

Innovation Booster



Roos Hofland,
Managing Partner US - Innovation Booster

Industry: Management Consulting

Mission statement: “Boosters provide measurable results at a rapid pace. We work with internal teams and ensure success along the continuum from ideation to commercialization.”

Headquarters: Amsterdam (Johan Huizingalaan 400, 1066 JS Amsterdam)

Founded: 2012

Roos Hofland from Dutch innovation consultancy, Innovation Booster, led the firm’s international expansion across the Atlantic. In a recent interview, she takes us through Innovation Booster’s dream to set up in New York, their triumphs and their inevitable struggles.

Innovation Boosters official slogan is ‘Unleashing your Future Together’. The firm future-proofs organizations with a structured approach to innovation and has worked with a number of big name clients across Europe including Unilever, Allianz and ING.

Their approach goes beyond fast-growth strategies and focuses instead on innovating sustainably. This approach led them to choose New York over San Francisco or LA, as business longevity is a hot-topic across the financial capital’s boardrooms.

Having already successfully set up an office in Athens to service the Southern European market, Innovation Booster had always had their sights set on New York. In late 2017, Managing Partner, Roos Hofland flew out to New York to see what was happening in terms of corporate innovation.

Armed with an entrepreneurial Dutch mentality, Roos spent her first five months in the U.S. chasing down boutique consultancies and corporates for coffee. She had all kinds of conversations to get a strategic insight into the American market, build connections and created an important local network.

After that initial stint, and together with the firm’s founding partners, Innovation Booster decided to give New York the thumbs up. However, the dream to set up in the U.S. was accompanied by a larger global ambition.

“New York is a huge market. If what we do works in New York, then it will work anywhere. That was the big step in a dream that we wanted to pursue.”

Today, Innovation Booster’s doors in New York have been open officially for just over one year. Their client base has expanded across the city, and the move has given them an increased focus on data, leading the consultancy to develop entirely new products to service the U.S. market.

Key takeaways:

- Sustainable innovation as a means of expansion instead of implementing fast-growing solutions
- Preparation strategies are important but allot time for meeting people upon your arrival
- Americans love Europe and are very interested in its innovations. Tell them stories about it for good interpersonal engagement and relation
- American legal grounding is very intricate
- Stop talking and start doing
- “Americans are peaches, soft and easy to connect with on the outside but rock hard in the center“

How did Innovation Booster prepare to take on New York?

Roos arrived in New York solo. “It was just me, myself and I,” she said. Having gotten the go ahead from the firm’s founding partners only five weeks out from boarding the plane, her preparation was limited.

According to Roos, the greatest preparation strategy is simply to get boots on the ground.

“I think a lot of people just talk about preparation; ‘we’re doing this, we’re doing that’. They keep on preparing and preparing rather than just doing. Just going out and talking to people. And I think that was what really helped me. I didn’t have a clue what to expect, because I didn’t have much time to prepare. If you just go and fix it, that’s when you learn.”

By physically being in New York, she could approach her peers and potential clients to shape a valuable understanding of her future milieu. To position Innovation Hub in the city – which has one of the most advanced geographies of innovation labs around the globe – Roos wanted to sit down with everyone she could.

“
Americans love Europe. You have to tell stories about how we’re doing innovation within Europe and they’re definitely interested.”



Innovation Booster team

“I’ve gone to meetups, all kinds of events and literally just asked people what they are doing. So sort of following the trends and I always asked okay; how do you do business here?”

She approached people via LinkedIn, even when there may have been no direct business opportunity. The strategy was solely to connect. To create personal relationships and she found that Americans were more open to this approach than their Dutch counterparts.

“People are willing to make time for you. They’re always interested to just have a conversation, to identify what you do and to understand who lives here in this city.”

Understanding cultural differences is key to success

Whilst the U.S. and Europe are seemingly similar in culture, beliefs and business acumen, success lies in capitalizing on the differences.

“Americans speak English, so you think you understand them. However, it’s a totally different culture. A totally different way of doing business. What drives people here is different. People have different incentives, different things that they find relevant in life, so it makes it for a totally different extreme.”

For some Dutch entrepreneurs, this may mean letting go of their native and very direct approach to business. For Roos, this starts with building a cache of American style soft skills and anecdotes from home.

“Americans love Europe. You have to tell stories about how we’re doing innovation within Europe and they’re definitely interested. What triggers American is to have cool stories, a lot of buzz-words and literally big names in terms of clients.”

Without these building blocks when setting up, developing business relationships and landing clients is, according to Roos, an uphill battle.

Peaches and coconuts

When we asked Roos about the difference between Americans and the Dutch she responds; “I always compare it with peaches and coconuts,” says Roos, referring to the consistency of both fruits.

“It sounds weird but in a sense, Americans are peaches.” Soft and easy to connect with on the outside but rock hard in the center. “They’ll very quickly have a conversation just to chat. Even if you’re in a supermarket, you can easily strike up a conversation with strangers.”

“That’s completely different compared to Europe, in Europe that’s weird, you don’t do that. Europeans are more like a coconut.” With a hard to

penetrate outer shell, Roos considers Europeans – and especially the Dutch – harder to crack.

“But when people trust you, they really trust you. And that’s totally different compared to Americans.

In terms of business, this shines through in terms of acquisition and legal. In Europe, once a connection is established between businesses, things are seen to move quickly and efficiently. Once a project has a defined goal and gets confirmation from both sides, it goes ahead and when it’s done, you get paid.

“Here in the U.S., I need to have four contracts for that.” Roos puts this down to a heavy reliance in the U.S. on legal grounding. “These types of cultural differences have a huge effect on business.”

“You see that literally everywhere in both business and private lives here. People can sue you for everything. That has an impact on how people behave, how to behave at work, how open they are.”

With the majority of even small decisions in the U.S. being passed through legal teams and multiple levels of management, lead times tend to become drawn out.

“It’s a huge difference to how we operate in The Netherlands.”

“
It sounds weird
but in a sense,
Americans are
peaches. Soft and
easy to connect
with on the
outside but rock
hard in the center.”

“That’s the thing you forget. You’re still in a Western country, but Europe and the U.S. are two worlds apart. So understanding what people say and what they really mean, what they really find important, that’s crucial to understanding them.”

Just like in any new venture, mistakes are bound to be made, especially in the first few months. For Roos it was people saying that a meeting went well or that they were interested in Innovation Booster’s products, only to find out that in fact, it had been the exact opposite.

“You can’t really get your head around it. Understanding the different aspects of that culture really comes with time. How you convince American is totally different compared to how you can convince your own people,” she says.

What’s Roos’ advice for entrepreneurs crossing the Atlantic?

When we asked Roos if she had any last words of advice for Dutch entrepreneurs thinking of making the move to New York, she responded: “Stop talking and start doing. There is some preparation involved but just come here with an open mindset, listen very carefully and be very persistent in delivering what you do best. That covers it all!”