

## Niedersachsen: A promising key to Business in Europe

Interview with Steve K. Lanier, President of American World Services and U.S.-  
Representative of Niedersachsen



*Mr. Lanier has been involved in international marketing and business development since 1985. Since founding American World Services in 1993, he has worked with hundreds of companies and organizations developing their international marketing activities and has become a frequent speaker and presenter on export and investment promotion topics speaking at international conferences and industry events in Europe and Asia. Mr. Lanier brings years of expertise in providing personalized strategy development to each of AWS' clients.*

*Previous to founding AWS, he was vice president of commercial marketing and procurement at NCE Group, Inc., a marketing and sales group with revenues of over \$10 million. Mr. Lanier also served as a marketing manager for an export trading company active in the Middle East and as an intern at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, where he worked on export promotion issues. Mr. Lanier has an M.A. in international affairs (with a trade and development concentration) from American University in Washington, D.C., and a B.A. in communication from Bethel University in Minnesota.*

### **Mr. Lanier, how would you describe your role for the state of Niedersachsen?**

„Representative“ sounds quite official, but in reality I am a type of Director of Sales, Marketing and Promotion for the state. Overall, I have two macro-level goals – assist companies in Niedersachsen to export to the US and secondly, identify US companies that desire to invest in Niedersachsen. To achieve these goals we develop marketing strategies, identify well-targeted US companies and contact each to determine their interest in the opportunity that we are offering. This is good, old-fashioned marketing.

### **What can you tell us about the importance of Niedersachsen in a global economy?**

Having a larger land mass than the Netherlands and Switzerland and with a population comparable to Austria or Switzerland, the state is certainly demographically significant. But more importantly, the state has world-class companies that have products, technologies and services that are needed by the world. We have seen the expertise of Niedersachsen's companies and are always impressed with the abilities that they possess. The challenge is to tell the story in a compelling manner and identify the right niche.

### **Would you say that it is of interest to companies in Niedersachsen to engage in the US?**

We have seen openness among Niedersachsen companies to engage in business in the US. However, the US market seems to be less of a priority than in the past. In large part, I believe



that this is due to the economic crisis on both sides. But there remain significant opportunities in the US, and I hope that Niedersachsen companies will continue to explore these opportunities.

**What obstacles are to be expected in such a cross-border commitment? And what are the possibilities of regional economic developers from Hannover and Niedersachsen to support such plans?**

The two challenges are time and money. It takes time and resources to focus on the US market. We tell companies that they should expect at least one year minimum from the beginning of a project until they will start to make sales in the US. This means a real commitment is required. Regional development organizations can assist in this process by providing services and funding so that it is less time and resource intensive. Reducing the risks inherent in international marketing is crucial for small and mid-sized companies and this is what working with a regional development organization can offer to private companies.

**And does it work in the other direction too? Are there US companies that want to expand to Europe, Germany and Niedersachsen?**

Yes, we are identifying companies that desire to expand in Germany and Niedersachsen. The German market is large and prosperous. US companies want to do business here, though we continue to find that the first stop for most US companies is the UK. A company will then look to the continent as second step. I understand this progression from a language and cultural perspective, but not from a strategic business perspective. Perhaps I'm biased, but I believe that Germany should be the first stop for many US companies.

**What expectations do these companies have? And what kind of difficulties are reported by them?**

The majority of US companies that desire to expand in Niedersachsen and Germany want to work with a local partner. The days of building a new greenfield factory are largely over. So the challenge is to identify local partners who will work together with the US companies.

**As last question we want to know, how do you think about the relations between companies located in both continents. Is there a trend that can be identified?**

Relations continue to be good among companies on both sides. However, it does seem that the economic crisis has slowed things down. I hope that this is temporary since even in times of slow growth, there are many opportunities.

Thank you for the interview!