

Bringing foreign companies to Japan - Welcome to our newest member firm!

Liza Robbins
Chief Executive,
Kreston Global



When Communism ended in Czechoslovakia in 1990, Marek Lehocky was in his teens.

“A lot of foreign investment flowed into the country,” Marek told me recently. “Even though I was young, I could help older friends take part in that business and create joint ventures. At one point we even flew to Stockholm to ask Ericsson for a phone dealership - and got it!”

Thirty years later he is still helping foreign companies enter a new market. Except now, the market he helps them enter is not Slovakia, but Japan.

Marek is the founder of ProWorks Group, Kreston Global’s newest member firm.

They help non-Japanese companies register locally, navigate the complex bureaucracy and local business environment and manage their tax, accounting and payroll. They also support foreign companies already operating in Japan.

It’s not as big a geographic jump as it sounds.

Back in Slovakia, Marek worked for a Japanese company for a while. He had already completed an MA in Intercultural Communication and Japanese Studies.

After a job in New York fell through at short notice following 9/11, he started an MBA at the University of Hawaii.

He completed the degree in Japan in 2004 and then stayed on, working for a small private equity group which did inbound business support. He founded ProWorks in 2007.

“I started the company because people think of Japan as a very sophisticated country with a high level of service, but when it comes to accounting, tax and legal issues, it can be the opposite.”

He cites poor banking infrastructure and an abundance of red tape, which can be very difficult for foreigners to understand.

“You need to fill in documents in a specific way in red ink... Japan is still very analog - for example, you can’t open a business

online. And of course there's a language barrier.

"Most companies need a local representative on the ground to help them."

Today, he has a team of nearly 50 people with international backgrounds who are bilingual in Japanese and English, serving a wide array of industries.

They have seen a surge of business in the last two years.

"Japan never really had heavy COVID waves, and morale was such that people continued working from the office almost throughout the pandemic," says Marek. "This was interesting to foreign investors, but they couldn't come themselves, resulting in a lot of work for us."

Joining an international network is the next logical step, especially as many of ProWork's clients need accounting work outside of Japan as well.

ProWorks now joins Kreston's two Japanese audit firms, Ark LLC and Yaesu Audit & Co, as a member of our network.

Marek was attracted to Kreston because when he saw that the member firms had genuine partnerships. Even before joining, ProWorks started cooperating with Kreston firms overseas and has received more than 40 referrals through the network already.

He's also interested in learning best practice from other firms, particularly around IT. This is an area, he notes, where Japanese firms often fall behind but ProWorks needs to stay up-to-date for its foreign clients.

Nowadays, Marek commutes between Japan and Hawaii, where ProWorks has another arm.

But he hopes to make it to our international conference in Madrid later in the year, and invites other members to contact him about business in Japan.

"Despite a weak Yen right now, there's still a lot of money in Japan attracting foreign interest. People can be afraid of Japan because of cultural and language barriers, but this is a very foreigner-friendly country with superb business opportunities and we're excited to help Kreston clients enter this market."

To find out more about ProWorks, you can [visit their website by clicking here](#).

And please do contact Marek directly to give him a warm Kreston welcome.

Warmly,

Liza



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