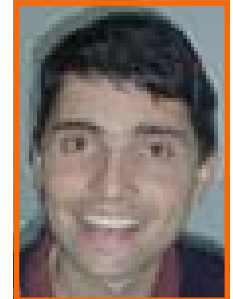




PROVENCE PROMOTION

Interfrench tell us...

France (and Provence!) don't want to sell themselves short



Ale Gicqueau

Is Ale Gicqueau some sort of new colonist, carrying French passions to the other side of the Atlantic? He is CEO of "The Business Bridge" consultants created to help French companies set up in the United States, or American companies set up in the PACA region and he is also the head of the largest Francophone association in the San Francisco region.

As its name suggests, InterFrench would like to create a strong French business community, particularly in California. The association was created in 2000 and now has more than 7 000 members, and is now very closely linked to Provence Promotion. Read on!...

> "French" everywhere!

Ale Gicqueau : I arrived in the United States somewhat by chance, by winning the Green Card lottery in 1995 in my second year in the Paris Ecole Centrale. This lottery is organized by the American government that allowed me to obtain a resident's card, and is awarded to more than 50 000 foreigners per year.

I settled in California and I created the InterFrench Frenchip in September 2000 and SiliconFrench (Silicon Valley InterFrench) in October 2001 with Pierre-Jean Charra, who has since returned to France to start InterFrench France. While InterFrench Frenchip organizes meetings between Francophiles for leisure and relaxation, SiliconFrench (<http://www.siliconfrench.com>) was designed as a purely professional structure.

> An Executive Club... for taste and for profit!

But facing success, and still with the intention of creating a strong link between Francophone companies, we set up an additional structure, the "Executive Club" (<http://www.lexecutiveclub.com>) in November 2002. This chapter brings together francophone CEOs, chairmen and vice-presidents in the San Francisco bay area, in the same friendly spirit as the SiliconFrench meetings.



Initially, apart from bringing French company leaders together, SiliconFrench worked to assure that French diplomas are recognized in the USA, to provide professional and personal support for French people who settle here, and to create some genuine solidarity between its members. With the Executive Club, we help in finding financing for French start-ups or French managers, in bringing together member companies, and the development of export, professional recruitment and commercial development.

At the same time, we are developing a more cultural range of activities such as the Palo Alto French CineClub (<http://www.frenchcineclub.com>) and Frenchip.

Cooperation and solidarity are useful to expatriate French managers because they tend to immerse entirely into the American culture when they arrive and therefore to break their ties with France and the French.

> Values and glasses!

Our values are solidarity, openness, the desire for enterprise, courtesy and complementarity. Our cultural belonging and the mutual search for beneficial cooperation are essential starting points for setting up professional relations within the network. We look on differences between partners as advantages rather than obstacles. We are always receptive to new ideas and diverse and various opinions, we prefer to think of a glass as being half full rather than half empty! For us, cultural differences are opportunities for mutual growth and we make every effort to build up a strong and efficient network within which everyone's success depends on mutual assistance.

> My small family of 70 000!...

The French population in Silicon Vallée is about 1% (about 70 000 between San Francisco and Los Angeles), and it is about 80 000 in New York. But unlike what might be expected and unlike other emigrate nationalities, the Francophone community is highly dispersed, no doubt because French men and women are individualist and capable of integrating very well professionally in the United States without assistance. Nevertheless, Interfrench has succeeded in bringing Francophones together and I must say that they are very pleased with it. Contacts with other French people create obvious links of confidence, particularly due to the common language, culture and "way of life".



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> The Executive Club: the last very trendy Happy Few

At the moment, the Executive Club is the top of the pyramid of francophones involved in business, with 400 French managers with assets of more than ten billion dollars! Our members can access its electronic directory on the web at <http://www.lexecutiveclub.com>. Apart from this directory, we provide a platform of networks that participate in the development of a francophone business community throughout the world. Obviously, French politicians frequently contact us, but we are very prudent in this case ...

> A "highly chaptered" organization

The organization is based on regional chapters, each member being able to sponsor others for which he is responsible. One chapter may be created in each large town in which there are sufficient Francophiles. The members of this chapter hold monthly general meetings and some groups can meet more frequently. Above all, we are an organization whose members are professional Francophiles who respect the initial charter and ethics of InterFrench, particularly through their open and positive attitude.

Volunteer coordinators help to organize these groups and are chosen for their interest in making contacts, their communication skills and their ability to help Francophiles in complete confidentiality. They provide services to members and each manages a group of 10 to 50 persons. They make efforts to present members to each other, so as to maximize the efficiency of contacts. In exchange, coordinators can see what is happening in their region, and are in contact with each other through meetings every two months.

Groups may be created by industrial affinity (biotech, telecom...), through business logic (entrepreneurs, salesmen, etc.), by nationality (Swiss, Moroccan, Indian, etc.), or by University.

> Provence Promotion, is the Alliance keystone

The cooperation with Provence Promotion started during the Home Sweet Home program that we helped to organize in California. Provence Promotion's teams are genuinely very dynamic, as demonstrated by the success encountered during the last three sessions that we organized together. In the past, the problem has not been the brain drain, but the difficulty in getting people to return to France. Provence Promotion was one of the first agencies to understand this need, as demonstrated by about a dozen Silicon Valley companies setting up in Provence. It acts as a genuine gateway!

> Frenchmen and women who love their own country

Having said this, I think that the French are very attached to France, even if the United States and its very flexible legislation are a valuable if not indispensable transit point to boost a career, particularly in some sectors.

The professional life of an entrepreneur or scientist operates in cycles: the USA is a genuine springboard for a career, particularly for young graduates since the USA badly needs good engineers while France is very well endowed with them, due to the high level of its Grandes Ecoles and their fairly low cost.

But when starting a family, the search for a high quality lifestyle brings out their preference for France. The American freedom of enterprise, these fast decisions following a handshake obviously have a downside, particularly in terms of education and health coverage. This is additional to the cultural differences that are even more marked in other American states, and is one of the main reasons why expatriates return home when they have an opportunity to do so.

> Provence, is a bit like the West Coast!

Inhabitants from the West Coast of the USA particularly appreciate Provence because the climate is similar and large towns in PACA look very much like towns in the suburbs of San Francisco or Los Angeles. This is why the different gateway programs between Provence Promotion and InterFrench/Executive Club are very important and are very much appreciated here.