

Where in the world?

Jane Russell CA, investor and consultant relations manager with Comgest in Paris.

BY PAUL M SOUTHWICK CA



What is your current position?

Comgest is an independent, international asset management group with entities in Paris, Dublin, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Singapore, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam and Boston. It's a boutique asset management group specialising in quality growth-listed equities.

My responsibilities include managing client relationships and developing new business in the United Kingdom and coordinating relationships with global investment consultants.

How did you find yourself there?

I bought a plane ticket for Paris in 2007 and rolled the dice! I'd always wanted to become fluent in French and decided to take the plunge by living and working in France. I found a job straight away in asset management (arriving pre-financial crisis definitely helped). Ten years later I'm still here.

What does your typical day look like?

No day looks the same. I travel a lot, as my role involves managing relationships with our clients in the United Kingdom, as well as global consultants. I'm typically in London for one to two days every fortnight, and in the US every few months.

When I'm in the office in Paris, I catch

up on emails and have lots of internal meetings. Working hours in Paris are quite different - we start later but finish later, and take a real lunch break.

My work involves face-to-face meetings with institutional investors (pension funds, insurers, foundations, endowments, wealth managers, and family offices) and investment consultants discussing a specific investment product. We typically describe the portfolio's composition, its performance relative to benchmarks, and our outlook for the markets/macro environment.

An accounting background is beneficial, particularly when facing sophisticated investors. The challenge is to ensure that we adapt the level of detail and focus for each investor - it's about knowing your clients and addressing their key concerns.

What do you like most and least?

I like the variety in my role and the fact that it's client-facing, so I'm not always sitting at my desk.

What I like least is that frequent travel means lots of backlog to catch up on when I'm back in the office - I don't have much down time to dedicate to thinking ahead.

When you chose accountancy, where did you expect to end up?

I had no idea but I thought it would be a good starting point no matter where I ended up, and I was right.

I'll never forget a well-known portfolio manager telling me: "Give me someone who can read a balance sheet any day!"

Although I'm now working in the field of relationship management and business development, my accountancy background serves me well constantly.

Would you recommend an overseas posting?

Definitely. Although I'm not sure my parents agree - you might just end up staying overseas.

Even though it may not be everyone's cup of tea, you experience far more than you could ever imagine.

You have great life learning experiences of different cultures and languages, enjoying different foods.

You come out having experienced something unique and make friendships, some of which remain with you long after you leave and move on to another country. ●