

Attracting Recent College Graduates

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A recent report from the American Institute for Economic (AIER) ranked Boston as the third most popular major American city among young college graduates. The ranking was based on the economic and quality-of-life factors that young workers find most attractive.

Among the eight economic and quality-of-life factors in AIER's *Employment Destinations Index* that influenced migration patterns of college grads ages 22-35, the most important were:

1. A high density of people with a college degree

Massachusetts leads the nation in college graduation rates. According to figures from 2011, 39.1 percent of Massachusetts residents have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 28.5 percent of the overall U.S. population.

2. A low unemployment rate

Massachusetts' unemployment rate recently dropped to 4.6 percent, according to the latest numbers from May 2015, making it the lowest since 2007 and lower than the national average of 5.5 percent. The unemployment rate for workers with college degrees is even lower, at about half the national average.

3. The ability to get around without a car

Despite the MBTA's troubles this past winter, Boston takes public transportation seriously. Several PSG clients have chosen to relocate to more accessible, urban locations when upgrading their office space. This is an important consideration for attracting Millennial workers, who – studies say – may be eschewing car ownership.

Other factors in the *Employment Destinations Index* included bars and restaurants per 1,000 residents, as well as earning power, rents, competition for jobs, and ethnic and racial diversity.

Boston's position in the ranking appears to be a reversal of a "brain drain" trend uncovered in a study two years ago that found recent college graduates were leaving New England at a faster rate than any region in the country. In its 2013 study, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston found that only 63.6 percent of 2008 graduates of New England schools were still living in the region, with the rest leaving for better jobs, lower costs of living, or more familiar territory after years away from home. In comparison, 88 percent of college graduates in the West, about 82.7 percent in the Middle Atlantic states, and 79 percent in the South Atlantic region stayed put for at least a year. The study found that Massachusetts ranked 38th among states in retaining recent college grads.

As a staffing and recruiting firm that serves hundreds of employers in the Greater Boston area, PSG has direct insight into the tactics local employers are using to attract, recruit, and retain younger workers. Some tactics include:

Using 21st century tools to communicate - Contacting younger workers today isn't as simple as dialing a phone number or sending an email anymore. Emails to candidates are often lost to black-hole "spam" folders or amongst the infinite bombardment of today's email marketing collateral. And, who answers their phone

anymore? Text messaging might have a slightly higher rate of response, but can tend to fall into the same trap as the incoming calls from random phone numbers.

While social media has been around for more than a decade it's really only now transcending most/all generations. This is important because those in position to hire, particularly those looking to attract the recent college grad age bracket, are putting themselves at a competitive advantage by using social media to connect. LinkedIn is absolutely leading the charge when it comes to ease of connectivity and depth of networking possibilities. It's also an active real-time news-feed which companies can/should use to post job openings and/or brag about fun and exciting things going on within their organizations. Facebook isn't far behind LinkedIn particularly in terms of success in attracting and connecting with this age bracket.

Helping workers envision their future - Training and development programs, along with other opportunities for "upward" movement, are still among the most common questions asked by candidates in this age range. To take on more responsibility and "move up" with a company is highly appealing to individuals seeking long-term employment. VP titles and high base salaries are like the stainless steel and granite of recruitment! Most companies have a form of training and development mapped out for all employees, particularly during the first 6-12 months. Creating programs that extend beyond and even include tuition reimbursement can easily differentiate one opportunity from the next.

Looking the part – Many younger workers picture Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg – wearing his trademark hoodie and jeans -- when they think of success. He's famously explained that this uniform frees him from wardrobe shopping so that he can focus on his business. While that could seem to be an extreme example, it's not far from the truth at some tech startups. The more important lesson is that the dress codes of the past have all but disappeared and younger workers expect to go to work looking and feeling much more casual than their predecessors.

Building state-of-the-art office space designed to promote collaboration – Offices with open floor plans and dedicated meeting space for small and large groups can increase worker productivity and be visually appealing. One of PSG's larger clients is building a sizeable, state-of-the-art kitchen in its new headquarters and plans to offer employees five free meals per week.

Getting creative with benefits – While larger office buildings can offer on-premise gyms and fitness centers, even smaller employers can convert conference rooms for weekly yoga or meditation sessions. Free dry-cleaning and heavily subsidized day-care make it easy for employers to attract those with young families or other responsibilities out of work. Some employers find that creative food and drink options are the way to their employees' hearts: the old water-cooler has been replaced with a new water dispenser that features reverse osmosis filtered water, as well as dozens of different flavored coffee and tea choices and other drinks, and creative options that appeal to foodies like kombucha and craft beers. And sitting right next to the beverage fridge and single-serve coffee machines are racks of all kinds of snacks from chips to assorted fruit. Makes life a little easier but leaving the office a little tougher.

Walking the work/life balance talk - Several PSG clients are attuned to the ambitious and time-consuming hobbies and activities their workers enjoy and encourage time off to pursue them. It is becoming increasingly popular for companies to offer unlimited or open paid-time-off to their employees. This opens up opportunities for personal and professional development, cultural enrichment through travel, time with family and friends, or simply ample time to decompress.

Focusing on employee engagement - Rebooting offices with collaborative space and lounge areas is not enough to increase teamwork and communication. Getting out of the office with your colleagues and

teammates to participate in team-building or community-centric activities is a big selling point for candidates in this age bracket. Opportunities to assert themselves into the surrounding community to participate in something philanthropic is another huge draw. Team-building literally comes in so many forms these days I need to write another article to do it justice. This age bracket is used to and is expecting elaborate field-trips, excursions, or several days long programs around team building. Research on retention rates and community outreach programs finds that organizations that regularly participate in volunteer activities in the local community stand to attract and retain at much higher rates than those that do not.

Connecting staff with one another – Alumni networks are a traditional recruiting tool that can still be highly effective. This method involves all staff members, depending on their interest and connections. For instance, the HR team at one of our clients taps a staff member in a different department to regularly visit his alma mater and talk to students about careers in his field and to share what it's like to work at their specific firm. Alumni networks have evolved from standard "career day" or "career fair" activities to include a wide range of activities that bring alumni together. Most have multiple online networks too, including public and private groups and pages on LinkedIn and Facebook.

If you or your company would like to discuss recruiting and hiring recent college graduates, please feel free to reach me at nbrown@psgstaffing.com or 617-250-1000.