
Introduction

Companies that do business in Canada and the United States tend to take cultural differences for granted. Canada is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural country. This feature goes well beyond the obvious English-French differences. Marketers are accustomed to adapting their products and their promotion methods to appeal to various sub-markets. Moreover, Canadians are used to accommodating differences in the way that people from different cultures behave in business situations. For the most part, however, these are relatively minor adjustments. While product preferences may vary, the overall style of conducting business is very similar throughout the United States and Canada.

Doing business in Mexico is another matter. Differences in consumer tastes and marketing methods are only the tip of the iceberg. There are major cultural differences, and they affect virtually every aspect of business relationships. For the most part, Mexicans are not as accustomed as Canadians to dealing with other cultures. As a result, they are more likely than Canadians to react badly to visitors who do not share their own values. This is partly because their traditions are based mainly on a single culture and are firmly rooted. Decades of protectionism have insulated Mexicans from the ways that other cultures do business. It is therefore essential for Canadians who export to Mexico to understand and adapt to the Mexican ways of doing things.

The need to do business “the Mexican way” applies to all types of business. It might at first appear that goods could be shipped to Mexico with the same kind of adaptations that are common within the Canadian market. This is certainly true in some cases. But Canadian companies that operate in Mexico usually say that establishing a long-term presence in the local market is a key to success. Accomplishing such a presence requires communications with four groups:

- local agents, representatives or joint-venture partners;
- customers or end-users of the good or service;
- government officials and regulatory authorities; and
- other actors in the business environment, such as banks, lawyers, employees, lobby groups and the media.

Communicating effectively with these groups requires a high degree of cultural sensitivity. This guide has been prepared to help Canadian companies understand the cultural factors that underlie the way Mexicans conduct business. Ideally, this information will minimize the