

Noobie Box



Renske Gosselink,
Co-Founder - Noobie Box

Industry: Marketing & Advertising

Mission statement: "Our mission is to offer all U.S. moms-to-be the Noobie Box experience, inspired by the iconic mommy boxes in Europe and other parts of the world."

Headquarters: New York, USA

Founded: 2015

Six years ago Renske Gosselink, a Dutch lawyer by practice, moved to NYC with her husband. Not being able to practice law in her new city, she decided to look for a new professional adventure to embark on. After joining forces with two Dutch friends in the same situation, she co-founded Noobie Box.

Based on the Dutch tradition of giving boxes filled with free sample baby products to expecting mothers, Renske and her co-founders decided to partner up with U.S. brands and bring their 'Noobie Boxes' to New York moms.

Just two short years after their New York launch, Noobie Box expanded across the country. They're now at a yearly distribution of about 100,000 boxes and continue to double the business each year.

Just how did three first time entrepreneurs from the Netherlands build and scale a winning business idea from NYC to the rest of the USA? Find out in our interview below.

Key takeaways:

- Sometimes great ideas are closer to home than you think
- Pilot test your product to find the right audience
- Influencers and bloggers can help you grow organically
- Rely on your Dutch network to introduce you to bigger brands
- Involve brands early on in the start of your company

Bringing a bit of Dutch culture to NYC

When my co-founders and I first got together, we decided to start brainstorming things that we could bring from the Netherlands to the U.S. There are a lot of products and services going from NYC to the Netherlands, but there's definitely also things missing here. One of them was the free sample baby box that's been a tradition in the Netherlands since the 70s. It's a free gift box with all free products to try out, introducing moms to this new world. It's especially helpful when you're a first time parent. A few stores in the United States give goodie bags when you shop there or when you register, but there was nothing like what we're used to.

Find your audience

We started with a very small pilot in NYC of a couple hundred boxes and got some brands involved. We packed the boxes ourselves and just thought: "Okay, let's see if this works and if it's an idea that moms and parents like." And also brands of course, because it's a sponsor based business we needed the support there as well.

We started very small on purpose because we really wanted to reach the right audience. We started by handing the boxes out at prenatal yoga studios, birthing centers, midwives and OB-GYNs, which helped us gain a lot of personal connections. So it started super locally.

And actually, right away that pilot was a huge success. We got a lot of good feedback and a lot of brands were interested in providing more samples. It was after the success of that small initial pilot that we really decided to start everything.

We found so much support in the American business culture. People were really willing to help and come up with cross promotions to create win wins. Here in the U.S., that culture of supporting entrepreneurs who start something from scratch is so strong, that was really amazing to see.

Harness the power of word of mouth

Word of mouth is very important. This industry in particular is very based on influencers, mom bloggers and baby bloggers. Since it's something free for moms and there was a lot of support from the community, a lot of bloggers found us and wanted to write about us to help spread the word.

That's still the case. But now we're also more actively reaching out to influencers who we like and who resonate with our audience. Now it's a bit more coordinated, but in the beginning that worked out pretty naturally. They wanted to write about us or post a story and we sent them a box in return.

We expanded two years ago across the United States. It's interesting how that happened because we started in New York and then expanded to the north east. Then two or three months after that we expanded across the country, which is sort of crazy, but I think a lot of our marketing is word of mouth. So it went pretty quickly and without a lot of effort.

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Be aware of the differences in business culture

Sometimes you're used to a certain culture of doing business, talking to people, negotiating and starting a business. That was, for us, a harder learning curve in terms of: How do you know if someone you're talking to is really interested? Here I'm talking about the B2B contracts that we had to close to get our first sponsors onboard.

It was harder to read the decisions that were being made from the beginning because, in the Netherlands, the business culture is pretty non hierarchical. People who say something usually also do something. Just getting that business feeling took us a little longer and I had a few expectations that didn't work out in the end.

Look to your Dutch network to connect you with bigger brands

In the beginning, we did a lot through either our network in the Netherlands who connected us with brands here or through someone here in the city who was Dutch and could connect us with someone who was working for a bigger company.

If I look at the earliest contracts that we had with Philips Avent, a big one here in the U.S., we got that contact through the Netherlands. Another one was Vita Coco, which at that time was run by a Dutch connection.

As the time flew, we went to mom and baby shows to connect with people and get to know the industry a bit more. In this way, they also got to know us which made it easier. LinkedIn and colder outreaches were usually not that successful. So we really built it with our initial Dutch connections and through people we met in NYC.

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Don't be afraid to network and get brands involved from the start

I think what would have helped us is if we would have involved brands, business partners or potential business partners more in the process of starting our business. What I mean by that is, we could have said to a couple of larger brands, “Hey, we're starting this, would you be interested in funding us and providing feedback in return for us doing it for free for a while.”

Looking back, we could have done it a little bit smarter, maybe in terms of engaging brands first, because I think that's the American way of doing business but that was not an understanding we had at that point. Because the culture is so focused on helping entrepreneurs start out, we could have taken advantage of that more in the beginning.

Noobie Box founders



Don't just rely on your network for business

We're now seven people. So two co-founders and five other people working with us on a contract basis. Some of them are even contractors who we met through our Dutch network. Some women who have worked with us came here with their husbands and didn't have a job, but definitely had the expertise and wanted to do something. So that's also a niche we found. We're also part of a network called The Wing. It's a network to support women and also offer them coworking spaces. So we were able to meet a lot of freelancers and contractors through that network.

Two things Dutch entrepreneurs should keep in mind

Analyze the needs of American consumers because I think for Europeans that's sometimes a bit harder to understand. Make sure that you really know that there's a need for your type of business here and make sure that you talk to a lot of people about that.

For us, we saw that it's just a huge potential market. I mean, there are 4 million babies being born every year. So, we can still grow quite a bit. We've also now expanded the business to other gift boxes which you can purchase as a customer. This made an additional revenue stream for us coming from customers instead of brands.

Also, make sure you build your network right away and you're just pretty aggressive in that. Reach out to people and go to events because people are generally pretty open, but you really need to build connections to do business.