

Based on our experience...

# How to start in France?

France is a country with big opportunities, unique markets, and a lot of assets available. However, as in any culture, some points are good to be kept in mind when launching, developing, or expanding your activities in France. Consider the following **7 tips & tricks when doing business in France**.

## 1. Decision-making



**Contrary to the Netherlands, French companies often use a vertical organization structure with specific roles and decision makers.**

Make sure you have contact with the right person: a decision maker or someone who is as high up in the hierarchy as possible, such as a Sales Director or an International Relations Director.

For a decision to be made by a French partner, it is necessary to wait for internal authorisation, and you should be aware that this process can take a significant amount of time. Business meals over lunchtime are a common practice in France, and you should see it as an opportunity to develop a relationship and have a less formal business exchange.

## 2. Business Communication



**The French language is important. Communication is based on trust and needs to be subtle.**

Therefore, investment in the French language is highly appreciated. A website in the French language is a clear and secure way to communicate with your stakeholders, and hiring a French-speaking employee

or a sales representative in France could be beneficial. Also think about recruitment options in Belgium or even Quebec, given they speak French and English/Dutch.

## 3. Anticipation of Administrative Steps



**Anticipate the different administrative, fiscal, and legal steps as early as possible.**

There is a defined process to follow, and it may take longer than expected. Therefore, we advise you to find out in advance the mandatory documents to be provided. For example, a postal address is mandatory to obtain a SIRET number, which itself is essential to apply for a tender. Being accompanied by an experienced partner will also ease the process.

If possible, partner with a French company. Some companies have managed to win important first projects with French companies, and then undertake future works on their own.

[More details on administrative issues in France here. www.expatica.com/fr/working/self-employment/starting-a-business-in-france-445998/](https://www.expatica.com/fr/working/self-employment/starting-a-business-in-france-445998/)

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## 4. Network



**Set-up, develop and maintain your own network.**

The network consists of colleagues, clients, (local) partners to facilitate your expansion. It is advised to visit exhibitions, trade fairs or to contact (local) intermediary organisations. A visit to a trade fair is not only useful for the French market, but also on a European level. Think of venues all over France. For example, *MIPIM* in Cannes for construction, *VivaTech* in Paris for digital, *Pollutec* in Lyon for industry, *Milipol* in Paris for safety and homeland security and the *Salon de l'Agriculture* in Paris. A booth is not necessary, you can come as a visitor and meet other companies and public authorities. Network is an investment and a label of trust. The bigger your network, the easier it will be for you to expand.

## 5. Start small



**Starting a company in France can be very experimental, do it step by step.**

Every sector of activity has its own specificities and regulations. Therefore, we recommend starting small and then expanding based on experience, knowledge, network, and demand; market research can support the establishment of a stable structure. Starting with an e-commerce platform could be a good first step. It will create awareness and a user database – while showcasing your brand or your products. In France, a lot of business is based on trust: the longer you are in business, the more credibility you will have.

## 6. Regional Activities



**In France, every region has its own Investment Promotion Agency. Regions are different and therefore have different demands and sectors they focus on.**

Moreover, there are more and more efforts to decentralize decision-making from the State level (in Paris) to the regional level, which includes more budgetary capacity and more competences. As such, some of France's 13 regions are hubs for specific industries and ecosystems, and entrepreneurial strategies. Choosing a region could also be on the basis of specific transport and logistics infrastructure, such as ports or airports.

**Want to know more?**

The Embassy, the Netherlands Business Council France and the two NBSO's in France (regional offices in Lyon and Nantes) are ready to support you.

For more specific information about French regions, see the following website: [www.investinfrance.fr/fr/les-atouts-des-territoires](http://www.investinfrance.fr/fr/les-atouts-des-territoires)

## 7. Hire & Labour Law



**Employing a French speaking co-worker can be a strategic advantage; however, many laws and regulations must be considered.**

Hiring people in France can be complicated. France is known for its significant protection of employees. These regulations and laws concern working hours, contracts but also remuneration, social contribution, and insurance. Legal advice is recommended to set up and verify employment contracts, ensuring it's in line with all relevant regulations. Underestimating these standards can sometimes lead to long and costly legal procedures.

The above-mentioned ways are indicators. For optimal results, we advise companies to contact an expert on the topic.

**For more information:**

Embassy of the Netherlands in France: [www.nlinfrankrijk.nl](http://www.nlinfrankrijk.nl)  
Netherlands Business Council France: [www.nlbc.fr](http://www.nlbc.fr)

