

Lawyers and Legal Documents

Business people in Asia rely on personal understanding and trust rather than on formal contracts. For this reason, most Asians would be offended if you brought a lawyer along to a meeting: it would be as if you had brought a policeman. It is not done and would create an atmosphere of distrust that could kill a negotiation before it begins.

To satisfy your people at home, you will eventually need some sort of written agreement, but keep it as simple as possible, and do not bring it to the table until the negotiations are complete. If your Asian partner has doubts about the negotiations, no legal document will salvage the deal.

Exchanging Business Cards

The exchange of business cards is a major ritual in Asia. Everyone you meet will offer one to you and expect one in return. When you hand an Asian your card, it will be studied carefully. Your card should have English on one side and the language of the potential investor on the other. Both sides should be of the same high quality and the card should not appear to have been made for this meeting alone. Advertising slogans are not appropriate for your business card.

Forms of Address

When addressing people within their own cultures, Japanese, Koreans and ethnic Chinese place their family name first. But when they are speaking English or dealing with Western business people, they follow the Western usage with the family name last, after the given names. This usage will be observed on the English side of their business cards, too. Always use the person's family name, preceded by an appropriate title such as Mr, Mrs, Miss, or Doctor. Often a business title such as *Director* is also appropriate. Do not use first names unless invited to do so.

Your Presentation

Your presentation is the key to explaining what you propose and what you are looking for. When preparing it include as many visuals as you can since they are the best way of overcoming communications barriers. The visual presentation should tell the whole story and should be comprehensible even to those who do not speak English. However, use English for your labels and headings, otherwise you will convey the false impression that you speak the language.

Transparencies for overhead projectors are the best medium for presentation. They are easy to carry and require less equipment than slides. Almost every office has an overhead projector or can readily get one (but make sure before your meeting). Have the transparencies prepared professionally and avoid a hard sell that might smack of Western advertising.

Briefing Books

When it comes to knowing your subject, you cannot prepare too carefully. Asian business people have an insatiable appetite for detail. Next to a strong visual presentation, a comprehensive briefing book is your most valuable tool. It should take the form of a loose-leaf binder with subject areas segregated by tabs. If you and your staff prepare it properly, no question will stump you. Also, as you make your presentations, you can add to the book based on the questions that your audiences pose to you.