

[https://www.omaha.com/opinion/midlands-voices-newbraska-concept-will-give-a-jolt-of-newness-to-states-economy/article\\_39f600dd-1825-5249-a712-8f1ed8018495.html](https://www.omaha.com/opinion/midlands-voices-newbraska-concept-will-give-a-jolt-of-newness-to-states-economy/article_39f600dd-1825-5249-a712-8f1ed8018495.html)

## Midlands Voices: NEWbraska concept will give a jolt of newness to state's economy

By Lynn Hinderaker  
Apr 4, 2020



PEXELS.COM

*The writer, of Omaha, is a consultant focusing on economic innovation.*

In 2019, more than 300 of Nebraska's business and civic leaders worked together to create an ambitious plan for our state's growth and evolution by 2030. Former State Sen. Jim Smith and Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and

Industry President Bryan Slone coordinated the effort and received well-deserved applause for the Blueprint Nebraska vision.

Although there are many worthy objectives inside Blueprint, perhaps the most important is talent attraction. Our state is losing about 3,000 knowledge workers per year to urban areas outside Nebraska. Tens of thousands have already left the state and are easing into phase two of their careers, buying homes, etc.

When I interviewed some of these young grads, I asked why they were intent on leaving Nebraska. They eventually confessed that, although Nebraska was a great place to grow up, the business community didn't seem to be focused on innovating. As a result, the available jobs were not that "interesting."

In short, these young knowledge workers wanted a career that emphasized "newness." This consideration seemed to come before wages, cost of living, affordable housing, good schools, low taxes, even arts and a bustling downtown culture (which was also considered important).

To their credit, these young folks were eager to "jump to the front" in their chosen fields; in order to be involved with cutting edge companies and new tech projects, they felt they had to leave our state.

As I reflected on this pattern, I also thought about the famous brand showdown that took place between Coca-Cola and Pepsi more than 40 years ago. Coke dominated its industry; Pepsi couldn't catch up. Eventually, Pepsi "reframed" the situation to emphasize youth and newness.

"Yes, Coca-Cola," Pepsi said in their ads, "you are the 'classic' brand. But we are the 'young' brand, the soft drink for people who are 'now and new.' 'Young' is good — thus, Pepsi is good."

Pepsi flipped the switch. Instead of talking about the product, they talked about the consumer. The resultant Pepsi Challenge was a hit. The youth movement exploded, triggering a social revolution.

Perhaps Nebraska needs to reframe itself similarly. Our state could add a "W"

to the first syllable of our state's name to create a promotional keyword ("new"). The resultant word — "NEWbraska"<sup>TM</sup> — would inspire a new mindset; it could open the door to new products, new processes and new business models.

This general idea was explained by 30-something author Eric Ries in his book "The Lean Startup." His approach has changed the way companies are built and new products are launched. It can make double-digit growth (and related publicity) a reasonable, systematic quest.

How to use this insight to help Blueprint's leaders put "boots on the ground"?

1. Regular workshops would help business owners understand the transformational idea.
2. A new web platform would publicize the progress of the NEWbraska business "trainees."
3. The platform would help Nebraska's companies collaborate.
4. Two inspirational conferences a year would reward newness in business practices.
5. A plethora of local growth "initiatives" would be integrated and synthesized.
6. The NEWbraska<sup>TM</sup> platform would help "emigrants" discover new career opportunities.
7. As things evolved, brain drain would slow to a trickle.
8. Nebraska's new economic development leader, Tony Goins, could cast a new vibe across the state that would, in turn, attract employers that value innovation.
9. The phrase, "What's new?" would attract job seekers and careerists. The reframing of Nebraska is like Pepsi's turnaround. Pepsi's beverage container symbolizes the economic development challenge in our state. The bubbly, sweet-tasting fluid inside is NEWbraska.<sup>TM</sup>