

## **Resources Available to Help You Succeed**

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Too often, people who are looking for a location for their business decide to do everything by themselves. This is a mistake—something you should try to avoid, especially since there are multiple resources that you can take advantage of in order to help guide you through what oftentimes becomes a time consuming and intimidating process.

First, don't overlook the possibility of working with a **commercial realtor**. In particular, look for someone with actual experience in helping people such as yourself find retail or restaurant sites which pass the **PASTA V** test. If the person you are considering establishing a working relationship with doesn't understand the meaning behind this important acronym then you either need to explain it to him or her, or better yet, find yourself someone who does.

Briefly, **P** stands for **parking**. **A** is for **access**. **S** is for signing. **T** stands for **traffic**. **A** is for **activity**. And, most important of all, **V** is for **visibility**. The absence of one or more of these variables should be a warning sign—something which immediately puts any site you are considering behind the “eight ball.”

Don't write off working with an experienced realtor because you think they will cost you money. In fact, just the opposite is true. A real pro will do much more than be a chauffer who shows you what spaces are available. In the long run, an experienced realtor will not only save you money but will save you something else which is nearly as valuable—time.

At this point you are probably asking yourself, how can I save money if the person I'm working with earns his or her living by being paid a real estate commission? The answer is quite simple. Unless you agree to compensate your realtor in some manner the landlord from whom you are considering renting will pay their fee. For your information, the vast majority of commercial landlords have real estate fees automatically built into their pro formas, especially if their property is listed with a real estate broker. So, because a landlord typically assumes responsibility for paying real estate commissions you can take great satisfaction in knowing that it costs you nothing, nada, zilch, zip to work with a realtor.

Please keep in mind the fact that your realtor will be able to either conduct or help you conduct a variety of research. Examples of important information you need to assess includes traffic counts, demographics, lease rates, CAM charges, vacancy rates, the presence and nature of area anchors, planned public improvements, zoning, required permits, store performance levels, lease incentives, etc.

Some other valuable services your realtor can provide to you include identifying a list of property options, performing comparative site analyses, and making sure that your credentials, including credit history, financial qualifications, business plan, and, where applicable, business experience, point to your being a viable tenant—someone a landlord can look forward to paying rental costs in a timely manner.

Also, when realtors have established working relationships with landlords it is important to remember that they are more likely to be able to open doors for you which otherwise might not exist.

While all of these factors are important, perhaps the most valuable credential a realtor brings to the table has to do with negotiations. Realtors are capable of negotiating the most favorable rents for you, negotiating the most favorable build out and landlord contributions, and negotiating a variety of lease provisions which can help keep you out of trouble.

Another great resource, especially for people with little or no business experience, is your local **SCORE** chapter—an affiliate of the Small Business Administration (SBA). This not-to-be overlooked organization is known around the country as the Service Core of Retired Executives. It is comprised of mostly retired executives of large, medium, and small public and private companies, some of whom have even owned their own businesses.

In addition to seminars on such diverse topics as creating business and marketing plans, obtaining bank financing, conducting market research, creating websites, successful sales techniques, and more, these volunteers offer clients face-to-face, telephone, and email counseling. Their goal is quite simple: they want to help you succeed!

In many chapters, especially those located in large metropolitan areas, one or more counselors are likely to have backgrounds in residential and/or commercial real estate. You are advised to seek their help and utilize their expertise to educate and help guide you—something which will enable you to not only get off to a faster start, but substantially increase your chances of successfully launching and/or expanding your business.

When working with one or more members of this important resource group be sure that you are open minded and that you are willing to accept help. Don't waste your time or a volunteer's precious time if all you are simply interested in having someone "bless" your ideas and give you the "green light" to pursue the direction you wish to head in. Unfortunately, this happens more frequently than many people care to admit. Such an attitude will not only prevent you from applying the advice you have received, but make your goals and expectations much more difficult to achieve.

One other thing you can look forward to as a result of working with this group is the many business briefs that are available to you at no cost. As an example, the Cincinnati chapter offers a brief on site selection, thanks to yours truly. Read it and apply its recommendations once you decide to embark on one of the most important and expensive investments you will make during your lifetime—finding a "home run" location for your business.

An overlooked but tremendously valuable resource is **your local library**. They are not only repositories for important business books like "The ABC's of Site Selection," but for a variety of business magazines. Furthermore, they are a treasure trove for a wide variety of data. An inaugural starting point involves asking your local librarian to help you access the most recent Census of Population as well as Census of Retail Trade information. This kind of "market intelligence" can help you better understand potential customers as well as learn more about the trade area(s) which comprise your customer base.

Many universities provide guidance to the small business community and entrepreneurs through what are known as **Small Business Centers**. And, almost every community, regardless of size, has a **Chamber of Commerce**. While becoming a Chamber member involves paying a fee, such membership provides you with innumerable educational and networking opportunities.

**On line research** needs little explanation. Accessing data and research by using your computer is a great starting point. However, it is just that—nothing more than a starting point. Nowhere else can you put your fingers on so much information with just the click of your mouse.

For someone who is willing to spend a little and learn a lot, hiring a **real estate consultant** such as **Location Decision Advisors** can prove to be a very worthwhile investment. Consultants are people who can supplement rather than replace the services provided by your realtor. For example, they can help you (a) rank sites by using such important tools as one or more of the author's Site Selection Scorecards and (b) estimating store or restaurant sales. Despite the expertise which consultants bring to the table, only a small percentage of businesspeople or prospective businesspeople will decide to employ their services.

The purpose in identifying the aforementioned resources is to let you know that you can do a better job of making an informed site selection decision if you not only become engaged in doing homework, but work with others, whether they be commercial realtors, SCORE volunteers, librarians, Small Business Center employees, Chamber of Commerce members, or real estate consultants.

If you decide against using one or more of the resources which have been identified you run the risk of not only being less informed but doing something which is not advised: gambling. Stated differently, without taking advantage of one or more of these important and time-tested resources, you are “rolling the dice” when it comes to being as well prepared as possible. As a result, you may be jeopardizing something very important—the opportunity to become a successful owner and operator of a small business.

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**Frank Raeon** has been helping clients find high volume retail and restaurant locations for more than twenty-five years. Examples of national, regional, and local market leading companies he has helped include Blockbuster, Buffalo Wild Wings, Dewey’s Pizza, Donatos, First Watch, Graeter’s Ice Cream, Izzy’s, McDonald’s, Pier 1 Imports, Servatii’s Bakery, Subway, United Dairy Farmer’s, Walgreen’s, and Wendy’s.

Frank is also the principal of ***Location Decision Advisors***, a Cincinnati based real estate advisory company which helps small retail and restaurant companies and franchise organizations better understand how to pick winners and avoid losers. He is currently working on his second book: **Inside Site Selection**. It is based upon interviews he is conducting with people from throughout the United States who are responsible for making retail and restaurant location decisions.

You can **contact** Frank regarding the provision of advisory services, including site selection coaching, at (513) 271-0300 or via email at [frank.raeon@gmail.com](mailto:frank.raeon@gmail.com).