

Switzerland, behind the scenery



Area Development Site and Facility Planning

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Most people know Switzerland's tourist face: gorgeous alpine landscapes and quaint villages, delectable chocolates, cuckoo clocks and watches, and a pervasive atmosphere of exquisite charm.

However, this nation of 7.1 million people is uncreasingly renowned for another feature: its flourishing, globally competitive business environment.

Every year, a growing number of companies from the United States and European countries discover the benefits of relocating or expanding operations to Switzerland. To date, approximately 650 North American firms have established a solid presence here.

Business advantages offered by this democracy are numerous and include a central location (making it an ideal European distribution hub); a multicultural, well-educated, and skilled work force; a highly stable political environment; pro-FDI governments; and an excellent transportation infrastructure. More good news: The nation boasts virtually no unemployment; low interest rates; pro-employer labor laws; taxes among the lowest in Europe; and a pro-family mindset.

A "soft," yet imporant bonus for multinationals: The average Swiss citizen is at least bilingual (the country is sectored into French-, German-, and Italian-speaking regions), and seeks to home his proficient English.

Pharmaceuticals and telecommunications are primary sectors. In the past 20 months, for example, more than 20 U.S. telecommunications firms have invested in Switzerland. However, new media and information-technology sectors are coming on strong, too. Companies involved in R&D appreciate the fact that the Swiss government actively promotes technology transfer between leading universities, research institutions, and industry.

Key Business Clusters

If Switzerland is considered Europe's center, then Greater Lake Geneva is its epicenter. Nestled in the southwest of Switzerland, cosmopolitan Geneva is famous for the International Red Cross, the World Trade Center, and the United Nations. Numerous North American firms have established European bases or major regional operations in the area, including Oracle, DuPont, Medtronic, Alcoa, 3Com, and Motorola.

In another area of the country, the people of Neuchatel have recently applied their meticulous, attention-to-detail skills in crafting precision watches to various other industries. Today, Neuchatel is renowned as one of Europe's foremost high-tech regions, flush with firms engaged in software, medical technology, microelectronics, and other high-technology endeavors. Local companies include Baxter (which recently announced a \$131 million investment), Mary Kay Cosmetics, Quark Inc., Telectronic S.A. (wireless communications), Axiome, Autodesk, Mediaphonic, and PSI Net.

U.S. firms Frito Lay and Staar Surgical (eye products) are among the corporate citizens of Berne, Switzerland's capital city, another place where the work force boasts watch-making skills easily transferable to high-tech employment. In the northeast is bustling Zurich, the nation's largest city and home of the European headquarters for giants Dow Chemical and General Motors.

In a nation where 30 percent of the land is covered by woods, central Switzerland is considered earthly heaven for lovers of extraordinary scenic beauty. Amgen, Essex, Estee Lauder, and The Fantastic Corporation are a few of the international and high-tech firms doing business in this economically strong locale.

Perhaps the recently published World Competitiveness Yearbook 2000 best sums up what the buzz is all about. For the first time, Switzerland ranks in the top five of 47 countries, each judged on 290 criteria. Such praise owes to the hard-working Swiss employees who carry on a strong, centuries-old work ethic with efficiency, promptness, and precision.

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