

## Headhunting in the Heartland

Witzig thrives off the beaten path

by Judy Linklater

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Mengel & MacDonald. Sandy Wade. Dale Fels. Barbara Bools. These are the headhunters that rule the roost in Chicago. The best in town. The ones who shuffle creatives like cards up and down the avenue. Who can make your career with a phone call. Or take you to lunch when "there's nothing available right now at your particular skill level..."

But there's another headhunter you should know about. Someone you've probably never heard of. She isn't in Chicago, New York or LA. But, according to some, she may be one of the best in the country. Her name is Pam Witzig and she's in Bloomington, Illinois.

Pam who? Where?

Some two-and-a-half hours south of Chicago on the endless, treeless landscape of Route 55, where more people die of boredom than car accidents is Bloomington (where Keith Reinhard once worked as a "creative account exec"), Pam Witzig started Witzig & Associates on April Fool's Day in 1986. Whatever for? "Because nobody told me I couldn't". Nobody told her it wouldn't work unless she was in a major city near large agencies with access to the creative people who are the pawns in this little game of life.

Witzig's way out of the way company started small, in her basement. She worked for local agencies in little markets, what she calls the "Pennsylvucky" regions – agencies with the neighborhood bank, a piece of farm equipment and a donut joint. At first, she developed an expertise in agricultural writers. Even now she can pull up 822 names of people who could write a jingle about chemical fertilizer.

Today, relocated in a renovated building that could pass for Navy Pier, Witzig has well over 8,000 art directors, writers; even account types at her fingertips. While other executive search firms are flipping through their card files, Witzig's people are all on the computer. In a heartbeat she can sort them by salary, background, accounts, ZIP codes, from where they'd like to work (Minnesota and L.A.), to where they have worked (Seattle to North Carolina), and what they like for lunch.

This attention to detail is probably why the Richards Group has been calling from Texas. Why Goodby from San Francisco, Hill, Holiday is calling from L.A. Wieden & Kennedy from Portland. Chiat/Day from New York. And why other headhunters are calling this headhunter. Quite simple, Pam Witzig has a knack for finding great talent in unexpected places. A young team from North Carolina. A great writer in Peoria. Some kids in Milwaukee. Her philosophy, "If you can have terrific creative out of Virginia or Minnesota or Oregon, why can't you get great recruiting out of Bloomington, Illinois?" No town is too tiny for good

advertising people.

According to one agency recruiter at a major New York shop, “Pam’s been so valuable to me, finding people in the cusp of being discovered, a niche she fills very well.” So have you been to Bloomington? “No, we’ve actually never met.” An executive creative director in St. Louis can’t say enough good things about Witzig. “She is a bright lady. Built a good company. We’re happy we discovered her, even if she is in Bloomington.” Ever been there? “Yes.” On purpose? “Well, my niece was going to Notre Dame and we had to go through Bloomington to get to South Bend.” Oh.

To keep in touch with her far-flung empire, Witzig publishes a once-in-a-while newsletter with tips for hunters as well as huntees. A recent story was about a candidate who sent T-shirts to the creative director with “I’ve got a boner for Doner” on them. Don’t do that, she advised. Unlike some headhunters who tell you laminate everything “or New York won’t even look at it,” Witzig says laminated books are just heavy. She ought to know, shipping hundreds of books around the country is her major expense, along with an astronomical phone bill. She does recommend putting your book in a protective box of some sort because baggage handlers treat your best creative work the way they treat everything else—badly.

On the other hand, Witzig & Associates treats its clients and candidates well. They send thank you notes often just for returning a phone call. “Candidates are amazed because we send a simple little business card with a note, ‘thanks for your.’”

Sitting with the effervescent Mrs. Witzig, not yet 40 years old, mother of five, grandmother of one, a woman whose lunch budget is in the low two figures because there’s nobody to wine and dine, who can make 20 phone calls an hour for you because there are no creatives dropping in to whine about their jobs, whose open, airy office is dominated by an enormous Andy Warhol serigraph of the Wicked Witch of the West, one can’t help but wonder, “Why Bloomington?”