

Mr. Prezident



Pieter Bosschaart,
CEO - Mr. Prezident

Industry: Creative Services

Mission statement: "We're experts in graphic design, interaction design, and storytelling. It's important to us that great stories are head. That's why we work together to create stand-out presentations."

Headquarters: Amsterdam (Ambonplein 67, 1094 PW Amsterdam)

Founded: 2011

Amsterdam-based Mr. Prezident proudly believes that they're the beginning of the end of the age of dull presentations.

Mr. Prezident started whilst co-founders Pieter and Paul were in University, when they identified a gap in the creative Dutch market. At first, the company was solely focused on making Prezi presentations, but in the years since graduating, they've created a defined niche adding some flair to the corporate world.

A few years later, Mr. Prezident have grown into a full blown creative presentation agency, offering everything from design services to storyline and structure, with boots on the ground in both France, Singapore and New York.

We recently sat down with Mr. Prezident's Founder Pieter Bosschaart and Head of U.S. Operations Nic van der Kwast to hear some stories of challenges and triumphs from their New York expansion.

Key takeaways:

- The Dutch Consulate in New York helped set Mr. Prezident up with introductions to the right consultants, their first employees and their Business Partner Scan service which was critical for success. "For us it all started with the Dutch Consulate in New York," says Pieter
- Before incorporating in the U.S., Mr. Prezident were advised by Tabs Inc – a consultancy which helps Dutch entrepreneurs set up shop in New York – to start lean and mean; with one man on the ground, servicing all clients from Amsterdam and then build up from there
- Mr. Prezident strategically partners with agencies and leverages their network. According to the pair, this was the single best approach; It allows you to "tackle the problems together. You don't have to come to the U.S. and try and do everything by yourself," says Nic. "That might be your best way to scale."
- Nic's biggest piece of cultural advice is not to blanket the U.S. as a monoculture, but try to understand that there are many worlds within the U.S. You have to, "consider where they come from and what their background is," before doing business

Today Mr. Prezident is on the brink of incorporating as a U.S. company, but continues to operate with one man on the ground. Nic a dual national, is supported by a scaling team in Amsterdam – where the work is done before the day in NY starts – and a growing network around the globe. And sales are growing.

What motivated you to expand to New York City?

Pieter Bosschaart: When we started Mr. Prezident, we were both students and we kicked off creating Prezi presentations. We were one of the first agencies in the world which focused solely on that. We didn't know at the time, until we found out that there's nobody else in the world doing it. And without us asking or pursuing it, we began getting requests from other parts of the world, including the U.S.

The Dutch market and the U.S. market were the first to adapt. Those were the two countries that started asking for professional presentation design. Today, we're still a young agency. But clients are coming from all over the world, and mostly from the U.S. and the Netherlands. So it was a logical decision for us to investigate and see if we can have someone on the ground State Side.

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When did you realize that having somebody physically in the U.S. was a necessity?

Pieter: Four years after founding the company, Paul and I began to graduate and I had the opportunity to use my own company as the subject of my thesis. So, I started investigating our U.S. expansion as my thesis topic. I ended up interviewing some people at the Dutch consulate. Plus, they have this Partner Scan where they see who in the consulate's network is able to help you in the process. For us, it all started with the Dutch Consulate in New York. The partner, Scan, worked immediately for us.

Were there any other helpful networks or services that you used?

Pieter: We did get some legal advice and advice on incorporation from Tabs Inc and Dutch Consulate employee Jacob Willemsen who started his own company consulting Dutch entrepreneurs making the move towards the U.S. He advised us that you can pull this off quite lean and mean for the time being. And as soon as you're ready, we can help you incorporate.

Nic: Essentially, I act as an agent for the agency. We don't necessarily solicit business in the U.S. But what happens is that any inbound sales efforts, or anybody that gives us a call, can get in touch with me and I still manage the account. But all the work still gets produced in the Netherlands. We are on the tipping point of incorporating now, actually within the next few months but we have been able to navigate the U.S. market and build up a very large client base in the U.S. by just using this strategy until now.

Have the steps towards incorporating been difficult, or is it just a lengthy process?

Pieter: It has been a lengthy process, because we were keeping it this way up to the point that we felt we needed to incorporate...which has probably come now. I think the incorporation itself will be very easy. It's not something that we're going to look into ourselves, it's something that we're going to outsource.

Can you tell me what you've experienced in terms of cultural differences in doing business in the Netherlands versus New York City?

Pieter: My general opinion is that whilst there's no language barrier, there's definitely a cultural barrier. In the Netherlands, analysis is often done in collaboration with the client. So the client comes in more often, or there's more meetings with clients. And it's really a joint effort; getting a presentation done with custom design. The Dutch client wants to be involved like that. The U.S. clients always say; "hey, you guys are the experts. Here's the input. Do your thing and check in with me if you have something to show." And that often is quite a difficult thing for us.

Nic: I think there really is a big cultural difference. But people often see America as just one country. But really it's 50 states and each has its own different culture and mentality. For example, imagine the way people grew up in small town Nebraska versus New York City. Naturally, people's expectations and needs are totally different across the spectrum, from industry to region.

So that's something you have to be very considerate of when you're thinking about the American clientele. It's like: Who am I dealing with? Where are they coming from? How do I approach this type of person? Because you can't just say everybody is an American. There's not just one mentality.

What would you say was the number one challenge when you were in the process of expanding to the U.S.?

Nic: It still remains a challenge. We're a foreign company so credibility in the U.S. is a different challenge than if you have a local team. We often get asked if we have a local presence. Do we have a team that can adjust for timezone purposes? Can they address our needs immediately? So that can be a hurdle at times. It's a land of opportunity, for sure. But there's also competition for every client.

Pieter: Because we started out lean and mean in the U.S., it makes it quite difficult to reach the tipping point where you're credible enough to really get those really big accounts. We're waiting for the day when a company says; "here's all of our presentations." That's a different ballgame for us still in the U.S. We're still making important steps to reach that tipping point.

Looking at it from the other side, how would you say your expansion to the U.S. has impacted your business in the Netherlands?

Pieter: It kind of speaks for us that we made the move. We're ambitious. We can achieve even more than the things we've achieved today. So I kind of think of that as a kind of support compared to a lot of the competition and I think clients like it as well. We're a startup agency who's very ambitious and we're trying to conquer the U.S. market as well. It generates the vibe that some of the clients are looking for.

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Nic: We can really address that global market. And that's where the ambition is; to be recognized by large corporations throughout the world as the best go to presentation agency.

Co-founder
 Paul van Hattem
 + Head of US
 Operations Nic
 van der Kwast



Are there any other tips that you would share with an entrepreneur who's thinking of making this move? Anything that really helped you guys?

Pieter: Patience is a big one. Not to pull back immediately if something goes wrong, or if things are not happening fast enough. Because over the past few years, we have been gradually increasing our revenue from the U.S. until we are now reaching a tipping point. You need to have patience for it, invest in it. Until things are really starting to get traction. It takes time.

Nic: The main thing for us is to emphasize the partnership approach. We focused on partnering with other agencies so that they can bring our services to their clients. So through that, like event agencies or major advertising agencies, they can create amazing presentations for their clients. And their clients think those partners are making them, but behind the scenes, we're doing the work. So, yeah, find your niche. Then see who you can partner with and who can also benefit from your niche. Tackle the problems together. You don't have to come to the U.S. and try and do everything by yourself. Reach out and try not to be too greedy. If you can partner with people, that might be your best way to scale.