

## Business Basics: How to start your business in the Netherlands?

By Suzy Ogé, © Etcetera Consulting

Have a great business idea, but not sure where to start? You are not alone. Starting a business is an enormous challenge. In a foreign country, navigating the maze of bureaucracy, cutting through the red tape, and understanding the business climate can be even more daunting. All things considered, the Netherlands is an attractive country to register your business and the government does try to stimulate new business. Here are three things to keep in mind as you start:

First of all, it is important to **assess the feasibility** of starting or relocating your business in the Netherlands. Identify your target market and research the competition as well as any products or services that could be used as substitutes by your target market. If your business will focus on a global market but rely on local labor or infrastructure, find out how you can best meet your business needs and at what cost. The West Holland Foreign Investment Agency is one of the resources available to assist foreign companies exploring opportunities in the region. The WBII in The Hague offers advice and services for starters in English.

The next step is to **get professional advice** regarding the legal formation of your business. Consult a tax advisor to determine the most appropriate structure for your individual circumstances. If you are establishing a sole proprietorship (eenmanszaak) you can easily handle the obligatory registration yourself at the Chamber of Commerce (Kamer van Koophandel). The tax issues of your business are best handled by a local professional, especially if you do not speak Dutch, as the tax office (Belastingdienst) is unwilling to assist over the phone in other languages.

The third tip for starting a successful business in the Netherlands is to **build a professional network**. Seek out like minded individuals through both social and professional networking opportunities. A few places to start are THIN, The Hague International Network, and AMCHAM, the American Chamber of Commerce. Don't be afraid to attend events that are held in Dutch as well, such as MKB and KVK. Even when you can't entirely understand the content, you always have the opportunity to meet people and connect to the local business community. It is not only who you know, but who knows you and what you do that will determine your success.

Starting and running a business in a foreign country can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of a lifetime. So keep these tips in mind and don't be too intimidated to pursue a new business opportunity. It could be just the right time and just the right place for you.