

Some common sense rules of etiquette

# Cultural differences – making it work virtually

Working virtually adds a whole new dimension to the phrase “cultural differences”. It immediately becomes apparent how different people around the world work, live and network.

By Susan M. Totman

The barriers have been lifted. We can now work “real time” with people around the world, assisting and serving from thousands of miles

away in a flash. What is commonly not considered is the fact that though we are working closely together, we may have vastly different

views of the world, various business practices and languages. This can be a mixed blessing and can lead to disaster on many fronts.

Photo: dogbone



## Language issues

Learning to adapt to different cultures in a flash can be difficult. You may have to alter your perception of your own language, understanding that though you use a specific version of English, for example, your colleague or client may be perfectly correct in their methods of writing and speaking in their own culture. Before criticizing someone, especially publicly as I have seen done so many times, check your facts – the other person may be correct. You could be the wrong one, despite your good intentions to point out an error. Though someone may not have a mastery

of your language, it does not mean that they are any less skilled or less professional than you. He or she may also not understand that though it may be customary to have specific etiquette in a business solicitation or transaction, it may be very different in their culture. Be tolerant.

Many times on colleague email lists and other virtual communication venues, someone will post with imperfect English asking for assistance or just wanting to communicate with peers around the world. Don't belittle that person for not writing in your language. If there are specific rules for the list stating that no posts can be made other than in your language, then it should be the responsibility of a moderator or list owner to take care of that issue – it is not up to you to openly criticize or berate that person – period.

be unsolicited, to be fair, so are cold-calling and postal mailings. Many of the people whom I've seen complaining about such unsolicited "spam", have also mentioned that they have used the same methods to obtain clients at one time or another. Let's not be hypocritical.

Many people new to virtual business may not understand all of the "rules of the game", but they are highly skilled professionals perfectly capable of providing you with a terrific end result. Many times using a professional from another country may be far more affordable to you as a subcontractor, particularly if you keep an eye on exchange rates.

## contact



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## Beliefs and customs

Understand that your beliefs and methods of working may be entirely different from other countries and that your way is not necessarily better! Each person, no matter where they hail from, is entitled to his or her own opinions and beliefs. It is not appropriate to question or condemn anyone at any time regarding these things.

## Interpretation of the written word

Though someone may advertise in a way that you consider "spamming", to him or her it may be considered innocent advertising. Though it may

## Working with clients internationally

Working with clients in different countries can be a challenge and requires consideration of different cultures. Many cultures are quite conservative and formal and require a strictly professional relationship in order to be successful. When approached by a foreign professional, be completely professional. Always address a potential client formally until he or she gives you permission to do otherwise. In many countries, failure to do so is considered a lack of respect and is reason to dismiss you.

Last, but definitely not least – avoid religious and political discussions with international clients at all costs. There is no quicker way to end a fruitful relationship than to begin to debate over such issues. Keep it professional – not personal.

*Flare without Help is like Help without Flare*



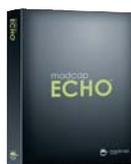
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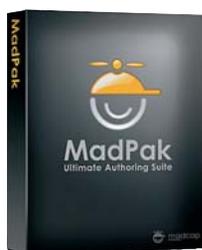
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