



# Why Companies Are Moving Back Downtown

By J. B. Wogan

Tax incentives aren't always the best way to lure businesses. Many are simply going where the talent is.

Ryan Woodings owns a fifteen-person tech startup in Boise, Idaho.

His company, MetaGeek, specializes in helping businesses fix and maintain their Wi-Fi systems. Or, as the website puts it, "making Wi-Fi more awesome for more people." A decade ago, MetaGeek was a side project out of Woodings's house. His mom was his first hire. Eventually, the company grew and moved into an actual office in a suburban neighborhood on the outskirts of Boise.

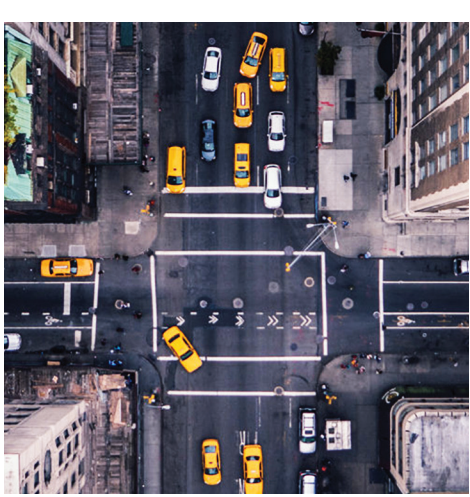
The location posed some problems. Foremost among them was what might be termed the "intern dilemma." Each semester, MetaGeek seeks the help of a handful of student interns from Boise State University. "Being twenty minutes away from campus," Woodings says, "we could only get students who had a car and had certain class schedules."

So, MetaGeek did what a lot of companies are doing these days. It moved downtown. The student interns are now able to bike over to the office between classes. In the afternoons, MetaGeek employees can take walks on the nearby greenbelt that runs through town along the Boise River. If they want to bike home, the city runs a bicycle rental program and has an expanding network of dedicated bike lanes. "Downtown Boise is where everything is," Woodings says. "When you have a lunch meeting, or get coffee with a client, it's always downtown."

MetaGeek is one of several tech companies that have put down roots recently in the center of Boise. Last summer, Boise State moved its computer science department downtown so that it could be closer to students' potential employers.

And Boise isn't unusual. In cities across the country, businesses are trying to capitalize on the increasing density of tech talent clustered in the heart of cities.

In Massachusetts, General Electric is setting up its new headquarters along the central Boston waterfront. In Rhode Island, Hasbro has moved



three hundred fifty jobs to downtown Providence. In Illinois, nearly fifty companies, from Kraft Heinz to Motorola Solutions, have reestablished their headquarters in or near Chicago's loop. According to the US Census Bureau, the number of

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