

## **Doing Business in the UK**

The United Kingdom (UK) is comprised of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It is important not only to be aware of these geographical distinctions but also the strong sense of identity and nationalism felt by the populations of these four countries.

The terms 'English' and 'British' are not interchangeable. 'British' denotes someone who is from England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. 'English' refers to people from England. People from Scotland are referred to as 'Scots'. People from England are not likely to take offence at being called "English", whereas a Welsh, Scots, or Northern Irish person will.

### **Cultural Diversity**

Formerly a very homogenous society, since World War II, Britain has become increasingly diverse as it has accommodated large immigrant populations. The mixture of ethnic groups and cultures make it difficult to define British as looking or acting in one particular manner. People may sound British and retain the cultural heritage of their forefathers while others may become more British than someone who can trace his/her lineage to the 5th century. The fact that the nation's favourite dish is now a curry sums up the cultural mish-mash that is modern day Britain.

### **Doing business in the UK**

The British are rather formal. Many from the older generation still prefer to work with people and companies they know or who are known to their associates. Younger businesspeople do not need long-standing personal relationships before they do business with people and do not require an intermediary to make business introductions. Nonetheless, networking and relationship building are often key to long-term business success.

Rank is respected and businesspeople prefer to deal with people at their level. If at all possible, include an elder statesman on your team as he/she will present the aura of authority that is necessary to good business relationships in many companies.

### **British communication styles**

The British have an interesting mix of communication styles encompassing both understatement and direct communication. Many older businesspeople or those from the 'upper class' rely heavily upon formal use of established protocol. Most British are masters of understatement and do not use effusive language. If anything, they have a marked tendency to qualify their statements with such as 'perhaps' or 'it could be'. When communicating with people they see as equal to themselves in rank or class, the British are direct, but modest. If communicating with someone they know well, their style may be more informal, although they will still be reserved.

## **Business meetings**

Punctuality is a very British trait. It is especially important in business situations. In most cases, the people you are meeting will be on time. Always call if you will be even 5 minutes later than agreed. If you are kept waiting a few minutes, do not make an issue of it.

How meetings are conducted is often determined by the composition of people attending. If everyone is at the same level, there is generally a free flow of ideas and opinions. If there is a senior ranking person in the room, that person will do most of the speaking. In general, meetings will be rather formal and always have a clearly defined purpose, which may include an agenda. There will be a brief amount of small talk before getting down to the business at hand. If you make a presentation, avoid making exaggerated claims. Make certain your presentation and any materials provided appear professional and well thought out. Be prepared to back up your claims with facts and figures. The British rely on facts, rather than emotions, to make decisions. Maintain eye contact and a few feet of personal space. After a meeting, send a letter summarising what was decided and the next steps to be taken.

## **Basic British Etiquette Tips:**

### **Business Dress**

- \* Business attire is conservative.
- \* Men should wear a dark coloured, conservative business suit.
- \* Women should wear either a business suit or a conservative dress.

### **Greetings**

- \* Shake hands with everyone at a meeting upon arrival.
- \* Maintain eye contact during the greeting.

### **Titles**

- \* Only medical doctors and the clergy use their professional or academic titles in business.
- \* Most people use the courtesy titles or Mr, Mrs or Miss and their surname. (Mr and Mrs are words in the United Kingdom and do not require a period after them as they are not abbreviations.)
- \* If someone has been knighted, they are called 'Sir' followed by their first and surnames or 'Sir' followed simply by their first name.

\* Wait until invited before moving to a first-name basis. People under the age of 35 may make this move more rapidly than older British.

### **Business Cards**

\* Business cards are exchanged at the initial introduction without formal ritual.

\* The business card may be put away with only a cursory glance.

### **Business Gifts**

\* Business gift giving is not part of the business culture.

\* If you choose to give a gift, make certain it is small and tasteful.

\* Good gifts include desk accessories, a paperweight with your company logo, or a book about your home country.

\* Inviting someone out for a meal can be viewed as a gift.

**Source:** <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/etiquette/doing-business-uk.html>