

# The Young and the Restless: How Kansas City Competes for Talent

Client Review Summary – February 2008



## Overall Summary:

The Kansas City Metro has better-educated young adults than other U.S. cities. It is gaining well-educated singles aged 25-34 due to its central location, affordable housing, strong job market and competitive salaries. The majority of KC migrants are from the four-state midwest region and the east and west coasts.

## KC Advantages:

- High level of college attainment and influx of college-educated young people
- Perceived as a Regional Center – attracting from NE, IA, KS, MO and coasts
- Affordable, abundant housing and strong neighborhoods
- Competitive salaries and work options
- Revitalization of downtown seen as positive trend
- Strong sports and entertainment culture
- Family-friendly environment

## KC Young Adults are Better Educated

Young adults in Kansas City are better educated, on average, than those in other U.S. metropolitan areas. Kansas City ranks 16th in the percent of 25 to 34 year-olds with college education. Although this demographic decreased in Kansas City over the past decade, the number of college-educated young adults increased by 12 percent—faster than in half of the 50 metropolitan areas.



## **KC Draws from Both Midwest and Coastal Regions**

Competitive salaries and a plentiful job market attract migration from the region and the coasts. Approximately 65 percent of the Kansas City's net migration is from within the Midwest region. However, Kansas City gains in net migration from all four census regions and 29 of the 49 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. The largest sources of inflow to Kansas City are Omaha, Norfolk, Los Angeles, Iowa City and Miami. Of the top 10 metropolitan areas with net migration to Kansas City, five are coastal places with warmer climates.

## **Affordable Housing is a Clear Advantage**

Young professionals view low housing prices and lack of traffic congestion as a plus. They believe Kansas City is a friendly city, with a good work-life balance. Housing options and strong, stable neighborhoods are clear perceived advantages. Focus group members could quickly enumerate the many neighborhoods that appeal to them including Westport, Brookside, West Plaza, Country Club Plaza, Fairway, River Market and several suburbs.

## **Kansas City Attracts More Married People than Singles**

Young adults in Kansas City are more likely to be married than young adults in most other large metropolitan areas in the U.S. Kansas City ranks 45th of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the share of its 25 to 34 year old female college graduates who are single (30%). Conversely, married couples, especially those with children, are overwhelmingly positive about the lifestyle and its family-centric character.

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## **KC Metro Disadvantages**

- Lack of strong transit
- Lack of diversity and significant out-migration of African-Americans
- Weak close-in neighborhoods
- Inability to pinpoint its own distinctive identity and DNA
- Feelings of disconnectedness, both geographically and socially, among young singles
- Concerns about quality of the public schools and crime

## **Kansas City Loses Singles to Other Metro Areas**

Kansas City's net outflows are primarily to large, fast growing metropolitan areas including Dallas, Atlanta, Houston, Austin and Denver. These cities offer a wider range of amenities and greater economic opportunity to young adults. Atlanta, Austin and Denver have higher levels of unmarried college educated women (40%).



### **Kansas City is Not as Diverse as Other Metros**

The young adult population in Kansas City is less diverse than the typical U.S. metro. Kansas City ranks 14th of the 50 largest U.S. metros in the percentage of the population that is white. KC ranks 28th, 35th and 32nd in the proportion of young adult African Americans, Asian-Americans and Hispanics, population respectively.

### **Migration Patterns Tend to Follow Racial Lines**

The young adult population in Kansas City is less diverse than the typical U.S. metro, and there are distinct location patterns for the region's young adults. The African American population is strongly concentrated in Kansas City, Missouri, while well-educated young adults and whites tend to be suburbanized, particularly in Johnson County. Ethnic and racial minorities expressed feelings of isolation and frustration about the lack of people like themselves in work and social environments. African-Americans in particular said that they had to “fall back” on the traditional anchors such as churches and African-American clubs to establish their social networks.

### **Lack of Strong Public Transit is a Deterrent**

Young adults in Kansas City are significantly less likely to use transit to commute to work than in other large U.S. metropolitan areas; this is especially true of well-educated young adults. In Kansas City, less than .05% of college educated 25 to 34 year olds who work outside the home use transit as their principal means of commuting to work, compared to 1.5 to 2.0 percent in the typical large U.S. metropolitan area.

### **Singles Feel Lost in the City**

Single 25 to 34-year-olds, particularly from outside the Midwest, often feel lost in the shuffle. The high proportion of married young people, the suburbanization of many young adults, and a lack of structured ways to connect through young professionals organizations or distinctive “scenes” make it hard for newcomers to find their way in the community. Concerns about crime also contribute to a feeling of uncertainty around the city.

### **KC Culture is Not Well-Known**

The city's strong arts investment and other cultural institutions are rarely cited by young people. Kansas City is recognized for some of its distinctive characteristics: fanatic community-wide support for the Chiefs and Royals, barbecue, and jazz.



## Recommendations

- Develop a compelling "Kansas City story" through a local and national branding program that:
  - Utilizes word of mouth marketing
  - Accentuates distinctive and uniquely "Kansas City" assets
  - Highlights downtown improvements and an urban lifestyle
- Sponsor organizations and initiatives led by young professionals that address key issues facing the Young and Restless.
- Develop an online presence for the Kansas City story that utilizes social networking and peer reviews.
- Encourage young leaders to get involved in their community and civic groups.
- Promote KC's assets to families, especially urban neighborhoods and lifestyles.

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**Research for *The Young and the Restless: How Kansas City Competes for Talent* was undertaken by Impresa, Inc. and Coletta & Company.**