

International Do's & Don'ts

The globalization of local economies increases the importance of working with international guests, which requires a heightened awareness of, and sensitivity to, the many cultures that make up the global village. Working with international guests at shows and events can be both challenging and rewarding. Part of the challenge is recognizing and adjusting to some of the cultural differences that exist. While each culture is unique, some universal truths do exist. They include:

- A genuine smile conveys friendliness.
- A handshake is a universal sign of goodwill.
- Business shows gather people with similar interests and concerns.
- English (usually British, not American English) is the international language of business. As long as you don't impose your country's cultural ground rules on others, you can build successful business and personal relationships with people from around the world.

International Do's

- When possible, communicate in the prospect's native language.
- Use international signs and signals in the booth and printed materials.
- Allow for "personal space," especially with British and Japanese prospects.
- Know the proper name for the prospect's country.
- Use both hands to "present" your business card to people from Asian cultures; put the card away after they have put your card away.
- Point with an open hand, not with your index finger.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Display interest non-verbally.
- Observe how your prospects interact with each other, and follow their lead.
- Have top-level management in the booth.

International Don'ts

- Don't assume that English is a second language.
- If someone does speak English, don't assume that he or she understands everything that you are saying.
- Don't assume that words translate literally.
- Don't use gestures unless you know what they mean to the prospect – for example, shaking one hand from side to side with the palm forward means "no" in many cultures; some gestures to avoid include touching another person, crossing your legs, and making the "OK" sign with your thumb and index finger.
- Don't speak too fast, use acronyms, slang, or double entendres.
- Don't rush your international guests — at European shows, booth visitors often stay for a half-hour or longer.
- Don't display frustration or a lack of patience.
- Don't bow unless you are bowed to.