TOM HOPKINS
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Beware of Unique Cultural Needs

by Tom Hopkins

If you do business with people from cultural groups different than your own, you would be wise to invest some time understanding their cultures as well as their needs in terms of your products and services. You may not necessarily be doing business with people in another country, but with those from other countries who have relocated near your place of business. If you want their business, you have to understand their needs on many levels.

Here are a few things you need to be aware of when dealing with clients from different cultures than your own.

* Be patient when building trust and establishing relationships. People from countries other than the U.S. generally need more time to build trust. It is important to observe a great degree of formality when becoming acquainted.

* Speak more slowly than you normally do, but don't raise your voice because you think the other person can't understand you. Volume doesn't usually increase comprehension. Also, don't speak down to them as if they are children.

* Avoid slang, buzzwords, idioms, jargon, and lingo. These can all be easily misunderstood by those who may not speak your language as their primary language. Just use simple terms until you can get an idea of what level of your language they understand.

* If you're using an interpreter, make sure the interpreter meets with the people for whom they are interpreting before you actually begin to sell them your product or service. This will allow the interpreter to learn the language patterns, special terminology, and numbers used by the people they're translating for. If your business sells to other businesses, you need to be certain you are both using the same product identifiers or other codes specific to that company or industry to ensure that you both understand the needs and terms of any transaction.

* Pay attention to nonverbal interaction cues. The word yes or an affirmative nod often means, “Yes, I hear you,” in Asian cultures, not, “Yes, I agree.” If you see a nod and move on to closing the sale, you may frighten them off with what appears to them as over-zealousness.

Culture is as much an influence on people as their personal experiences, so knowing about your clients' customs and traditions only makes sense. That way, neither you nor your client will be made to feel uncomfortable and selling can be done.

If you need or want to find out about another culture, some wonderful resources are available to steer you in the right direction and tell you everything you need to know. Spend some time browsing through your local library or bookstore for a resource that works for you. Or go online and look under the topics of “protocol,” “diversity,” or “cultural awareness.”

Depending on your product and how much business you might be doing with clients from cultures unfamiliar to you, a good source we found is: http://www.usaprotocol.com/ . This is

where you'll find the handbook for U.S. diplomats on proper etiquette and protocol for engagements with people from diverse cultures around the world.
Remember: Knowledge is power.

TIMELY TIP

Email Your Business Card

If you use Microsoft Outlook as your email program, here's a great way to send all of the information from your business card to potential clients, existing clients and those who might refer business to you. It's easy.

Simply go to your Contacts list. Click on "New." Enter your information and save it. Then, re-open that listing and under the "File" menu, select "Save As." At the bottom of the window under "Save as Type" use the drop-down feature and select "vCard Files." Save this file somewhere easily accessible such as on your Desktop. When sending an email message, simply attach the vCard.

For your recipients who also use Outlook, they can simply click on the card and it will open a new contact in their file. All they need do is hit "save" and they have all of your information without having to manually enter anything.

Using this feature shows clients that you're considerate of their time, efficient and readily available to them. You can even include a nice message in the notes area such as the times of day you are most available, the time zone in which you reside, or a simple "Thank you for the opportunity to serve your needs."

Another idea is to include your company slogan or mission statement or even a brief description of your most popular product in notes area of your contact information.

Beware not to include anything in your contact card that may become dated or offers that might expire. Assume your recipient will keep your information on file for a very long time.

CLOSE OF THE MONTH

The "I want to think it over" Close

You are guaranteed to hear a variation of the phrase “I want to think it over” from one out of every five new clients. Some of the variations you'll hear may be:
“I want to sleep on it.”
“I'll get back to you.”

"We'll review all the facts, then make a decision."
"We never make a decision on the first visit."

The exact words that are used matter little; what really matters is that you recognize the stall and are ready with this reply:

Phraseology: "That's fine, John. Obviously, you wouldn't take your time thinking this thing over unless you were seriously interested, would you? I mean, I'm sure you're not telling me that to get rid of me. So, may I assume you will give it very careful consideration? Just to clarify my thinking, what phase of this opportunity is it that you want to think over? Is it the quality of the service I'll render? Is it something I've forgotten to cover? Is it the color? Seriously, please level with me, could it be the money?"

A tip when using this strategy: Don't pause after the word "over" — if you do, a client is likely to answer "everything," or "the whole idea of going ahead," and you're dead in the water. What you want to do here is review what they've already agreed to. In other words, you're weeding out all the other objections and narrowing it down to the most common final objection, which is the money. Handle the money objection and begin reclosing.

For more closes, refer to: Sales Closing for Dummies™, $16.99.

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