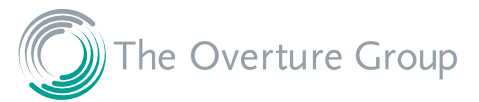
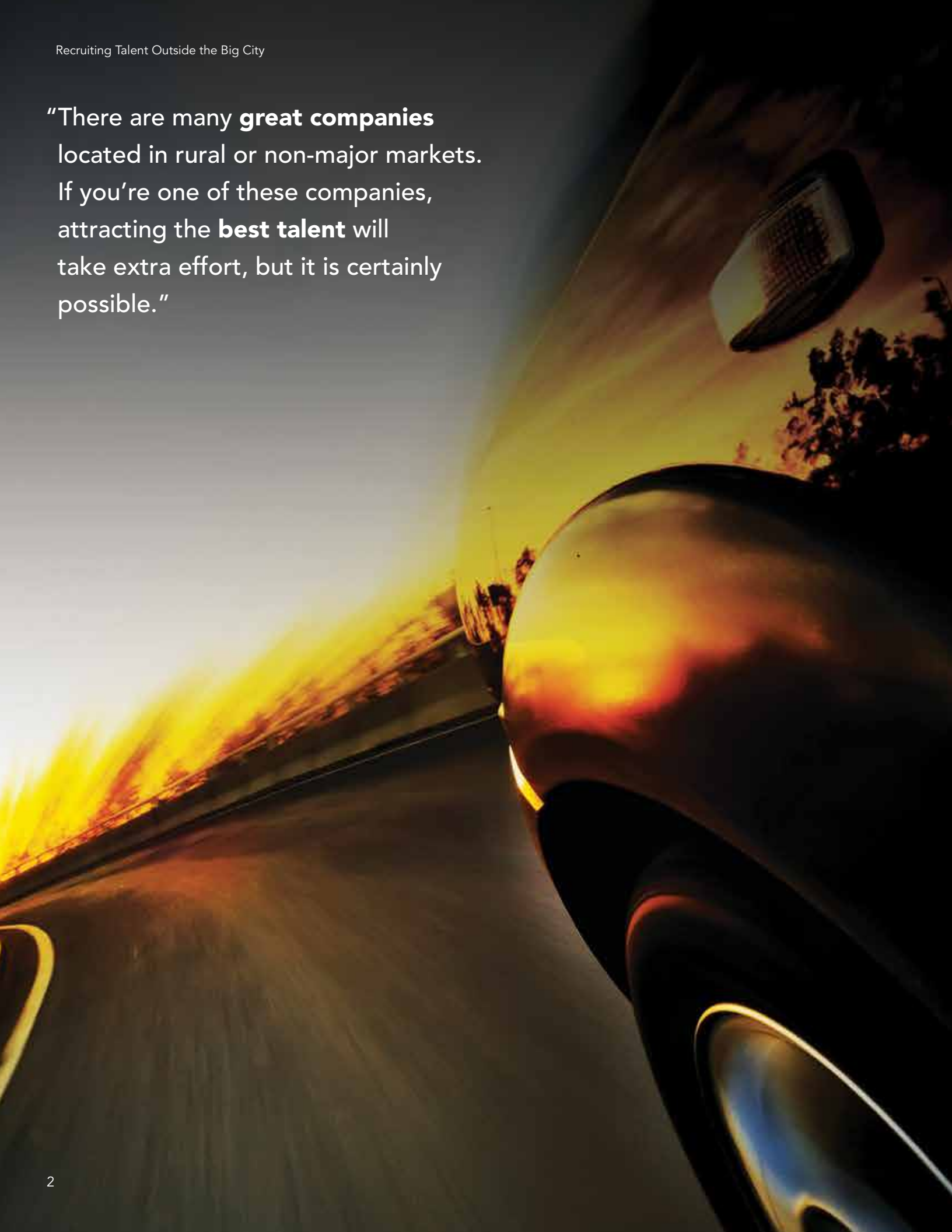


RECRUITING TALENT OUTSIDE THE BIG CITY

By Bob Lindeman and Brandi Adam Mueller



“There are many **great companies** located in rural or non-major markets. If you’re one of these companies, attracting the **best talent** will take extra effort, but it is certainly possible.”



Despite continued high unemployment, many companies struggle to hire qualified talent, particularly for executive and professional positions. While the national unemployment rate was 5.4 to 5.7% in 2014, the rates for professionals in categories such as accounting (3 to 4.2%), technology (2.5 to 3.5%) and human resources (4 to 5%) are significantly lower.

(See Figure 1.)

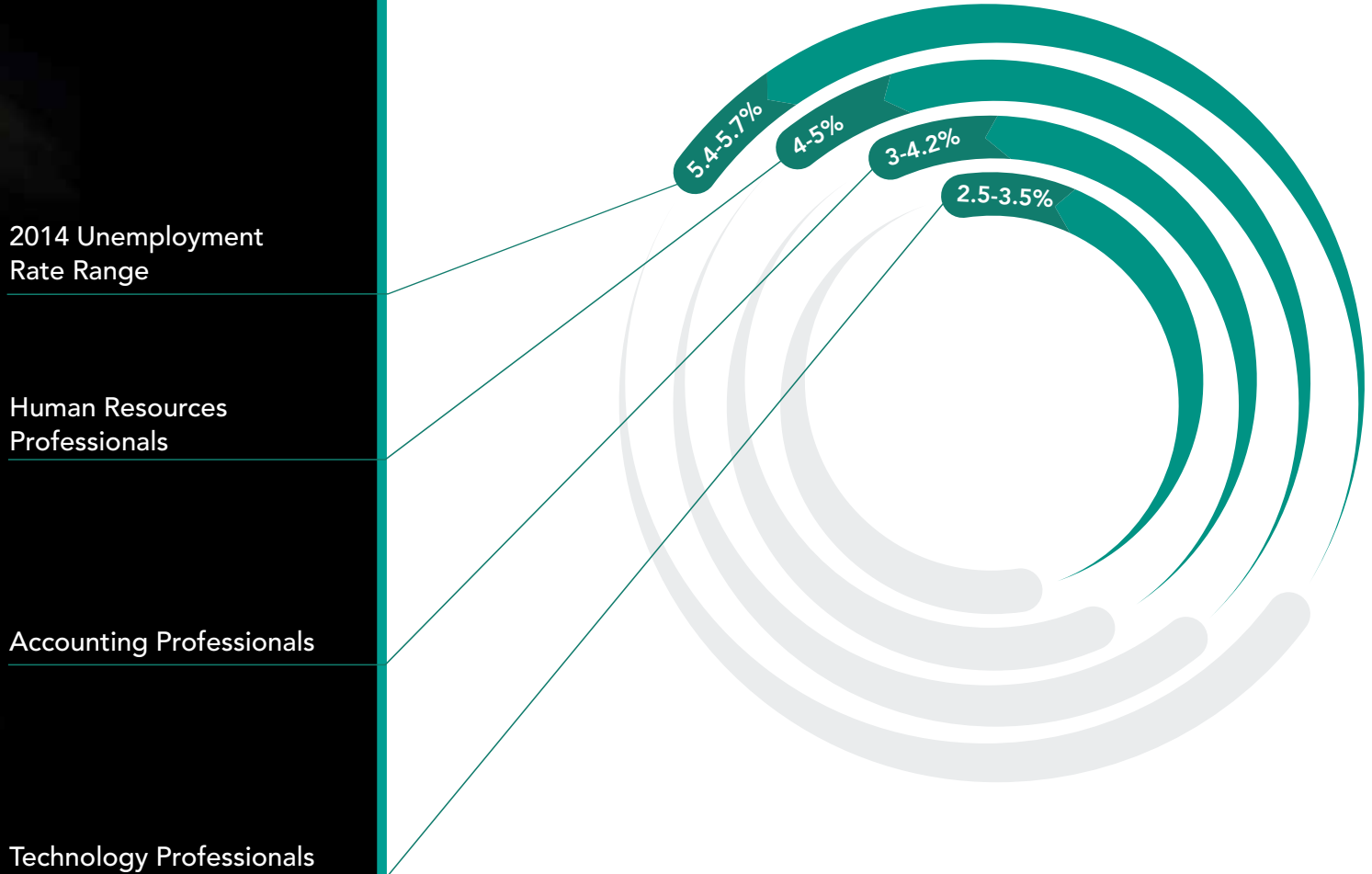
Job growth in these professional categories is also significantly higher than in other fields. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that between 2010 and 2020 job growth will be 15.7% for accountants, 20.5% for human resources professionals and 22.2% for certain technology roles. These factors create a difficult recruiting environment for many employers.

Companies in non-major rural markets face an even bigger challenge than their metropolitan counterparts when trying to fill professional positions, given the talent landscape in their communities.

There are many great companies located in rural or non-major markets, and they want the best and brightest people working for them. If you're one of these companies, attracting the best talent will take extra effort, but it is certainly possible. The top-shelf candidates you want to attract have options—so your job is showcase what makes your company stand out.

Once it is decided that the position is critical to the company or department and you have initiated your search, you have to assess whether you will limit your search effort to the local market or expand the search to include candidates across the geographic region or nationally.

Figure 1: 2014 National Unemployment Rate Range



STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH:

1. Review your position specification, which we refer to as the “success profile.” Determine what is truly required, preferred or a plus with respect to education, certification, experience, skills, personality traits and management style. Be flexible and stick to those skills and experiences that are truly critical for success in the role.
2. Develop strategies to locate candidates that once lived in or grew up in your market or a similar one. Make sure that your current employees are aware of the opening and that you have a strong employee referral program in place so that they can tap into their personal networks to refer qualified candidates.
3. Be prepared to articulate a realistic vision for future growth to prospective candidates. In order to entice candidates to leave the safety and security of their current position, they need to know that your company offers long-term career potential.
4. Provide relevant and up-to-date information on your business regarding strategy, financial strength, trends and differentiators. Top-level candidates want to be a part of a growing, forward-thinking organization.
5. Offer information to prospective candidates about your community and the broader marketplace including schools, demographics, business environment and housing. In order to give your company serious consideration, candidates will need to be able to picture their future home life as well as their work life.

“Provide an employee benefit that **does not cost much but could make a huge difference in securing the right candidate. For example, offer an extra week of vacation or a car allowance.”**

ONCE YOU HAVE FOUND A CANDIDATE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Evaluate your compensation offer and strategy. Internal equity is very important, but you may not be able to attract the right candidate if you are not market competitive. To bridge any potential gaps, consider the following:
 - Increase the base salary or incentive compensation.
 - Offer a sign-on bonus.
 - Offer a guarantee on part or all of the 1st year bonus target.
 - Provide an employee benefit that does not cost much but could make a huge difference in securing the right candidate. For example, offer an extra week of vacation or a car allowance.
2. Look for commonalities and ties. Review LinkedIn to see if you and the candidate share any connections. Perhaps your common connection can help in recruiting or telling your company’s story.

It may appear that we are suggesting that you bend over backwards for candidates. However, these strategies aren't about rolling out the red carpet but rather highlighting what makes you as good as—or better—than major market companies. You can even use your location to your advantage. For example, rural markets offer candidates an opportunity to escape the grind of an urban lifestyle, and companies in non-major markets often offer candidates more opportunities for leadership and development. For example, you might share, "This role allows you to work side by side with the CEO and executive team and work directly with our lenders." These are experiences candidates may have to wait years to get exposure to in an urban market.

We also find that in the more rural markets, the opportunities to become a part of the community are more available. Does your company encourage getting involved in the community? Sell those opportunities to the candidates as perks! Career development is your number-one selling point—use it to your advantage.

With these talent search strategies, you'll be in a position to attract top-level, professional talent. A non-major market can be just as enticing as the big city—you just have to present it as such.

"Determine what is truly required, preferred or a plus with respect to education, certification, experience, skills, personality traits and management style. Be flexible and stick to those skills and experiences that are truly critical for success in the role."

THE PERFECT CANDIDATE FOR YOUR BUSINESS

How many times have you looked at a job description and said, "The person I hire must meet all of these requirements"—and then reality smacks you in the face and you get zero candidates that have all the requirements? Some candidates meet maybe ½ of the requirements, and you end up discouraged and you stubbornly dig your heels into the ground until the heavens deliver you a perfect resume.

And when the perfect candidate finally lands in your lap, her salary requirements are outside your salary range. You get frustrated and everyone walks away.

If you are nodding to yourself that this has happened, you are not alone. This is an issue that faces companies in urban, suburban and rural areas alike, but the problem is magnified when you're located in a non-major market and you already face a talent shortage. Here are some tips for finding the perfect candidate and avoiding exasperation:

- Make a list of the skills the successful candidate must have and the skills that you would like him/her to have. You will find more candidates for the position, and you can help the future hire develop the "nice to have" skills.
- Be competitive. Pay candidates what they are making in the metro markets and also be prepared to pay incentives for them to move to where you are located. Make it worth their while.
- Provide assistance and opportunities for their spouse to find employment in your market. Many families rely on two incomes, so it is important to show candidates that the job market offers opportunities for both partners.
- Be prepared to sell them why they should be working for you. The great candidates will vet you just as much as you are vetting them.

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