

Bomem

The Netherlands was chosen as the logistical centre of Europe.

Canadian operations Bomem is an 18-year-old company that manufactures high performance spectrometers used mainly in research and quality assurance. Most clients are research centres. In Canada, Bomem employs 100 to 150 people. Recently, the company was taken over by a German company, Hartmann & Braun, which produces a complementary range of products.

Dutch activities Bomem's market is worldwide. One-third of the market is in Europe and it quickly became important for Bomem to have a base in Europe for marketing, as well as to support clients after the sale and during installation. All the manufacturing is done in Canada. The products are made to order with a delivery deadline of three to four months for research grade instruments and six weeks for standard laboratory instruments. The office in the Netherlands coordinates all the marketing and after-sale activities in Europe. The company uses agents, except in the United Kingdom and Germany, where Bomem has employed some salespeople directly.

Lessons to be drawn **The Netherlands is the logistical centre for Europe.** The Netherlands was chosen as a European base for logistical reasons – it is somewhat at the centre of Europe, and the first director of Bomem Europe was Dutch.

Communications with Canada work very well. Technical expertise is in Canada and daily contact is necessary between the Dutch and the Canadian operations for technical advice on specifications required by clients and more complex after-sale support. Language is not a problem because everybody in the Dutch office speaks English. The extra cost associated with these transatlantic communications is not a problem, although recently competition has become tighter and costs will probably need to be watched. This communication with the headquarters in Canada is one of the services that Bomem provides for its clients. A large proportion of clients are university laboratories, which find it too expensive to communicate directly with Canada for after-sale support.

Staff exchanges are kept to a minimum. There is no real staff exchange, but engineers go to Canada twice a year to keep abreast of technical developments. In addition, every year a sales meeting is organized in Europe and one in Canada. Systematic staff exchanges would be too expensive for such a small company.

Potential employees may have a negative preconception of Canadian companies. In the Netherlands, Canadian companies are associated with U.S. companies. North American companies have the reputation of being tough in the way they treat their employees. A common preconception is that if an employee makes a mistake he or she can be easily dumped by the company.