

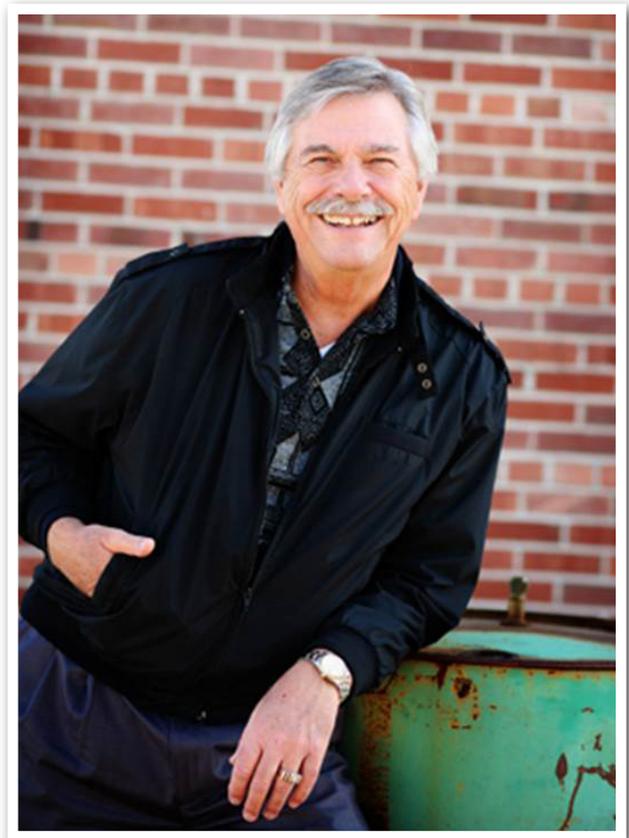
## Case study: Pay Plus Benefits

*A professional employer organization (PEO) that enables clients to outsource human resource management, Pay Plus Benefits Inc. generated \$20 million in 2015 revenue with 30 employees — numbers that CEO John Heaton wants to grow. To help boost expansion efforts, the Kennewick, Washington-based company entered the Tri-Cities Economic Gardening Program in late 2015 and worked with the National Strategic Research Team. Within a year of its engagement, annual revenue at Pay Plus benefits had increased 23 percent, hitting \$24.6 million in 2016. Below, Heaton and controller Diana Minard discuss their Economic Gardening experience:*

“We had already established our business development goals and action plans for the next five years,” says Heaton. “Yet whenever you look that far out, there are always large mountains to overcome. The Economic Gardening researchers were able to look at those obstacles and bring us information to achieve our business plan.”

Among deliverables, the researchers:

- Made recommendations for improving the company’s website functionality — especially on mobile devices — and how to increase its performance in search-engine rankings.
- Produced several lists of companies with merger or acquisition activity (typically good prospects for Pay Plus’ services). For example, one list yielded 1,500 results nationwide and included companies of 50 to 1,000 employees in hotels and accommodations, building construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- Produced a list of foreign companies that might establish a presence in the United States and need HR assistance (companies that are also good prospects).



*John Heaton, founder and CEO of Pay Plus Benefits*

The last assignment was particularly tough, Heaton says. “You don’t find a list like this just lying around on the street. Yet the researchers were able to identify common touch points for where those companies might congregate, such as working with an attorney that specializes in international relocation or going to a consulate for advice.”

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Heaton was also impressed with how quickly the research team “got” his firm. “Pay Plus provides services to a wide variety of companies, and each deliverable is a little different,” he says. “We have employees that have been with us for 10 years who couldn’t explain what we do as well as the team leader did after our first 90-minute phone call.”

In addition, Heaton gives the researchers high marks for their efficiency and professionalism. “I’ve been involved in other types of business assistance, in which large companies would try to mentor smaller ones and send a couple of their people to us — yet nothing ever happened. The Economic Gardening researchers did what they said they were going to do.”

“The research team really listened to our needs, rather than providing what they thought we needed,” says Minard. “They drilled down to a lot of specifics, such as what size companies are we looking for, what kind of net income and how many employees. When we received the information, it was truly customized to our needs — as opposed to being a cookie-cutter report that might relate to a number of companies.”



*Diana Minard, controller of Pay Plus Benefits*



*The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the Edward Lowe Foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG helps state and regional organizations establish Economic Gardening networks, delivers Economic Gardening services and maintains national standards in training and certification. To learn more, visit [www.edwardlowe.org](http://www.edwardlowe.org).*