

EVBox



Tim Kreukniet,
VP of Business Development - EVBox

Industry: CleanTech & Energy

Mission statement: "EV charging for commercial and residential spaces

We build future-proof EV charging solutions for every electric car, parking space, and power capacity. See our solutions at work, around homes, offices, retail centers, and highway rest stops."

Headquarters: Amsterdam (Fred. Roeskestraat 115, 1076 EE Amsterdam)

Founded: 2010

Tim Kreukniet is founder of Energy Transition New York, a specialized trans-Atlantic consultancy focused on bringing Dutch Clean Energy technology to the U.S. Since 2013, the company has worked with over 50 Dutch and European entrepreneurs on their North American expansion. Two years in, one of his clients - EVBox - exploded and ever since, Tim's been operating as their VP of Business Development.

Whilst his own journey holds many valuable lessons, it's the insights he's gained from helping his clients which are universally applicable. We recently sat down with Tim to get to know more about his U.S. journey, how to create a soft landing in New York and what his tips are for entrepreneurs looking to make the move.

Key takeaways:

- Instead of trying to bootstrap the U.S. market and take on the whole country from the ground up, find partners who are willing to help you. "This idea that you can do everything by yourself in a market of 360 million people is absurd"
- If you want to be successful in the U.S., you already need quite a solid foundation in Europe, otherwise you are building two ships at once. Plus make sure you understand the U.S. market and don't assume your functioning European product is a good fit in the U.S. The biggest mistake European's make is that they forget to fully Americanize their product.
- Leverage the network you have, but quickly branch out and make moves in your target audience's industry. Most people in New York have been in the same position and they're willing to introduce you to people. "You have to suck it up and just start shaking hands."

You've worked with so many Dutch companies that have expanded to the U.S. What are the most common challenges and pitfalls you've seen?

This idea that you can do everything by yourself in the market of 360 million people is absurd. It depends a bit on your funding structure and business model, but try to find contacts or entities that you can partner with so you can really focus on your product and giving the best experience whilst tapping into the network of others.

Also, doing business in the U.S. is considerably more expensive than doing business in Europe. So from day one, you should be focused on product market fit and actually selling your solution. If you don't have a concrete product or you have something that's not really working in a European setting, then trying to put in the U.S. is a recipe for failure.

Make sure you have a solid business at home. If your product works in Europe, then you already have a steady revenue stream and you don't have to worry about business at home. But if that's not the case then it's too soon to go to the U.S. It's just going to be a long time before you will see any revenue.

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Why did you choose New York specifically as opposed to elsewhere Stateside?

Between DC and Boston there are 60 million people in heavily urban environments. It's only six hours time difference with Europe and for people from Europe, I think the East Coast is more relatable than the West Coast.

The East Coast is also quite clear. When you approach someone it's a yes or no if you will do business together. That transparency on the East Coast helps in order to not waste too much of your time when you're already doing 60 hour weeks.

If you choose San Francisco, then you have to be more independent. With a nine hour time difference, it gets very difficult. The costs of doing business in San Francisco are also 15-25% higher than they are in New York. You have to really consider your motivation and if you really need to be down there.

What were some of the expertise, services or networks that you found most helpful?

Initially, anything organized by the Dutch Consulate or The Netherlands Club in New York is good for networking purposes. They helped me find the right people. The Dutch network also helps quite a bit. And then, quite quickly, you need to move into an industry specific network.

You just have to get out there and meet a bunch of people. Nobody knows you. You have to suck it up and just start shaking hands.

What I did in the beginning at the end of every meeting was to ask, "who are two other people who you think I should know, as I'm starting out in the U.S." That question was extremely helpful and gave me a lot of introductions.

EVBox team



Are New Yorkers accommodating for people who've just arrived? Are they comfortable to make introductions.

The vibe of New York is that everybody's a visitor. So everybody remembers when they started there. When they were nobody. Also because it's so densely packed and everything's so close, people have the mentality to spend time helping others.

Just don't try to get meetings for two hours with people. No one has time for that. Just keep on drinking coffee with as many people as possible and this snowball will start rolling down the hill. It's almost like a shotgun approach.

What would you say are the most important preparation steps you should take before leaving the Netherlands?

I think the biggest mistake most entrepreneurs make is that they think: "I know my product, I can sell it in the U.S.," but they don't think about the U.S. customer. Simple things like Celsius vs. Fahrenheit or Miles vs. Kilometers. It's just sloppy to present stuff in the wrong format. Those are rookie mistakes made by even the most seasoned business people and entrepreneurs. And although the language barrier is not that big, society is different in the U.S. You really have to think about the U.S. customers.

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What are some of the cultural differences you've noticed in terms of doing business in the U.S.?

I think one of the fundamental differences is that people in the U.S. are way better in thinking in processes and little steps. And on the European side, they're way better at thinking what is the end goal.

From a management perspective, with people from the U.S., you have to be very direct and very clear about what they need to do. While if you would do that on the European side, that would be considered micromanaging. If you are able to convey that message properly, then the quality of work in the U.S. is quite high because they want to do just one thing really, really well.

Another crucial difference is that in the U.S., if something breaks down, people expect that they can call a number and someone will take care of it. There's really this service mindset. On the European side, it's more making sure that that product doesn't break down in the first place. It's more about quality. In the U.S., it doesn't matter how big the problem is, it has to be solved right now.

What is the main piece of advice you would give to an entrepreneur who is thinking of taking this step?

You've got to create revenue fast. Focus on one thing that you can sell and sell as much as you can of it. Just focus and sell.