

## **Doing Business in Canada**

Despite what many people – particularly Americans – think, Canada is not a continuance of the United States in any way other than geography. Quite the contrary, as the Canadians are still very much influenced in culture and behavior by the Europeans – primarily the British and the French. This manifests itself in norms and practices that are substantially different than the way Americans behave. So too, the Canadian view of business tends to differ a bit. Entering the Canadian market thinking you can duplicate or extend out your efforts in the United States would not be entirely correct.

This is not to suggest that the United States has not exerted influence over the Canadian people and its business practices. Certainly American culture is present and powerful, and American businesses are visible and successful. But Canada is more than just a separate country, it is a separate people. And success in Canada requires an acknowledgment of this central fact.

### Understanding Canadians

In addition to the typical error of assuming that Canadians are just Americans with a higher tolerance for cold weather, many people also view Canada with a single ethnic identity. This minimizes some complex social and business settings, particularly, but not limited to discussions on Quebec. Canada has many ethnic groups throughout the country and should be approached as a setting for diverse cultures.

The most significant difference is between Quebec and the remainder of the country. With a French majority and a strong affiliation to French culture, it would be fair to say that Quebec behaves a bit differently than the remainder of the country, where even diverse cultures tend to behave in similar ways. In Quebec, the French flavor is evident in the somewhat less formal way people interact.

### Conducting Business with Canadians

Business is relatively easy to conduct in Canada. Canadian businesses are eager to do business. They are serious and skilled negotiators who will maximize their position, but typically seek deals that allow all sides to benefit. In general they are open to any reasonable proposal.

When approaching a Canadian business with a prospective business venture it is best to submit objective information that comes with third party validation. While they are interested in your opinion and want to see you believe in what you're proposing, they will rarely accept your analysis on face value. By presenting objective opinions, you will increase your credibility and hasten the process. Don't expect a Canadian to place feelings over facts when evaluating a deal, and while they enter each negotiation looking for the proper formula that will allow an agreement to go forward, they are not in the least resistant to the idea of saying no when a deal is not right.

There is an excellent chance that the individual you are negotiating with has the authority to make the go-no go decision. In many cases he/she may bring it to a final internal decision vote, but chances are if you earn his/her support the deal will be approved. Keep in mind that this process may take a bit longer than you are used to, as the pace of business may be a bit slower in Canada than it is in the United States.

## Do's and Don'ts in Canada

In most instances the use of common sense will prevent any major uncomfortable moments, and certainly avoid a mistake that can cost a deal. The Canadians in general are aware of American culture and are generally inclined not to be offended or taken aback by somewhat more aggressive behavior than they themselves would display.

Nonetheless, the adherence to behavior more in tune with the Canadian disposition could lead to a closer relationship and a more conducive business environment.

Therefore, it is best, when in Canada, not to discuss personal matters with or ask personal questions of your hosts. In general, Canadians are not interested in becoming immediate buddies and are uncomfortable with personal information being shared. Same too for discussing politics, as most Canadians prefer to avoid political issues as a topic for small talk. Remember, people are generally more formal in Canada than they are in the United States.

When discussing business in Canada be certain to avoid making exaggerated claims about your product/service and your company. Canadians will view this as over reaching and you will lose some of your credibility. This is true too of promises you make. If they do not believe you can meet your promise they will be inclined to discount it significantly, perhaps offsetting the value of the deal and placing it in jeopardy.

English and French are the languages of Canada and your marketing materials should be in both. It is okay if you do not speak French when doing business in Quebec, although it is clearly an advantage if you, or someone in your party, does.

Canada is an attractive, active, business friendly market interested in doing business with international companies in Canada and abroad. Doing business in Canada is as simple as bringing the right deal to the right people at the right time. Do that, and act in accordance with intelligent business rules, and you will get your deal done.