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10 tips for export success in China

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When doing business in China, the ability to navigate cross-cultural issues is just as important as the goods and services you bring to the marketplace. This is true whether your company is just now considering the China market, recently gained its first sale or maintains an in-country presence.

Mia Doucet is the Managing Director of the Sales Development Institute and the author of *China in Motion*, a book that has assisted hundreds of Canadians in refining their export business strategy to address the cross-cultural and language challenges that affect productivity and profitability in Asia. The following tips, extracted from Doucet's award-winning book, will keep you from making some costly mistakes.



Tip #1: The Chinese need for respect and acknowledgement governs all business communications, not just negotiations.

Show respect by keeping some distance. Allow one person to speak at a time.

Tip #2: Focus on building the relationship before talking business.

Asians want to do business with people they trust. But that trust has to be earned by doing things right.

Tip #3: Respect face.

Never argue or voice a difference of opinion with anyone—even a member of your own team. Never make the other person wrong. Never say "no" directly, as that is considered rude and arrogant.

Tip #4: Speak clearly because most Asians understand less spoken English than we think they do.

Smiles and nods have more to do with respect, protocol and saving face than getting your meaning. Talk in short sentences. Listen more than you speak. Pause between sentences. Find four or five easy ways to say the same thing. Never ask a question that can be answered with a simple yes. Avoid all slang. Skip humour altogether.

Tip #5: Manage the way you present written information.

Document everything in writing and in detail. Present your ideas in stages. Write clearly, using plain English text. In order to appeal to the visual bias of many Asians, use sketches, charts and diagrams.

Tip #6: Prepare for every interaction.

A lack of preparedness can cause loss of face and trust; do not give or expect to receive partial answers from your Chinese colleagues, as that is considered offensive. Do not count on your ability to wing it.

Tip #7: Make sure your facts are 100% accurate in every detail, or you will lose credibility.

Do not present an idea or theory that has not been fully researched, proven, or studied beforehand. If you make a mistake, you are not to be trusted.

Tip #8: Never pressure your Asian colleagues for a decision.

To speed up the decision process, slow down. Start from the beginning and work through to a solution in a logical, step-by-step fashion.

Tip #9: In negotiations, consider yourself a babe in the woods.

Patience and a bit of humility will go a long way, as the process will be anything but smooth. Do expect your highs and lows to be like the spikes on a stock market chart. All the above tips will ensure a more successful outcome.

Tip #10: Avoid costly customer service gaffes.

It takes careful training and preparation to bridge the cross-cultural gap. The people on your team who communicate with your Asian customers, suppliers and local staff need to be just as aware of cross-cultural sensitivities as the business traveler who brings home the contract. Most of us are not by nature sensitive to the differences in culture—we have to be taught.

For more information, go to www.chinainmotion.com, or contact Mia. Doucet, e-mail: mia@chinainmotion.com.

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