

# Sana Commerce



**Tim Beyer,**  
CEO North America - Sana Commerce

**Industry:** eCommerce

**Mission statement:** "The shortcut to e-commerce. Sana Commerce is an integrated e-commerce software that uses the business logic and data stored in Microsoft Dynamics and SAP to create beautiful, user-friendly web stores."

**Headquarters:** Rotterdam

**Founded:** 2008

Sana Commerce delivers B2B e-commerce solutions that help wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers to grow online.

We recently interviewed Tim Beyer, who became COO in 2015, making him responsible for the international (expansion) of Sana to over 10 countries, as well as for scaling up it's corporate services (such as finance, HR, and legal) for all Sana offices worldwide.

Tim is now based in NYC, taking on the role of CEO and President (North) America of Sana. As CEO of North America, Tim is driving the initiative to continue Sana's global expansion and to further accelerate and manage growth across the Americas.

Key takeaways:

- Expect sometimes working after-hours due to the differing time zones, this will mostly only be at the beginning
- New York continues to be a really good option for Dutch-based companies because of the direct flights available and the manageable time difference
- A project specialist helped initiate and execute the move
- The U.S. market already accounts for 30% of Sana's sales and revenue
- Hire a lawyer and don't cut the budget for these expenditures, liability is a huge risk in the U.S.
- Learn to adjust to American culture, don't let the obvious similarities fool you into doing otherwise

### Where Sana Commerce began

Sana Commerce was officially formed in 2008, under ISM Group (founded in 1992) - an early pioneer in e-commerce that launched one of the first Dutch webshops in 1997 for Bruna.

After an ISM client at the time wanted to broaden their sales channels, from wholesale to retail, a gap was spotted for e-commerce services that go beyond the realm of B2C.

Enter Sana Commerce, which is now a global leader in enterprise-level e-commerce platform solutions.

### Expanding from the Netherlands to New York

From their early offices in Rotterdam, the Sana sales team began actively reaching out to potential U.S. clients in 2011 by leveraging the family connection of one of their sales reps. The States.

Accounting for the timezone, the team would work after-hours to follow up with potential resale partners, leveraging their network to build an indirect sales system, and successfully securing their first U.S. deal in 2012.

About six months later, after lengthy and drawn-out Visa application processes, Sana officially moved a member of their sales team to the U.S.

### Why New York?

Tim's reasons for Sana's choice of setting up in New York are pragmatic ones. Because the time difference between New York and the Netherlands is only six hours, there was still a small window each day within which the U.S. team could communicate back to the Rotterdam team.

On top of that, New York is geographically well-positioned, with direct flights to Amsterdam, and practical domestic flights, which best accommodated Sana's continued growth in that region.

Finally, Tim remarks how there's "so much going on in New York", particularly in terms of talent, and that the Dutch Consulate played an important role in helping Sana get set up on the ground there.

### Expanding across the U.S.

With initially just one U.S.-based employee working out of an apartment, Sana soon after hired a project specialist in 2014, and steadily began scaling up their on-the-ground team since then. Their first U.S. office was opened in 2016.

By the end of 2018, with their product-market fit firmly in place, and their unique value propositions having been accurately validated, it was time for Tim to set up a more permanent base in New York. At the beginning of 2019, Tim made the move, providing him with the platform to begin rapidly scaling Sana's commercial and operational avenues - moving to a bigger office, facilitating new hires, and continuously growing their client base.

Today, Sana has over 18 full-time employees in New York, and a total of 30 across the U.S.

### Reaping the rewards

Since taking the leap, the U.S. market accounts for 30% of Sana's sales and revenue, with their executive team having now set the ambition of growing this baseline to 50%. Apart from this drastic increase in their bottom line, Sana has also adapted their product offering where necessary - improving it and expanding it to match local and international demand, putting them in the upper tier of their industry.

Overall, the move to New York also played a significant role in cementing Sana's status as a global company, with offices now spread across the world, from Manchester in the UK to Sri Lanka and Australia, with 9 global offices.

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Sana Commerce  
 team

### The practical parts:

#### What were the most important steps taken to prepare for leaving NL?

“If you want to make a strategic move like this, make sure that you incorporate your company properly in the U.S. Hire a lawyer and ensure that your contracts are properly drafted. Don't cut budget for these types of things. Liability risk is big in the U.S.

#### Was there anything that could have helped you make the decision process and/or execution easier?

“Looking back, the process was trial and error - based on a low budget and a lean approach. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this approach, but it does take longer. If you're gonna do funding and expansion, make sure there's someone on board who's done it before, like a team member, executive or advisor that's been through the process of internationalisation, particularly in the U.S.”

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#### What were your main learnings? Did you run into any obstacles?

“We learnt that there are immense differences between U.S. states, especially with things like legal and contractual requirements.”

“Apart from differences between U.S. states, it's also important not to under-emphasise the differences between the U.S. and Europe. The American culture is not the same as European culture. Learn from it and adjust to it. Don't let obvious similarities fool you.”

“Many people think that because they're familiar with American pop culture, and because of the close proximity in language, that the cultural gaps aren't particularly large, and that integrating their business in the U.S. won't be as difficult as expected. In reality, there are immense cultural and other differences between the U.S. and Europe, which are good to take into account before scaling.”

#### What are the biggest cultural differences you've experienced? (In terms of doing business, start-up culture or marketing/PR in the U.S.)

“In the U.S., there's a huge difference in organisational culture within a business. Coming from the Netherlands, the Sana team culture has always been flat, with executives and junior employees comfortably working together in the same room. In the U.S., it's more common for executives to sit in their own corner offices, which reflects a more hierarchical culture in general.”

“Similarly, Dutch people are generally more 'blunt' and direct when it comes to interpersonal communication. I believe we've used this difference to our advantage, finding a nice middle ground between the two sides, and facilitating an environment in which people feel encouraged to give feedback on things, and push back when needed.”

“Overall, we've built a culture that's very open, in line with our core values, and that praises people for good work.”

#### Tim's advice for other entrepreneurs looking to expand to NYC/Boston?

“Lawyers, fiscal matters, and company registration - do it right and spend money on it.

Also, make sure to test the market for as long as you need in a lean and cost-effective way, until you're sure of your product/market fit. Take your time to get basics sorted before scaling. Experience the market first, and tailor your product accordingly. Once you're confident of your product/market fit, don't wait. Move ahead with scaling up as quickly as possible.

Once you're ready to scale up, make sure to first pay attention to your founding team, and that you've got the right decision makers on the ground in the U.S. in order to move fast.

Once you start scaling your team culture, allow a region to differ slightly from the company headquarters. Yes, core values should certainly be implemented, provide the new regions with enough freedom to act independently within global systems and processes.

Most importantly - enjoy the ride. The U.S. is filled with great opportunities, great partners, and great people to work with - have fun and appreciate the learnings along the way.”