

Amazon seeks bids for second headquarters, to invest \$5bn

September 7 2017



Amazon announced plans Thursday to invest some \$5 billion in a second North American headquarters, in a fresh sign of the phenomenal growth of the diversified US technology giant.

Bids are now being accepted for the second headquarters, to be called HQ2, which will be "a full equal to our Seattle headquarters," said Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and chief executive, in a statement.

"Amazon HQ2 will bring billions of dollars in up-front and ongoing investments, and tens of thousands of high-paying jobs. We're excited to find a second home."

The announcement highlights the extraordinary growth of Amazon, which was founded two decades ago as an online bookseller and has grown into one of the world's largest retailers, while diversifying into streaming video, cloud computing and other sectors.

The company, which has more than 380,000 employees worldwide, said it would add as many as 50,000 jobs for the new headquarters. It is already the eighth-largest US employer.

Amazon said it will be seeking bids from metropolitan areas with more than one million people—of which there are about 50 in the US—and which offer a "stable and business-friendly environment."

Proposals are being requested by October 19, and Amazon indicated it would make a decision on the location sometime next year.

Cities 'that think big'

The Amazon proposal is likely to spark a bidding war among cities offering tax breaks and other incentives to lure the new headquarters. In 2001, Boeing moved its headquarters from Seattle to Chicago and got some \$60 million in incentives.

Amazon said it would consider "urban or suburban locations with the potential to attract and retain strong technical talent" and is aiming for "communities that think big and creatively when considering locations and real estate options."

The new location "will be a complete headquarters for Amazon—not a satellite office," according to the company, which added that it would hire new teams and executives for HQ2, and also allow some executives based in Seattle to choose either location.

Amazon's campus in the northwest US state of Washington currently employs more than 40,000 people scattered across 33 buildings and 750,000 square meters (8.1 million square feet) of office space, according to a company fact sheet.

Amazon has dozens of warehouses and data centers around the world and has invested heavily in artificial intelligence, resulting in its Echo "smart" speakers and its voice-controlled Alexa digital assistant.

Humble beginnings

Company founder Bezos, who also owns the Washington Post newspaper and the private space exploration firm Blue Origin, briefly overtook Bill Gates as the world's richest individual earlier this year due to a surge in Amazon's share price.

Amazon was incorporated in 1994 in Seattle, and made its first online book sale in July 1995, with Bezos personally mailing packages to customers in the early days. In 1999, Amazon went beyond books to become a diversified online retailer of consumer electronics, toys and games, software, home improvement and video games.

Its Amazon Web Services, launched in 2002, has grown into one of the world's biggest cloud computing operators, generating close to 10 percent of company revenues and a large share of its profit.

Over the years, Amazon has expanded internationally, and operates as a retailer in Canada, Mexico, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, China and India, with plans to move into Australia.

Citation: Amazon seeks bids for second headquarters, to invest \$5bn (2017, September 7)
retrieved 20 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2017-09-amazon-headquarters-invest-5bn.html>

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