

Charlotte USA reaching decision-makers

CHARLOTTE, USA, October 8, 2002 — Through its Charlotte USA initiative and other ambitious efforts, the Charlotte Regional Partnership (CRP) has helped spread the word across the country and around the world about our region's outstanding business strength, accessibility and quality of life.

The message is getting through, according to a RoperASW 2002 follow-up to an earlier benchmark study commissioned by CRP to measure awareness and impressions of the Charlotte region locally and across the country.

In the 2002 update, 55 percent of companies outside the area had a favorable impression of the 16-county Charlotte region, vaulting the Charlotte area past Atlanta (49 percent) and putting it ahead of all the major Southeast regions in the poll (Raleigh, 43 percent; Nashville, 34 percent; and Tampa, 33 percent). The Charlotte region's jump from 45 percent three years ago to 55 percent this year was the largest increase among all regions in the study.

Among consultants who advise companies on relocations, the Charlotte region's advantage in positive impressions is even more striking. Sixty percent of consultants said they had a favorable impression of the Charlotte area, doubling the percentages for Atlanta and Nashville respectively, and decisively topping Raleigh (40 percent) and Tampa (38 percent).

“Our area's move to No. 1 among these Southeast regions in terms of favorable impressions is clear evidence that Charlotte USA's message of outstanding business strength, accessibility and quality of life is taking hold,” says Michael A. Almond, president and Chief Executive Officer of the Charlotte Regional Partnership. “But, we must build on that momentum to reach even more of the decision-makers.”

Now more than ever, Charlotte must be top-of-mind for the executives who choose sites for new and relocated facilities for their companies, and these leaders' impressions of the region must be positive.

Increased competition for fewer prospects

In the newest poll, 43 percent of companies outside the Charlotte region said they planned to open new facilities within the next two years, down from 57 percent three years ago. The figure also dropped for companies within the region, from 28 percent to 19 percent.

While the study showed the weak economy had reduced the potential for new facilities, 80 percent of relocation consultants said the competition among regions had intensified, up from just 40 percent three years earlier.

“These figures reinforce the importance of reaching decision-makers with a positive message about the Charlotte region,” Almond says. “Ours must be among the first regions considered by executives looking to relocate or expand their operations.”

Getting to know you

Impressions, of course, are built on awareness. Among companies in other regions of the U.S., more than one-third (36 percent) expressed a close familiarity with the Charlotte region, second only to Atlanta among the major Southeast regions in the poll. The Charlotte region gained ground on Atlanta in terms of awareness since 1999, the study showed. However, familiarity among all regions — including Charlotte — declined overall.

The 2002 poll revealed that awareness of the Southeast regions by consultants is much more evenly mixed, with 90 percent saying they were familiar with Atlanta, followed by Nashville (80 percent), and Raleigh and the Charlotte region both at 70 percent. Sixty percent of consultants said they were familiar with Tampa.

Drilling down

Simply gauging familiarity with regions is not enough, however. With awareness come impressions — the perceptions that ultimately can determine whether a region is even considered for business relocation or expansion.

More than two-thirds of companies polled outside the Charlotte area (67 percent) characterized the region as offering a very high quality of life, up from 61 percent three years ago. Sixty-three percent cited the Charlotte area's pro-business climate, up from 55 percent in 1999.

“These characteristics are crucial in attracting new and expanded business to the Charlotte area, because they often represent the first set of criteria in identifying potential regions for relocations,” Almond explains. “Regions that don't make the cut in these two categories aren't even in the game when the final decision is made.”

While the Charlotte region's climate didn't change over the course of three years, the impression by national companies of our weather became much sunnier, with 63 percent citing the region's mild temperatures, up from 55 percent in 1999.

The percentage of favorable responses also jumped for Charlotte's wide range of recreational activities (55 percent), professional sports franchises (50 percent) and extensive range of business services (48 percent).

Perceptions and misperceptions

Despite some strong numbers, the data revealed some critical challenges. Just 27 percent of companies outside the Charlotte region cited its transportation network as an asset, down from 35 percent three years ago. Only 27 percent agreed that the Charlotte region's public schools were excellent (this was not measured in 1999). At the same time, those considering the Charlotte region as a major cultural center fell from 29 percent to 23 percent.

“Plans for improved mass transit are moving forward, our already-excellent schools are making tremendous strides that are getting national attention, and the Charlotte region has become No. 1 in the nation in its contributions to the arts,” Almond said. “We must reverse these misperceptions and make transportation, education and culture the magnets that attract corporate relocations in the Charlotte region.”