Howlett, has worked to launch the initiative.

Today, it is widely accepted that a regional strategy is necessary to assist employers in attracting and retaining the talent their organizations require to be competitive. Quaeris is a collaborative effort to represent the region's great communities and employers to prospective candidates looking to move to this area. By offering a unified and positive message on the web, a method of sharing the resumes of trailing spouses or partners, concierge programs to help those recruited find their "fit" in West Michigan and other strategies we can address the barriers employers are often faced with. Working together, employers can address their talent deficit and attract the best talent to West Michigan, a region we know to have great companies, amenities and people. By working together, we can increase the number of well-educated, well-paid and skilled professionals living here, which benefits everyone in the region.