

Executive Summary

The Automotive Industry as a Career Opportunity

Perspectives of today's youth and adult influencers in Michigan and beyond

May 28, 2014

Introduction

One of the undeniable realities of the global economy is the growth of cities. The world's major metropolitan centers are already witnessing crisis levels of traffic gridlock as well as growing environmental concerns. While Michigan maintains a global leadership position in the area of automobiles and personal mobility, several factors pose significant challenges to maintaining this spot at the top:

- Increased capacity for innovation from other global regions (e.g. Europe, China) and other industries not traditionally associated with automotive (e.g. Silicon Valley);
- Changing nature of personal transportation ownership (e.g. younger generations delaying automotive purchases, less emotional connection with automobiles, growth of car sharing, increased reliance on public transportation in urban areas);
- Attracting the necessary "best and brightest" talent to the U.S.-based automotive industry to address the looming "skills gap" in this critical sector.

It is this last point – how to attract the necessary talent to specifically the Michigan-based automotive/mobility industry – that is the focus of this private closed-door session with automotive leaders at the Mackinac Policy Conference.

Automotive stakeholders and businesses depending on the industry have identified talent attraction as a top priority and publicly acknowledged that the perception issues are adding to the challenges presented by the existing skills gap. In May 2014, the Detroit Regional Chamber's MICHauto program sponsored a study to benchmark current perceptions associated with Michigan's automotive industry as part of its efforts to raise awareness about the career opportunities in the growing and rapidly evolving automotive industry.

Study Demographics and Perceptions

The MICHauto study, completed in the week of May 19 by intellitrends of Clarkston, Michigan, gathered feedback from 900 respondents, consisting of youth (age 17-24) and adult influencers from both inside and outside of Michigan. Influencers were defined as parents with kids aged 12-17, adults in leadership roles of youth organizations, high school and college level educators, career counselors and academic advisors.

As part of the study, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions intended to provide insight and data on the following issues:

- Commonly held perceptions and assumptions regarding Michigan's automotive industry that propel or hinder consideration for career opportunities;
- Gaps in perceptions that exist between Michigan residents and those outside Michigan; and
- The profile of influencers (parents, media, educators) who shape perceptions and expectations of Michigan's automotive industry.

Data Highlights and Findings

This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings.

1. Automotive viewed as high-tech, but not a growth industry.

While the automotive industry receives high marks for being "high-tech" and "one of the most advanced consumer products in the world," less than one in two participants in the survey believe it offers "growth in terms of opportunity and advancement in manufacturing, skilled trades and for those with advanced degrees."

2. Increased awareness needed among influencers to recommend automotive careers.

Less than half of influencers would recommend a job in the automotive industry with perceptions of instability/fragile, dead/declining, poor job security. Only 9 percent of influencers would say the automotive industry has a "positive" reputation.

3. Outside sources providing most influence on automotive career perceptions.

Youth report receiving information about automotive-related careers from the news, online career employment sites and TV commercials. Influencers also receive their "automotive industry career" information from the news, career/employment sites and company websites. Only nine percent of influencers say the automotive industry has a "positive" reputation, versus 40 percent of youth.

4. Lower exposure to Michigan tempers consideration of an automotive-related career.

For youth outside of Michigan, the lower exposure to Michigan's automotive industry decreases their likelihood to consider automotive-related careers. Among youth who don't know anyone who works in the automotive industry, only 9 percent would consider an automotive-related career.