

The key to creating inbound business to the UK

Turning an idea for a business discussed over coffee into an operational, successful reality in the UK is a rocky road – just ask any startup founder. But with the right support and guidance, that road can be made significantly more comfortable.

Birmingham Enterprise Community (BEC) is an organisation that supports a global community of entrepreneurs and businesses through programmes and initiatives that offer from the concept phase through to creating a startup all the way through to supporting high-growth scaleups.

Maddyness UK spoke to BEC's Daniel Evans, CEO, and Omran Al-Habbal, chief operating officer about launching a business, growing in the UK and BEC's invaluable offering.

How can you launch a business in the UK?

One of the big selling points about the UK is the ease of doing business. Actually registering a company in the UK can take less than 30 minutes and doesn't require the founder to be physically here, meaning that a business can begin the groundwork for launching in the UK before they have got here.

The regulatory requirements for most businesses are not complex either and can be easily navigated with the support of the right experts. The other important factor to explore if you plan on physically being in the UK will be visas. There are several different options again here when it comes to this which have their own benefits/cost to each. In theory, though, you could be active within the UK without having a single person here!

You can also describe the UK business environment as very open – the barriers to accessing communities are not particularly high. The UK government itself offers a wide range of support for businesses entering the UK, such as the Department for International Trade's Global Entrepreneurship Programme.

However, because there is so much going on within the business environment, it can get very confusing regarding who you should be speaking to and what opportunities you should be exploring. Again, that is why finding the right support to help you to understand the ecosystem is really important when launching a business in the UK.

There are, of course, plenty of things you can do yourself, but business today requires us to work as efficiently and effectively as possible, so why waste your time figuring it all out alone when there are people who know the answers you are trying to find?

How does BEC support businesses coming to/launching in the UK?

We provide comprehensive softlanding support – either through our FORWARD Accelerator for those that fit the criteria, or on an individual basis – that gives the business access to the knowledge and opportunities they need to make a successful entry into the UK market.

This includes very tangible support such as setting up the UK entity, a registered address, a co-working space and so on, but also deep intangible support on a strategic level that includes signposting to various opportunities, access to partnerships, access to finance, strategy development and importantly access to a great community of entrepreneurs! With this last point, we are able to ensure that when they arrive in the UK, they have people they know on the ground to connect with.

When we welcomed Sibó into the UK from Costa Rica in August 2020, one of the first things we did was go out for drinks with them and about five other entrepreneurs – one of which later was able to support them with finding accommodation. These social connections are a critical part of helping entrepreneurs who have just arrived in the UK and are just as important as the

business connections we make.

The support that we offer looks different for each business we support. There are overarching themes such as finance, partnerships, legal, product development and talent, but the form that the support takes and the main areas of focus depend on the industry the business works in, their needs & strategic choices.

We've purposely kept our offering flexible to accommodate for this. Once we've gained an understanding of what the business needs, we can then get to work on helping them meet the right people, build the right partnerships, and gain access to the relevant resources, clusters and networks they need to move forward.

As a not for profit organisation, we are also able to offer significant cost savings compared with other options. For example, a business we recently supported from India saved £1,500 on company registration through our support just by having us advise them on which services they actually needed and which were not relevant to them.

How can overseas businesses grow their operation into the UK?

The UK presents huge opportunities for businesses from across the world to support their development into a global business. From world-class talent through to an abundance of support from universities on innovation and R&D, the UK offers businesses everything they need to succeed globally in business.

The UK also carries a global recognition and standard that provides immense benefits to any businesses based in the country beyond simply being able to access the UK as a market. The status of a UK company carries significance when it comes to raising investment and the protection of intellectual property and contract law too, which provides huge benefits to businesses looking to operate internationally.

How do you work with UK universities to support new startups?

We work closely with seven different universities and have links to several more. When businesses come to the UK, they cannot believe the range of support that universities offer to businesses, which includes consultancy from academics, knowledge exchange partnerships, access to university equipment

and research facilities, access to talent and even practical business support. With our connections to these universities, we are able to link them in with the right departments and people to make things happen quickly.

We've had a range of support provided to our businesses, including supply chain mapping and product testing for a sustainable tableware manufacture; consultancy work conducted to develop strategic options for market entry into the UK for a business from India; access to commercial kitchens for a food tech businesses from Latin America; and product development support from artificial intelligence experts for an ecommerce platform, just to name a few examples. This is on top of many student internships, speaking opportunities and networking sessions facilitated by our partnership with universities.

Maddyness, media partner of Birmingham Enterprise Community.

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