



Cleveland+ creators now take aim at site selectors

By **JOHN BOOTH**

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Site selectors. It's their job to advise companies on what cities or regions would make good spots for, say, a new distribution center or polymer plant. They're the influencers. And they're in the crosshairs of the Cleveland+ economic development campaign.

"Most large projects, (those that would bring) 50-plus jobs, end up in the hands of a site-selection consultant," said Carin Rockind, vice president of marketing and communications for regional economic development group Team NEO. "There are only a couple thousand in the country, and really only a few hundred that do most of the work. We know who they are, and we just have to start building (deeper) relationships with them."

The roughly \$1 million economic development campaign will start with some direct marketing to site selectors under the new Cleveland+ banner. It will hit them with a message that defines the region as including Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Youngstown and all points between. Establishing that collective identity, Ms. Rockind said, has been a problem in the past.

In researching the area's image, Ms. Rockind noted, "We couldn't find a site selector (from outside the region) who could name two cities in Northeast Ohio. The first message is going to be that all these communities are working together now."

Mailings to site selectors will include monthly newsletters listing things such as new properties for sale, updates on changes in tax incentive offerings, or news about the work force. Larger quarterly promotional packets will be sent out as well.

Furthering the concept of Northeast Ohio as a collective region rather than separate cities and counties, the Cleveland+ campaign includes a web site, www.clevelandplusbusiness.com, that will give site selectors a single place to do some of their homework. Information such as profiles of the work force and of businesses in a given area will be in the Cleveland+ database.

Don Schjeldahl, vice president and director of facilities location for Cleveland-based Austin Co., an engineering and construction firm that offers site selection services for clients, said the availability of such information is important, but it's also "just the price of entry" in terms of competing for business against other regions.

"That's one of the big challenges in Northeast Ohio, where you've got this great big geography that has all these local and parochial interests," Mr. Schjeldahl said. "It's really hard to bring all that together to a standard that will satisfy the kinds of people that need the information."

Let us entertain you

Direct mail and an abundance of data may induce site selectors to take interest in a region, but there's also the matter of showing a place off during what's called a familiarization tour. These are usually held once a year, and while making effective presentations and having the right business leaders on hand to make a case for an area are important, there also must be a way to make the trip stand out.

Familiarization tours in Tennessee, for instance, have included walks down the red carpet at the Country Music Awards.

This year, Ms. Rockind said, the Cleveland+ movement for the first time will offer site selectors two familiarization tours, each with a different theme to its glitz-and-glamour angle.

Akron promoters, she said, have worked with Team NEO for a few years to put together a tour centered around the Bridgestone World Golf Championships at Firestone Country Club. This year, the golf tournament happens to be the same August weekend as the Pro Football Hall of Fame's inductee dinner in Canton, so a familiarization tour combining both events in one package is in the works.

For site selectors who can't make that one, or whose interests are less sports-oriented, a second tour is in the making.

"The folks at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame have been wonderful, and they've offered to us some backstage, unique opportunities for the site selectors we bring into town," Ms. Rockind said. One approach to that tour might be to pair a behind-the-scenes Rock Hall visit with prime seats or backstage passes to a concert.

Road trip

Austin Co.'s Mr. Schjeldahl said there's a "a certain indulgence about (familiarization tours) that's a little annoying" for site selectors. Nonetheless, Mr. Schjeldahl said, "There's no better way to tell your story than to get someone to come there and tell your story in a controlled setting."

Mr. Schjeldahl said he takes about one familiarization tour per year from a field of several dozen, and that's about par for the course in the industry.

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