

**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF MARK.WILHOITE@PECOREP.COM**

From the Cincinnati Business Courier:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/cincinnati/news/2018/10/08/quotient-founder-cities-shouldnt-try-to-be-next.html>

## Quotient founder: Cities shouldn't try to be next Silicon Valley (Video)

Oct 8, 2018, 2:58pm EDT **Updated: Oct 26, 2018, 1:17pm EDT**

The founder of Quotient Technology Inc., a \$1 billion Silicon Valley tech company with a large Cincinnati presence, said cities don't need to try to be the next Silicon Valley in order to be attractive to startup talent.

Steven Boal, who founded Coupons.com in 1998 after watching his father-in-law clip coupons out of the Sunday newspaper and grew that company into Quotient (NYSE: QUOT), was in Cincinnati on Monday to deliver a keynote address to kick off the second-annual Startup Week. The weeklong event is meant to showcase what's going on in Cincinnati while offering programming and panel discussions to offer practical advice and guidance to entrepreneurs.

Boal is no stranger to Cincinnati. When starting Coupons.com, he visited the Queen City to woo the king of consumer packaged goods giant Procter & Gamble. Don King, P&G's associate director responsible for coupons, told him, "Mark my words, Steven, we will never, ever work with you." P&G would eventually eat those words.

Cincinnati is tied with Bangalore, India, as home to Quotient's second-largest office with more than 200 employees working out of the Kenwood Collection. That got



DAVID KALONICK

Steven Boal is founder and executive chairman of Mountain View, Calif.-based Quotient Technology Inc.

even larger when Quotient acquired Cincinnati-based influencer marketing startup Ahalogy in June.

Boal, fresh off a trip to Nunavut, Canada, to photograph polar bears, sat down with the *Courier* at Union Hall to talk about how Cincinnati has changed over the years, why the market is important to Quotient and why cities need to stop trying to be "the next Silicon Valley."

**A lot of headlines ask if so-and-so city is the next Silicon Valley; is that something cities should be aiming for?** Years ago that was a big drive – we're going to be the next Silicon Valley. And you heard that from a lot of places like Austin and others. I'm not sure you want to be the next Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley is great for a lot of things, and there's great innovation and passionate people. But the thing about Silicon Valley is that it's a very unique experience and you don't really have a good view of the way things develop outside that environment. I'm not sure I'd want to be the next Silicon Valley, I'd want to be the next center for technical excellence, or a center for startups, or a center for environmental excellence.

**You have a long history with Cincinnati. How have you seen the city and its talents change over time?** When we started in Cincinnati, people – folks who would consider joining our team – were working for larger companies. Over the period of time since we've been here, we've seen that there are an awful lot of smaller companies tapping into the talents that are being developed at larger companies. Agencies, for example, have terrific people inside them but they're larger organizations serving larger companies. The drive to do something unique and special and startup-y has developed. Now, when you come to Cincinnati, you have startup everywhere. Instead of incubating ideas in a large company, they're spinning them out.

**What advantages do you have by having such a large presence here?** One, we become an employer of choice. When you have enough of a footprint in a marketplace, as long as you're doing right by people and holding to the principles you've had all along, it becomes a place where people want to come work. It's a fun work environment. We bring the fun from our roots in our offices in Silicon Valley. You're part of a larger organization, but it's still very startup-y.

**What are some of the things you do to attract talent?** It's creating a culture of wanting to be a great place to be. You don't do that because you're wanting to

recruit, you do that because it's part of who you are, it's part of your fiber. We started three of us in a basement with a 9-month-old child crawling around, and we always kept a family feel to the business. Now, with more than 800 employees, it still feels like a family.

**What are some of the things you do to create that culture?** One of the biggest things we do is reach out into the community. It has been said many times that one of the things that attracts people to our company is that we care so deeply about people outside of the company. And that to me is probably one of the things that makes the biggest difference. For years we've gone out and rebuilt women's and children's shelters and Habitat for Humanity.

**What are some of the strengths of our region in Cincinnati?** You have this perspective of the way America behaves and feels. In your region in particular you've got such a great compaction of old world, new world, technology, non-technology, physical products, digital products, there are fewer unique places where you can find great companies like Kroger and Procter & Gamble and all of the digital things that surround them.

**Where are some areas we can shore up to strengthen our ecosystem?** This building we're in (Union Hall) and this event taking place this week is the best example I've seen anywhere in the U.S. so far. That speaks to the fact that there's a culture here of trying to get people together and make everyone successful, not just one or two companies. Someone was explaining to me this morning that there are more than 400 teams that come to this space to foster communication and introduce them to bigger companies and let them cross collaborate, and that's something Silicon Valley did really well and isn't done in other markets.

**Where does Ahalogy fit into what you do?** If you think about the offline television space, for example, when the 30-second spot was in jeopardy because people were using Tivo to record and fast-forward, product placement became a big business because someone holding a can of a soda in a popular sitcom became a way to get to consumers. Influencer marketing is almost the same corollary for offline. It's the next evolution in the way people get to consumers in a way that is most comfortable to them in a way that's transparent and honest. It fits perfectly with our analytics and platform.

**Andy Brownfield**

Reporter

*Cincinnati Business Courier*

