



New website will help plan business location

A client recently told me that he didn't like the current location of his [business](#), but decided to stay there because it was close to his home. Jessica Beckendorf, associate vice president of economic development for Advance, the economic development arm of the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, recommends a more analytical approach to site selection.

"If you want to see [your business](#) grow, you might be better off moving your home," she said. "Find out where your business will thrive the best and relocate."

At a recent SCORE seminar on Innovative Options for Locating Your Business, Beckendorf presented an exciting new tool that will allow [business owners](#) to make better location decisions. For the past few years, she has worked with economic development professionals throughout the state to produce a comprehensive information system. The result, Locatein Wisconsin.com, will debut in the next few weeks.

"This new system makes sense," Beckendorf said. "When it's up and running, you will be able to see sites and buildings that are available and all the different [businesses](#) in the surrounding area."

There will be listings of buildings available for lease and sale, and demographic information that will show businesses where their likely customers are concentrated. Maps will provide a picture of population density and income. Other reports will show the number of households, household income, and ages of residents within a certain area

Beckendorf emphasized the importance of defining your customers.

"Businesses need to know exactly who their customer base is and why," she said. "If it's a startup, they haven't likely had many customers, so they really need to take some time to work with SCORE, NWTC (Northeast Wisconsin Technical College),

SBDC (Small Business Development Center) or another counselor to develop that part of their [business plan](#)."

This means that entrepreneurs need to carefully refine their business concept. You need to know your niche market and as much as possible about the characteristics of your customers.

"If you're a restaurant or clothing store or even a service-oriented business, you want to locate where there are other businesses," she said. "Even if you're serving homes, you want to be near where people run their errands."

Depending on the type of business, you can gain information from your competitors. National chains have strict criteria in site selection, and look at all of the demographic variables. If your business is similar, you might want to consider the same area. The [new website](#) will allow you to see the location of other businesses right down to the name of the business. This is helpful for co-locating or identifying an area that might be saturated for your business type.

Beckendorf is an advocate of using information to better your chances of [success](#). The site will provide rent information that will help in lease negotiations so that it fits with business plan projections. If an area meets your business criteria but is too expensive, she advises trying to find another area that fits or waiting until you have additional funds.

"I've seen so many businesses open up thinking that once I open, people will just come, but that's a big mistake," Beckendorf said.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.