



**BRISTOL**  
GLOBAL MOBILITY

**BEYOND  
BORDERS**

## **CANADA: LOCALES ARE FAR APART, WAIT TIMES ARE FAR TOO LONG, BUT MOBILITY DIFFICULTIES DON'T HAMPER ITS DESIRABILITY**

Find out what challenges relocating families face from the lingering impact of COVID-19 and fluctuations in the housing market, what to expect if you're working with an on-the-ground provider, and what Canadian business are doing with their talent and mobility strategies when faced with talent shortages, work-from-home mindsets, and more.

For insights into the relocation trends and challenges in Canada, Bristol spoke to two valued supplier partners and a leading corporate mobility practitioner.

Bristol is an independently owned and operated global relocation management company headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona. Bristol's autonomy allows our associates to focus on delivering a complete breadth of domestic and global mobility services with our full attention and flexibility. We excel when it comes to intelligently integrating all mobility constituents in ways that create consistent value on behalf of our clients and meaningful move experiences for their relocating employees. The experience Bristol delivers isn't just fueled by the data of best practices nor the expertise gained through our 25 years in mobility, but a genuine need to connect with our clients and their relocating employees in a meaningful way. This is our relationship-centered philosophy of **Connecting with, versus Controlling People.**<sup>SM</sup>



# THE CANADIAN COMPANIES LENDING THEIR PERSPECTIVES

## MEET OUR EXPERTS

### Roy Phelps, Chief Commercial Officer QMM Inc.

Quality Move Management (QMM) is a self-hauling specialist regarded as one of the top moving and storage companies in Canada. For 26 years, they have successfully moved people to all corners of the globe. QMM is Allied Van Lines' largest agent in Canada with locations in Vancouver (head office), Calgary, Edmonton, and Toronto. As an award-winning operator, they pride themselves on their cross-border prowess, dedication to customer service, and industry-leading safety record.

*Pictured in order from left to right is QMM's Leadership Team: Christina Perry, VP of Operations; Roy Phelps, CCO; Tim Nager, President and COO; and Scott Shaw, CFO.*



**PREMIUM MOVING EXPERIENCE**



### Jeff Houck, Director Global Mobility McCain Foods Limited



McCain Foods was founded in 1957 in Florenceville, New Brunswick in Canada. Today, the company's corporate global headquarters is in Toronto, and they have 49 production facilities around the world. Over the past 60 years, McCain Foods has grown to sell their products (e.g., potato products, pizzas, and desserts) in 160+ countries.

### Nitin Badhwar, Vice President Welcomehome Relocations Inc.

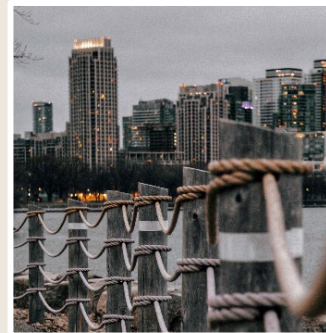
Welcomehome Relocations provides a range of destination services to cover all phases of corporate relocation (e.g., area orientation, rental and short-term accommodation home finding, and settling-in assistance). Their team of relocation specialists—located in more than 50 Canadian cities—have assisted individuals and families experience soft landings in their new communities for nearly 25 years.



# TRENDS & CHALLENGES: WHERE TO CALL HOME

## THE RENTAL MARKET REQUIRES RELOCATING EMPLOYEES' EXPECTATIONS BE SET

Welcomehome Relocations notes that Canada is incredibly challenged with real estate inventory at this time. This may be the biggest challenge Canada-wide, with slightly greater prevalence in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary—and to some degree—Montreal. Difficulties with securing rental accommodations for relocating employees is thanks to several factors intertwining:



- ◆ **Higher inflation and cost of living:** The Consumer Price Index in Canada rose by 7.7% in May 2022—the highest yearly increase in almost 40 years.
- ◆ **Dropping home prices and higher interest rates:** Home prices that were previously skyrocketing are now starting to cool down as a result of the Bank of Canada's massive rate increases in effort to fight inflation (e.g., this summer, the overnight rate was raised to 2.5%, which was the biggest increase since 1998 and the highest level since 2008). While price drops are affecting housing types differently (condos aren't impacted as much as detached, semi-detached, and town homes), prices are coming down significantly from even a few months ago.  
**Owners are less likely to sell:** At the peak of home sale prices, there was the issue that if one sold their home at the higher price, they would have to also buy a home of an equally inflated price. Now, with prices going down, people can't sell their homes for what they wanted to, and with the instability in pricing and uncertainty of future value, the majority of these potential sellers/buyers are either staying put or not getting into the housing market at all.

These factors have created a situation where fewer people are able to buy a home or can't afford to get into the housing market because mortgage rates are now quite a bit higher and speculated to go up even more. This has created greater demand in the rental market, because if you can't buy, your other option is to rent. Meanwhile, rental inventories have not gone up at all because for people that got caught in the squeeze, if they have investment properties, they're selling them (because they need the money), so there's a bit of a snowball effect at play. The other challenge that arose was that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when home prices kept going up significantly, rental rates did not keep pace. Now, post-COVID home prices are coming down, but rental rates are being jacked up to try to catch up for two reasons: (1) the cost of servicing those debts is higher and (2) there is simply just greater demand and still not as much inventory.

This is a fairly consistent story across Canada where the inventory just isn't what it was. If a relocating employee finds something that has seven out of 10 boxes ticked in terms of what they want, it's recommended that they jump on securing it. Not to suggest that one can't find a place to live, but once one does, there's no haggling over price. The next restriction to keep in mind is that if it's a place desirable to the relocating employee, then there are going to be multiple people looking for it, often resulting in multiple offers. In some markets, landlords have even resorted to asking for pet bios before considering renting to potential tenants. Welcomehome Relocations always tells relocating employees that they can share their wish list, but Welcomehome Relocations cannot guarantee what they are going to get.

Jeff Houck of McCain Foods notes that his mobility program faces a vacancy rate of 1% for rentals in Calgary and struggles in Toronto (where they have their executive office) with the sheer cost of housing (e.g., a 700-square-foot condo is a million dollars). McCain Foods' executives are then opting to live 1.5 hours outside of the city (as they're only required to commute in twice a week), and Jeff focuses efforts into finding them permanent housing as quickly as possible so they can skip temporary accommodations at high price points.



# TRENDS & CHALLENGES: WHERE TO CALL HOME

One additional undesirable effect of the rental market strain is that destination service providers (DSPs) must deal with a greater scale of dissatisfaction among clients and relocating employees, and sometimes it is unfortunately voiced at them as the DSP. To try to fix this, it is important that prior to DSPs getting involved, relocation management companies (RMCs) and involved corporate HR stakeholders look to manage expectations with relocating employees moving into Canada by speaking to them about the realities of the market as early and consistently as possible. Welcomehome Relocations also tries to set expectations that properties available months in advance of an employee's move date or home-finding trip are not going to be available or even reflective of the type of unit that will be available by the time they arrive.

## WIDE OPEN SPACES MAKE FOR VERY DIFFERENT PLACES

### TRAVEL CAN BE ALONG LONG, LONELY ROADS

QMM cites that a big relocation challenge is the remote nature of Canada's geography. To compare and contrast a bit with the United States for context, the U.S. population is 10 times that of Canada, but Canada has more land. So with 10 times less people and more land mass, lots of remote locations exist for people to live, resulting in a very dispersed (and sometimes disparate) population. The country also boasts a lot of area where there's nothing other than a beautiful landscape of mountains, prairies, and lakes.



Canada also has a very resource-based economy. Forestry, oil and gas, and mining are the staples—particularly in Western Canada—and those resources come from areas where there are forests and natural oil reserves, which are really remote locations and obviously not near major metropolitan centers. This results in Canadian household goods moving companies, including QMM, having a very different model for getting to relocating employees' homes. It's not uncommon for QMM to send a truck 800-1,000 miles empty, which can be hard sometimes for their U.S. counterparts to believe. If a moving company is in Chicago, for instance, they'll work within a 60-100 mile radius of Chicago, and anything outside of that, they'll have the agent in the next city cover the move. That's something that can be impossible for some locations in Canada: there isn't another agent that's in High Prairie, for example. That agent is going to have to come from Calgary and is going to have to drive 12-14 hours to get there to service a shipment, and they may have to charge the client an empty mileage fee to go there because the fact is, the trip to the location is solely to pick up the shipment. With locations that are so remote, it's not likely they will be able to find any other shipments coming from them to offer the driver. This scenario is something that is very unique to Canada (the second largest country in the world) and can surprise U.S. counterparts.

Companies relocating employees in Canada can expectation-set accordingly by understanding that the country's geography does not result in dealing with lots of local deliveries but rather days-long drives and expenses for the distance. Things are uniquely difficult to service, though U.S. states like Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah have some similar challenges.



# TRENDS & CHALLENGES: WHERE TO CALL HOME

## NOT ALL PLACES ARE ALIKE & HOW COMPANIES CAN HELP BRIDGE THE GAP

Welcomehome Relocations has experienced the pitfalls of companies they support struggling with the talent shortage, as this is a challenge Canada is facing (not unlike the rest of the world). There are some instances where companies assure their employees who are moving to remote Canadian locales that they are just like Toronto or just like Vancouver. That would be like someone in the U.S. saying we will send you to Des Moines, Iowa, and it's just like Chicago. When these employees get there, they experience massive culture shock, and the feeling is heightened due to there essentially being no such thing as a Starbucks out where they have agreed to move.

On a positive note, McCain Foods has experienced the benefits of a small locale. In Coaldale, Alberta, they have a production plant, and employees relocated there (and to McCain's other rural locations) experience the joys of less confinement and the benefits of privacy that come with spaces being more secluded. With less eyes on goings-on and less hustle and bustle, they can enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle outside of work. Last year, despite all of the COVID-19 related restrictions, McCain relocated their very first female plant manager in the world to the Coaldale plant.

When it comes to successfully settling McCain's talent into any place in Canada—remote or metropolitan—or in the world for that matter—Director of Global Mobility, Jeff Houck, finds cultural readiness training to be essential for success. By providing this cultural/psychological training, McCain's relocating talent can know what to expect and what they are supposed to do, be formidable, and remain resilient in the face of adversity. This engagement and learning opportunity for McCain's relocating employees is very important to the global mobility program and helps to ensure its positive outcomes.

Before Jeff became involved, it so happened that cultural awareness/readiness was one of the two least used provisions in McCain's programs. The other least used benefit was spousal/partner assistance. Jeff and his team expanded their definition of spouse/partner assistance to go beyond the typical career and résumé-writing guidance and embrace more personalized support options for the spouse/partner. If the spouse/partner wants to join a professional or recreational club to better integrate into the new community or put their children in daycare so that they can go to the gym, those are acceptable use cases. Jeff looks at this flexibility as supporting the benefit's *intended benefit*: "It's supposed to be something that is helpful, so let it be helpful," he states.

## A LOOK AT SOME OF CANADA'S MAJOR CITIES THANKS TO WTRMOBILITY FROM WORLD TRADE RESOURCE

Toronto	Montreal	Vancouver	Calgary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lies on Northwestern shore of Lake Ontario</li> <li>Population of six million+</li> <li>Fifth-largest urban center in North America</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second largest Canadian city with population of 1.75 million</li> <li>Second largest French-speaking city in the world after Paris</li> <li>Recognized leader in global aerospace industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population of two million+</li> <li>Located in province of British Columbia on the western coast of Canada and close to the U.S. border</li> <li>Canada's third largest urban center</li> <li>A business center with fishing, forestry, manufacturing, mining, and tourism as local economic contributors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the prairies meet the foothills of the Rocky Mountains</li> <li>Alberta's largest city</li> <li>Largest city between Toronto and Vancouver</li> <li>Product of oil economy and is a key economic and tourism center for the region</li> </ul>



# TRENDS & CHALLENGES: WELCOMING WITH A WAIT

## A WELCOMING WORLD, BUT BE READY TO WAIT

### IMMIGRATION EXPECTATIONS

Welcomehome Relocations notes that Canada has a very open immigration policy and supports bringing people in, particularly if they're skilled. Canada is also very welcoming to all people and is by far one of the more tolerant countries culturally and from a lifestyle and lifestyle-choices perspective. This openness continues to grow rapidly especially as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives are at the forefront of conversations globally. Canada is a melting pot that seems to be ahead of the curve in living in harmony (e.g., gay marriage has been legal in Canada since 1995).

Hindering Canada's eagerness to welcome new workers and citizens, however, is one of the lingering effects of the pandemic: talent absences and how when government service office employees contract COVID-19 and must be out of work for days-long quarantines, immigration and assimilation processes for relocating employees are set back. Processes to obtain health insurance and a Social Insurance Number (SIN), which one needs to work in Canada or access government programs and benefits, run behind.

Some processes for relocating employees are being handled in a more streamlined manner thanks to continuing COVID-19 adaptations (i.e., they are being done online). Welcomehome Relocations is able to help out the relocating employee greatly in that area, but if the employee has to go to a government office in person for anything, waiting lines are longer—and sometimes processing times are **a lot** longer. They are currently seeing problems/delays with passports and even with work permits. While these factors are outside of the control of a DSP, Welcomehome Relocations is doing all they can to prepare the relocating employee before they come to Canada, providing an overview of what they need to have ready so that as soon as they show up, they can put things in play.



For McCain Foods' global relocation program, Jeff Houck cites that they feel the fallout from understaffed consulates and embassies, and the overarching immigration and processing times have been hugely disruptive. They have not only been disruptive to the employee but to McCain's projects. Lack of capacity to process is hindering McCain from moving forward with projects that are on a schedule, and if they cannot get the people into their locations, there is a ripple effect and more effort has to go into the project once people are finally there. It can be very disenfranchising for the relocating employee once they finally arrive. This is not only the case in Canada but around the world, and it affects where they are building out greenfield locations.



# TRENDS & CHALLENGES: WELCOMING WITH A WAIT

Despite these challenges, which are not unique to Canada, it has been, and continues to be, a sought-after destination, Welcomehome Relocations states. Political discord in the U.S. has also helped to some degree, as companies are finding it harder to bring talent into the U.S., but the talent wants to come to Canada. Welcomehome Relocations has seen higher volumes in the last year and continues to for the time being.

**A Special Support for Those In Need:** McCain Foods is working with the Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada's (IRCC's) federal initiatives (global pathways through IRCC) and Talent Beyond Boundaries (the tax-exempt registered charity in Canada) as a part of their new formal program focused on hiring refugees and furthering McCain's broader DE&I commitments. The IRCC has lessened the scrutiny for a work permit for Ukrainian refugees, which further helps McCain to reach their goal of number of refugee hires by end of the year. The IRCC has also made it easier for companies like McCain to move any refugees meeting certain qualifications through a swifter process.

## HOUSEHOLD GOODS EXPECTATIONS

Jeff Houck states that a global pain point for McCain Foods' relocations has been the delays of household goods shipments. From the household goods mover perspective, QMM cites that the best thing we can do as an industry to prevent delays for relocating employees is provide as much lead time as possible to movers. Something a month to two months out is fantastic, because it allows QMM to get it in the books, have it surveyed, and get it planned on a driver. This is especially helpful for QMM as a self-hauler, which means that they're doing all the logistical planning and driver assignments "in house." Alternatively, a household goods company that is subcontracting places all their shipments into a van line system and someone else has to deal with the planning. QMM staff are building the trips so gathering the aforementioned specifications in advance lets them optimally build them.



And while climate and inclement weather can cause delays and setbacks when it comes to household goods shipments making it through a snowy climate, Canadian drivers carry chains and are accustomed to those certain times of year when they will literally cover all their wheels in chains in order to make it up and down the mountainous terrain of Canada safely. Luckily, the winter season in Canada coincides with when relocations slow down, so this kind of weather ends up not being too much of a challenge. Companies like QMM can plan for it, and it does not have a domino effect like it would in the summer's busy moving season where if one thing goes a little bit off kilter, it throws off numerous other things.

QMM also notes that a trend the company has noticed is less and less storage and smaller shipments. In the past, oil and gas companies that sent people overseas would have the relocating employee's goods in storage for as much as 10 years. Now, storage is more like 60 days at the top end. Shipment size has gone down with people living with smaller footprints, especially the younger generation who are not as worried about having a large house. Shipments from condos and apartments seem to be more and more common origin and destination locations.



# GROWING INDUSTRIES & INITIATIVES

## BRINGING TALENT TO CANADA, BUT NOT BRINGING THEM TO THE OFFICE?

### TECHNOLOGY & RESOURCE-BASED COMPANIES BALANCE TALENT DEMANDS WITH WORK REQUIREMENTS

While Canada is home to many resource-based companies, like any other country, the biggest area for growth is technology, QMM cites. Many of the larger global players like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon are expanding in Canada, and that's a trend expected to continue. Tech companies are coming in and opening up space in places like Vancouver and Toronto, which are hotbeds for companies of that type because there is a backup workforce in those locations. South of Toronto, the Region of Waterloo is brimming with tech companies. It is one of the fastest-growing tech sectors in the world and second-highest start-up density after Silicon Valley. As the tech industry attracts a younger demographic, the population moving in is younger with smaller moves (as they have less stuff), and they're moving into a downtown condo that has a convenient location, great amenities, great restaurants, and perks for their lifestyle—they're not looking for a five-bedroom house on half an acre. Welomehome Relocations also notes that they continue to see a boom in relocation activity from tech companies as they bring in tech-talented people from Ukraine and Russia.

With the younger workforce comes the prevalence of the work-from-home mentality and lifestyle that many adopted with COVID-19, but younger employees do not want to give up. Roy with QMM has gone to visit a big tech company's office in Toronto where they boast a beautiful, retrofitted building that's full of computers and has the infrastructure to host hundreds of employees—and there's nobody there. The company told him that they've tried to relaunch (e.g., they're having a ping pong tournament and they're giving away pizza) but no one shows up. They're trying to become firmer with the in-office requirement, but there isn't a lot of uptake because people have gotten used to the convenience of working from home.



One positive for relocation-related companies in Canada is that having the country's prevalent resource-based industries as clients means moves will keep happening just based on the nature of the industry requiring people to work in person. Tech companies do not have the same necessity of in-person work as much as a company running a pulp or lumber mill, which can't operate on its own without people onsite.

The household goods industry, which has historically relied on onsite labor and has been old fashioned in the sense that they abide by the

traditional mentality of visible productivity (i.e., wanting to see people in their seats and witness that they are working) may be experiencing a shift. When Roy went in to visit the QMM Vancouver head office recently and no one was there—but there had been so much work that was getting done—it was a real moment of realization that they could grow their business and be successful while not requiring everyone come work out of the same space.



# GROWING INDUSTRIES & INITIATIVES

Welcomehome Relocations notes that the energy sector continues to rebound in Canada as oil has rebounded, but the dynamic of their relocation has changed, and it's creating some challenges. In the past, these companies brought executives and corporate employees into Calgary. Now, they're bringing groups of workers (e.g., 40 relocating employees at a time) into remote towns with small populations—300 people on the smaller end—in Alberta or British Columbia. The companies expect DSPs to find housing, but there is relatively no infrastructure in place to support this inbound population.

When it comes to bringing employees into Canada, one cautionary Jeff at McCain foods has for companies is born from his experience working in the energy industry. He has seen that companies in Canada are happy to hire people from the U.S. because they think the candidates are very similar (and there will be a minimal learning curve and onboarding strain), but when the opportunity recreates itself in the U.S., the person goes back for the job. Companies may be better off to hire employees from locations that are farther away (e.g., Europe, India) because there is likely to be more of a commitment from the employee to remain living and working in Canada.

## HOW TECHNOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY ARE CHANGING SERVICE DELIVERY

### SUSTAINABILITY SUPPORTED THROUGH TECH

Roy at QMM notes that more sustainability inquiries in RFPs and from prospective partners are trending, but there is only so much companies in their position can do at this point in time. While he wishes QMM could say they have some beautiful fuel cell technology, really, at this point, the business is driven by diesel engines. In freight, he notes, they may have tractors running on electric first, but a tractor trailer in Canada will encounter massive stretches where there isn't a charging station, for example. That might not change soon as the cost of building out that infrastructure would be enormous. To operate sustainably, QMM uses a lot of cardboard by nature of their business, and they try to reuse what they can. They also try to burn fuel that causes less pollution when possible, and they have gotten rid of paper. It used to be that inventories would result in pages and pages of paper per home, but now inventories are done on an iPad and saved to the cloud. Virtual surveying (the adoption of which was accelerated thanks to COVID-19) is another example of a reduction in carbon footprint by not putting another car on the road (for a back-and-forth trip) when a survey would require a QMM employee drive to walk physically through a home when they can now instead do it through virtual means.

Nitin with Welcomehome Relocations also points out that the company experienced a big push for virtual services during COVID. Conventional wisdom suggested that it was going to be a great service delivery method going forward because DSPs could continue to save relocating employees time while their specialists went to visit the properties in person and conduct video calls from the site with the relocating employees located elsewhere. Part of their reasoning for the virtual method's longevity was, as an example, if a customer were doing a rental search for housing, the DSP specialist can arrange for 10 appointments over two days, go to the appointments, and do Zoom and FaceTime calls with the relocating employee to showcase the places, saving the employee time to be productive elsewhere. They would then come up with a short list of those properties that the employee liked and the specialist would visit them again, but this time with the employee, reducing the effort to one shorter trip.



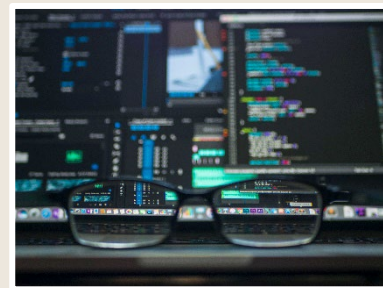
# GROWING INDUSTRIES & INITIATIVES

Unexpectedly and quite the opposite, there seems to be a complete aversion to virtual meetings and a reversal to everyone in Canada now wanting to go back to full accompanied services. Virtual home finding as a post-COVID trend and sustainable initiative (by sparing the carbon impact of relocating employees' flights to visit properties) has not stuck.

Welcomehome Relocations no longer provides paper welcome packages as everything is done through their destination services app for relocating employees to have all of the information they need at their fingertips. They also haven't ordered relocating employees a paper map in approximately five years, and they used to do that as customers preferred them, but they made the push to support going green in this manner instead.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS IN THE FUTURE

Roy with QMM foresees that what may happen in time in the household goods industry is the use of technology efficiencies like AI to read a dispatch report and map the different locations to plan trips. This would replace the current model of a person looking at shipments and discerning what shipments they can fit and still have room for others based on the weight limitations for the trailer.



Jeff at McCain Foods notes that internally they're looking forward to relying more on AI because they have a lean team, and they want time freed up to consult more internally with their relocating employees in order to be consultative and guide the employees through the process before handing them off to a self-serve model.

Jeff believes that RMCs that won't shift into the digitized model are going to be a thing of the past. He sees how AI is an opportunity for RMCs to free up their staffs' time as well. Rather than people writing emails, AI can do the work and speed up the time it takes to email a relocating employee, freeing up the RMC staff for more advisory and consultative functions and conversations with relocating employees that are meaningful and not just about how to complete an expense report.

For any company deploying AI, and for McCain, who is focusing on the importance of their culture and DE&I—things that are human based—we need to make sure to remember that technology is not a substitute for empathy in customer service.

On a final note related to customer service, Jeff also points out that the increased industry consolidation (i.e., RMCs merging) is diminishing choices for corporations to find a partner who is unique. When mergers happen, it weakens a vendor's advantage and uniqueness of what one of the firms used to do. Having a bigger footprint or more people involved doesn't help a corporate mobility stakeholder when they have a unique situation and need someone to *look at it as unique* rather than fit it in a box, he reflects. A larger global footprint and more RMC staff are not going to help provide HR mobility practitioners the needed perspective and flexibility in that situation.



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