Business etiquette, language & culture

Overview
The following will help make a good impression and enable you to better understand your Venezuelan business acquaintances:

- Expect to shake hands upon introduction (embraces are reserved for friends).

- There is no formal ceremony attached to the exchange of business cards. Simply offer your card. You may or may not receive a card in return.

- Keep your expectations modest for your first business trip. You might spend the entire first meeting on social pleasantries. Latin Americans do business with people they know and like. Many meetings may be needed to reach this level. You should therefore take advantage of all social invitations which facilitate the process of getting to know each other.

- Don’t assume that all markets in Latin America are the same. Venezuelans are proud of their country and will appreciate your interest in the country.

- Visitors should try to be punctual, without expecting punctuality from others. If timing is crucial, explain why and hope it has the desired effect.

Finally, understand that you are building a personal relationship which may lead to business. Venezuelans do business with you, not your company. If you leave your firm, your replacement must build that relationship all over again.

Appointments
It is better to be a few minutes early than a few minutes late for appointments in Venezuela, so allow yourself plenty of time to compensate for traffic – which can be a problem in Caracas. Avoid scheduling appointments two or three days before a public holiday.

Meeting etiquette
When meeting groups always introduce yourself to all those present (within reason) and when leaving, say good-bye to each person individually. Since this is a formal culture, address people by their academic or professional title (where known) plus their surname until invited to move to a first-name basis.
Dress etiquette
Appropriate business attire is expected. Men should wear dark-coloured business suits. Women should dress elegantly – appearances are important in Venezuelan culture.

Business cards

Business cards are exchanged during introductions with everyone at a meeting. Have one side of your business card translated into Spanish, and present your business card with the Spanish side facing the recipient.

Business cards should contain both your professional and educational qualifications, since Venezuelans are status conscious. NB: Writing on someone's business card in front of them is considered very rude.

Business negotiation

Expect a minimal amount of small talk before getting down to business. Older Venezuelans prefer to get to know people before doing business with them, while younger businesspeople are more concerned with business than the social relationship.

It will take several meetings to come to an agreement, so negotiation and time for consultation are important – negotiations and decisions take a long time, and be aware that Venezuelans focus on long-term rather than short-term goals. However, relationships are viewed as more important than business documents. Venezuelan business is hierarchical, with decisions being made by the person with the most authority.

Negotiating

Initiate business contacts through local intermediaries. They can make introductions for you at the correct levels and in the appropriate social circles. Letters, brochures and
other documents should be translated into Spanish, although if you receive a reply from a Venezuelan in English, you may begin using English in correspondence.

Relationships and communications

Venezuela is a country where networking is important since it broadens your base of personnel who might have a connection you need. Venezuelans prefer face-to-face meetings to doing business by telephone or in writing, which are seen as too impersonal. It takes time to develop relationships.

Language

The official language of Venezuela is Spanish. English is sometimes spoken in business environments. In case of need, the UKTI Team in Caracas can help identify a suitable translator/interpreter.

**English**

**Spanish**

Good Morning

Buenas días

Good Afternoon

Buenas tardes

Good evening

Buenas noches

Goodbye

Hasta luego

Yes/no

Sí/no

Please

Por favor
Thank you
Gracias
My name is...
Me llamo....
Nice to meet you
Encantado de conocerle
Could you please tell me...
Por favor me podría decir....
Excuse me
Discúlpeme
Can you help me, please?
¿Puede ayudarme por favor?
How much does it cost...
Cuánto cuesta...
Take care!
¡Cuídate!
Cool!
Chévere

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