

How to make a CoolTown

Cool



Silicon Valley, Denver and Charlotte made attracting young professionals a priority in the '90s. Now they're seeing higher sales tax revenues, prosperous new businesses and remarkable job growth. The City of Austin credits their quality of life (i.e. the live music capital of the world) for #1 rankings in net migration and Forbes' Best Places for Business and Careers. Cambridge, Mass. has long catered to retaining its university graduates, and now ranks as the 23rd largest economy in the world. Even the small towns of Madison, Santa Fe and Albuquerque are attracting job-growing creatives - and faster than their peers.

Why isn't my city attracting growth, excitement and prosperity like Austin?

*Does your city produce **and** retain talent?* Major universities produce talent. A creative city retains it. The tipping point to prosperity occurs when the two combine to form a formidable one-two punch:

Talent-Producing Universities

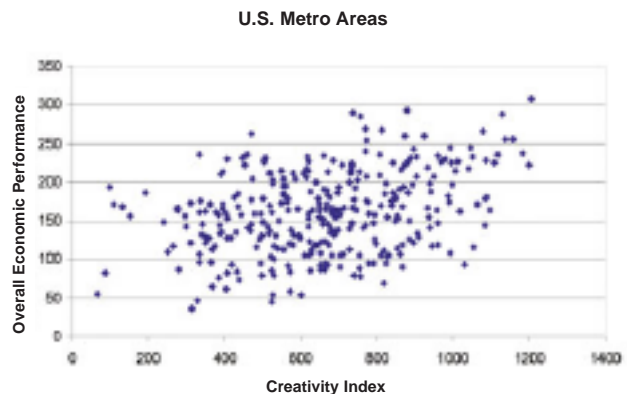
The SF Bay Area has Stanford; Cambridge has Harvard and MIT; Austin has the 49,000 student University of Texas and Charlotte has

UNC, Duke and NC State. All of these universities have partnerships with surrounding employers to help ensure jobs for its graduates, as well as talent for the companies.

Talent-Retaining CoolTowns

Say you have a prodigious talent-producing university, but what good is it if the students leave once they graduate; a phenomenon known as "*brain drain*". It helps to think like a student - even the best job offer isn't attractive if the town isn't cool enough, or if the dating prospects are less than stellar.

Ground-breaking research ties that cool factor to *creativity*. The nationally-respected Richard Florida Creativity Group released evidence that directly ties creativity (creative industries, diversity, patents, high tech) to city-wide *economic performance* (job and population growth, high-tech growth and changes in per capita income).



The more creative the city, the more prosperous it is

Understanding this then begs the question, “How do I attract creativity?”, or in other words, “How do I attract creative people?” This leads to the title of this story, “How do I make a CoolTown cool?”

Do businesses believe in CoolTowns?

Absolutely. Entrepreneurs, free agents, and small business owners seek creative places above all else, for they *are* the creative class. How important are they? 69% of the Inc 500, the fastest growing businesses in America, started with less than \$50,000, and 56% started in the home. This increasingly prosperous trend of developing local businesses is known as *economic gardening*.



The world’s largest companies know where their success lies:

"Keep your tax incentives and highway interchanges, we will go where the highly-skilled people are" - Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina. Charles Brewer, founder of Mindspring/ Earthlink, desperately sought a CoolTown to relocate his 3000 employees before he had to settle for an office park.



Talent rarely leaves towns with exceptional nightlife.



CoolTowns create unforgettable experiences

OK, we're committed to becoming a CoolTown. What are the next steps?

Phase I: Building the Human Community

The first phase involves building the community of people who will actually live, work and create in the to-be-planned, to-be-built CoolTown. This CoolTown Build2Live! program is a five-step process:

1. **The CoolTown 100** - We'll establish a collaborative of the most influential entrepreneurial creatives, the CoolTown 100; a local and national group of visionary business, civic and academic leaders. The group will craft a clear vision focused on enhancing local industry and cultural strengths through a new/revitalized community.
2. **The CoolTown Circles & Guilds** - The CoolTown 100 leads a series of interactive market research focus groups to understand the amenities and price points needed to attract a creative talent base to the new community. Those who then commit to living and working in the new community become the CoolTown circles (residential) and guilds (commercial); local communities focused on fulfilling specific economic, A&E or social interests.



CoolTowns have myriad indoor, outdoor, informal and formal 'stages' that allow creatives to publicly share their talent.

3. Build2Live! Action Plan – In conjunction with existing institutional investment partners, the CoolTown circles & guilds collaborate on a concise road map that highlights the specific action to build the CoolTown (and its unique economy): land control, development team, tax system, economic gardening plan, technology, culture and public policy.

4. The CoolTown Planning Charrette -

The guilds represent the economic and residential market in a master-plan charrette* hosted by the City and the development team, taking a direct role in planning their own community and economic future. **An intensive week-long exercise where the entire town is planned.*



The charrette must involve the creatives who will live, work and employ in the new CoolTown.

5. Keeping It Cool – The circles and guilds evolve and serve to grow the economy and sense of community, assisted by a self-financed local collaborative to ensure the best programs, tenants and services are in place to maintain the town as a creative destination.

Phase II: Building the Physical Community

Successful talent attraction comes down to providing three key elements: *entertainment, jobs* and *affordability*, in that order. Fulfilling just one or even two elements won't make it happen. All three must be brought together, and that requires building a CoolTown.

Why is entertainment (& arts) first? Most young professionals wouldn't take a dream job in a town that didn't provide adequate social life. On the other hand, the exorbitant rents of Manhattan and San Francisco still don't stop starving artists from becoming permanent residents. Besides, they subconsciously know that jobs follow entertainment (e.g. nightlife, music, recreation, dating prospects) because companies follow talent. Affordability is the secret ingredient that unbuckles the restraints on unparalleled economic growth.



Truly experiential entertainment and arts are woven into the very fabric of the community.

1. Experience Entertainment!

As we evolve from a service economy to an *experience economy*, entertainment and the arts become the unique selling point - from the



A nightly, A&E-oriented dining experience in Spain

dynamic (nightlife, music, recreation) to the everyday (residence, work-place). Today's creatives expect more than a home and job, they want a neighborhood experience and a workplace performance. This 24-hour arts & entertainment experience (*Experience A&E*) in one's daily home and work life is the secret driving force behind what makes a CoolTown cool.

Thus: • Weave *Experience A&E* into the streets, buildings and public spaces, integrating it into the community's routine.

- Ensure a substantial amount of affordable, art-inspired residences and workplaces for entrepreneurial artists and musicians.



- Provide a variety of 'performance stages': a piazza, a gym-sized community center and multiple small-venue *third places* for spontaneous interaction and self expression.

- Establish entrepreneurial capital to utilize technology in the distribution and marketing of local entertainer and artist talent within the community and around the world.

2. Entrepreneurial Jobs!

Work knows cool. Corporate workplaces are moving back to the city, office parks are reporting high vacancies and 47 million people telework to some degree. There are 33 million "free agents" in the workforce today, and among them are the next Bill Gates and Steve Jobs that can attract both creativity and economic prosperity to your city.

Thus: • Establish a guild that allows the workforce to collaborate efficiently and share resources town-wide within a common vision.

- Provide loft-style shared workplaces for cost-conscious entrepreneurs.



Would creatives rather work here or in an office park?

- Support tenants with sponsored main street programs and progressive lenders.
- Build relationships with out-of-the-box thinking employers; often the most interested in improving employee quality of life.
- Create early agreements with corporate office tenants so they can take advantage of low initial land/rent costs, the primary detractor keeping them out of the city.
- Establish a wireless broadband network integrated with informal workplaces and a collaborative business intranet to arbitrage new opportunities and enhance local industries.

3. Quality *Affordability!*

A Builder Magazine survey concluded that Gen Xers and Yers can't spend more than \$150,000 for a home. Creatives, including entrepreneurs, have very limited budgets. It also stated that the demand overwhelmingly exceeds the supply in reaching this price point in the downtown, where entertainment is best.

Creatives prioritize smaller places with low maintenance, will move into riskier areas to save rent, and actually prefer not owning a car if jobs/amenities are convenient (e.g. NY, SF). Car debt subtracts about \$50,000 from the amount of a home one can qualify for.



Lofts: Simple, designed to be affordable, wildly popular

Thus: • Locate the new/revitalized town in an up-and-coming area that doesn't already suffer from inflated land values.

- Build four-six story multi-family residences with small footprints, but larger windows and open floor plans. Leave them unfinished (i.e. lofts) to further save costs and cater to young creatives' penchant for customization, self-expression. Build workplace versions with the same concepts.
- Provide a diversity of unit types that allow different levels of affordability.
- Unbundle parking from the cost of a home, establishing a parking lease instead.
- Locate entertainment and workplaces within walking distance, transit and car sharing.



What's *Next?*

- To learn more on what makes a CoolTown cool, join the *affordable* [CoolTown Network](#)
- Call us for a free overview of your town or city neighborhood after you join the network.
- If you're ready to initiate a CoolTown in your city, we'll help you establish the CoolTown circles and guilds, secure their investors, and build their community. Let's start a dialogue to build that next **CoolTown**.

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