

# Working with Site Selection Consultants: Some Thoughts from Experience

By Jerry W. Szatan

I have been a site selection consultant for more than twelve years, working with call centers and now contact centers in many industries throughout the United States and abroad. My clients have considered new locations because they were expanding to add capacity, relocating existing centers or realigning their facilities to match changed business goals arising from mergers, acquisitions, consolidations or other organizational change. Some projects had very short time frames while others had more comfortable ones.

Usually, my clients have been welcoming. Once or twice they have been hostile, typically when senior management hired me for a second opinion or to work with a team where members strongly held opposing opinions on the best course of action. In one project dealing with a site selection team composed of one representative from each of three organizations that were merging, I was accused by one individual of biased subjectivity when contradicting his not-so-hidden agenda and praised for objectivity when supporting it. My goal is that at the end of the project my client will feel that I added value.

I think that site selection consultants can add value in three general ways:

1. **Providing a path and guide:** a company's project team may never have conducted a site search before. Site selection, like anything else, can be an overwhelming process for someone who has not been through it. Providing a structure for the process can add efficiency and effectiveness. The consultant should help you ask the right questions in developing appropriate site selection criteria, know where to find pertinent data (often the problem is sorting through too much data), and be able to contribute perspective in analyzing it.
2. **Providing an extra hand:** a company team may have been through the process before, but may be occupied with other business issues. A consultant adds a temporary team member to accomplish a specific goal, perhaps to perform only one step in the site selection process, perhaps to conduct the entire process.

3. **Providing an objective third-party opinion:** a company site selection team may have multiple and sometimes conflicting, even warring, points of view. There is an old joke about consultants that says that a consultant is someone who takes your watch and tells you what time it is. But human resources may see the location goal one way, real estate another, operations yet another, and so on. Sometimes the points of view differ so widely it is as if the team members were in different time zones. Somehow the team has to agree on a common time, and a consultant can help. Differences can be more extreme in mergers or consolidations where members of the site selection team represent the different companies or centers and have vested interests in influencing the combined entity to settle in their current locations. Again, a consultant can provide the necessary neutral perspective to articulate the issues, research them and identify options.

## Communication Is Critical

Reworking some real estate advice, the three most important factors in a productive client-consultant relationship are communication, communication, communication. If you know what you want from a consultant, say it. If you're not sure, bring up your ideas and half-ideas and work it out. If things seem to be going wrong or you are uncertain why something is being done, ask. If something may be changing in the company that would affect the site selection goals, raise the possibility as soon as you can. Errors of direction that have small or no consequences if detected early may lead you well off course if ignored. My most successful consulting engagements are the ones where the interaction was greatest. Do you have a question or a doubt, or are you pleased with progress to date? Bring it up and improve the odds that value will be added.

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