

# Wonderkind



**Laurent Scholten,**  
CEO - Wonderkind

**Industry:** Media, Marketing, HR

**Mission statement:** "Wonderkind turns the entire Internet into a recruitment platform. Our AI finds candidates based on their online behavior, and hyper-targets them with the right job ads on social media, Google, and beyond.

**Headquarters:** Amsterdam (H.J.E. Wenckebachweg 123, 1096 AM Amsterdam)

**Founded:** 2016

Wonderkind is a HR tech start-up which turns the entire internet into a recruitment platform by leveraging artificial intelligence. The platform reaches 100% of the market by targeting passive talent to attract the perfect candidate.

Founded in 2016, Wonderkind's three founders saw an opportunity for change in the recruitment industry that only technology could make possible.

Since being named Dutch start-up of the year, Wonderkind has become one of the fastest-growing tech companies in recruitment globally. Today, the company operates in 48 countries around the globe out of their base in Amsterdam.

We sat down with one of Wonderkind's founders, serial entrepreneur Laurent Scholten, to discuss their trans-Atlantic expansion, and ask how their growth strategy in the U.S. market has developed their business.

Key takeaways:

- The U.S. talent market is way more competitive than in Europe, the war on talent has started
- It's fairly easier for tech companies to expand their services to other regions
- Many companies in the U.S. reached out about wanting to test the products first
- Advancements in U.S. market boosts reputation back at home (in Holland)
- Establish yourself in a niche market and beat all of your competitors before entering a larger market. It's easy to see opportunities everywhere, this can be a big mistake
- Speak with as many entrepreneurs as you can
- Get a professional coat to ease the growing pains
- Make sure to get an American phone number, people in the U.S. appreciate and almost prefer domestic landlines
- Be yourself but always try to be extra nice, Dutch tend to be more blunt

### The beginning of Wonderkind

The U.S. talent market is far more competitive than its European counterparts. This fierce environment drives organizations to utilize talent acquisition technologies to get the upper hand. Particularly in major hubs like New York, the heating up of the war on talent is contributing to increase demand for Wonderkind's platform.

However, Wonderkind's international expansion was more organic growth than strategic positioning. Starting off in The Netherlands, they had a few clients who asked for support abroad and as a result, their international expansion began.

"We're a tech company, so for us it's really easy to expand and to service companies in other regions," says Laurent Shoulten, Wonderkind's Chief Strategy Officer and co-founder.

Laurent says that whilst they don't have a physical presence in the U.S., he has to fly between Amsterdam and New York regularly to spread the gospel of Wonderkind.

Instead of bricks-and-mortar, the platform works with resellers who sell on their product and make up a significant portion of U.S.-based revenue. Laurent says that Wonderkind is currently being sold in packages across the country with upwards of 200 people independently peddling their product each day.

"This is something that we just stumbled upon. These companies reached out to us. They said, 'we want to test your product, see how it works and maybe we can use it for our market'. The way we work now in the U.S. is really an example of how you can expand rapidly."

### The U.S. war on talent; an opportunity for entrepreneurs

The Wonderkind platform opens up – and automates – the recruiting process; a highly sought after technology for multinational corporates and niche market enterprises alike. Laurent puts this down in-part to a transition from an employers market to a candidate market in the past 20 years.

"It's getting tougher and tougher. The war on talent has started."

Particularly in the U.S., this has led to a heightened necessity to attract and retain quality workers. "I always knew it was the U.S. for us. They already speak a lot of talent acquisition; not just recruitment or HR, but its talent acquisition. It's employer branding. I knew that the U.S. would be more adaptable to our technology."

In the U.S., Laurent suggests that because of the competitive nature of the talent landscape, employees can easily quit and begin a new job immediately. Whilst this type of fast-pace job market is beginning to become more standard in Europe, employers in the U.S. must be more resilient to stay ahead.

This provided Wonderkind with a large yet niche market and opportunity worth seizing in the U.S. However, beyond the sheer economic opportunity that market presents, servicing the U.S. also builds credibility in a competitive global landscape.

For Wonderkind, their success in the more advanced U.S. market has also boosted their reputation at home.

"Just mentioning that we are active in the U.S., helps us get the clients here in Europe as well. We can name drop companies which we work with in the U.S. That is, I think, one of the best things, aside from revenue & experience, that we can get out of working in the U.S."

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### Start small and enjoy success before scaling internationally

When we asked Laurent about his practical advice for setting up Wonderkind's international operations, he suggested to start off with a global mindset, but to really narrow down on the service offering.

"We always thought internationally. For us, it wasn't switching to a new way of thinking. That's also something which wasn't positive in our first phase. We were thinking too big."

"As an entrepreneur, it's easy to see opportunities everywhere, but this is also a big mistake you can make. And companies ask for a lot of solutions, but you have to stick to the thing that you do best. It's important to make sure that you have a fundamental base and then begin to expand to new markets."

He suggests that once you can beat every competitor in that niche landscape, then go on to the next. "That's a mistake that – whatever I do in the future, whatever company that I will build – I won't make again."

### What else does Laurent suggest for other entrepreneurs considering a U.S. expansion?

"Just talk to as many entrepreneurs as you can, that's what helps," he says.

A trans-Atlantic expansion can be a solitary journey for many entrepreneurs, but the fundamental path is well established. One of the greatest pieces of advice which Laurent points to is leveraging the network which is already established.

"I've talked to everyone. For us, Halve Mean – the public-private partnership which creates a soft-landing for Dutch startups in New York – has been [the basis of] this network. And honestly, a vehicle to meet all these other entrepreneurs, because they can then share the things that they have experienced."

"I just asked them everything that I wanted to know. All the hurdles that they had had. It's the only way that you can make sure that you don't make the same mistakes. They can also introduce you to other companies and clients which they work with."

### Get a professional coach

Laurent also suggests seeking out the help of an experienced professional to help ease the growing pains. Whilst business etiquette in the U.S. may seem to be similar to that of Western Europe, there are many subtle differences which can catch fresh-off-the-boat entrepreneurs out.

Finding someone who can, from a professional angle, take you through the ins and outs of this culture can have a big impact on a successful expansion. He mentions having, through the RVO, received financial aid for his professional development.

“I had some coaching also. You can talk to someone who has been through the same experience; moving to the U.S. So that’s what I did. I also think that’s what it’s about, building your network and accessing New York.”

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### Take out a phone subscription with a New York number

One of Laurent’s dreams in life was to get a U.S. phone number. “I took a True Phone subscription. The first number that I choose was +646, New York’s area code. I always wanted to have that.

“Even if you think the U.S. thinks internationally, they only want to call on domestic landlines. I took one so that U.S. companies can call me whenever they want.”

### Laurent’s last piece of advice is to be a little bit more like an American

Before Wonderkind began operations in the U.S., Laurent thought that Americans were really direct. “But they aren’t like we are in Holland,” he says. “They can be really enthusiastic about your proposition to your face, but think differently. They will tell you that something is really great, even if they don’t actually like it and then they don’t call you back.”

“That’s not something that you’re used to. It’s not bad or good. We in Holland think it’s overwhelmingly nice – but it’s another way of ‘nice’ – and that’s why we think that Americans are always thinking something different.”

“Just be yourself, but always be extra nice in the U.S. When I had my eureka moment, I was in a bar with a colleague of mine and I just said, ‘Can I have a beer?’ and I got in trouble for it. Because in the U.S., you can’t just demand a beer, you have to ask ‘Hey pal’ or ‘hey buddy, I would like to have a beer? Thank you. Really great. Thank you. This is amazing.’”

This is something that, according to Laurent, is not done in Dutch culture. Injecting multiple seemingly unnecessary words into a business transaction – even at a bar – seems to be counterintuitive to a Dutchman, but in the U.S., it’s a part of life.

“That’s one of the biggest lessons I’ve learned; you just have to be yourself but be a little bit more like an American. I even practice it more and more in Dutch. Use more words than you would normally use. Say ‘sorry’ sometimes. And say, buddy, to give it a nice ring. It sounds odd for a Dutch guy but it works.”