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Greater Omaha region powers Google's data requirements

Google is a company typically associated with cutting-edge Silicon Valley cool, but recently it discovered the benefits of locating a significant part of its infrastructure in the Greater Omaha region – which some now refer to as the Silicon Prairie. Just ask Chris Russell, the on-site manager of Google's data center in Greater Omaha, and he'll tell you the region offered several advantages when it came to a finding a data center location to run services such as Gmail, Google Maps and its popular search engine.

"While our data centers are among the most energy efficient in the industry, they can't run without power," Russell said.

"So we looked for places where the power supply is high quality and available in sufficient amounts. Upgrading power infrastructure can be expensive and time consuming, so the grid needs be ready up front."

On a scale of one to five, with five being the most important, Russell said power considerations rated a four in their selection process. "There were other considerations as well – ready availability of water for cooling, a good climate and low incidents of natural disaster – but power was pretty high on the list."

Russell said Google sought a "shovel-ready" location for its data center with infrastructure already in place, including dependable, robust power and access to a telecommunications networks built along the region's transportation corridors.

There were also reasons for choosing the Greater Omaha area that went beyond power and infrastructure. "Council Bluffs and Iowa were very helpful when it came to things such as rezoning and permitting," Russell explained, "and the local chambers of commerce and economic development teams helped us navigate all the requirements. That saved a lot of time and headaches. I can't overstate the importance of having the local government and chambers excited to have Google set up here. Not all communities are that supportive."

Russell also mentioned the quality of life in the area as a selling point. "You can afford a home, there's plenty of room to grow, there's a large and educated workforce available and our employees' wages go a lot further."

Is the quality of life here good enough to compete with the glamour of Silicon Valley? Gauging from the reaction of Google employees it appears the answer is, "Absolutely."

"Since we started building," Russell said, "we get internal transfer requests to come here all the time."