

How to do Business with Buyers from USA

Mr. Will Fraser and Mr. Cole Brown from Velocity Consulting guide on understanding the business mentality of the Americans and how the wants, needs and expectations of the American customers can take your business to the next level. Mr. Fraser has been traveling to and working in India since six years, in a wide range of fields including Accent Training, Brand Management, Market Research, and now Consulting with Velocity Consulting. Through his extensive experience With Indo-American business, he has gained the ability to help Indians transition successfully to the US by training them in accent neutralization, soft skills and cultural acclimatization. Mr. Cole Brown has spent the past two years in India under Velocity Consulting doing sales and training in both soft skills and accent neutralization.

There are two distinct cultures present when Indians and Americans are doing business. These cultures can work together and there is much to be gained from Indo-American business deals but unfortunately manufacturers in India often find business deals dead before they start or soon after the first deal. There are some key differences in the communication and expectations between our two cultures that can shed light on how manufacturers can maintain customers and increase sale in America.

Interacting with other cultures

When people interact with other cultures, their immediate response is to think that their cultures way of thinking is the "one way". Most people think their way is the only valid way and refuse to adjust. This will lead to frustration, anger and resentment towards another culture. By accepting that there are many valid ways, it helps us to understand the importance of being willing to adjust to each and every situation. Mr. Cole says, "for example, if I exchange business cards with you and I just put the card immediately into my pocket without reading it or acknowledging any of the info on the card, what does that communicate? Do you think American's are intentionally communicated that when they receive your business card? No, Americans see business cards as information that is to be used at a later date. An American would be more interested in returning to conversation, keeping eye contact, and asking questions - because in America that is what communicates

respect. In India and most other Asian countries, it is expected that you will receive the business card with care, read over the information and mention the title



and name of the individual. This communicates respect to the person who gave you their card." While simplifying the fact that there is no right or wrong way of attesting a cultural pattern, rather it is about understanding a cultural pattern. Four crucial aspects are :

Fluid time vs Structured time

Fluid time cultures value human interaction over time. Structured time cultures see time as separate units that are placed into a schedule. The former attests to honorary conversations and no time barriers (as in the Eastern world), whereas the latter splits into timely schedules, where there is always an ongoing rush. While India follows a fluid time culture, USA has a structured time culture. One reason where a person may lose out on future businesses with the Western world is when he would backtrack out of stipulated deadlines. As everything is built on a trust with the signing of a deal, one has to ensure that s/he is on time, as it adds up to a personal insult on the other end. Therefore, in interactions with people from the West, one should:

- Assume that the stated time or deadline is expected to be met unless otherwise communicated in advance.
- Assume that times and deadlines set by you will be strictly followed, so do not exaggerate them.
- Know that showing up late for an appointment is received as a personal insult.

High context vs Low context

High-context cultures speak more vaguely. They expect the listener to figure out what they are saying based on the context



of the situation. Low-context cultures communicate everything they mean to say word for word. The listener receives all the information they need from the speaker. They are not expected to infer anything else from the situation. In the former, the communicator expects the listener to comprehend the underlying messages in a conversation, based on additional clues, while the latter is focused on a word-to-word literal comprehension. In the West, the people are not expected to infer anything out of a conversation. For a successful deal, one ought to speak frankly and clearly. One just needs to ensure what one means and what is true to the fact. He clearly states that one shouldn't make commitments s/he can't make, or it will frustrate the buyer's expectations. In a low context, one only has to make clear-cut expectations, and never rely on the context. Mr. Will explained that once he was told that in India, there are 14 different ways of saying no. An American can't possibly comprehend all of it. Deadlines are very important to Americans because trust is very important in American business. When an American enters into an agreement with someone in manufacturing, they assume that the manufacturer will finish the product by the time they stated during negotiations. Because of this, the purchaser is then going to base many other decisions on the date the manufacturer has communicated. If the client asks for status updates and you are running behind he wants to hear that from you as early as possible. This will allow him to communicate as needed with all the relevant parties and avoid losing trust with his clients. However, this American client of yours does not understand high-context communication, so if you say, "Perhaps they may get delayed" or "I'll try my level best" they will not understand the doubt that you are communicating and they will probably lose trust with clients as a result. This will result in you losing their business more often than not.

Americans are horrible at understanding subtle clues and body language, while Indians are great at it. When speaking with Americans it is important to be direct in communicating thoughts. In India there are many different ways to say "no", but the direct way is almost never used. Saying "no" outright is commonly thought to be rude, disappointing, or unnecessary. An Indian understands when you mean "no" even though you don't use the word "no". Americans won't understand this. Unless they hear someone say "no", they don't think the answer is "no". Therefore, in interactions with people from the West:

You should:

- speak directly and frankly.
- also communicate your feelings clearly.
- say what you mean and what is true.

You shouldn't:

- receive clear directions as an insult to intelligence.
- respond as if you do understand when you do not understand.

Multi-tasking vs Mono-tasking workstyle

Indians Multitask - they believe it is possible to do multiple things at once and expect others to do the same.

Americans Monotask - they like to focus on one task at a time and give it all their attention. Indians tend to

believe it is fairly possible and expect the others to do the same, whereas the Western folk put all their effort behind just one task at a time.



The Customer is always right vs Work is Worship

Mr. Cole said, what this means is, never immediately say "no" or "that is not possible". First, ask them questions in order to understand what they want and then give them your opinion. You must be more gentle and careful in presenting your opinions to clients. Their opinions matter the most! For example at an ice cream store one encountered, when a flavour was not available. The waiter didn't have authority to make that decision, and so he said it wasn't possible. He could have sought out the manager who would have been more likely to facilitate our request, but instead he just said "that is not possible". The best response the waiter could have said is, "I am not sure, let me ask my manager and come back." If you don't have authority or if you don't know the answer of a client's questions then you should tell them that "you do not know, but you will get back to them."

In the West, if the seller favors one over the other, it would be considered dishonorable. Furthermore, he stresses that one ought to ensure by any means that the customer receives his order. If the delays are unavoidable, early apologies would be much more considerate on both sides. Indians tend to think that even if a customer leaves dissatisfied, there are other customers who would come after him, whereas the Western mentality would be solely facilitating the customer's order at hand. ■

