Interview: Bruno Masurel – Head of International Division, Lyon Chamber of Commerce (CCI Lyon), France

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Lyon provides companies with a flamboyant and collaborative environment to develop. Bruno Masurel, Head of the International Division of the local Chamber of Commerce talks about the advantages the region offers and the services the institution has to help companies go international.

Could you please explain the reasons behind the recent restructuring of the Chamber of Commerce?

The reason is very simple: The French Chambers of Commerce are actively involved in the French state financial optimization initiative and our public subsidies consequently decreased by 40 percent over the past three years. This has changed everything and has pushed us to find alternative solutions to be more efficient and reduce expenses. That’s why we decided to merge three local chambers into one: the new chamber encompasses a larger territory and a larger number of companies, but it is more homogeneous.

What are the strengths Lyon has to offer to the rest of the world?

The overall environment that Lyon and its surroundings offer is what makes companies decide to settle here. First and foremost is location as we are located in the heart of Europe and well connected to the rest of the world. Moreover, the environment for innovative companies is very

favorable. Our *pôles de compétitivité* (competitiveness clusters) are thought to foster R&D projects: the objective is to bring together larger companies, small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) and research centers to co-develop innovation and what the industry will need in the future. Our experience tells us that investment in R&D is too high for one company —especially a SME— to bear, hence a shared model is favorable for all actors.

What makes Lyon unique and why?

When we visit other French and European cities, we always receive positive comments about the collaborative model we have been able to develop here and are asked how we make it so successful. I think Lyon has a strong entrepreneurial spirit, as it is a strong industrial region: the region is economically very important to the rest of France and first in many sectors; we may not have many decision centers, but we have always been driven towards innovation. A good example is the textile industry, which over time developed into plastic processing, mechanical engineering as well as manufacturing of technical textiles and fabrics.

How is the Chamber of Commerce helping companies establish themselves?

Our role is to help companies which are already established in the region develop, whether they are constituted with domestic or foreign capital. It is not our role to attract them (ADERLY/INVEST IN LYON, the development Agency jointly created and supported by the Lyon Chamber of Commerce and by the Metropole, is meant for that purpose), but once they are here they become our clients, especially if they are SMEs. Our clients are companies that begin developing abroad after having established themselves on the local market. The first question they need to answer is: is my product able to interest a client abroad? If so, how can we get it there and where in priority? Our role is to help them build up their strategy to get their products to clients abroad.

What markets are companies most interested in?

Our experience indicates that depending on their country of origin, the aim will be different: a Japanese company will come to France to distribute its products or services across Europe, while a German firm may first come to access the French market and, later, to leverage their presence here to expand into other French-speaking regions, such as Northern or Western Africa. As most of the companies are beginners usually the natural first step is to start exporting to close countries. From here, they will be mainly interested in EU markets such as Spain, Italy, Germany, but also in Switzerland. Maybe even in Northern Africa, as it’s an emerging market and they speak French. The second step would be towards Northern Europe, the UK, Eastern Europe and Russia.

Is French-speaking Africa one of the regions offering most potential to your clients?

In the future Africa will definitely be the next exploding market, but despite its enormous potential today the continent is still plagued with political and economic uncertainties, which make local operations challenging. Today Northern Africa —encompassing Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco— is very important, especially Morocco, which is in some ways the gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa.

What kind of services do you offer to help companies in their expansion process?

In addition to local support, we also organize trade missions abroad. Every year, for instance, my colleague sets up a regional pavilion and takes nearly 20 local companies to a the bioscience fair in the US “BIO International Convention” . These are what we call ‘grown-up start-ups’, which need our help: they are born global so the US is their second step to develop. A good example is Flamel Technologies, a specialty pharmaceutical company developing new drug delivery options and formulations. Twenty years ago —when I started working at the Chamber and we helped them— they were only three or four people; today it is a large company with revenues of USD 170-185 million per year.

In addition, we have ‘Novacite’, an initiative dedicated to support innovation-driven companies, which need more support than others, as they are developing products that are not on the market yet. At the beginning it was designed as a hub of companies, now also companies outside the hub are part of the project. Last but not least, with the Grand Lyon region we have a special program called “Pépites”, which every year offers financial support to ten fast-growing companies, mostly in the IT and bioscience sectors. We try to focus on specific destinations, but also on specific sectors.

What are your priorities for the Chamber for the next five years?

We shall continue helping companies develop their export operations. We have noticed that companies that are exporting their products achieve better results and live longer, as they are able to balance their results in a better way. We shall be closer to companies, meet their needs and expectations, and accompany them into new markets. That is why we want to be present at the very starting point when they decide to go international and help them achieve this objective. Lyon provides an incredibly stimulating global environment: everything is available to make companies develop strongly and smoothly, locally as well as in the rest of the world.

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