

Bynder



Ruben Vermaak,
Head of Learning and Development - Bynder

Industry: Marketing, Software

Mission statement: "Make your brand work for you. Role-based access from anywhere, anytime. Bynder's Digital Asset Management solution helps you do more with your marketing skills."

Headquarters: Amsterdam (Max Euweplein 46, 1017 MB Amsterdam)

Founded: 2013

In a recent interview with Bynder's Head of Learning and Development, Ruben Vermaak, we learnt more about Bynder's global expansion, and some key takeaways about how they entered the U.S. market, and beyond.

Key takeaways:

- Moving to the U.S. is an important decision for B2B businesses
- Bynder acquired a U.S./Belgian startup in Boston called LumaCloud
- Expect a lot of traveling between Holland and your U.S. location at the beginning. You will have to mediate the complexities of new hires, client demands, and global operations, first hand.
- Organization cultural consistency is key, it would be a good idea to fly the new U.S. team members to Amsterdam for training and onboarding
- Hierarchy plays a bigger role in American organizational structures than it does in Holland
- Make sure to have at least one original team member at the U.S. branch helping in the early stages of setting up

What is Bynder?

Initially founded in Amsterdam, Bynder is a digital asset management (DAM) platform that empowers SMEs and enterprise-level businesses alike to safely store digital content in the cloud.

Through their DAM system, Bynder provides their clients with powerful “digital libraries”, empowering key stakeholders with simple and safe access to their marketing team’s digital assets - including images, creative files, video, audio, presentations, documents and more.

In May 2014, Bynder made their global expansion official by setting up their first satellite office in Boston, MA, where they’ve experienced significant growth ever since.

What started as a side project for the digital agency Label A over 9 years ago, has now grown into a global leader in digital asset management - with offices spread across Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Boston, Dubai, London, and Barcelona - and with a team of over 330 people.

Having joined as one of Bynder’s first employees almost six years ago, Ruben Vermaak was the ideal person to offer us more insight into the Bynder story.

Where it all began - why the move to Boston?

Bynder’s motivation to set up an office in Boston was multifaceted. After gaining notable traction across Europe with their digital asset management software, they began to attract more and more clients from the United States.

Being a B2B saas platform, Ruben points out that in the early stages, the Bynder sales process was possible to execute remotely, through video calls and other digital touch points. At a certain stage however, particularly with B2B enterprise sales, it became increasingly necessary for the Bynder team to meet their U.S. prospects and clients in person, putting them in a better position to conduct face-to-face conversations and negotiations.

After a lot of initial back-and-forth trips between the Netherlands and the U.S., whether for meetings with existing clients, or for prospecting meetings with potential new clients, the Bynder team decided to take the leap.

In May 2014, after acquiring a U.S.-Belgian start-up LumaCloud within the same space, Bynder set up their first satellite office in Boston.

Deciding on Boston

Apart from the fact that they’d acquired a startup in Boston, Bynder’s decision to move there was also closely tied to Boston’s geographical location. Being on the U.S.’s East Coast, Boston only has a six hour time difference to the Netherlands, with direct flights running between Amsterdam and Boston.

At the same time, Boston has a leading higher education sector - with over 60 different universities and tertiary institutions within its surrounds. This, in conjunction with it’s rapidly-growing startup scene and entrepreneurial atmosphere, made it a prime location from which Bynder could grow it’s international team - particularly in the talent domains of sales, customer success, marketing, project management and growth.

Getting set up on the ground

After opening their Boston office, Bynder’s management team was doing a lot of traveling between the Netherlands and Boston - all the while mediating the complexities of new hires, client demands, and global operations.

From an administrative point of view, the Bynder team worked closely with local banks to get set up in the U.S., as well as a Dutch firm who helped them to efficiently overcome the challenges of Visas and other practical considerations related to immigration.

Culture as a prerequisite for growth

This led to a decisive moment for Bynder - and one where Ruben had to step in as an early team member in order to strategically steer the Bynder team into a direction that would later help maintain Bynder’s core values across more than six global offices and teams.

By personally moving to Boston for an initial period of six months, Ruben was able to closely align the new U.S. team with the head office in Amsterdam - onboarding new employees, streamlining processes, facilitating new hires, building out teams by sharing vital company and product knowledge, and ultimately laying Bynder’s cultural foundations for the various additional offices and teams that would follow in the coming years.

Especially within the early phases of their scaling across the U.S. (and the rest of the world), Ruben emphasised the importance of cultural consistency. In practice, this meant that many of Bynder’s early team members in the U.S. were flown to Amsterdam to receive training and onboarding, up until the point that their Boston hub was established enough to facilitate such processes internally.

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Ruben poignantly remarks that “It’s not that every office needs the same culture. In fact, each office needs it’s differences to reflect the local context and nuances. Ideally, however, the team culture within any of our offices - whether Boston or Barcelona - should always allow it to feel like a Bynder office for employees visiting from another office.”

The same way that Bynder’s HQ offers their employees unlimited vacation days, remote-working weeks and in-house massages, so do the rest of their global hubs.

What were some of Bynder's biggest challenges when expanding to Boston?

Between the challenges of time zone differences, administrative challenges, legal considerations, and daily operations, Ruben points out that one of Bynder's initial challenges in Boston was mediating between the various cultural differences between the U.S. and the Netherlands/Europe - both with regards to their client relationships, as well as their team culture.

For example, he emphasised how hierarchy is something that is not particularly embedded into Bynder's Dutch operations, or into the Dutch working world (in general). In the U.S., however, many people assume that hierarchy plays a critical role in organisational structure - determining (to an extent) how they engage with other employees, and how they work with-in teams or projects.

What kind of doors were opened for Bynder by being in the U.S.?

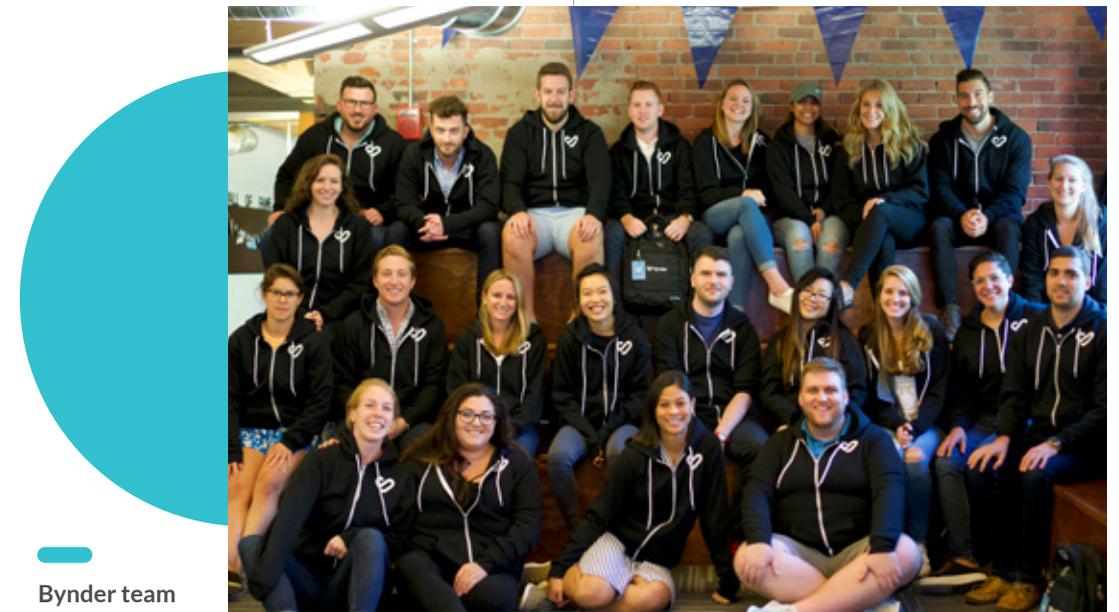
Through being in the U.S. - with its more established market for digital asset management platforms - Bynder was pushed into the "big leagues" of their industry. As a result, they strived continuously to keep their platform at the forefront of the market - constantly improving it and adding new features and use cases. This of course had positive knock-on effects for Bynder's clients around the world, and further cemented their position as a global industry leader.

Beyond this, Bynder's U.S. expansion led to them securing clients within the Fortune 500 league, boosting their business's credibility and growth significantly, whilst also providing the potential to further expand into new markets around the world.

What was Ruben's advice for other entrepreneurs looking to move to the U.S.?

"If you're coming from the Netherlands, make sure to have at least one original team member on the ground, especially during the early stages of setting up in the U.S. This is essential for maintaining the company culture overseas, yet also very practical when it comes to answering the many questions new employees in the U.S. will have."

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Bynder team

For Dutch founders wanting to scale to the U.S., Ruben also highlights the crucial practice of cultural awareness training. He points out that "since we're so familiar with American (pop) culture, news, and businesses - and because of the proximity in language, many Europeans assume that the cultural differences will be minor."

In the same way that a European company expanding to somewhere like Asia or Africa would initiate some form of cultural awareness training for their team, this practice should be implemented when expanding to the U.S. "If you're going to expand your business with an office in the United States, invest in cross-cultural training for both your Dutch/European team members, as well as the new hires made on the other side. This will enable a culture of clear communication, and prevent a lot of frustration along the way".

From a cultural perspective, Ruben points out the challenge of setting up a satellite office with a management team who are not always physically present at the new office - especially in the beginning phases of growing in the U.S.

"If your executive team is not going to be based in the U.S., make sure that they visit as often as possible to engage with new employees and the U.S. team. Satellite office employees can sometimes feel secondary to HQ operations, so it's important to include them in as much activity as possible. That way, local employees really appreciate every meeting, lunch or after-work beer with an executive team member."

Practical tip: Once a month, Bynder has a team hands-on meeting called the Ruby, with each team dialling in through video conferencing from their offices across the world.

Lastly, Ruben advises that if you're going to make the leap - it's good to contact as many local startups and entrepreneurs as possible who have made similar moves, experienced similar challenges, and who can provide you with the practical insights needed to make the move as seamless as possible.