



Attracting and Retaining Knowledge Workers in West Michigan

A Regional Marketing Plan

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Regional Marketing Plan for the WIRED Knowledge Worker Innovation Project¹

Generating a Community Infrastructure
for the Innovation Economy

Executive Summary

The West Michigan regional economy is unique. It is blessed with a central geographic location in the mid-west; it has a very high quality of life and a relatively low cost of living; and it has a rich, deep, and diverse talent base.

However, as we have learned, the self-image of the region is less than optimal. This document, which is a deliverable for the Knowledge Workers and Economic Development Innovation project, is intended to be a stand-alone work that will serve as a roadmap for implementing a regional economic development marketing campaign targeted at knowledge workers. Of course, we recommend that this document be used in conjunction with the other major deliverable for Phase II of the project, "The Business Planning Toolkit."

The linkage between these two reports is simple. The marketing plan outlined here will have to be implemented in order for the remote work center business operations described in the Toolkit to be successful. Therefore, implementation of business operations will push the marketing plan detailed here into reality, and should answer some of the open issues we continue to see in late Fall 2007.

First, a few caveats. This is a regional plan. It includes the area defined in the WIRED project as seven counties (e.g., Newaygo, Muskegon, Kent, Ottawa, Ionia, Allegan, and Barry). We have taken the view here, that these seven counties constitute an ecosystem of tightly-coupled communities that must work together for the good of the entire region. Any stand-alone remote work centers will only be as effective as they can link to other similar operations. Marketing and business development, as we see it, must be a collaborative effort involving all the individual operations, largely because the optimum value of Remote Work Centers comes from their participation in a regional – and, ultimately, national – network of centers.

¹ We want to acknowledge in particular and with gratitude the insightful comments by John Cleveland, Michelle Cleveland, Joanie Reid, and Penny Ladd on earlier drafts of this document. Even more important have been the thoughtful and focused contributions of David Bisbee of the WIRED staff. David's critiques and questions contributed significantly to our thinking and to the quality of these recommendations. This report also draws significantly on the contributions of other members of the Advisory Council for the Knowledge Workers and Economic Development (KWED) innovation project. Of course we remain fully responsible for the report's content as well as for any errors or omissions.

Second, we believe there should be two distinct, but linked, marketing efforts. One is aimed at employees and individual knowledge workers already located within the region. As we have outlined in our business planning process, these individuals and groups comprise about 60% of the potential market for members, and users, of remote work centers. We believe a priority should be placed on recruiting and selling to these people.

The other market, which is less well-defined but equally important, is the extra-regional market. This is the 40% of the market that will come to West Michigan from outside the immediate seven-county region. These individuals are the knowledge workers who currently live and work in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and other Midwestern areas that West Michigan wants to move into the local region.

This report is structured into three major sections:

- ◆ Conceptual basis for a campaign
- ◆ Intra-regional marketing
- ◆ Extra-regional marketing

Where possible we have identified specific resources and media outlets in West Michigan. However, we are the first to recognize that local economic developers, public officials, and PR specialists have much deeper knowledge of local media that we, as outsiders, could ever have.

We have also prepared a concluding section that identifies the open issues requiring resolution before a regional plan can be effectively implemented.



Conceptual Basis of the Campaign: What Attracts Knowledge Workers?

The challenge facing every community and region today is how to adapt to the new global economy that depends on knowledge, creativity, and innovation. It is becoming increasingly clear that the key to a thriving innovation-based economy is talent: knowledge workers and professionals. The emerging economic development paradigm focuses on making a region attractive to knowledge workers, in the well-founded belief that an area that attracts talented people will generate enough jobs to keep them there – and will develop a strong regional economy based on their wants and needs.²

We have addressed the questions of “What is a knowledge worker?” and “What is knowledge work?” elsewhere.³ Suffice to say for our purposes here, knowledge workers are the engine of the information- and innovation-based economy; they are the “creative class” in Richard Florida’s language.⁴ But the larger question remains: what attracts these people to specific geographical areas? What causes them to relocate from their hometown, from a college town, or from their most recent residence to another area? What kinds of services, programs, and institutions make an area attractive to them?

Our strong belief is that first and foremost knowledge workers value self-control and autonomy. And they view their careers and their personal life as something they want to plan and take care of on their own. Having the opportunity to choose among alternatives is thus a key component of what knowledge workers are looking for. But self-control and choice by themselves are not enough; knowledge workers also want to be part of strong communities that meet their other personal interests and needs.

If, as we suspect, these wants and needs are the central features of an area that drives its local economic development, then cities and neighborhoods must consider carefully in their planning and development programs which attributes and characteristics are most desirable for the talent they are seeking to attract. Without those attractors, the talent won’t come; and, as the broader global economy becomes ever more dependent on innovation and ever more location-independent, regions that are less attractive will wither, and, in many cases, die.

We believe the short answer to the question of attraction is **community**. Although the physical attributes (weather, recreational opportunities, cleanliness, livability) of a region are important, the equation is far more complicated than that. It is, frankly, about the psychology of the region.

² See “Market Segmentation and Development for Remote Work Centers” by James Ware and Charles Grantham, WIRED Working Paper, January, 2007, for a broader discussion of this new economic development paradigm.

³ See “Knowledge Workers and Knowledge Work, James Ware and Charles Grantham, WIRED working paper, March, 2007. Available on request from the authors.

⁴ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, Basic Books, 2002; *Cities and the Creative Class*, Routledge, 2004; and *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*, HarperCollins, 2005.



We are convinced that you can have all the roads, schools, airports, business services, Internet access, and hospitals you want, but if you don't have a meaningful sense of community you won't see much in-migration.

It's not that roads, schools, airports, business services, Internet access, and hospitals are unimportant or trivial. Indeed, without those basics no region will be able to thrive. Our contention is that these resources are just the price of entry. The more important question is what it takes for a region to be head-and-shoulders above average in attracting and retaining talent.

We believe a good way to approach this question is to take a step back and examine first what kinds of abilities and competencies will be required of the workforce of the future. Or, put another way, what will knowledge workers have to be good at to thrive in the emerging global economy?

Our hypothesis is that they will be attracted to communities that offer them an **experience** of what they have to be competent at. One of the best explanations of that concept we have found comes from Daniel Pink in his 2005 book *A Whole New Mind*.⁵

Pink proposes six new competencies for the future of work:

- ◆ Design
- ◆ Story
- ◆ Symphony
- ◆ Empathy
- ◆ Play
- ◆ Meaning

Design is not just function; it is the aesthetic quality of a thing—be it a chair, a house, or a town. For a community design is a combination of architecture, appealing public and natural spaces, layout, and geography. Design also involves non-physical elements: how well the community incorporates diversity, provides mixed-use housing, includes multiple industrial sectors, enables recreational opportunity, and supports a variety of social institutions to create a vibrant, “cool” place to live.

Story is not just argument; it is the compelling narrative. It's the engaging and emotional part of the conversation. Does the community have a strong understanding of its own history and build that history into current events and institutions?

Symphony is not just focus; but variation, interweaving of things, putting it all together across boundaries and synthesizing things.

⁵ Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2005.

Empathy is not just logic; it is about caring for others, understanding their various motivations, and identifying with them as part of a larger whole.

Play is not just seriousness; it is humor, lightheartedness, and games.

Meaning is not just consumerism and possession of material things; it is about purpose, transformation, and spiritual fulfillment. It's about the community or region's sense of identity, and its connections to other regions and specialized communities of practice around the state and around the world.

If these are the core competencies, the things that knowledge workers engage with, then how do they translate into community characteristics? Table One captures our initial thoughts.

Table One

Competency	Community Characteristic
Design	Social and ethnic variety; "coolness"
Story	Performing Arts; Historic Preservation
Symphony	Civic involvement; diversity of interests
Empathy	Social action programs
Play	Recreational variety; whimsical architecture and natural spaces
Meaning	Number of faith-based organizations; connectivity to the global economy and society

Design is about **variety**. Creativity and innovation (the end products of design) usually come from the interaction of people from varied backgrounds, viewpoints, and philosophies. The amount of ethnic, religious, and social diversity are good indicators of how much potential variety exists in a community. Knowledge workers are attracted to regions that have these kinds of variety. Conversely, they are generally not attracted to highly homogenous communities because they don't find the amount of social stimulation they are looking for.

Design is also by nature an "edgy" profession. Is the community on the leading edge in its physical and social architecture? Does it "push the envelope" in experimenting with new structures, new outdoor spaces, new businesses? Is it a "cool" place to be?

The **Performing Arts** are about telling stories and expressing emotions – some old, some new. The extent to which communities have locally staged productions and events tells prospective residents about the story-telling capacity and intellectual energy of the community. Is there an opera house, symphonies, venues for live music? Those are critical elements of communities that are attractive to the creative class (whether or not a given individual is personally a performing artist is not the question; it is the possibility of participating and the opportunity to attend performances that matters).



But Story is not just about the performing arts. It's also about a community's **sense of history** and connections with its past and its roots. A community that offers its residents well-preserved (but updated) buildings and a strong sense of neighborhoods that include people of all ages is a community filled with stories. And stories contribute deeply to that sense of place that knowledge workers crave. In a world that has become virtually a global village, a strong sense of local place is more important than ever.

Symphony, or the ability for members of the community to interact, translates into **civic involvement**. Political, professional, and civic associations (i.e., Kiwanis, Masons, Elks, etc.) show how involved residents are in local activities. These kinds of associations are evidence that a community has the potential for high involvement – and that there is citizen interest in a wide variety of community activities.

Social action programs like help for the homeless, Habitat for Humanity, gay and lesbian support groups, and proactive environmental programs are additional examples of a community's empathy for its members, and of its openness, inclusiveness, and tolerance of diversity.

Recreational variety is a key ingredient for a well-rounded life for knowledge workers, no matter what their age. Outdoor venues like skiing, boating, biking, and hunting (and their indoor counterparts) are as important as, and often much more important than, spectator sports. Again, the more variety the better to accommodate a wide range of interests. Organized sports leagues are another great example. How the community reaches out and develops different opportunities for its residents of all ages is a key indicator of recreational variety – and of energy and zest for life as well.

One of the executives we interviewed for this project actually said that things that helped people bring “meaning to their lives” were a very important attractor for the people his company was trying to recruit. Institutions that generate meaning are another critical variable, especially for young families and older groups who “want to give something back.” In the United States today this theme translates roughly into the number and (especially) the variety of **faith-based organizations** that are active in the community. Organized churches, places of worship, active philanthropic organizations, and other volunteer groups all help provide people with deeper meaning in their lives.

But Meaning isn't just about formal religion. Healthy communities also include respect for the environment, a commitment to citizen activism, and high-quality public schools. These other institutions also demonstrate a commitment to Meaning in that they offer residents specific opportunities for acting out their values – to a sustainable environment, to citizenship and the community at large, and to the next generation.

Communities possessing these qualities and resources are the ones that, if marketed appropriately, will attract and retain the knowledge worker talent they need to thrive economically.

Conducting a Community “Health Check”

But how can you tell if your community has what it needs? We don't know of a fully-formed, statistically-supported answer yet, but we are actively investigating the development of a widely agreed-upon set of community-based “health” metrics.

For now, we turn to the work of John Gardner, former head of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and then a professor at Stanford University. Professor Gardner was fascinated with leadership: what is it and how do you grow it? Later in life he turned to the study of communities and in particular how to promote and develop a sense of community. He felt that the contemporary breakdown of community was a root cause of many social ills and a significant contributor to a general decrease in the quality of life in America.

As a result of his interest and concern Gardner developed a framework for measuring the ingredients of community. While there is not an exact one-to-one match between Pink's six competencies for the new economy and Gardner's framework for community, there is a rough correspondence that we find compelling. Gardner's categories are:

- ◆ Wholeness incorporating diversity
- ◆ Reasonable sense of shared values
- ◆ Caring, trust, and teamwork
- ◆ Effective internal communication
- ◆ Participation
- ◆ Affirmation
- ◆ Links beyond the community
- ◆ Development of young people
- ◆ A forward view

We have taken all these ideas and synthesized them into a few simple questions we pose to participants when we conduct community development workshops. Please bear in mind that this list is research in progress and doesn't yet exist as a formal diagnostic instrument, but we believe it gives us a good basis for working with serious community leaders.

The questions we encourage a community to ask itself are:

1. Do the people in our community share a similar purpose for living here?
2. Is our community highly diverse in its cultural and ethnic makeup? Do we practice an openness that allows all of us to question assumptions?
3. Is teamwork among our community members very important and valued?
4. Are people in our community recognized publicly for their contributions?
5. Does everyone in our community communicate well with each other?
6. Does our community have a distinct and unique identity? Is there local pride in what we do and represent?



7. Is our community connected economically and politically with others in our region? Do we play an active leadership role in developing the region politically, economically, and environmentally?
8. Do we welcome new members to our community, even when they come from different backgrounds and have different lifestyles?
9. Do we believe in the “equal rights” of all our residents to transportation, education, clean air, and public spaces?
10. How easily does our community resolve conflicts among our members?
11. Do our residents invest time and energy to develop the community? To improve our schools? To ensure a sustainable environment?
12. Do we have adequate resources in our community to help it thrive?
13. Are we constantly seeking to “push the envelope” and striving to become a better, more interesting place? Do we support and encourage innovation in both our public and our commercial enterprises?

Vision into Action

What, then, can communities do? If they want to attract highly talented people who are motivated in their lives by design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning, they should develop programs, organizations, and capabilities that support exactly those kinds of experiences.

Let’s consider these components one at a time, and then we’ll conclude this section with some thoughts on how to promote community using Gardner’s approach.

Social and ethnic diversity exists to some degree in most communities. But it is often hidden within the larger context of the dominant culture. Community leaders should spend time and effort helping minority groups within the community organize themselves. For example, this might mean supporting a Hispanic Business Leaders group or an African-American Chamber of Commerce. Supporting these groups then helps them develop a known identity, a social structure, and a means for new community members to quickly connect to them and to others with similar views, values, and needs.

Performing arts are usually supported by local philanthropic groups. Cataloging these groups, developing a roster of key contacts, and compiling schedules of events are the kind of activities that again promote visibility and offer connection points. Funding periodic public events that showcase local performance groups is another tactic that can help communities emphasize their support for the performing arts.

Civic involvement is a natural process for communities to emphasize. But, again, how do local residents (and others as well) know what’s going on, and what’s available? More is needed than the pole with all the Kiwanis and Elks Club signs on it alongside the main road leading into town. In today’s world the more effective way to broadcast and promote civic involvement is via



the Internet and Worldwide Web. A professionally-designed and -maintained civic website is a good way to get started.⁶

Social action programs are also important. Find the ones already operating in the community and promote them. Most community social action programs are associated with a religious or fraternal organization. Look for local chapters, or contact national associations to find out how local chapters can be formed. In our experience the most important contemporary organizations are those related to environmental issues (“Being Green”), social venture networks,⁷ and “triple bottom line” advocates and implementers.⁸

Recreational variety depends very much on local geography and weather conditions. Each region should promote its own strongest possibilities (i.e., boating, skiing, biking, hiking, and so on). Again, we recommend connecting with national organizations and publications to promote the local region.

Faith-based organizations are usually fairly visible, but often stand alone. Supporting the development of non-denominational groups and inter-faith organizations is a powerful way to mobilize this community resource. And there are many professional and volunteer organizations and communities of practice that do “Good Works” beyond the purely faith-based ones. Active local chapters of national groups like the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, 4H, the NAACP, and the wide variety of political action groups speak volumes about the meaning that local residents can add to their lives.

In closing, once a community begins to organize itself around these kinds of attractors it then needs to mount a major marketing campaign to tell its story both to the outside world and to its own residents.

We recommend that the core message in that kind of campaign be taken from John Gardner’s work. A campaign that emphasizes the theme of wholeness through a forward-looking view will be aimed squarely at your target audience. Encourage local community and regional leaders to respond to the questions we listed above, and then publicize their testimonials as a centerpiece of that campaign.

⁶ See http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR650/mr650.ch5/ch5.html for a good example of this kind of effort.

⁷ See <http://www.svn.org/>

⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_bottom_line for more information on the concept of the “triple bottom line.”

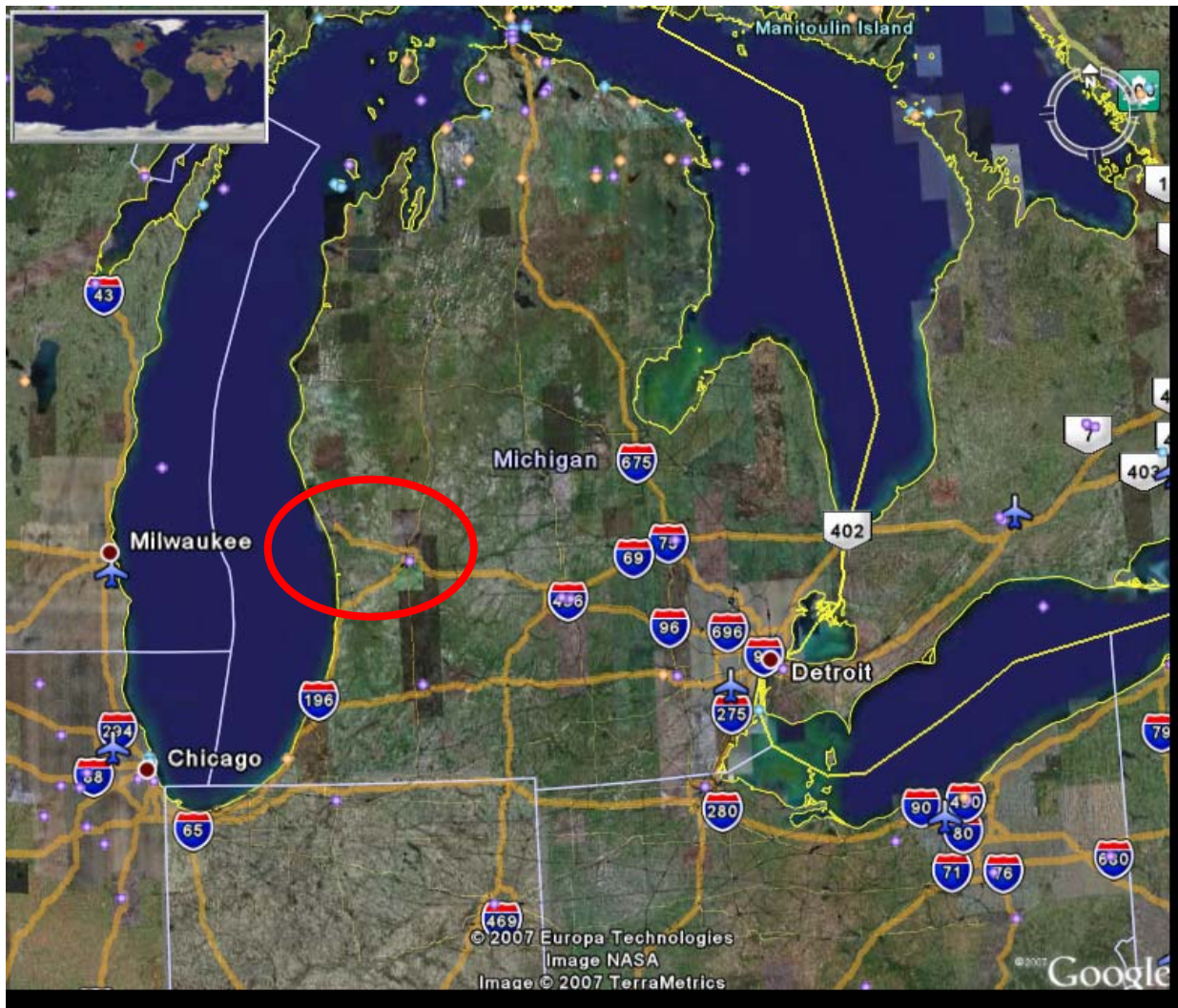


Intra-Regional Marketing Plan

Where is the Market?

The intra-regional market is composed of the seven-county area of West Michigan, including:

- ◆ Newaygo
- ◆ Muskegon
- ◆ Kent
- ◆ Ottawa
- ◆ Ionia
- ◆ Allegan
- ◆ Barry



Reaching the Market

The local “market” for distributed workers within the region has two major components: the largest sector is the large employer organizations in the area. The business model that we have developed is based on an assumption that 60% of the occupancy of any individual remote work center will come from this core market. Reaching the other major sector, independent entrepreneurs and small businesses, is another matter and is not covered in this preliminary version of the marketing plan.

There are two tactics we recommend based on our recent work in West Michigan. First is and foremost is a direct marketing campaign or personal contact with human resource executives in the 25 largest companies in the region. We have tested this approach with several firms and found them receptive to the messages summarized in our communications matrix shown below.

The second principal tactic for reaching the employee-based knowledge worker market is through a professional educational approach, through local chapters of professional associations and human resource providers. In addition, we have found service provider organizations such as Crandall Partners to be excellent potential marketing channel partners.⁹

Communication Matrix

Table Two, on the following page, is a summary of the relationships between themes, messages, and means of delivery we have identified in our work within the region.

As a meta-theme for this campaign we recommend something along the lines of “***Saving time and Energy.***”

⁹ <http://www.crandallpartners.com/>



Table Two

Theme	Message (s)	Medium	Tone	Frequency	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reduce commuting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Keep employees off the road ◆ Reduce carbon emissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Corporate leadership forums ◆ Local print ◆ Public service announcements (PSA's) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Good corporate citizens ◆ "Green" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regional marketing executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Employment in communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide link to "global" economy for residents ◆ Support trailing spouses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Web-based "new media" ◆ Local press ◆ RapidGrowthMedia ◆ Radio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Another benefit for living here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Monthly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ County EDC's ◆ Community foundations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promotes regional infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Your village is part of a larger network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Elected officials ◆ Professional associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Working for the greater good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ WMSA ◆ The Right Place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Personal development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ West Michigan offers support for small businesses and entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Local colleges and Chambers of Commerce ◆ Professional associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Building a life-long personal development plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ County EDC's ◆ Community foundations ◆ Local Colleges

An Unresolved Critical Issue Concerning the Regional Transportation Network

There is one major gap in this marketing message plan that we believe must to be addressed to create a complete and effective marketing message aimed at making West Michigan more attractive to high-end knowledge workers. That gap is largely out of the scope of this project, and requires a completely separate planning effort.

However we want to note it here and encourage WIRED to address it in the context of preparing the complete regional marketing plan. While we are aware of several current efforts to improve



the regional transportation network,¹⁰ we remain concerned about what appears to us to be a significant gap in regional transportation planning, including:

- ◆ Better regional transportation networks (both public and private);
- ◆ Air service providing national connections and more frequent flights from the region to national hubs; and
- ◆ Regional public transportation, including inter-regional rail and bus service.

Regional Strengths

We believe it goes without saying that any regional marketing plan must build on West Michigan's core strengths and attractiveness, even as WIRED seeks to enhance and add to those strengths.

We will not recount those strengths in any detail here, but it is worth noting that many of the region's largest employers, like Steelcase, Herman Miller, Haworth, Spectrum Health, and Alticor recruit nationally and would benefit significantly from a stronger regional "brand" that, in our humble opinion, should include a regional network of remote work centers that will make it easier for "location-neutral" workers to be successful both locally and globally (see our parallel report, "A Remote Work Center Business Planning Toolkit," for details on the business case for building out that network in West Michigan).

West Michigan is clearly a family-centric region; we heard numerous stories about young adults who had left to pursue careers elsewhere but were quick to return when they married and began raising children. And of course the region's philanthropic tradition is almost without equal. As we understand it, West Michigan's level of charitable giving per capita is exceeded only by the Mormon-rich Salt Lake City metropolitan area.

We also believe the future of West Michigan lies in its core strength as a center of industrial design. We encourage the developers of any regional marketing plan to be fully informed about the Design West Michigan initiative, a parallel WIRED project, and to include information about the many industrial and software design and architectural career opportunities that exist already in the area.

Other things that make West Michigan special include the richness and diversity of the "faith-based" community, the large number of privately owned companies and the richness of the housing stock at a much lower price point than the country as a whole. And those homes are located in safe, family-friendly neighborhoods both in the major cities and in their suburbs.

Downtown salmon fishing, great Lake Michigan beaches, the Meijer Sculpture Garden, the ease of access to cultural events, the strong regional presence of Grand Valley State University and other smaller institutions of higher learning – all combine to offer "big city" amenities without the

¹⁰ See, for example, the [Ride the Rapid](#), [Grand Valley Metropolitan Council](#), and [Gerald R. Ford International Airport](#) sites.



congestion and hassle associated with cities like Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Gary, and Toledo.

We are also fond of pointing out that only four of the forty-eight states in the continental US have an extended “west coast” where you can watch sunsets over water – California, Oregon, Washington, and Michigan.



Extra-Regional Marketing Plan

A West Michigan marketing plan aimed at attracting and retaining knowledge workers would be incomplete without serious attention to markets outside the region itself. After all, if West Michigan is to develop a “brand” and to promote itself to individuals and companies elsewhere.

Where is the Market?

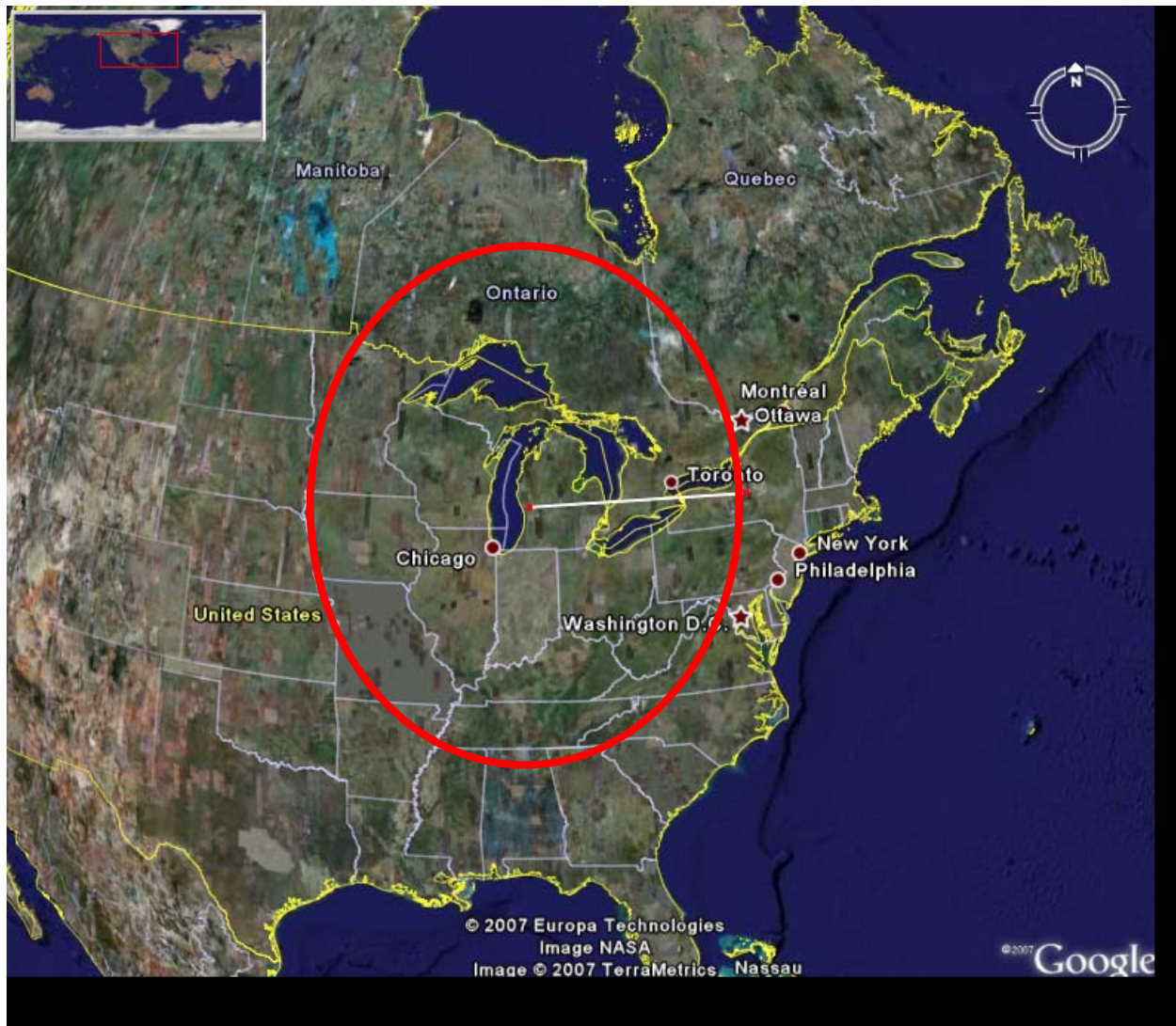
We believe the primary extra-regional market for West Michigan is the area within a 500-mile radius of Grand Rapids. This extensive geographic region has similar weather patterns and strong historical ties to West Michigan residents. It is also fairly similar culturally, drawing largely from Western European immigrants for its current population.

We believe that reaching beyond this area (at this stage of distributed work development) would be ineffective. Thus the major metropolitan areas we recommend targeting are:

- ◆ Toronto, Canada
- ◆ Chicago, Illinois
- ◆ Champagne-Urbana, Illinois
- ◆ Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- ◆ Detroit, Michigan
- ◆ St. Louis, Missouri
- ◆ Buffalo, New York
- ◆ Rochester, New York
- ◆ Erie, Pennsylvania
- ◆ Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- ◆ Des Moines, Iowa
- ◆ Minneapolis, Minnesota
- ◆ Indianapolis, Indiana
- ◆ Cincinnati, Ohio
- ◆ Dayton, Ohio
- ◆ Cleveland, Ohio

Washington, DC, and Montreal, Canada, remain on the outer fringes of this target market, but may be open to niche marketing for the design profession, as an example.





Reaching the Extra-Regional Market

We believe the primary way to reach this broader geographic market is through the exploitation of new media. First, the target audience themselves are very tech-savvy and use these media in their professional work and everyday life. Remote work centers must have state-of-the-art web sites, active weblogs, wiki's, and social networking software data bases. The design, development, and maintenance of these platforms is a basic marketing cost that we have already built into our financial planning assumptions.



Thus we envision some aggressive outreach to these target markets through paid online advertising, active participation in regional and national economic development conferences, print advertising, and the placement of positive stories about West Michigan in local and regional publications. But the primary purpose of all those efforts will be to drive traffic to local community and work center websites.

Communication Matrix

Table Three, below, is a summary of the relationships between the themes, messages, and means of delivery we have identified as particularly effective in our recent work within the region.

We recommend that the meta-theme for this campaign be something on the order of “West Michigan: An affordable place to live, work, and play.” The campaign must build the story of a compelling community to live in, relocate to, raise a family, and build a career. But we leave the details of branding and marketing to the specialists.

Some keywords (“tags,” for online web sites) that are important to this market are:

- ◆ Sustainability _____ Low-maintenance living
- ◆ Commute avoidance _____ Continuum of elder care
- ◆ Public Schools _____ Universities and colleges
- ◆ Innovation _____ Collaboration
- ◆ Recreation _____ Sports participation
- ◆ Sports spectator _____ Low operating costs
- ◆ Meet and know interesting people _____ Community management
- ◆ Entertainment _____ Residential services
- ◆ Interesting _____ Cultural gravitas
- ◆ Affordability _____ Life Balance
- ◆ Connectivity _____ Convenience
- ◆ Belonging _____ Health care
- ◆ Hip – coolness _____ Investment value
- ◆ Security - crime _____ Security - mother nature
- ◆ Art _____ Recreation



Table Three

Theme	Message (s)	Medium	Tone	Frequency	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quality of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ This is a healthy environment ◆ It's safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Linked to "green" websites ◆ Go for lifestyle sites such as <i>Fast Company</i>, <i>Slate</i>, <i>CoolTown Studios</i>, <i>Sperling's Best Places</i>, and <i>Find Your Spot</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 'Earth friendly' ◆ Preserve the environment ◆ Balance in live/work/play ◆ Clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Monthly updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regional marketing Executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cost versus metro living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Housing is affordable ◆ Lower tax rates ◆ Less transportation is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Business publications ◆ Lifestyle sites like HGTV and www.coli.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frugal use of personal assets ◆ Opportunity for investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ County EDC's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Family values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Community is emphasized ◆ Education is valued ◆ Solid mid-western values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Faith-based national sites ◆ West Michigan sites like www.graceoffice.org, www.rca.org, and www.faithgrandrapids.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Wholesome ◆ Nostalgia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regional and/or State EDC's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strong career support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ High-quality educational institutions ◆ Effective support for small business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Business publications ◆ Lifestyle sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A place to live and learn ◆ Lifetime learning and personal development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regional and/or State EDC's ◆ Local educational institutions

In summary, the extra-regional marketing plan should ensure that all the economic development entities in West Michigan are presenting a unified message that covers these basic points:

1. Free agent support platforms—such as Internet based media
2. Life-long education
3. Connection with community and culture
4. Diversity and tolerance
5. Green – good for the planet
6. Healthy lifestyle
7. Life, balance, and time management

In building this message we believe [The Right Place](#) should become the primary marketing entity for West Michigan. However, it is essential to focus on the entire region, not just greater Grand Rapids.

Use of New Media

We can't emphasize enough the necessity to develop and use a new-media strategy. Knowledge workers (who are *the* target market for this initiative) rely on non-traditional media extensively to find information, develop social network contacts, and do research. Essentially this is a practical exercise in developing a dramatically new economic development program.

We highly recommend the *Society for New Communications Research* (SNCR) as a resource for this effort. SNCR is at the leading edge of the impact of new media on society and business. The organization has a strong portfolio of research and methodologies that can help inform the core of a new-media campaign.¹¹

Outstanding issues

This regional marketing plan is obviously incomplete, and deliberately so. The agency, or entity, that mounts the campaign on behalf of West Michigan must take ownership of the plan. We have provided an outline, a template, and a number of themes and tactics that we believe will be successful. But ultimately the group that executes the plan will bear responsibility. We are left with three questions concerning the regional marketing plan at this juncture:

- ◆ Who does it? In all our research and conversations in the region no one entity has emerged that would be the natural place for operationalizing this plan. However, we do believe that it should primarily be a private sector responsibility, coordinated with economic development authorities and regional groups. We recommend that one of the

¹¹ See <http://www.sncr.org/>

regional remote work centers should take on the leadership for this effort, using a fee chargeback mechanism with the other centers to share the cost regionally.

- ◆ Who is the regional coordination authority? Again this question remains open, at least in our minds. Is it the Western Michigan Strategic Alliance? Is it Right Place? We offer no opinion other than to note that without clear accountability and recognized responsibility a regional marketing effort will certainly fail.
- ◆ Funding? This issue is simpler for us. It is clear that funding of this effort must be included in the budgets of the individual remote work centers. This approach will provide continuity and a clear link to performance. Effective marketing of the RWC concept in conjunction with the West Michigan “brand” will certainly contribute to the growth of members and users of the centers.

