

7. Zakelijke gedragscode

Appointments

Flemish companies should recognize the importance of meeting at the working-level of their Japanese counterparts and not exclusively with the executive level. It is recommended to use a professional interpreter in business meetings, even if the Japanese side is supplying one. This shows proper preparation, gives an opportunity to observe the other side more closely and assures better communication. It is preferable to prepare bilingual business cards but complete translation is not necessary. Only the names and titles are sufficient in most cases.

Gifts

Giving gifts sometimes works effectively on some business occasions but it is unlikely to be as important as before. It might be preferable to give gifts that could be shared amongst a group.

Mentality

It is very important to understand Japanese business and social practices in establishing and maintaining successful business relationships in Japan. Indifference to local business practices may indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the exporter, and may lead to misunderstandings and bad feelings between both sides, which could result in the loss of business opportunities.

Business negotiation

Decision-making by Japanese companies is mostly group-oriented and is regarded as bottom-up rather than top-down. Exceptions are some family-owned companies and very small companies. The group decision-making is becoming less important than before. Japanese society is complex, structured, hierarchical and group-oriented with strong emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding dispute on the surface. Building relationships should emphasize mutual trust, confidence, loyalty and commitment in the long run. It takes a comparatively longer time to cultivate business relationships in Japan rather than in Europe. Flemish companies should not expect to make a deal in just a few days or they will leave the country in frustration, having made no progress. Consistent follow-up is essential.

Clothing

Recommended clothing for a business meeting with Japanese partners is shirt and tie with suit jacket. Due to the rainy season, June is hot and humid in Japan, however, most partners would accept only shirt and tie. Casual wear is not recommendable for most meetings except in the design-oriented or artistic industries.

Topics

Good things to talk about are the market situation in Europe for the products at issue and the market trend, if possible. Your Japanese business partners are usually very interested in the move of their competitors. This topic is one of the bad things to talk about too. It is often very dangerous to talk about the other companies in the same field. Your business partners are very curious about this and will often ask you which companies you have visited or intend to visit. You should pay much attention when replying to this question.

You may give bad feelings to your Japanese business partners in case of refusal but they may become more cautious about the business relationship with you in case you disclose everything, suspecting you do the same to with other companies. Smart replies are advisable.

Period

It is recommended to avoid business travel to Japan during the following periods since it is extremely difficult to make appointments and many hotels are fully booked:

- *January 1-8 (longer New Year's holidays)
- *April 29-May 5 (during the Golden Week)
- *August 10-16 (before and after Buddhist All Soul's Days)
- *December 28-31 (year-end holidays)