



They Came. They Saw. They Stayed.

LifeinIndy.com shares personal stories to boost city's profile as a desirable place to live and work

When Luke Zhang arrived in the United States, he was 16 years old and bound for a private high school near Orlando, Florida. Born and raised in Wenzhou, China, Zhang chose to make the long journey to Florida to challenge himself academically and “to write my own life story.”

Twelve years later he had a Bachelor of Science degree

from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Indiana, and a job as a senior data scientist with a technology firm, Indianapolis-based KSM Consulting (KSMC). He also had purchased a house in the northern Indianapolis suburb of Carmel.

As a Rose-Hulman graduate with majors in computer science, software engineering and mathematics, Zhang was recruited by technology firms on both coasts. But he chose to accept an offer from an Indianapolis start-up firm where he worked for three years before joining KSMC. He had first experienced the city in the summer following his freshman year in college when he was one of the interns (dubbed “X-terns”) hosted by Tech Point, a growth accelerator for Indiana’s technology sector, to introduce technology students to Indianapolis. He had liked it, which led him back.

“When it comes to tech jobs, nobody ever talks about the Midwest,” Zhang says. “The people in the Indianapolis tech community are friendly and accessible. Here people are able to max out their potential.”

Inspired by gratitude for the reception he received in Indianapolis, Zhang volunteers with Indy Chamber’s Project Amplify, a five-year coordinated effort to transform the city’s image locally and globally. As an ‘Indyfluencer,’ Zhang shares his experiences of living and working in the Indianapolis region through LifeinIndy.com, Project Amplify’s search-optimized website.

The site and coordinated social media strategy offer an array of photos, videos and personal stories about the city. In 2020,

Lilly Endowment made a \$2,792,930 grant to the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Foundation to support Indy Chamber’s Project Amplify. It is the first coordinated effort to provide a single source of information about life in Indianapolis—from neighborhoods and nightlife to cost of living and quality of life.

The LifeinIndy.com website is intended as a recruitment tool for businesses and a relocation resource for individuals and families. What makes the site more than a branding exercise is its personal touch—it features stories from real people like Zhang, who have settled here and are ambassadors for the city.

Research suggests that people who live in the Midwest know a little about Indianapolis, according to Michael Huber, Indy Chamber’s president and chief executive officer. But outside of the Midwest, people have almost no perception of the city. “And no perception can be worse than a negative perception,” Huber adds.

LifeinIndy.com seeks to improve the perception, especially among individuals who are open to building their lives and careers in the Indianapolis region.

● Luke Zhang (below) has such an affinity for Indianapolis that he has become an ‘Indyfluencer’ on the Indy Chamber’s new digital platform, LifeinIndy.com.



About
LIFE IN INDY

Imagine a place where passion meets innovation.

That's the Indianapolis region—a place where creators and doers come together to inspire progress and discover solutions. Where our hospitality is only matched by our ambition. And where everyone can find their community in a place they love to call home.



Life in Indy is all about creating the life you want to live. Take a few minutes to explore our region, and you just might realize that Indianapolis is the perfect place for you to grow.

“The Indianapolis region as a cluster of communities has grown significantly in recent years,” says Huber, “and its economy is one of the most dynamic in the country, especially in terms of metropolitan areas with a population in the one- to two-million range. There’s access to sports, to arts and culture, to an active lifestyle, to community leaders. When people move here, the common reaction is: ‘I had no idea all this was here. It’s unlike anyplace else I’ve lived.’”

For years, Indy Chamber had been learning about the need for an information resource from local business leaders. There had been attempts by other organizations and companies to provide relocation resources, but nothing of the scale or magnitude of Project Amplify. Driven by two guiding principles—what the audience needs to hear outweighs what Indy Chamber wants to say and the initiative grows stronger with each additional diverse voice it showcases—the project’s aim is to provide an authentic panorama of Indianapolis rather than a rose-colored-glasses snapshot.

To do that, says Joe Pellman, Indy Chamber’s executive director of regional image marketing and the leader of Project Amplify, the effort must be coordinated across an array of corporate, civic, cultural, and community organizations. “For this to succeed,” says Pellman, “it has to be a collaborative effort.”

To develop LifeinIndy.com, Indy Chamber convened a group of regional marketing professionals from businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to serve as its “Story Board.” Additionally, the Chamber sought input from the Talent Summit, a gathering of human resources and recruiting professionals, and members of the Regional Strategy Council, which oversees economic development strategy at Indy Chamber.

Indy Chamber also tapped a variety of other organizations and individuals for their perspectives, including Julie Heath. The executive director of the Speak Easy, the city’s first collaborative workspace for entrepreneurs, Heath also is a co-founder of New to Indy, a meet-up group that helps transplants to the city find one another and build personal and professional networks.

Heath helped start the group after she and her husband moved to Indianapolis from Philadelphia in 2016. While her husband’s new job brought them to Indy, Heath was trying to figure out how to plug in professionally. Through connections with other newcomers, she tapped into what she called a hidden brain trust: the partners of professionals who moved here for jobs.

● Michael Huber (opposite left) and Joe Pellman (opposite right) lead LifeinIndy.com, a project of the Indy Chamber designed to uncover and share authentic stories about what it is like to live and work in Indianapolis.

It was that brain trust that Heath turned to when Indy Chamber asked her to lead discussions about Project Amplify with Central Indiana stakeholders. The resulting conversations helped Indy Chamber identify three key factors as it designed LifeinIndy.com. Content should:

- **reflect diversity and inclusion**
- **include input from people who had experience relocating to Indianapolis; and**
- **draw on the combined expertise of the project's partners to amplify the stories being told.**

From the beginning, says Pellman, everyone working on the concept knew that the website had to offer visitors an abundance of useful, insightful information obtained from diverse sources and provide a variety of perspectives. "This has to be about both quality and quantity."

To achieve both aims, the website was designed to be user-friendly and information rich. From the home page, a visitor can select from four major categories: Community, Things to Do, Career Opportunities, and About. Each category contains multiple subject headings. Under Community, for example, are education, find your neighborhood, cost of living and transportation. Written content and photography are augmented by video to help tell stories within each of the categories.

As suggested by Heath's working group, diversity and inclusion are essential elements of those stories.

"We're making an effort to tell ethnically diverse stories," says Huber, "as well as stories from LGBTQ residents."

While it encompasses a variety of topics, LifeinIndy.com isn't the final word on any of them. The website links to other content, including websites for Indyhub, 16 Tech, Indy Black Millennials, TechPoint and the Network of Women in Business.

LifeinIndy.com complements the city's other major online resource designed to attract people to the city, VisitIndy.com. A product of the Indianapolis' tourism agency Visit Indy, VisitIndy.com is focused on promoting the city to tourists and convention planners.

"That's a great resource, but the city deserves to have a residential equivalent," says Shelly Towns, the chief marketing officer for Marathon Health, primary care platform. Towns, who formerly worked for Angie's List, says competing for talent in the technology and healthcare sectors requires selling Indianapolis as a viable alternative to other cities. "There hasn't been a coordinated effort to market Indy at scale on the talent side. That's what Life in Indy represents. It's a way to brand our city in a differentiated way and tell that story consistently."

Another Indyfluencer who stepped up to share her story is Lisa Anderson. Originally from Denver, she has lived in Indianapolis twice—the first time in 2001 when her boyfriend (now husband) accepted a job with Eli Lilly and Company. Moving from Austin, Texas, they stayed for nine years before relocating to Southern California. In 2012, they returned to Indianapolis, this time voluntarily because her husband had transitioned to consulting and they were free to live anywhere they wanted. "We liked Indianapolis, so we chose to come back," says Anderson, who works for the Indiana Public Employees Retirement Fund.

But the first few months after her 2001 arrival, Anderson kept asking herself, "How long do we have to stay here?" Gradually, she got her bearings. "After we had kids," she says, "we got really comfortable because we connected with other families."

As someone who didn't settle into Indianapolis right away, Anderson is uniquely positioned to connect with reluctant relocators. Compared to other cities, she says, Indianapolis is underrated. "Living here is easy. There's something for everyone."

According to Pellman, the success of LifeinIndy.com will be determined by multiple indicators: the amount of traffic the website attracts, the number of people with postsecondary credentials who move to the Indianapolis area, the number of employers using the site and resource library as part of their recruitment efforts, and the number of visitors to the site who contact an Indyfluencer.

Luke Zhang is happy to connect with those virtual visitors. "I'm passionate about promoting Indianapolis," he says. "The city has been good to me, and I want to give back."

