

These Are The Top-Ranked US Cities For Starting A Business

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I just finished reading Richard Florida's ["Who's Your City?"](#) It's a cool book that takes a look at the impact of *where you live* on your professional and social opportunities. Florida conducted research to understand what places attract entrepreneurial minds, how they do it, and its affect on the regions these places inhabit.

He also takes a look at what cities represent the best opportunities to find a mate, start a family, be an empty nester, and retire.

My City: San Diego

It's all quite interesting to me, as I personally recently re-located both my family and part of my business to San Diego from St. Louis. For years, I've been drawn to both the attitude and spirit of the people of San Diego, and the lifestyle the weather and geography allow.

It's a hotbed of internet marketing. It's a place full of people I feel are similar to me, and have similar views. And all the while it's a city many will tell you is [one of their favorites](#).

Since I was 19, those feelings of lust towards San Diego have been accompanied by feelings of disgust and disappointment with where I grew up in St. Louis. So much of the culture and prevailing attitude in St. Louis, to me, is one that lacks innovation or adventure. It's populace is generally conservative, and generally only interested in what happens in and around not just St. Louis, but their own slice of town. They think people that live 7 miles away are "different" and untrustworthy. "You went to what high school? Oh, we can't do business."

Seriously.

Despite being home to some world-class universities and a few remaining corporate behemoths, St. Louis is stagnant. I can count on one hand the number of young, hustling entrepreneurs in my age group that I networked with there.

In California, it's a different story. Any 6-year-old can tell you that. (But ask a 40-year-old St. Louisan, and they'll downplay the difference, even question the true value of living somewhere, anywhere, else.)

Let's not forget that my San Diego pales in comparison to the action seen up the coast [from LA](#) on through Silicon Valley and San Francisco. There's a lifetime of opportunity here, and it's exciting to me.

What Cities are "Winning"?

To tie this back to Florida's book, while reading it I was constantly evaluating the conclusions he drew from his research against my own experiences. He applauded the efforts of medium-sized cities like Boulder and Austin to draw in investment, innovation, and most importantly, eager young minds.

These cities are very popular with 20-something entrepreneurs, and for good reason. I've visited both of them in the last year, and I've had conversations with some of the VC's and entrepreneurial success stories that are the driving force behind each city's popularity with that crowd. There's an undeniable sense you get in those two cities that new ideas are welcome. New ideas are pursued with vigor, and with proper funding. They encourage any attempt at the next success, and do not view failure as "failure". [TechStars](#), [SXSW](#), [Austin Ventures](#), the state universities . . . and relocating 20-somethings out to chase their dreams.

Florida also praises the continued growth of big cities like Boston, New York, and DC. These places will always make the "top" lists when it comes to economic opportunity for young people. And to me, they've only increased their momentum and the gap that exists between them and the also-rans of the South and Midwest in the last 15 years.

I'm on a plane to DC right now actually, and if you ask me where the place to be is right now if you're 20-35, single or married, looking to start a career or start a company – it's DC. The

government presence definitely helps stabilize the economic opportunities and the housing market. There are top class universities, an arts scene, startups, and jobs galore.

DC is a place to be circa 2011. Would you rather lose your job and have to find a new one or start a company in St. Louis, or DC? Exactly. Same answer applies for all the “winner” cities on the list.

Where you live matters more than you may realize

That’s Florida’s main point. The question of “where” matters more in our lives than maybe we all realize. We place great emphasis on who we marry, and where we work or what we do professionally. But not enough of us consider the impact our physical location has on our opportunities and quality of life. Sure, we notice the weather in San Diego is better than Wisconsin. We might even say, “Damn, it’d be nice to go to the beach in February and not have 10 feet of snow.”

There should be more conscious consideration made in that choice, however. Do I get along with the people here? Are companies re-locating or expanding here? Are the research institutions and strong investment communities? Are the schools good? What neighborhood is best for me?

I think you have to be as specific as possible in answering these questions. I didn’t pick San Diego, and more specifically, La Jolla, on a whim. For me, it’s the perfect combination of lifestyle, business opportunity, and the chance to live in a city with a positive attitude and outlook. Depending on what you do to make money and to have fun, the destination would likely be different. But think about it! It matters.

Cities should stand up and take notice

Hopefully it’s not just us as individuals that take notice, but the cities themselves. I admire the way some cities have fostered and encouraged their reputation as a destination for young people and entrepreneurs. Some places are lucky to have successful startups run by energetic people who re-invest in the community and further that reputation.

It has to be a combination of civic involvement and encouragement, and those private individual and company successes, if you want to create the next Austin, Boston, and beyond.

Otherwise, you end up like St. Louis, who loses native sons and daughters every year. I’m happy to take my millions and my employees elsewhere. Believe me, I know I’m of little significance. But I’ve created 30 jobs in Missouri in the last year, after stepping away from being CMO of a [company that’s created 500](#) in 4 years.

The fact is, a lot of people doing that sort of thing are drawn to the coasts. The weather isn’t the catalyst. The attitudes and the people are. The momentum created by successful companies, or lack thereof, is.

It's time to ask: Who's your city?

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