



Professional Member Spotlight



ATTA Professional Member Spotlight

Arie Schreier

Arie Schreier has been a Professional Member with ATTA since 2011. Arie is originally from Israel, and he has 20+ years of experience in operational management of foreign-owned companies in China.

Arie is the General Manager of PTL Group China. He is based in the company's HQ in Shanghai; from there, he manages the entire company's operation at all of its branches across China, the UK, and Israel.

Between 1997-1999 Arie served as the Israeli Consul at the Israeli Embassy in Beijing.

Arie joined PTL Group in 2005 when the company's workforce totaled 20 people. Since then, Arie has fulfilled several roles such as COO, VP Sales, and Marketing, and in 2014 he was appointed as the General Manager of PTL Group.

Over the years, PTL Group's ever-growing client base has evolved considerably. It includes many young and dynamic start-ups who have joined the large industrial companies that have been with the company from the very beginning. Putting it in numbers, in more than two decades of operation, PTL Group has supported more than 300 projects in China and has more than 300 employees on its payroll.

Arie holds MBA in Entrepreneurship and Innovation from Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia, another master's degree in Public Administration from Tel Aviv University, and a BA in Political Science and International Relations from Tel Aviv University.

Under his leadership, PTL Group won the ATTA's 2011 "Best Turnaround Award" and ATTA's 2012 "Best Transformation Award."

We were pleased to interview Arie Schreier and below are excerpts and commentary of the questions.

1. Can you tell me more about what does PTL Group China do and what are its service values?

PTL Group provides management and operational support for international companies throughout their market entry and growth stages in China. Our team in China acts as our clients' local management and execution arm in a wide range of disciplines.

PTL Group allows its clients to outsource multi-disciplinary business services in order to manage a stable and well-functioning operation in China. Our services respond to a wide range of needs, including HR services in China, financial services in China, supply chain management, payroll management, manufacturing, and much more.

The leading value that guides our service team is to enable our international clients' full control of their entire business operations in China. In order to achieve a high level of transparency and control, we have developed supervision mechanisms over the commercial, administrative and business activity of foreign-owned entities in China.

2. You have been with PTL Group China for 16 Years. Please tell me what brought you here, how have you personally contributed to the business development, and what changes have you seen since then?

I have joined PTL Group after 12 years of diplomatic service activity and with a great passion for China.

One activity that I am happy and proud of initiating is developing a new service that is crucial for a stable and sustainable business operation in China. We call it **Operational Audit**, and this is a perfect example of the multi-disciplinary approach that we advocate. It is a comprehensive "health check" that inspects every department in the company to point out risky areas where further checks could be conducted and expose issues embedded into common practice. It then suggests tools that can enhance the synchronization between departments and improve their performance. In extreme cases and based on the operational audit findings, we perform a complete turnaround and restructuring of the entire company. Developing this service skill set allowed us to join ATTA and win two awards in two years consecutively.

In addition, since I joined the company, I have witnessed the company growing steadily and expanding its service providers' partner network. This observation led me to establish the **PTL Group's Partners' Network**, which allows service providers and experts to share the expertise they have accumulated after many years of operating in China within their respective fields. The network cultivates ongoing communication via a dedicated WeChat group, and we meet 4-5 times a year in special events that we host.

3. Please share with us some of the achievements you think have helped PTL Group to be what it is today? Who are your competitors, and what values do you bring that differentiate you from others in the competitive landscape?

As a lucrative market, China is abundant with service providers committed to helping international companies fulfill their potential in China. But these companies normally specialize in merely one or two business aspects. Companies that offer a wide variety of in-house services are hard to find. This is precisely what we do at PTL Group. After 21 years of operation in China, we have developed a status as a multi-disciplinary service provider. Unlike niche businesses with a single area of expertise, we provide services regarding diverse business aspects and focus on their integration. We zoom in to optimize HR, finance, logistics, and manufacturing needs and zoom out to coordinate them seamlessly under one roof. We provide our clients with a dual approach that penetrates into each aspect of their business and, at the same time, enables a birds' eye-view of their China operation. This is how we differentiate ourselves.

We are also very proud of having a vast network of partnerships. Sometimes we even partner up with service providers that could be considered competitors, but instead, we choose to cooperate with them on areas where our services do not overlap. Due to our wide range of services, we are able to collaborate with other service providers that are providing parallel services during different stages of the foreign company's operation in China.



4. You have worked in the Consulting and Business Advisory Industry for many years. What are the changes you have seen in China since you joined early in your career? Have you seen any shifts or transformation initiatives being deployed that you believe are critical and valuable for future growth in China?

The business reality that emerged since the Coronavirus outbreak has created a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, while other nations struggled to pick up the pieces, China was the only market to bounce back and demonstrate growth. On the other hand, this new era of doing business in China confronts companies with new challenges, such as travel restrictions and disruptions in the global supply chain. So how can companies fulfill China's market potential amidst these complexities? By outsourcing services in China. Back-office outsourcing is the most responsible and transparent way of doing business in China when you can't physically be in China.

5. What do you hope to achieve in the next 10 years of your career as the general manager of PTL Group?

While in some countries there is a consensus about us being a leading service provider in China, we hope to gain such a reputation in other markets as well. The US market is obviously very interesting for us. Despite the current political atmosphere between China and the US, we firmly believe that the bilateral business relations will last and even become tighter than ever. Since travel restrictions and other barriers might make it harder for American companies to operate in China, I hope that our role as a service provider will become crucial for the success of American and European SMEs seeking to come to China.

6. Over the years, you have advised hundreds of foreign companies. What do you think is critical that companies entering the Chinese market do to optimize success and growth potential in China? What tips can you share with them and with companies already operating here and wish to scale?

Managing a business in a different country is never simple, let alone in China. This is why foreign companies arriving in China should strive to make the unstable as stable as possible.

One of the most “typical symptoms” that international companies experience during their China market entry are lapses in communication. A lack of transparency between the HQ and the local team in China, a shortage of knowledge, or proper understanding means that any problems arising in China cannot be easily resolved. The lesson then to be learnt is not to face operational challenges alone! Instead, turn to a professional and experienced local third party who could plug these gaps altogether.

Another tip I can share is to join online groups and follow relevant blogs or forums. There are so many online hubs, be they on social media or websites that have amassed extremely useful information. They are an infinite resource of real-life knowledge that has been accumulated over years of international companies doing business in China.

Lastly, I want to address a common misunderstanding – Over the last years setting up an entity in China has become much easier, so many foreign companies are tempted to take this step. However, setting up an entity in China is not as easy as it may sound. This is a major decision that comes with serious liabilities. But there is no need to rush into setting up a company before you know where your market is, before you assemble a team that can support your business, and before you have enough business activity to justify opening a subsidiary in China. It’s worth knowing that most business activities in China can be accomplished without a local entity by leveraging outsourced services, such as recruiting employees, importing goods into China and storing them in a warehouse, collecting payments, invoicing, accounting and reporting, and much more.

7. What are the other industry groups you are active in? What values do they bring to your work and development?

One great forum I am active in is **China Business Circles**. This is a cross-industry forum and community for managers in international companies operating in China. China Business Circles was created for HR, Logistics, Business, and Financial managers to connect, share work-related experiences, learn and consult with peers through online and offline meetings and special WeChat and WhatsApp groups.

Other important forums I am naturally involved in are Amcham, Britcham, Austcham and Ischam (Israeli Chamber of Commerce in China).

8. What most motivates you to do what you do? What are you most excited or passionate about? What are the goals you most want to accomplish in your work?

Let's start with what frustrates me: despite the enormous amount of knowledge of doing business in China, we still see, after so many years, companies repeating the same mistakes over and over again. My motivation is to be there for these companies, hopefully before they make these mistakes. If it's already too late, I hope to help them get out of the trouble they have put themselves in in the first place.

I am excited when we manage to impact the fate of a company in China by averting a potential disaster awaits the company and getting them on the right path to success.

9. Why did you join ATTA and what was your motivation to be part of ATTA?

We joined ATTA after our first turnaround & transformation projects, a field we specialize in. In 2011 & 2012, we were awarded ATTA's 1st Prize for submitting a successful business transformation project regarding a foreign-owned China joint venture. I enjoy being a part of this distinguished organization. The accumulated experience that ATTA members possess is priceless, and each new member brings a wealth of knowledge. In that sense, ATTA brings us many opportunities to enrich each other with new stories and new valuable information, share expertise and together support companies in distress and get them to a better place.

10. What do you do beside work? Can you also tell us more about your family?

About a decade ago, I founded Kehilat Shanghai. It is the city's progressive Jewish community, which had more than 200 community members at its peak. Kehilat Shanghai's purpose is to ensure that Jewish people from all backgrounds find a home away from home in Shanghai to celebrate Jewish culture and traditions in a progressive spirit.

Also, it's not entirely unrelated to work, but part of PTL Group's mission is to champion foreign technologies and promote them where possible for the betterment of society as a whole. One recent example is sponsoring the inauguration ceremony for the "Wheelchairs of Hope" initiative; a sophisticated wheelchair that aims to help children with mobility impairments. Besides sponsoring, my talented 10-year-old son also donated to the event by putting up his beautiful artworks for a special auction to raise money for the wheelchairs.

Arie, we appreciate your time and support to ATTA. It is great to hear, learn and exchange with you on this.

Thanks again for the great response and for this sharing.