

Business etiquette, language & culture

Meeting and greeting

Establishing personal relationships is essential in conducting business in Russia. You should invest time and effort into creating rapport with your business partners, and be aware that as Russia is a conservative, hierarchical society it is considered important to create a good impression by dressing smartly.

When meeting and greeting it is normal to shake hands with men although not expected with women, although this is becoming more common. Russians address each other by name and patronymic, but it is perfectly acceptable for foreigners to use first names.

Language

An increasing number of Russian companies, particularly those with an international outlook, have English speakers on their staff. Many of the younger generation – particularly in Moscow, St Petersburg and other large cities – can speak some English, but few do in more rural areas.

When setting up an appointment, you should always ask if your contact speaks English or if they would feel more comfortable with an interpreter.

Interpreters

Your interpreter is one of your key assets, so needs to be chosen carefully. We recommend you use a professional interpreter for negotiations and avoid using electronic translation for your correspondence. Initial written approaches to Russian companies should always be in Russian, and your literature should be translated too.

Lists of potential interpreters and translators can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/russia-list-of-translators-and-interpreters>.

Meetings

Arrange meeting schedules around two weeks before arrival, and confirm closer to the visit, reconfirming the day prior to the scheduled time. It is an idea to provide the Russian company with the subject of the meeting and provisional support materials in advance too.

Meetings can be formal, normally starting with business and ending with small talk, although overly-informal behaviour could be construed as lack of respect.

Russian business is hierarchical, with decisions being made by the highest ranking person, so you should not expect lower-level staff to have the authority to make decisions. As Russian companies are often driven and directed by one strong, central character you should therefore ideally try to reach the decision-maker at the top as early as possible, and send your top person to meet with them, as this is indicative of how much you value your prospective business in Russia.

[Source – DIT]

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