

## China jump-start

**Conquering the Chinese market is not easy. Fortunately there are many organizations that have the knowledge and experience to guide you in making your first steps on strange soil as successful as possible. One of these organizations is the Benelux Chamber of Commerce. China Success Stories trotted to the office of this Chamber of Commerce to speak with the General Manager, Helmy Koolen.**

The Benelux Chamber of Commerce (or BenCham, as they call themselves) arose out of a merger between the Dutch Business Association and the Belgian Luxembourg Business Association in China. "In 2001 the Benelux Chamber of Commerce started a chapter in Shanghai and in November 2004 we opened a chapter in Beijing. At this moment we have over 550 members. We therefore are strong representatives of the Benelux community in Beijing and Shanghai. The BenCham offers three sorts of activities: business events with regard to doing business in China, information activities for young professionals and workshops for the middle- and small-scale industry. All activities are rich in informative content and, of course, go hand in hand with informal network drinks."

### Membership

"Not only companies from the Benelux can become a member of the BenCham. One can also become an individual member. However, we are stringent. This membership is reserved for those, who are from the Benelux, but work for a non-Benelux company. In those cases exclusively we consider an individual membership. A membership that costs € 450,- a year and provides access to the network and all kinds of other services and activities."

### Activities

"Frequently we connect companies with other companies or authorities. We further organize round table conferences every now and then. And when a new company comes to China to see if they can establish a business here, I search for people who can help them. We have been successful doing so several times. Commercial consultancy advise is where we draw the line though. We have the policy not to compete with the activities of our members, some of whom in some cases do offer business consultancy."

### Fairytales

People often tend to say you have to find a Chinese partner for your business, is that true? "Personally I would definitely reconsider that. Finding a good Chinese partner is no walk in the park. Several of our members have experience in loosing (a lot of) money to a so-called 'partner'. If you don't really need a partner, and you have a good product or service, I wouldn't do it. Sometimes however, you have no choice. For instance if you want to register on tenders from the government, say as an architectural firm, it is often demanded that you have a Chinese partner. Considering the fact that a public tender from the Chinese government is very complicated for foreigners, having a Chinese partner in these cases is no superfluous luxury."

### Chinese mentality

Whether you work with or without a partner, do or don't become a member of BenCham, sometimes one

just has to take a leap of faith. "You will grow accustomed to the country and the Chinese business approach quite easily. I admit, Chinese employees can have difficulties with priorities and they might find it hard to work independently. It is however to their credit that they are flexible, prepared to work hard and they are very kind by nature. Of course, just like in the West, there is always a chance to be swindled, and, like any business anywhere, you can loose some money someday. But don't let that keep you from coming to China. It would be a pity if you miss out certain business deals, just because of the wrong information and exaggerated fear. After all, doing business is all about taking risks."

### **Huanying!**

"In case you do decide to go to China, observe the market well, gather as much information as possible and make use of all your contacts. It can sometimes be frustrating and not everything you touch will instantly turn into gold. But if you are patient and keep the fact in mind that China is a growing and willing market, you will discover a whole new world. Jump in!"

The Benelux Chamber of Commerce is an informal organization consisting of those business representatives of large-, medium- and small sized companies, who have an active interest in developing two-way trade and friendship between our three countries Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and China.

Their mission is to strengthen the business, government and community ties between the Benelux countries and China and to promote the Benelux countries as an integral part of the European Union, renowned for their excellent products and its friendly business climate.

For more information, please go to: <http://www.beneluxcham.org/>

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