

Business Culture

The business culture in the US is probably different from what you are used to.

American companies have many choices in the marketplace and, therefore, will want to understand as quickly as possible how a product fits into their business infrastructure and what value it will bring to their bottom line. Secondly, they want to understand why they should do business with you instead of your competition. After positive responses to these questions, they may look at the details of how the product works. Many companies entering the US market make the mistake of just wanting to talk about how wonderful their technology is, instead of focusing on how this addresses their customer's particular needs.

Time is the most important resource for American business people, and, therefore, they will only invite you for a face-to-face meeting if they conclude that the meeting will be a good investment of their time. This means that before accepting a meeting they will want to understand the purpose of the meeting, what the visiting company is potentially able to offer them, and the probability that the meeting will be successful. This means that you need to get the key messages to them before the meeting, so they are able to assess whether to invest in a face-to-face meeting.

American companies base their decision to accept an invitation for a meeting on multiplesources of information; the message that you deliver in your initial approach phone call or email, your web site, other internet resources, and additional exchanges of information and phone calls. If you have not been able to get your arguments across to justify investing time in meeting you, then it is unlikely that a meeting will happen.

Because of the perceived risk of lawsuits in the US, business people are trained to protect their companies' legal position. They will be formal in their written communications, and will be careful to avoid making statements that can be misinterpreted or used against their company in a court of law. In many cases a verbal discussion will clarify their underlying concerns. They may be concerned about federal or state laws that you do not even know are in existence.

Most companies serving local markets probably do not have much experience dealing with non-US companies. Some will be curious to meet with business people from outside the US and will ask questions about your country; others will feel uncomfortable and will not be willing to invest an extra effort. To be successful, it is best to behave as much as possible as an American company, i.e. hire US employees or hire a consultant to represent the company. If you bring your own staff over to the US, it may take considerable time before they have adapted to the American business environment.

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