

Hampton Hotel at EXPOFORUM,
St Petersburg



Going global

Frank Wagner FCSI of K3 in Berlin, discusses working in foreign markets with **Hildegard Dorn-Petersen** FCSI

Globalisation and how to deal with working internationally are issues that directly impact upon the foodservice industry. They are both a challenge and an opportunity for FCSI consultants, as global foodservice markets are growing rapidly and new and interesting markets are emerging. At the same time, customer behaviour is changing. Many FCSI members have been working internationally for years now. Others want to follow, but are reluctant to take on a risk that is hard to assess.

Frank Wagner FCSI, co-owner and managing director of Berlin-based K3 Kitchen

Planning, has his own success story, which he has been sharing with FCSI colleagues. The new president of the German-Austrian FCSI chapter founded K3 in 1998. Today, he travels the globe from Russia to Africa, from Kazakhstan to Dubai and Bahrain but his first overseas trips were to Russia. "I will never forget my first trip to Moscow on 26 August 2006. I paid \$1,000 for a hotel room and was really scared by my own courage," he says.

Here, Frank gives us an insight into K3's world, as well as giving great tips on how to proceed and pitfalls to avoid doing business abroad.

Hildegard Dorn-Petersen FCSI: There are only a few consultants in Germany implementing international projects in the hospitality industry. What was one of your most interesting recent tasks?

Frank Wagner FCSI: The most challenging was the EXPOFORUM Convention and Exhibition Centre in St Petersburg, Russia. It's the newest and most modern venue for business, cultural and entertainment events of any type and almost any size: exhibitions, conventions, forums, concerts, sporting events, and much more.

We received the initial request in 2009, and signed the contract in 2010. The first problem for investors turned out to be the façade, which won a design competition. It is very attractive to look at, but raised significant fire protection problems.

Within the centre, our projects were a Hilton and a Hampton hotel, with a total of 450 rooms and a convention centre for 7,000 people. We planned and implemented the complete back-of-the-house-concept.

But projects in Russia cannot be measured by German standards. Sudden changes, even during construction, are normal and demand improvisational talent and enormous personal commitment. This time, we

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could not stay backstage only and had to take centre stage to avoid major mistakes.

HDP: Could you give us some examples of that?

FW: The two hotels are located apart from each other, but we were able to connect them through underground tunnels, linking them to a central kitchen to make delivery and transfer of banqueting equipment easier. Other substantial changes were small kitchen units for regeneration (reheating) and distribution, located near the large function hall. To make this happen, wardrobes and other rooms had to be allocated, but it was worth the hassle – otherwise, no multi-course, warm meals could have been served at banquets, an absolute no-go in Russia and in a five-star property as well. Sometimes small changes make things more efficient: in Russia, you can usually expect heavy snowfall, so it's a good idea to have covered or underground delivery zones.

HDP: Do you have any advice for an FCSI consultant considering taking on their first job in a foreign country?

FW: You will never succeed without local support. They know the country, the culture and mentality, and will have their own network of reliable partners.

“People must take pride in their place of work – and ambiance influences the quality of work delivered”

You need helping hands at every stage of the project. Keep in mind two points of view at all times: number one is the investor, who needs to have the right budget for the project. Number two is the guest, who must like the spot afterwards.

Once the place is open, it must run smoothly. If there are McDonald's outlets in the country, go and look at which coffee machines they use – then you can be sure there is service support for them. If we are unsure, we ask our partners from the industry. Sometimes, it is better to put two smaller dishwashers instead of a large machine. If one breaks down, you still have the other one.

Forget about the standards in your home country. Other countries have different building regulations and standards. These should always be followed. I learned from my FCSI colleague Michael Flatow that flexible units and kitchen tables are preferable in foreign countries.

Also, inform yourself about the political situation in the country. Could there be delivery problems for the equipment you are considering, such as new custom rules or pirates on the sea? This does not mean your client should not spend money in a critical area – opening an interesting and innovative place can earn your client good money. But your payment should be guaranteed and free of risk.

HDP: What is the most important thing to consider?

FW: Culture and cultural differences. It starts with work ethics, working hours and



Frank Wagner FCSI is president of FCSI Germany-Austria and managing director of K3 Kitchen Planning in Berlin, Germany: k-drei.de



Hildegard Dorn-Petersen FCSI is director of public relations for FCSI Germany-Austria and owner of Hotel Consult: spa-hotel-consult.de

vacation times. Religious rules cannot be ignored, and during fasting periods like Ramadan a whole country comes to a standstill. For many cultures it is absolutely essential to save face. Educational standards have risen in many areas of the globe. Young people go abroad to study and work and come back well trained and highly educated. You need to listen carefully, before talking. As a matter of fact, I learned from my own experience that major cultural differences even exist between Germany and Austria. I paid an awful lot of money to learn that lesson.

HDP: Let's talk about labour. Are there any special requirements in different countries?

FW: People must take pride in their place of work – they do a better job and handle equipment with more care. Ambiance influences the quality of work delivered. For staff canteens in

Africa we plan a larger space. The warm meal staff get there is likely to be their only meal of the day. We build nice changing rooms and offices with daylight if possible. Not only for the general manager but for the chief engineer as well. The general manager must have his office as close to the guests as possible, not on an upper floor with the best view.

HDP: Most of the hotel projects you are involved with are four or five-star establishments. What does luxury mean to you?

FW: In the eastern part of Europe especially, there are very rich people and big spenders, but money is not everything. Around the globe luxury will be redefined. For me free time outside an aeroplane is a gift. Luxury concerns the guest and workflow, which must be separated. If the hotel has a spa or a pool, a separate elevator is a must – guests wearing bathrobes should not

interfere with convention or restaurant guests.

HDP: What tops the list for you?

FW: Hygiene and security, especially regarding food, are beyond any discussion. I have learned that I must not try to do everything myself, and a good team is a winning team. If there is a firm that can do the job better than our company, we will recommend it – there is enough business around for everybody. We are proud to be members of FCSI as independent consultants.

HDP: K3 has offered professional foodservice design for 16 years, and you have completed projects for hotels, restaurants and shopping malls. What have you learned and what did you enjoy most?

FW: As I travel a great deal, I have to get organised with new technology – from data transfer of revised plans directly to the

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Frank Wagner FCSI's checklist for saving money and making a prosperous business

- Look for domestic partners and local support.
- Value cultural differences.
- Act in the interests of your client and future guests.
- Hygiene and security are a must.
- Check local support services.
- You cannot be an expert on every topic – if you are not sure, recommend an FCSI colleague.
- Insist on advance payment if you do not know your customer.

office in Berlin, to social media and keeping in touch with family, friends, colleagues and customers around the world. We are in a people business, and I really like it. I like to return to Radisson Blu Berlin (the one with the aquarium) and the Spagos Restaurant & Bar in the Park Inn by Radisson Berlin Alexanderplatz. I am fortunate in that I can come back to every outlet, restaurant or hotel we have worked on and be welcomed warmly. ■

K3 managed 450 rooms and 7,000 convention centre seats at the EXPOFORUM

Happy chef, happy clients

Frank Wagner FCSI was interviewed on the premises of Rational in Landsberg am Lech, Germany. He was keynote speaker at a seminar organised by Rational in co-operation with FCSI and VdF to present the EXPOFORUM St. Petersburg and share experiences on international products. The hosts were proud to introduce their new seminar and training centre, and prouder still to present the new SelfCookingCenter with technical and practical details. This innovation has given the company a sensational increase on revenue of 15%, especially in Germany and the rest of Europe. Product manager Gerhard Kramer presented the new manual for consultants and planners, where the smallest technical details are explained. If there was an FCSI award not only for design and innovation, but for demonstrating diligence, Gerhard Kramer would be a great candidate for it.

