

Protecting confidentiality brings jobs to Tallahassee



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Imagine posting on Facebook that you are considering relocating your business

to another state. Within minutes, your kids

are upset about changing schools, your employees start looking for other jobs and your competitors are strategizing about how to take advantage of a changing market.

The simple act of exploring your options has set in motion a sequence of events that could prove extremely detrimental to your business — and your life.

While no business owner is likely to post such speculative information on Facebook, without existing protections from the state of Florida, businesses exploring the possibility of a relocation or expansion that involves public funding would face a similar scenario.

One of the roles of the Economic Development Council of Tallahassee-Leon County is to work with companies that want to know if our community has the facilities, work force, training capacity and business environment to fit their needs. In fact, we most often work

with site consultants who do not divulge the identity of their clients for the reasons already discussed. It can be a long process, and it is often unnecessary to discuss certain details until all parties involved know if the courtship has a chance.

And that process goes both ways. Over the past several years, the EDC and its partners in government, education and business have developed specific criteria for evaluating companies that show interest in our community. We want to make sure these companies would add real value to the community by creating high-quality jobs above the average wage, playing an active role in regional development, demonstrating growth potential and developing connections to other industries.

Although attracting new businesses to the area receives the most attention, the EDC spends more than 60 percent of its time and resources on addressing the needs of local existing businesses, including start-ups and those businesses that result from university-based research. In all of those cases, it is equally important that a business's intentions are protected as to not give away a competitive advantage. Plans to add a warehouse or hire

25 new sales executives is not something their rivals need to know until it is absolutely necessary.

To help qualifying companies that are relocating to or expanding in our area, the state of Florida offers tax refund programs that are matched by our local governments to help offset start-up costs. These incentives are performance based, which means the companies must create the promised jobs and pay their taxes before they ever see a check. The risk is extremely low, because if they don't keep their end of the bargain, they don't get a dime.

Without the ability to consider these opportunities confidentially, or evaluate them properly, Florida would no longer be competitive. Tallahassee would no longer be competitive. We need our local businesses, as well as those companies that are considering making an investment in Tallahassee, to have confidence that considering our area will not result in a premature panic back home.

— To learn more about the EDC's efforts to promote job creation in Tallahassee, visit www.taledc.com.

