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## **The landscape has changed**

The business of selecting a site has evolved into a sweet science

*By Tony Kindelspire  
Longmont Times-Call*

LONGMONT — Gone are the days when an executive for a growing company places a call to a local chamber of commerce and asks for a community's demographics and real estate statistics. A global economy and the advent of the Internet have changed the way expanding business find a place to build or relocate.

And it's changed the way people such as Don Schjeldahl, a site-selection consultant for 25 years with Cleveland-based The Austin Co., operate.

"In a town like Longmont ... they have to understand the competition is not down the road," said Don Schjeldahl with Cleveland-based The Austin Co. "It might be Shanghai, or what's happening in St. Louis, or somewhere else."

Companies' moves today often involve international searches, said Bob Ady, a 30-year site-selection veteran and owner of Chicago-based Ady International Co.

"You might be looking at places in four different countries," he said.

Both men agree that it's a much different world than when they first got into the business.

"Speed — the biggest change is that things happen faster," said Schjeldahl. "And the other thing that's changed is complexity.

Never before have companies wanted as much detailed information on potential locations as they do today, Schjeldahl said, and they want that information faster than ever before.

"We used to use mail; now (Federal Express) is too slow," he said.

The site-selection process 20 years ago might have taken three to four months, Ady said. Today, he said, it takes about five weeks "if you're lucky."

But site selection is still about the process of elimination, Ady said.

"What we're basically doing is systematically eliminating the places that have the most disadvantages and the fewest advantages for our clients," he said.

A company in the past might have considered 12 to 20 locations for expansion or relocation, but there's now 100 or more considered during the initial screening process, he said.

The scope of deals has changed, too, Ady said, because of advances in technology leading to increases in productivity.

Twenty years ago, a typical deal might involve a company looking to open a facility that employed 300 to 400 people and might cost about \$10 million. That same deal today would probably be 50 to 75 people and cost \$40 million to \$50 million, Ady said.

“A lot of communities say we haven’t gotten any 400-person companies (to come here), but you know what? There are very few of them out there,” he said.

Last year’s announcement that Bristol-Myers Squibb would build a \$1.1 billion facility that will bring 550 jobs to Devens, Mass., is a rarity anymore, he said. More common would be a deal like Copan Systems’, which relocated to Longmont from Austin, Texas, in 2003, a year after its founding. Copan employs about 80 people and came here because of the availability of qualified data-storage workers.

A quality work force is one advantage Colorado — and particularly the Longmont-Boulder area — has over other parts of the country.

But Ady warns that the educational system is just as important, and not just how it teaches kids to be computer programmers or engineers, he said.

In today’s world, companies find soft skills — teamwork, communication, how to be an independent thinker — at least as important as so-called hard skills, he said.

“A company can teach hard skills, but if a guy doesn’t have soft skills, it’s very difficult to teach that,” Ady said.

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