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## Gathering Places

JEFF BLOOM AND ROB KAY

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### **Time is ripe for marketing Hawaii's high-tech assets**

IN A RECENT issue of Forbes magazine, a national survey ranked Honolulu 189 out of 200 in a study titled, "Best Places for Business and Careers." Ahead of Honolulu at 188 was Davenport, Iowa, and behind was Akron, Ohio at 190.

Although the survey's results were not new -- Hawaii was 189th last year, too -- it is troubling because the survey reinforces the perception to the rest of nation that Honolulu is still a business backwater.

We believe the study did not do justice to what Hawaii has accomplished during the last few years in technology, in which the local sector has grown tremendously. Moreover, the Legislature has recently passed progressive legislation that provides generous tax credits for technology companies.

Unfortunately, few venture capitalists on the mainland are aware of these incentives. The irony is that Hawaii has been successful in promoting itself as a tourism destination while the notion that the Aloha State can be a center for technology is something that Hawaii

needs to explain and the mainland needs to understand.

We think now is the time to promote Hawaii to the mainland. Recent downturns in the NASDAQ market for high-tech securities should not deter us from this path. On the contrary, it is an opportunity for Hawaii to position itself for the next up-tick in the technology investment cycle.

WE BELIEVE the quality of life here, Hawaii's connections with Asia and great bandwidth in telecommunications capabilities are enough to make many entrepreneurs seriously consider Hawaii as a launching pad.

According to the Forbes survey, however, Hawaii barely registers on the radar screen as a place to do business. We must gear up a marketing machine and let people know that we've got a product to sell. The question is then: How do we get the message out?

In our opinion a media relations campaign could deliver our story to the mainland at a bargain basement price. There are dozens of mainland journalists who would be interested in reporting on our technology assets if they had the opportunity.

For example, last December a television crew from Silicon Valley spent nearly two weeks traveling throughout our state surveying and documenting the tech scene. The effort was led by former Oahu resident Stewart Cheifet, who hosts "Computer Chronicles," a nationally syndicated TV show.

Cheifet and his entourage tried to see every facet of Hawaii's nascent tech industry and shot thousands of feet of videotape in doing so. The result was a four-part series called, "High Tech Hawaii" that was aired nationally on PBS in February and again in July.

The "Computer Chronicles" series was a showcase for our state and provided entities such as Adtech, the Maui High Performance Computing Center, the Keck Observatory and Pacific Missile Range Facility with exposure on national television. The cost was minimal -- airplane tickets and hotel rooms for the TV crew.

IF HAWAII were to host mainland technology journalists in the same way we've been hosting travel writers for years, we could reach millions of mainland entrepreneurs and investors who might be interested in setting up shop here.

Compared to a massive marketing campaign, this sort of program consumes fewer resources and produces excellent exposure. If we're serious about branding Hawaii as a good place to do technology and tourism, getting editorial coverage on TV and in the national business press would be a great place to start.

Other communities have been successful with similar programs. Orlando, Fla., more famous for Disney World than technology, has embarked on a \$9-million marketing program that will "co-brand" Orlando as a high-tech and tourism center.

So far as we can tell, Hawaii has barely gotten off the starting line. It's time we got moving. The competition certainly isn't waiting.

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Jeff Bloom is president of Computer Training Academy and Network Resource Center here. Rob Kay is a marketing and PR consultant in Honolulu.

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