



Project background

As a result of the current developments worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Dutch Business Councils in foreign markets have to adapt their services to this 'new situation'. Physical meetings are (still) not recommended in the coming months, traveling is restricted and some (traditional) market opportunities are uncertain.

On the other hand we all know this Pandemic is temporary and there are still many (potential) market opportunities in those foreign markets while at the same time for a large part Dutch companies do depend on those international opportunities.

In order to capitalize on these opportunities (in the future) action has to be taken now. In this context NLinBusiness has started a pilot project to test a digital form of the traditional matchmaking. When proven successful, a Digital Matchmaking Process (and Tool) can generate new business for Dutch exporters already now during this Pandemic and prepare grounds for actual business deals in the near future.

The primary objectives of this project have been:

- Visualize the digital matchmaking customer journey
- Evaluate existing matchmaking tools
- Choose/Develop a scalable tool that can be integrated within the NLinBusiness Platform and used by other NL Business Hubs
- Test the tool in a live case for the Food Non Food Retail market in Colombia





RENOWNED DUTCH EXPORTERS & THE LARGEST COLOMBIAN RETAILERS AND IMPORTERS IN ONE PLACE.

Click to the Event




Logos include: BEEMSTER, VAN DEN TWEEL SUPERMARKET, ZIVIER, 100 YEARS Griffith Foods, CENTURION, squiby FOODS, BOSKA, Morenos, cencosud, grupo éxito, van der Meulen, Trinity, ALKOSTO HiperAhorro, SENZORA bv, STEPS INVISIBLES, OLYMPICA, makro, FrieslandCampina, JAGUAR, Coolfinity, onafoods, digiaca, L A 14, Cloetta, bloomy pro, Kálepa EXPORT & TRAINING, HOME CENTER SODIMAC, PREMIUM CHOICE.

HIGH INTEREST BY COLOMBIAN COMPANIES

AVERAGE MEETINGS PER COMPANY 4-5

SATISFACTION OF DUTCH COMPANIES 94%

+5000 views

60%

OF MEETINGS WITH SALES PERSPECTIVES




Organized by



Generic Learnings

1. Get the concept clear

- Digital missions and digital matchmakings are not exactly the same. Digital missions generally include digital matchmaking, but also other program elements like webinars, live broadcasts and network events. For many participants however, matchmaking is the central component.
- Organizing quality digital matchmakings requires an important effort and time dedication by the organizer, possibly even more than is the case for traditional matchmaking.
- Define and delegate roles within the project team. Make sure all involved persons/staff members know and comply with their responsibilities.

2. Define your business model, before deciding which platform to use

- The business model for your matchmaking event should always be the starting point and leading when making decisions. Break-even should be achieved even in your most moderate scenario. Costs will normally consist of time expenditure (staff of the Hub or its partner) and investment in platform/tools, while the main revenue sources would be participation fees and contributions of possible sponsors.
- Acquiring an expensive platform for all digital matchmaking events is not a “must”. Of course, it helps you organize professional, automated and integrated events but most likely a simpler tool will suffice. When organizing manually, planning would be done by the organizer’s staff and the meetings could also be realized through Microsoft Teams, Google Meet or Zoom. This way, not all information will be centrally available in one place, but costs can be reduced considerably.
- Platforms normally define their pricing based on two variables: 1) Duration of your matchmaking event (one day, a few days, two weeks, etc.) and 2) Number of participants. You can always upgrade along the way, so it would be recommendable to calculate realistically.

3. It might be more difficult to convince Dutch participants than expected

- New ways of identifying Dutch participants have been used successfully in this pilot (network of Service Provider in NL, LinkedIn campaign aimed at “Export Managers Netherlands food and non-food” and direct mailings), however, more experiments should

be done on “how to find unique Dutch `unusual suspect` participants” using innovative tools.

- Dutch participants often have specific wishes and interests so the organizers should determine case by case if these wishes can be met.

4. Assure commitment

- Establishing a participation fee will greatly help to assure quality participation and commitment during the realization of appointments.
- It will probably take some time before Dutch exporters will be familiarized with tariffs of +1.000 EUR for a well-organized digital matchmaking. Until then fees of +/- 500 EUR seem viable.
- In this pilot, we decided to do an experiment with “a fee per planned / effective meeting”. However, in practice it did not work. Dutch companies became much too selective thereby excluding/missing out on valuable appointments.

5. Preparation and continuous support are paramount to arrange meetings

- Fully understanding the interests of the participants is essential, in order to be able to organize, classify each participant by interest, be agile and assertive in scheduling the right meetings.
- It is highly advisable to study and double-check the company profiles and interests to reach out to the right person/counterpart for carrying out the meeting and avoid mismatches.
- For the companies to “find” each other and agree on day/time, the initiative of the matchmaker/staff of Holland House Colombia proved to be crucial.
- During the matchmaking the organizer should always be on top and available to remind and solve technical issues, in order to avoid no-shows.
- If technical issues occur that cannot be solved by the matchmaker, make sure you have a direct line with the helpdesk, e.g. provider of the platform. They should be standby at all times.

6. Make sure privacy is guaranteed

- In a digital matchmaking, the organizer should define which information will be visible for all participants and which information should be visible only for specific counterparts (with

previous authorization). Competitors could be part of the same matchmaking, prices could be included in their presentations, etc. The exact content of the matchmaking should not be visible to others.

7. Three hours of matchmaking per day

- The pilot demonstrated 3 hours of matchmaking per day to be the right amount, so that motivation and concentration were a constant.

8. How to pitch!

- Some of the Dutch participants might have underestimated the dynamics of online presentations and generating an impact in a short first-contact call with experienced international buyers. It is recommended to include a short preparatory session on how to pitch online, custom-made and taking into account tips & tricks for the specific target audience.

Platform Specific Learnings (Eventtia)

9. Use as much features of the platform as possible

- Design a landing page with a clear call to action. By including the logos of the participating companies on your public event page it will stimulate visitors that have not registered yet to do so and get a log-in to access the private part (= the virtual matchmaking stage).
- The registration form can be completely customized by the organizers. Of course, each participant should be able to edit their profile at any moment.
- The main metrics of the event are shown on the platform dashboard: registrations, scheduled meetings, website visits, the average of accepted and rejected meetings, etc.
- Define categories for the participants by sector (retailer, distributor, agent), role (importer or exporter), country (Netherlands or Colombia), interest (buying, selling, partnering), etc.
- Define which categories can match with which categories.
- Networking/matchmaking module allows to:
 - o Modify the meeting slots (= time per meeting)
 - o Block slots in the agenda for all participants
 - o Scheduling meetings at specific & convenient times
 - o Send notifications to the participants regarding their agenda, activities, webinars, etc.
 - o Parallel agendas are possible. You can organize multiple parallel meetings/webinars.

- Matchmaking agendas can be exported in several formats.
- During the matchmaking meetings, the platform allows screen sharing, chat and taking notes. These notes will be sent to the participant's registered e-mail address automatically.
- It is possible to send surveys regarding the agenda, event, prices to all participants.
- The organizers can access and revise the complete event information (all realized matches, profiles, etc.) during 1 more year after realization.

10. Technical learnings

- Set-up of the platform is easier than expected. In only two hours and without any previous knowledge, the complete customization (name of the event, number & characteristics of participants, registration form, visuals, etc.) can be done and implemented. Also, the participants confirmed this user-friendliness.
- Platforms usually register persons instead of companies. If multiple persons in one company participate in the matchmaking, separate profiles – that can be linked – will be generated.
- Test, test, test. Although your staff knows all ins and outs of the platform and a complete technical manual has been delivered to the participants, unexpected issues can and will occur.
- Platforms often send standard notifications on all changes. This can be overwhelming and confusing for some participants. Make sure to program the frequency and type of notifications and personalize communications/e-mails to each participant. Avoid generic e-mails!
- The platform allows the participants to upload company presentations, brochures and videos. Remind the participants to study these materials upfront to ensure effective meetings!