

2004 KLA White Paper

Topic: Promoting Kosciusko County

Presented: April 13, 2004

Team Members: Andy Pelo, Leanne Hamrick, Steve Carlson, Mike Scott

The economic strength of a region may be defined by that region's ability to grow during prosperous economic times. But a more accurate definition of economic strength may be stated as a region's ability to "weather the storms" of economic downturns. In the middle of the manufacturing and farming heartland of America sits Kosciusko County, Indiana. It may just be such a place of economic strength.

Northern Indiana, a manufacturing-rich region, has experienced its fair share of economic hardships during the past several years. Manufacturing has been hit hard and the state of Indiana has suffered greatly with more job losses than any other state since 2000. However, Kosciusko County has been a shining star through these rough times. Kosciusko County has lost its share of jobs as well, but seems to be more resilient than surrounding counties. Why? One reason among others is that Kosciusko County (KC) boasts good growth prospects in the medical device manufacturing sector and is considered the "Orthopedic Capital of the World." KC also benefits by its location having strong ties to nearby Elkhart, South Bend, and the Fort Wayne metro areas.

Keeping KC's economy strong is important. The quality of life of the residents in the county is directly related to the strength of its businesses. Strong businesses create more good paying jobs and a greater corporate and individual tax base among other things. But weak demographic trends and low levels of educational attainment by its residents cause challenges for many Kosciusko County businesses. Human Resource professionals recognize that their ability to attract talented employees to the county is essential for a vibrant local economy. But are the tools in place to accomplish this?

Businesses in Kosciusko County have struggled to bring outside talent to the area and many that do relocate to KC for work have initially demonstrated a reluctance to live in the community, not having been educated well enough about the amenities that exist. Currently, relocation packets exist through the Chamber of Commerce and a video of the community was made some 20 years ago. These tools are in need of updating and through the use of available, modern technology, we have an opportunity to help shine a bright spotlight on the successes of our county—its businesses and way of life. In cooperation with the area business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Mayor's office, we are proposing the creation of a marketing tool, specifically a marketing/promotional CD-ROM. This marketing tool would help communicate and attract talented individuals to Kosciusko County---thus supporting area businesses--- which in turn will help keep our community and economy strong and vibrant.

The Specific Need

Our team has identified what we believe is a critical need for Kosciusko County – doing a better job of promoting the county to prospective residents. Many of the large businesses and institutions in the County are currently and will likely continue to recruit significant numbers of employees with skills not currently available locally. Filling these jobs with individuals who are currently outside our area is vital for our county's continued growth and prosperity.

When individuals consider relocating to a new area they people generally factor in two broad areas in their decision making process. The first consideration is financial – the cost of living, home prices, etc. The other key area of consideration is quality of life – quality of schools, entertainment opportunities, crime rate, places to live, etc. The financial considerations are readily available in print on the internet at sites such as Monstermoving.com, Homestore.com, and Relocationcentral.com. Quality of life considerations is where we believe Kosciusko County can do a better job of communicating what it has to offer.

Members of our team have first hand experience dealing with this deficiency – the lack of communication on the great quality of life offered in Kosciusko County. A significant number of prospective residents are impressed by the employment opportunities, but “turn up their nose” to the thought of living here. Thus, many organizations find it difficult to fill many skilled positions. We certainly aren’t suggesting it is possible to convince everyone to live here. We are, however, suggesting that our idea for marketing the County with an interactive CD-ROM regarding our great quality of life will make a big difference.

Our team has felt strongly about this need idea from the start. We thought it would be important to substantiate it.

Substantiating the Need

After identifying what our team felt was a critical need in Kosciusko County, the next step was to substantiate our hypothesis. One of the ways we decided to do so was through opinions of key leaders in our community.

Our first meeting was with Joy McCarthy-Sessing, President of the Warsaw Kosciusko County Chamber of Commerce. Joy agreed that, while Kosciusko County has much to offer, we don’t do a very good job of promoting that to prospective residents. Having lived in many other cities herself, Joy said that it would be difficult for some people to envision themselves living in a small, mostly rural county. People who are unfamiliar with the area are not aware of the many things that Kosciusko County has to offer. The Chamber does have promotional literature for the county. While these are well prepared and informative, the consensus was that some type of interactive media would be more effective in showcasing all Kosciusko County has to offer.

Our team also met with another key community leader in Mayor Ernie Wiggins (Warsaw). The Mayor shared with us that several years ago the Chamber had created a promotional video on VHS for Kosciusko County. The Mayor felt strongly that the video was a good tool at the time. He went on to agree that our county needed some kind of marketing tool to assist in promoting the great things of Kosciusko County. Mayor Wiggins liked the idea of an interactive CD-Rom. He felt it was important enough that he would be willing to consider financial contributions by the City of Warsaw.

A representative from our team discussed the issue at hand with Tara Burns, president of the Kosciusko Human Resources Association (KHRA). Tara shared with us that KHRA membership certainly feels the need for attracting skilled workers to Kosciusko County. She pointed out that her group had recently discussed the shortfall of skilled labor in the area, including both blue and white collar positions. Ms. Burns confirmed that the KHRA would certainly advocate an additional marketing tool such as what we are proposing.

The Solution

After substantiating the need for additional marketing tools for attracting individuals to Kosciusko County we turned to the specifics. Print materials are available, but certainly don't generate the same level of spark or interest that something containing an interactive feature with music, video, and web-link capabilities.

We believe that our idea for a promotional CD-Rom is vital to the continued prosperity of Kosciusko County. All employers of Kosciusko County, from the big orthopedic companies to the smaller employers in Pierceton, Etna Green, Mentone, Atwood, and Silver Lake. They all have one thing in common, the need for a skilled workforce. And, the majority of those skilled individuals will need to come from a place outside of Kosciusko County.

We've all seen the travel commercials on television. They're colorful and scenic, filled with the wonders and sights of the destination, and they're filled with people having fun. Each destination wants to put its best foot forward. That's just what we need to do, put Kosciusko County's best foot forward. The target audience is that potential employee being recruited by one of our local companies. We want to capture the potential employee's attention with the beauty and activities available in this area. We want to inform and enlighten the potential employee as to the quality of life we offer at minimal commute from anywhere within the region.

What might this interactive CD-ROM contain? Certainly it should start out with some live action video of the lakes and sights of the area. With graphics and still photos, list key public services with their telephone numbers, addresses, maps, and links to organizational websites. A list of local employers with their pertinent information might be helpful. And the list goes on of potential parties and organizations that might wish to be included in a vehicle that promotes Kosciusko County. A few other ideas for content might be:

1. Action from lakes
2. Wagon Wheel information
3. Area restaurants
4. Village at Winona
5. Grace College
6. The great school system
7. Golfing opportunities
8. Variety of housing subdivisions
9. Programs for kids
10. Museums and history of the County
11. The library
12. The various churches
13. Volume of top notch employers

How much would it cost? Based our research, the interactive CD-ROM project would cost anywhere from \$10,000 - \$100,000 for initial creation and production. The overall cost varies depending on the type of "bells and whistles" that were included. The lower end would likely include primarily still photos with less overall content. The higher end would include more video content and other attractive features. The production cost is certainly the most significant investment. The CDs themselves would cost only \$1-3 per unit.

How would this project be funded? We envision the initial production costs to be covered by contributions and donations by interested and participating parties, be they local organizations,

businesses, or individuals. The CD-ROMs would be available at cost through the organization managing the project.

Who would manage the project, have it updated, or make changes to the content over time? We're suggesting the Chamber of Commerce might be a good choice for managing and coordinating this project. Representing the collective interests of all its members and of the County as a whole, the Chamber already has the contacts and the organization to manage this type of activity. As a matter of fact, it has done so in the past with its video and information packages. This is exactly the same, just on a different medium, CD-ROM instead of tape or printed materials.

The Conclusion

Kosciusko County is a great place to work and live. Unfortunately, not everyone considering relocating to this area feels that way. Why? In many cases it is simply because we do not effectively communicate and market what most of us think is a great quality of life. As a result, local businesses and institutions often struggle to attract the "right" talent to sustain and grow their business. Looking at the big picture -- we all suffer. Our failure to support the growing businesses and institutions in our local communities will most definitely hurt the local economy and ultimately our way of life. A strong economy will help us sustain and even improve our quality of life...but, we must start by doing a better job of telling others about it. We urge the citizens and leaders of Kosciusko County to support our idea, an interactive marketing CD-ROM that captures and promotes what most of recognize as a great place to live.

Individuals or groups interested in supporting this project should contact the Kosciusko County Chamber of Commerce.