

TIPS & ADVICE

It is extremely important when you are investing in an exhibition stand in the Middle East that you have sufficient information to understand your audience, the culture, the politics and how it varies from other regions in order to get the most from your participation.

This guide is designed to help you with your planning and to understand the region you are planning to do business in a bit better, it is not tailor-made to individual products but to be treated as an overview.

MEETINGS & NEGOTIATIONS

Meetings are key to doing business in the Middle East, the Arab Culture is to build a relationship with the person and the only way to do this is by meeting up face to face. It is often normal to make an appointment just days before you wish to meet and to ensure that you have confirmed it verbally by telephone. Initial meetings are all about relationship building. Building trust and establishing compatibility are key requisites for doing business in the Middle East. One should engage in conversation and try to get to know the 'person' you are doing business with. It is important to note, that there will normally be several meetings in order to build the trust and relationship so do not expect immediate results from an initial meeting and be sure to follow up on your return to arrange further meetings and keep up correspondence.

HOSPITALITY

If you wish to serve food and drinks on your stand or chalet the Arabic custom is to serve Arabic Coffee and Dates which will ensure they feel welcome and encourage them to visit. Alcohol is not consumed by Muslims and will be more of a deterrent than an attraction for your stand. However, in many countries it is not forbidden so it is simply a considered choice on the part of the exhibitor.

Anything that may put a local Arab off visiting your stand is not a good idea, so ensure your stand manners are also dressed appropriately. The less flesh on show the better. This applies to both men and women, short sleeves are perfectly acceptable but sleeveless tops are not as acceptable. Short skirts and shorts are also not a good idea but are not prohibited.

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

Arabs are fairly informal with names when doing business and generally address people by their first names. John Smith will be addressed as Mr. John. The Arab title of note is a Sheikh (these are normally members of the Ruling families and are often preceded by His Highness), many senior Arabs are also addressed by His Excellency, again pertaining to their level of importance.

The Middle Eastern culture places more value on someone's word as opposed to a written agreement. A person's word is connected to their honour. Contracts are viewed as memorandums of understanding rather than binding, fixed agreements. Be sure to promise only things you can deliver. Failure to do so will result in loss of honour. The Arabs do not separate professional and personal life. Doing business revolves much more around personal relationships, family ties, trust and honour. There is a tendency to prioritise personal matters above all else. It is therefore crucial that business relationships are built on mutual friendship and trust.

MEETING AND GREETING

The traditional Islamic greeting you will hear is 'Asalamu alaykum' (peace be with you). As a non-Muslim you would not be expected to use it, but if you did you would receive the reply 'wa alaykum salam' (and peace be with you). Thank you is 'Shukran' and Welcome is 'Marhaba'

MARKETING, SELLING AND PROMOTING YOUR PRODUCTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Many websites can be restricted in the middle east just because of an unacceptable word featuring on one of their pages, some news sites can be restricted and in general, a high percentage of the Middle East population do not use websites or much email. The majority of their communication is done face to face, so meetings are the best way to sell your product and a reason why exhibitions are so popular in this region.

There are no road names or postal addresses in Dubai, everything operates by PO Box, so regular mail is not completely reliable and as such you cannot totally guarantee that mail will reach your recipient in a timely and accurate manner.

If you wish to send invitations or free tickets to visit your stand at the show we would recommend using a courier wherever possible, or if you have a local office, hand delivery is the best guarantee.

If you wish to market your attendance at an exhibition in advance of the show itself, a press release is one of the best ways to reach a market you may know some people in, but not all. The regional daily press together with regional weekly and monthly specific industry publications can be a very useful tool in reaching your audience. For help with regional PR, talk to the show organizers who can help with joint press releases where applicable.

ARABIC VS ENGLISH

At the Dubai Airshow the aerospace language is English, though it is always a nice gesture to have some Arabic translated business cards done for the show or perhaps a few key words on your stand branding translated into Arabic. However you do not need to have anything translated if budgets are tight or it is not appropriate.

THE USE OF HANDS AND FEET IN MUSLIM CULTURES

Among Muslims, the left hand is reserved for bodily hygiene and considered unclean. Thus, the right hand should be used for eating. You should shake hands with your right hand and women should be prepared for some cultures where Muslim men are unable to touch women and therefore will be unable to shake your hand. If you are introduced to a woman as a male, it is advisable to wait and see if a hand is extended. If it is not, then do not try to shake hands. Avoid touching and prolonged eye contact with women.

In many Middle Eastern countries, grouping the thumb and fingers together, and shaking it up and down, fingers pointing upwards, indicates "wait". In Iraq and Iran, the "thumbs up" gesture is considered an offensive insult. Displaying the sole of one's foot or touching somebody with one's shoe is often considered rude. In some circumstances, shoes should be removed before entering a living room.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM

One cannot talk about the Middle East in a cultural sense without mentioning Islam. Islam permeates all levels of society. It provides guidance, values and rules for personal life, community relations and ways of doing business. This section looks at a few examples of the manifestations of Islam and the way in which these may impact your business trip. Muslims are obliged to pray five times a day. Prayer times are announced by the mosques using the call to prayer (azan). Not all Muslims go to the mosque. Some pray at home or in the office. Daily routines, appointments and meetings must be fitted in appropriately around prayer times. Friday is the day for congregational prayers and it is obligatory for all

males to attend. There are two major festivals of note. Eid al-Fitr follows Ramadan and Eid al-Adha follows the annual pilgrimage. These holidays last approximately three days although it is not uncommon for the government to extend these. It is best to avoid doing business on or near the two Eids.