

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL?

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You are a successful UK IT firm looking for export opportunities. Spinning the globe in your mind, you try and imagine where you could capitalise on your existing expertise.



Europe is so close you can smell the garlic. But language and market differences are a deterrent. Or you may already have “been there – done that.” Eastern Europe seems to need just about everything these days. But will you be paid? The Middle East seems relatively wealthy. But all your competitors are already there. Asia has all the emerging markets. But it is far away and relatively closed. Africa?

But then there is America. With a single language (your language), single hard currency, a massive and wealthy population and a consumer mentality, America seems a likely gold mine.



We all know the Americans are different, but in which way? How do the differences in culture affect your chances of export success? Here are a few answers to ponder:

Americans prefer other Americans. Like the British, Americans are slightly xenophobic. American firms you may compete against will use your very origins against you. American prospects will try and find an American alternative, if possible. At least you are not Asian. Americans feel threatened by the Asian Tiger economies. They use customs duties and the like as weapons to stem a rising trade deficit. Americans hardly feel a threat from the UK. That’s an advantage.

Americans are decisive. If you press them they will tell you their answer. They want you to be decisive too.

Americans use voice mail. In the USA, the telephone system is a way of contacting people – eventually. You **MUST** return all the calls you receive, or delegate the task to an employee. Not having their calls returned is offensive to Americans.

Americans like videos. “Show me” is big in America. Produce a professional-looking video with an American voice-over that is less than 10 minutes long. Decision-makers will watch it.

Americans like deals. Buy one get one free. Limited time offers. They expect the price to go down as time goes by. They can be prompted into action by believing they are benefiting financially.

Americans want the best price. They need to think they are getting a special deal. They like to believe they are buying at the lowest price, but you must be very careful here. There are laws against offering different prices to similar customers!

Americans are gamblers. They are willing to take calculated risks. They finance deals easier and believe in the future more than the British. If you are adept at selling your vision, they will invest readily.



Americans are in a hurry. Americans do not like to wait for you, as it communicates that you feel more important than they do. And how could that be?

Americans prize service. Friendly, personable people to handle the pre-sale, reception, and post-sale activities

Americans like to complain. They are not long-suffering by any measure. Handle their complaints to their satisfaction and they will buy from you again.

Americans like to be entertained. Breakfast, lunch, sports tickets and the like are very much a part of the business scene in the USA. Ignore this at your peril. Some American companies have a policy against their buyers accepting “entertainment.” However, you will not be penalised for offering.

Americans want to think they are buying the best. Get out the corporate flag and start waving. The correct message is: “We are the world’s est company.” Biggest, best, first, whatever. It does not even have to be accurate!

Americans like market coverage. If you want them to sell your offering, they want to know you are spending to create pull-through. If you want them to consume your offering, you have to have service and support nearby. If you want to do business you need to be there. Even mail order is no exception. Expect to send huge quantities of collateral. Remember that the market is ten times the size of the UK.

Americans want control. 51% of something is much more appealing than 50%. Everyone in the channel fights to be channel captain. A certain amount of willingness to play by your customers' rules will score points. Just make certain the situation is win-win.



Americans protect their rights. During recruitment interviews you cannot legally ask questions about age, religion, etc. Don't ever transgress. Find out the rules before hand. If in doubt, do not ask the question.

Americans have equal opportunity laws. You **MUST** hire a mix of sex, race, religion, etc. You must also claim loudly that you subscribe to this rule. This becomes more important the larger your success in the USA. Keep records.

Americans want to tax you. Watch out for State and even Municipal Governments attempting to tax your corporate earnings in their state or city. Maybe years later. Do not set up a physical presence until you are sure you must.

Americans will sue. Given half a chance they will take you to court, regardless of the merit of the suit. Check terms and conditions carefully. Carry enough insurance. Word disclaimers perfectly. If you want to really impress them, sue them first. Then settle out of court.

Americans want it in writing. Anyone who is hoping to sue you needs a little documentation. Make promises carefully. Know American laws, or a good law firm that does.

Americans like partnerships. If you are too small a company to meet the needs of a large prospect, partner with an American firm that can help you.

Americans are competitive. Expect your partnerships to be short-lived, and your partners to compete with you sooner or later.



Americans like youthful energy. Expect to meet key people in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties with multimillion-dollar decision-making responsibility.

Americans value experience. Reference selling and name-dropping is critical. “We have done it before, we can do it for you,” is a powerful statement for you to make to an American.

Americans like sex. Well, at least in the marketing of products. But keep it soft. Hint at it. Subtlety wins over nudity.

Americans value appearance. At a certain level, staff your company with presentable types. Hire carefully.

Americans think they are smart. But they want to be smarter than you are. They deride genius, except their own, and feel threatened by genuinely bright people. Be humble in person.

Americans like uniformity. Make certain your business cards are the standard American size. Dress as they do. Correspond accurately in American English. Label things with bar codes. Do business only in US Dollars.



Remember it is a mass-market and that means massive potential. Do not give anyone exclusive rights to your product or service, except on a time-limited basis.

Get the best advice you can. Then go get them!

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