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INTERNATIONAL TRADE & EXPORTING

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Any company which is serious about growing its business by breaking into export markets cannot rely on good luck to send its sales soaring – getting the basics right is what makes the difference between failure and success.

Learning about the culture and customs of the countries you are targeting and discovering how your potential customers prefer to do business can really pay dividends.

Taking the time to learn a little of the lingo and checking out the significance of colours, symbols and special dates in another country's calendar can also be smart moves and save you from being left with a red face!

Getting things right from the outset will boost your confidence at an exciting, but potentially nerve-wracking time. It will also send a strong signal to your potential client that you are

keen to form a good working relationship with them.

In areas where you have little knowledge or experience, investing in professional help is a savvy move. There's plenty on offer too.

You can source interpretation and translation services, tap into Lincolnshire Chamber's export documentation service and go along to International Trade events hosted by organisations such as UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), East Midlands International Trade Associations (EMITA) and Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

The PAB Translation Centre in Boston works with clients locally, nationally and internationally simplifying business communications.

The Chamber members' services include the translation of technical documentation,

including manuals, contracts, medical documentation as well as terms and conditions. Translators work on marketing materials to provide clients with a service tailored to their specific language needs.

PAB also offers website translation, modifying existing websites or creating dedicated pages to make them accessible, usable and culturally suitable for target audiences.

Interpreters are provided for business meetings, conferences and trade shows, and PAB also offers business language lessons, cultural awareness courses and support with multi-lingual staff recruitment and induction.

Managing Director Iwona Lebidowicz said: "When working in the global commercial environment, knowledge of the impact of cultural differences is one of the keys to international business success."

A DIFFERENT VIEW – SOURCING GOODS FROM CHINA

In the early 1990s, as a director of a business based in the south of England, Neil Barrett regularly visited China to source satellite television components – and eventually he worked with a company to make exactly what he needed.

Ten years later, he moved back to his home county of Lincolnshire, and decided to plough his experience into Supplybase Solutions. Today he is helping all manner of firms wanting someone to take the headache out of buying products from China and the Far East.

Neil sources and supplies anything from grinding tools to shower curtains and mouldings for a toy company. His service includes tracking down and vetting potential suppliers, placing orders, arranging the shipment of goods into the UK and offering local warehousing.

"I have found that, when people want to reduce their costs, they move away from their normal purchasing arrangements, particularly if times are tight or they are pushed for time," said Neil.

"I have an office in Ningbo, not far from Shanghai, which is staffed by someone locally who understands the culture of that country. They are able to keep their finger on the pulse when it comes to keeping supplies flowing.

"Businesses which are just starting to look at sourcing from China need to be aware that it is very easy to flick onto a variety of websites and then find themselves dealing with a business which they know nothing about.

"Buyers should be aware of the fact that you always have to pay 60 per cent of the cost of an order upfront and the remaining 40 per cent when it is shipped."

Neil said that, while a British business may find that a Chinese manufacturer is eager to clinch their business, things are not always what they seem.

"Chinese business people are unlikely to say "No" to an opportunity to supply a British firm. They like the UK and they are interested in building relationships, but there is plenty of mileage for orders to be misunderstood.

"Should the incorrect goods be supplied, they are unlikely to want them returned. This can mean you are left with a pile of stock and the subsequent headache of trying to sort something out commercially with them," he said.

For more information visit supplybasesolutions.co.uk



Neil Barrett

Irrespective of whether a firm is involved in finance, technology, manufacturing or consumer electronics, Iwona said that global cultural differences will directly impact on a business and its managers or sales people.

"For instance, when translating websites, our staff have to take into account a number of cultural differences, such as measures or currency formats," said Iwona.

"Numeric formats are not universal and can, in fact, have the opposite meaning depending on the country and language. Local address and telephone formats will be adapted so that the end-user can easily input his or her address or telephone number in the format which is used in his or her country."

The Gregorian calendar is the most widely used, but in certain cultural settings, the Chinese or Islamic calendar may need to be used instead. Only three countries have not officially adopted the metric system, and one is the United States.

Getting the fine details wrong can mean the difference between clinching or losing a lucrative deal.

"It is crucial for today's business personnel to understand the impact of cross cultural differences on business, trade and internal company organisation, to avoid misunderstandings, offence and a breakdown in communication," said Iwona.

When getting marketing materials together for an overseas trade visit, businesses ignore the importance of localisation at their peril.

"The choice of colours or graphics for a background can send out very different messages to the end-user. For example, a red colour in China/Asia means celebration, luck or marriage, whilst in the US and Europe, the same colour is seen as a symbol for stop or danger," said Iwona.

"Graphics and icons can also mean different things, or even nothing, in different countries.

Global marketing: did you know?

- Colour increases brand recognition by up to 80%, so it's important to get it right when sharing your company's brand and message overseas. In the UK, white reflects purity and virtue, however in China the colour is associated with death and mourning.
 - 56 per cent of consumers rate the ability to read content in their own language above price. However, it's one thing to translate your marketing content – it's another thing to ensure that your message transcends the cultural differences of your domestic and foreign market.
 - Not only will you have to consider differences in legal requirements, product labelling or electrical voltage for example. You may also need to make changes to the taste, manner of use or economic suitability of the product – adaptations come in many different forms.
- Have you ever noticed some products we have at home taste different abroad? The popular hazelnut spread, Nutella, has a distinctively sweeter flavour in the UK than the version sold in Italy.

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