



The Tokyo government's business support was instrumental in Austrian entrepreneur Mariel Lohninger's successful startup.

Building a Support System for New Business

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government is pulling out all the stops in welcoming new ventures and ensuring their entry is a painless process.

Starting a business can be a daunting task anywhere, but starting a business in a foreign country can require a herculean effort. Myriad rules, regulations and bureaucratic red tape, all in a foreign language, can bog down even the most dedicated entrepreneur. Fortunately, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Japanese government have established several entities to help ease the difficulty facing those from overseas looking to set up ventures in Tokyo.

The Tokyo One-Stop Business Establishment Center (TOSBEC) was launched in April 2015 to help people move quickly through the processes required of business startups. Conveniently located in the

Akasaka area, home to many foreign corporations, it offers one-stop support for preparing all the paperwork necessary for meeting regulations and application procedures, from completing articles of incorporation to company registration, tax, insurance and immigration matters. Everything, including the consultation and advice of the professionals on hand, is free of charge.

Successful film and TV sound service company entrepreneur Austrian Mariel Lohninger is one of many who have made use of the center's expertise. He turned to TOSBEC after struggling to find sources of useful information for his startup. "I was pretty overwhelmed at the beginning, as there are not really any

specific English guides, forums or places where people can learn about doing business in Japan," he said.

Lohninger had specific problems which he needed help with. "My visa is a business manager visa, which requires a number of supporting documents," he said. "TOSBEC not only made sure everything was in order, they supervised the paperwork and gave me clear instructions on what to do when I went to the immigration office to hand in my documents."

Next to TOSBEC is the Business Development Center TOKYO (BDCT), which offers non-Japanese more comprehensive support with startups. At BDCT, experienced business professionals provide help in formulating business plans, assisting in developing startup projects from pre-launch to post-launch and helping companies with everything they need to gain a solid foothold in the Tokyo business scene. They can help with sourcing the professionals—including lawyers, accountants, labor consultants, real estate agents and employment agencies—that new companies need for a smooth launch. They also offer personal support, such as sourcing schools or hospitals with foreign language services. Said Lohninger, who also used the BDCT services, "They even put me in touch with a helpful real estate agent who understood my specific situation and requirements."

The Tokyo government has undertaken several other initiatives that demonstrate a clear and firm commitment to bringing dynamic businesses to the city, including setting up special economic zones with the goal of attracting more than 400 new companies to the city by 2020. In order to further facilitate foreign startups, it has also established an "Access to Tokyo" program, with offices in London, Paris and San Francisco that can quickly respond to inquiries from organizations that are supporting local companies with their overseas business development. Functions include holding seminars for those interested in doing business in Tokyo, participating in local trade shows and identifying promising companies.

The Tokyo government has also launched accelerator programs which invite fintech and other IT startups to Tokyo for three months to develop their business plans and connect with Japanese financial institutions.

As the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 approach, more businesses across a wide range of sectors—such as the emerging fintech field, health care and services, and IT—are expected to look at Tokyo as a potential market. As the above initiatives show, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government continues to take steps that make it easier and smoother for companies to establish themselves in the city.

