

How the attempts of Swiss SMEs to enter new markets are doomed to failure from the start, in respect of their business promotion efforts.

The entry of Swiss companies into new markets ought to be facilitated by means of assistance from quasi-governmental organizations and consular representations. The following practical example from an Asian country shows that what actually happens is exactly the opposite. The authorities do all they can to ensure that entry into the market is made as difficult as possible. Effort, time and costs are huge to the extent of being totally disproportionate.

Initial Situation:

This example concerns direct investment in a senior citizens' home with an integrated clinic. A five-day trip to Switzerland is planned in order to enable the business partners to obtain an overview of our systems and quality standards. This includes visiting a residential facility and a hospital. The business traveller is a doctor who already has her own clinic.

Act 1.

An application for a visa is made to the Swiss consulate. An enclosure containing an invitation letter from the Swiss company confirming that all costs, such as return air fare and hotel expenses will be paid, must be included with the application.

The application is rejected within a few days on the grounds of the credibility of the doctor concerned! The letter of invitation is stated to be generally irrelevant for the grant of a visa and thus can even be waived.

Act 2.

Opinions are sought from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). SECO goes into the questions only to a partial extent and sends the ball onwards into the court of the EDA. The EDA refers to the possibilities of recourse by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), also observing that the process will take 6 to 8 weeks, and that an up-front payment of SFr. 200.00 will be required.

In addition, enquiries are initiated at Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE). After 14 days of inaction, the concerned official merely acknowledges the query.

Act 3.

At the SEM, a request is made for access to the relevant files for inspection. The intention is to learn how within just a few days, an application for a 5-day business trip was refused though it was accompanied by a letter of invitation. The SEM interprets the request as a measure of recourse.

In a friendly manner, the letter also explains the onward course of the procedure in detail:

1. The application files will be requested by the Swiss diplomatic representation abroad. These will be delivered to the SEM by diplomatic courier.
2. These application files will be forwarded to the cantonal immigration authorities for the purpose of obtaining supplementary clarifications. The immigration authorities will communicate in writing in this connection.
3. After completion of the inland clarifications, the now supplemented dossier will be returned to the SEM for adoption of the decision on the appeal.
4. The process can therefore take up to 10 weeks.

Investigations have revealed that this is unfortunately not an isolated case.

Findings:

This practical example shows how Swiss SMEs have to combat additional bureaucratic problems. It is therefore advisable to enlist the support of specialized companies on-site or to use the services of a company-owned network.

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