

## **Lose the tickets on yourself to make it in the States**

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Memo to Australians planning to do business in the United States: please tread softly.

That's the advice from your countrymen established in the US, as well as a suggestion from an American tech industry insider. The main obstacle, according to one Australian entrepreneur in the US, is often underestimating cultural differences between the two countries.

They are real and can crush you, he warns, especially if your superior skills and talent are misread for arrogance.

"You can't offend them," said Aivars Lode, an Australian who launched a merchant bank in the US to fund software companies. "What is Australia [in the eyes of many Americans]? It is a pissant place that has the population of Florida.

"Australians have the knowledge to be successful but you have to know how to do it. You have Aussies who come to America, think that America is ahead of Australia, start talking about their knowledge, and offend Americans without understanding where they are in the actual cycle of knowledge.

"Australians are well liked but if you don't understand the culture you totally and utterly miss the plot. Your knowledge will be discounted."

Lode is backed by James Boland, a financial consultant to start-ups and the founder of The Australian Community, an American networking group based in New York with over 2000 members. The pro tip: be yourself; be modest (even if you're smarter); be in it for the long haul.

"In my experience, the most successful Australians in the US intrinsically understand how to leverage American fascination with Australia in selling their value proposition," Boland said.

"These Aussies quickly develop deep personal relationships which in turn become the cornerstones of their business relationships.

"On the dark side, our otherwise admirable pragmatism is often lost in translation. The expected roars of laughter may not be as forthcoming when you summarise a risk assessment by stating, 'I'm as nervous as a nudist through a barbed wire fence'."

Lode adds the US is not the super-efficient and best-practice paradise it is sometimes perceived to be, a point that Bruce Bachenheimer, professor of management at Pace University in New York and a board member of MIT Enterprise Forum, believes is dependent on what sector you do business in.

"It's really about the entrepreneurial ecosystem in regions of the US," said Bachenheimer, an American who has studied and worked in Australia. "Silicon Valley, Boston and Cambridge, New York City, the Research Triangle in North Carolina, and Austin Texas. Learn how to plug yourself into that."

Bachenheimer said there's a difference in American perception between doing business with a company in Australia and doing business with an Australian in the US.

"We see an Australian in America pretty much the way we would view anyone else," he said. "All kinds of successful businessmen, entrepreneurs, professors, and doctors are from overseas. If they had the wherewithal to make it to the US and are successful, good on them."

On the positive side, the US business environment is far more forgiving than Australia, according to Lode.

"America is 300 million people in a geographic area the same size as Australia," he said. "In Australia you can't make a mistake. If you do, it is final."