



**EDC GUIDE**

# CULTURAL TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

How to maximize your success

Canada

 **EDC**  
TAKE ON **THE WORLD**

When it comes to business etiquette, what's acceptable in one country, may not be in another. To be successful in international trade, you need to understand the culture, traditions and business habits of your clients and partners in your target markets and adapt your communication and business strategies accordingly.

It could mean the difference between winning—or losing—a contract.

Made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom is a strong market of interest for Canadian companies across a diverse range of sectors, including energy and renewables, infrastructure and transportation, advanced technologies and financial services.

Following the U.K.'s exit from the European Union, known as Brexit, the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement came into force on April 1, 2021, to ensure continued preferential trade access into each other's markets and the elimination of tariffs on 98% Canadian products exported to the island nation.

With its large, diverse and sophisticated economy, the U.K. is also an important source of foreign direct investment for Canada, ranking third after the United States and the Netherlands and second after the U.S. as a destination for Canadian direct investment abroad.



# THE UNITED KINGDOM

## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- 1. Know your geography.** With a population of more than 67 million spread over four countries, the U.K. has many different cultures and markets. Don't mistake a contact's background, especially referring to a Scot as English, or someone from Northern Ireland as being from the Republic of Ireland, which isn't part of the U.K.
- 2. Follow the lead.** Most business contacts will engage in small talk, especially around the weather, before a meeting, but don't be offended if your counterparts get down to business quickly. Picking up on "more polite" indirect banter will help guide your own tone for the meeting. Most meetings and interactions begin with a firm handshake and a smile.
- 3. Make time to socialize.** It's common for late afternoon business meetings to end up in a pub or a bar, where more social, personal conversations are common. Politics may be discussed in social settings, but try to steer clear of going down the Brexit rabbit hole (and other potentially sensitive topics) and getting into debates to avoid the chance of a business relationship turning sour. In London, a Thursday is traditionally "pub evening" with colleagues, while Fridays are saved for family and friends. In other parts of the U.K., Friday is typically pub night.
- 4. Dress appropriately.** At daytime meetings, a suit and no tie are now the norm for most men, however, always have an emergency tie on hand just in case. You don't want to be dressed more casually than your British counterpart. Women often wear dresses, skirts or pant suits, or a dress with a jacket. If in doubt, dress more formally.
- 5. Time your day.** To be on time for meetings, which often run longer than scheduled, give yourself extra time for travel. London traffic can get hectic during the day, so using the tube is usually more efficient. Central London and the City of London are great for walking, and it may be faster to get from Point A to Point B on foot. If your meeting is outside London, the train is likely the best option.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC's [country and market info page](#)
- › Visit the [Canadian Trade Commissioner Service's country and sector information page](#)
- › Reach out to [Stephen Wilhelm](#), EDC's regional vice-president for Europe and [Olga Vovk](#), EDC's senior regional manager for Europe based in London, England.



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE U.K.

- › Located in the South of England and one of the U.K.'s most famous tourist attractions, Stonehenge is believed to have been created around 3,000 BC, meaning it's older than the Egyptian pyramids.
- › It's only the 80<sup>th</sup>-largest country in the world, but the U.K. has the sixth-largest gross domestic product (GDP) at US\$2.7 trillion in 2020.
- › Most people call the clock tower next to the London Houses of Parliament "Big Ben," but that's actually the name of the massive 13-tonne bell inside. The actual tower was called St. Stephen's Tower until 2012 when it was renamed the Elizabeth Tower.
- › Tea is by far the most famous drink for Brits. It's estimated that they drink 165 million cups of tea every day.
- › Queen Elizabeth, who turned 95 on April 21, 2021, is the longest reigning queen in the world. On Feb. 6, 2022, the monarch celebrated 70 years on the throne. The royal residence, Windsor Castle, was built in 1080 and is one of the oldest occupied castles in the world.
- › London is the biggest city in the U.K. and home to many famous attractions, including Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral and the London Eye observation wheel overlooking the Thames River. It's also the birthplace of William Shakespeare, The Beatles and Harry Potter.
- › The Giant's Causeway of Northern Ireland is a natural wonder of the world featuring strangely symmetrical columns of rock reaching out into the Atlantic Ocean. Truly inspirational.

## ABOUT EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CANADA

### Who are we?

Export Development Canada (EDC) is Canada's export credit agency. Our job is to support and develop Canada's export trade by helping Canadian companies respond to international business opportunities. We're a self-financing Crown Corporation that operates at arm's length from the Government of Canada.

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