

Marketing Greater Baltimore

An Interview with Christian S. Johansson,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore



Christian S. Johansson

EDITORS' NOTE Before joining the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore, Christian Johansson was a Senior Consultant for the Sag Harbor Group in Boston. He also cofounded two companies: Inka.net, a CRM enterprise software company, and Dola Health Systems, which held operations in Baltimore and Stockholm. He has represented Booz Allen Hamilton as a Management Consultant in the firm's London office. He is currently Co-Chairman of the Education Committee and a member of the Executive Committee of the Hippodrome Theatre, and serves on the University of Maryland, Baltimore County President's Board of Visitors. Johansson is also a member of The Leadership Board, a program of the Greater Baltimore Committee. The recipient of a bachelor's degree in biology from Brown University and an MBA from Harvard University, Johansson is the author of two books on health care quality improvement.

COMPANY BRIEF The Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore (www.greaterbaltimore.org) is a public/private partnership that unites business, government, and educational institutions to market greater Baltimore as a highly desirable region for new business growth and investment. The Economic Alliance promotes the region, using comprehensive data and strategic, proactive outreach. The Economic Alliance also provides access to a premier network of relationships through its member companies and

jurisdictions, and provides an array of services to companies interested in relocating to the greater Baltimore region.

What role does the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore play within the city?

The mission of the Economic Alliance is to unite business, government, and education to market greater Baltimore for new business and investment. The only way to achieve economic development on a regional level is to have collaboration among the key stakeholders in that community – it makes all the difference. Our board includes the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Mayor of Baltimore, the chief elected officials from the six surrounding counties, and members of the business and education communities. So the Alliance is very much a regional entity with a focus on sales, marketing, and client services.

There's a lot going on in Baltimore these days. Is enough being done to promote the city's success stories?

There's a perception gap, because this region has changed so much over the last 10 years. Ten to 15 years ago, people compared us with cities like St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland – Old World, rust belt cities. If you look at the numbers today, in terms of education, personal income, home prices, and just about everything else going on in this region, we look like Seattle, Denver, and Minneapolis, and that transformation has taken place relatively quickly. Today, we see cranes everywhere in Baltimore. It's amazing how fast things have changed.

Are you also marketing the city to companies in international markets?

Of course. A number of large multinational firms have a significant presence in our area, and we're open to building upon that. If you want to grow in a global economy, you have to think outside of your region, state, and country – you have to think larger than that.

Your board membership is like a who's who of Baltimore. How does the Alliance engage its members?

We could not do our work effectively without an engaged board. Our board is comprised of Baltimore's best sales folks. The board is critical. We need them to believe in Baltimore. They need to be ambassadors for the region, and I think they definitely are.

Is research a key part of what the Alliance does?

Yes. Most of the time, companies are looking at Baltimore, while also evaluating four or five other markets of interest. What they need throughout the decision-making process is supporting economic and demographic information. They want to know how Baltimore stacks up – how we compare to other cities. They want to know if the workforce they need is here, if their cost structure will be acceptable, and if their partners and supply chain can reach them here. So the first step of engagement is good information. The second step comes down to validating that information with key stakeholders, i.e., our board members and business leaders throughout the region. When you're selling at this level, the information has to be there. Otherwise, it's just back-slapping and golf, and that doesn't work.

Is Baltimore's talent pool one of its key competitive advantages?

Yes. For all the industries we see growth in, access to talented labor is critical. Among the top 25 U.S. metropolitan areas, we're ranked fifth in advanced degrees. For an economy such as Baltimore, a successful economic development plan will focus on cultivating and increasing its talent pipeline.

So what actually makes Baltimore unique? How do you communicate that?

You have to justify claims with good numbers. From 2000 to 2005, Baltimore increased per capita income faster than any other top-25 metropolitan area in the United States. That's an interesting metric for business activity. In differentiating ourselves, we need to identify our core competitive advantages, because we can't be all things to all people. In each one of our core competitive areas, we can hand you an industry report to tell you why we excel in those areas and what it means for your business.

Has the Alliance managed to foster an open dialogue between private and public sector leaders in the Baltimore area?

The public/private partnership is really what makes our organization work. Chubb recently relocated about 250 people to Baltimore and that deal happened because we were able to bring a delegation consisting of the Maryland insurance commissioner, city and state officials, and local prominent members of the business community to the table with Chubb's people. That was novel for Chubb. We told them, "We really want you here," and we ended up winning the deal. ●