

A WIN for the Region of Cincinnati USA: Economic Development Database Tool Shared by 11 Organizations

Economic development is a numbers game. Cincinnati USA is no exception. 2 million people. 11,000 businesses and prospects. 13 counties. 11 economic development organizations. 3 states. And 1 database. Not just any database, but a database designed to WIN. WIN* is the Web-based Information Network, a database used by the Partnership for Greater Cincinnati, the region's collaborative economic development organization.

Like any solid economic development organization, the goal of the Partnership is to maximize resources to uncover leads which can be converted to wins for the region. At the same time, open communication among the partnering organizations and investors is a must.

What is WIN?

The WIN for the Partnership combines the sophistication of CRM technology with customization capabilities that allow the organization to track their performance and actually see their impact on economic development for the region. The Partnership took the leadership role in the development and implementation of this entire network.

Here's a brief overview of what WIN can do:

- Gather pertinent data including corporate contact info, jobs created/retained, facility square-footage and more.
- Set and track goals through the system for accountability.
- Improve efficiency for managing prospects, increasing the likelihood of converting prospects to wins.
- Track competition.
- Discover length of time from initiation of a project to a successful announcement.
- Allow for easy access through the Web from anywhere in the world, at any time.
- List marketing activities to determine return on investment in order to better allocate marketing dollars.
- Slice and dice data in a number of ways. Growth reports are generated by community, by client manager or by marketing efforts.
- Demonstrate to investors that the Partnership is a good steward of their dollars.
- Help the smaller communities in the Partnership track their progress.
- Showcase the small projects that don't necessarily make headlines, but help the region succeed nonetheless.
- Present solid data to potential and current investors about companies with whom the Partnership initiated a relationship.
- Debunk rumors and rhetoric about which regions are succeeding or failing.

Overcoming Obstacles

Imagine the complexities of dealing with 11 different organizations, many of whom are competing for the same projects. To encourage the sharing of information, the Partnership surveyed the partners to assess their needs and concerns and used that information in the creation of WIN. As a result, there are built-in confidentiality functions. Actually, the competitive nature of the organizations keeps everyone interested in the system. County A wouldn't want to see that County B had more active projects than they have.

Another obstacle was initially encouraging regular use of the system. Partners often request updates. Now, it's as simple as a reminder to log in to WIN. So when the Partnership is contacted for growth reports or

other project updates, they can encourage the use of WIN instead of taking extra time to print reports and send faxes. Everyone benefits because timely information is available to all, at any given time.

Productivity Wins

It's all about efficiency — economic development professionals have the customized information they need at their fingertips and have the time and data to be more responsive to site location contacts. Instead of leafing through file folders and calendar pages, client managers for the Partnership are out meeting with prospects, calling on newly located corporate contacts and seeking new leads. The team is able to focus its energy into client service, and that has incredible payoff.

Marketing Wins

Knowing the return on investment is essential to any successful marketing program. WIN tracks marketing activities and shows how these investments beget investments in the region. WIN can track leads from an article that appears in a trade publication or from a visitor to a trade show booth. Print ads, publicity, etc. also are tracked in the system to ensure that marketing dollars are being spent wisely and to track which activities are yielding the most leads. And it never hurts to be able to demonstrate this ROI to the investors who fund the marketing efforts!

A WINning Example

What started out as a business attraction tool, also lends itself to being a business retention tool as some 400 companies are surveyed per year. These surveys inquire about the state of their business and ask the companies to rate the area in terms of taxes, workforce and other measures. The data is then entered in WIN which automatically “flags” a client manager when a company is expected to make a decision about expansion, relocation or pursuit of new markets. For example, a downtown Cincinnati-based market research firm with an average annual wage of \$65,000 had outgrown its existing office space and was going to relocate. Due to a misunderstanding about tax incentive programs, the firm planned to move out of state. Luckily, the database flagged the Partnership that the company had expansion needs. Due to the flag, a client manager met with this firm, was able to clear up this misunderstanding. The company stayed downtown and added an additional 20 jobs. Without WIN, this company would have moved to another state because the retention call would never have occurred. But they stayed. A win, thanks to WIN.

Information is key in today's global economy and a workable, customized database is imperative. But it's the results that really matter and that's why WIN is a win for the region. It took an initial investment of time and money to launch the system, but the increased accessibility and productivity are well worth it. Need more information about economic development WINs in Cincinnati USA? Allow me to consult the WIN...

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* WIN is designed and maintained by International Database Engineering