

Metropolder



Friso Klapwijk,
Director - MetroPolder

Industry: Architecture and planning

Mission statement: "The MetroPolder company revives cities through smart water management, leveraging stored rainwater for cooling, growing, and fostering nature within the city. MetroPolder is a leader in advising, developing, and maintaining smart water storage in cities."

Headquarters: Amsterdam (H.J.E. Wenckebachweg 93, 1096 AL Amsterdam)

Founded: 2017

Friso Klapwijk, founder of Dutch born MetroPolder, a sustainable company which leverages stored rainwater for cooling, growing, and fostering nature within the city, sat down with us to tell us more about how his company is bringing Dutch style sustainability to the Big Apple.

Key takeaways:

- Keep in mind that every U.S. state and even every U.S. city is different, so creating customer segments can be difficult
- A great and largely untapped network are NGOs. We connected with a lot of them to find out what was going on in our field
- Take your time and do not expect to arrive and be in business right away
- Try to get into the local community as much as possible and build relationships
- Get advice from the Dutch Consulate, they really have a good sense of what's happening on the ground

What motivated you to expand to New York City?

Well, I believe our concept and technology can have a huge impact in all cities around the world. It is very hard to imagine yourself working in a different city, a different culture and all the challenges that come with it. But I have always been intrigued by the U.S.

Around the world, you will see some language and culture barriers, which make it hard to connect and really understand what is happening in general. Being in South Africa or the eastern side of the world, you find yourself in a whole different atmosphere. Coming to the U.S., you connect to what is happening here. For our product and the business there is already a lot of legislation and investments in place in New York.

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Could you describe what your expansion strategy was like?

First, I wanted to have a U.S. citizen working here, someone who could really connect to the culture and be able to translate what we are doing to the U.S. market. We then stepped into a visibility stage. It took us some time to really understand and figure out how to get going. The second stage lay in the things we do, like in the building, the pilots and some showcases. And third we needed to show contracts and make it happen. What I am looking for is a sales team and sales partners that will use our technology. We are taking it one step at a time.

What would you say was the most difficult part of this process?

Choosing and focusing.
 You come to the U.S. and see it as a whole, but then you dive into 50 different states. And when you dive a little bit deeper, you see that Washington is a totally different ballgame than Baltimore. And Baltimore is different than New York, and so on.

We wanted to focus on the East Coast, but then realised that it would be way too much. Then we opted for New York, and we still have to focus and consider different options for a number of areas such as Brooklyn or Queens. Customer segments, for example, were the hardest part.

What expertise, services or networks were most helpful for you during this time?

One of the most helpful and interesting things I found is the local NGOs – it is important to understand what goes on and which particular NGOs in this specific field to address. You can really benefit from relationships with NGOs.

Did you reach out to these NGOs directly?

The consulate introduced us to a couple of NGOs. You start by having interesting discussions and from there, you step into giving presentations, pitches, etc. With time, people come up to you to introduce themselves, try to understand what's happening, and you find potential partners. From that, you build interesting relationships from zero. Networking is very important.

We took a lot of detours, but at the same time trying to fit in as much as possible with the local communities. That was the key to our success today.

Something other entrepreneurs see is that, in New York, when you speak to somebody they are ready to introduce you to new people. It is very much about introducing and connecting people. Did you see that as well?

Yes, absolutely! One of the things I love about New York and the U.S. in general is that people are so friendly and forthcoming.

Looking back on the process, is there something you wish you had done differently?

People have always warned me that if I want to do business in the U.S., I really need to take my time and be aware of the fact that it is a big country and very complex in its way. So, I was realistic when stepping in. I knew I could not simply fly to the U.S. twice a year, if I wanted the business to work. I knew I had to be present and get to know the local communities. I think one of the things I did differently that really helped me from the beginning, was hiring a local individual.

Do you have any success stories that you can share with us?

Starting my business in the U.S. really helped me to redefine my European distribution and get things straightened out in Holland. We established our U.S. office this fall in New York and have our first project this year. Probably, by next year, we will have three operational roofs in New York. By 2021, we are aiming at somewhere between five and ten projects. We know things take time... This year I will be signing and negotiating and hopefully, signing more contracts. Profit will be in 2021.

I am really happy with where we are right now.

If a Dutch entrepreneur comes to you and tells you that they're thinking of expanding to New York, what would you tell them?

Try to really connect to the Dutch consulate in New York. They have such a broad network and a realistic view on what is needed. Take your time to meet people and build relationships. People here want to meet you. It's really about "Hey, I want to do business with you!". But that is not going to work in one day.

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Metropolder team