

Wooing Amazon with sun, fun ... and giant buttons

October 18 2017, by Matt O'brien



In this Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, photo, Zavian Tate, a student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, pushes a large Amazon Dash button, in Birmingham, Ala. The large Dash buttons are part of the city's campaign to lure Amazon's second headquarters to Birmingham. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)

Mayors from Toledo to Tulsa are so eager to woo Amazon's much-vaunted second headquarters that they're brandishing bourbon, selling the sun, whispering sweet nothings to the company and even pushing its

buttons.

Literally.

The Associated Press talked to the leaders of more than 50 cities or metropolitan regions about the different ways they're showcasing themselves to the Seattle e-commerce company. The bids are due Thursday.

300 DAYS IN THE SUN (OR MORE)

It's easy for many metropolitan areas to emphasize their similarities to Seattle. It's a little gutsier for cities to cast themselves as an escape from the rainy Pacific Northwest.

"We have 300 days of sunshine," says J.J. Ament, chief executive officer of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. "Our skies are bluer and prettier." Ament's organization is compiling a formal bid that also highlights Colorado's 45,000 miles of hiking, biking and all-purpose trails.

Austin, coincidentally enough, also touts 300 sunny days and outdoor activities—plus live music, festivals, sports and a "big foodie-friendly community," says Mike Berman, a spokesman for the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce.

But wait: Albuquerque, New Mexico, has upped the ante with a claimed 310 cloudless days. (The city also makes a naked plea to sentiment, noting that it's the birthplace of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos.)



In this Saturday, June 24, 2017, file photo, volunteers lead a large rainbow banner during a gay pride parade in St. Petersburg, Fla. Most bidders for Amazon's second headquarters are highlighting their city's diversity and openness. At least two, Philadelphia and St. Petersburg, Fla., are touting a perfect LGBT equality score of 100 from an advocacy group's municipal index. (Luis Santana/Tampa Bay Times via AP, File)

YOU DASHING ROGUE

Many cities are flirting with the idea of landing Amazon's new headquarters. One Alabama city is REALLY flirting.

"Amazon, we got a 100% match on Bumble. Wanna go on a date?" Birmingham asks the company in one of hundreds of Tweets it has sent the company.

The city even set up giant replicas of Amazon's Dash Buttons—those

dangerous order-a-product-with-a-single-press gizmos—to send one of more than 600 pre-generated tweets to the company.

"We are Chipotle and these other cities are Taco Bell, Amazon," one said.

BEER AND BOURBON ABOUND



In this Tuesday, June 23, 2015, file photo, a bicyclist navigates a trail as the South Platte River flows in the background in Englewood, Colo., near Denver. In an effort to woo Amazon to build its second headquarters in the metro Denver area, the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. is compiling a formal bid that highlights Colorado's 45,000 miles of hiking, biking and all-purpose trails. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File)

Bars, pubs, taverns, wine bars. Many cities insist they've got the best

options for Amazon happy hour (assuming that local alcohol laws allow it).

"We have 348 breweries in Colorado, second only to California," says Denver's Ament. "That's six per 100,000 residents."

Louisville is playing up its role as the gateway to Kentucky bourbon country. Even the farthest-flung locales lay claim to a vibrant nightlife.

"Lots of bars and restaurants, plays, lots of music," says Mike Savage, mayor of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The city, one of several in Canada making a bid, once billed itself as "the next Seattle" based on its 1990s grunge scene.

HOT (AND HIP) OR NOT

Looking for hot and hip? "Providence is particularly hot and hip," says Rhode Island Commerce Secretary Stefan Pryor, who led efforts to craft a pitch for the country's smallest state. "Our capital city was identified by GQ, Gentleman's Quarterly magazine, as the coolest city in America." (This is true .)



In this Sunday, Feb. 2, 2014, file photo, Denver Broncos NFL football fans celebrate as the Broncos complete a pass while watching the first half of the Super Bowl against the Seahawks inside Jackson's, a sports bar and grill in Denver. Many cities are trying to woo Amazon to build its second headquarters in their area, with some insisting they've got the best options for bars, pubs and taverns. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, File)

Others are happier embracing their hip-to-be-squareness.

"We're sort of a put-your-head-down community, where we just work real hard and build real business," says Howard Tullman, the CEO of 1871, a Chicago tech incubator.

BE TOGETHER, NOT THE SAME

Most bidders are highlighting their city's diversity and openness. At least two—Philadelphia and St. Petersburg, Florida—are touting a perfect LGBT equality score of 100 from an advocacy group's municipal index .

Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi argues that Canada is the logical choice if Amazon is "really interested in recruiting an international workforce of 50,000," given nativist sentiment in the U.S.

SPINNING HURRICANES



In this March 21, 2015, file photo, Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros perform at the Rachael Ray Feedback Party during the SXSW Music Festival in Austin, Texas. Austin is one of the cities vying for Amazon's second headquarters. Austin touts 300 sunny days and outdoor activities, plus live music, festivals, sports and a "big foodie-friendly community," says Mike Berman, a spokesman for the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. (Photo by Jack Plunkett/Invision/AP, File)

For Columbus, Ohio, one of the selling points is its location: well out of the way of natural catastrophes. Albuquerque also brags about an absence of earthquakes and hurricanes.

That could be important if Amazon wants to avoid rising sea levels or extreme weather. If not, there's always Houston.

"I think the world saw Houston at its best in the local recovery efforts," says Bob Harvey, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership. The city's people, he said, are the kind Amazon "might want on hand."

DO THE RIGHT THING

New Jersey's largest city talks up fast internet, its airport and recent downtown redevelopment efforts.

But Newark also offers Amazon the opportunity to make a "strong social impact statement," says Aisha Glover, president of the Newark Community Economic Development Corp.



In this June 21, 2016, file photo, cars make their way along historic Route 66 in downtown Albuquerque, N.M. Albuquerque is one of the cities wooing Amazon to build their second headquarters in their area. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan, File)

Karen Freeman-Wilson, the mayor in post-industrial Gary, Indiana, says Amazon should use this opportunity to "leave a legacy as having transformed or been a part of the transformation of a legacy [city](#)."

NO THANKS, AMAZON

And then there are those hardy communities that simply decided they're better off not making a desperate pitch.

Alaska, for instance, didn't even bother applying, given Amazon's requirement for a metro area with more than a million residents. (There

aren't that many people in the entire state.)

The mayors of San Antonio and San Jose, California, say they were turned off by the bidding war Amazon is creating among states and cities.

"Blindly giving away the farm isn't our style," San Antonio officials wrote in an open letter to Bezos.



In this Wednesday Nov. 13, 2013, file photo, Charlie Downs, the artisanal craft distiller at a new Heaven Hill Distilleries tourism attraction in downtown Louisville, Ky., checks gauges on a still that will produce small batches of whiskey. In an effort to woo Amazon's second headquarters to their area, Louisville is playing up its role as the gateway to Kentucky bourbon country. (AP Photo/Bruce Schreiner, File)

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