



EDC GUIDE

CULTURAL TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS IN THE UNITED STATES

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.

The United States is known for many things, including its technological innovation, military might, dominant economy, high average incomes and moderate unemployment rate. It's also renowned for its fascinating natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon and its imprint on global culture, including music, movies and TV shows, as well as sporting and food industries. With a population of more than 330 million, the U.S. continues to offer investment and exporting opportunities for Canadian businesses.

The U.S. is our closest and largest trading partner, friend and ally. Our total trade in goods and services was \$1 trillion in 2019, with Canadian merchandise exports to the U.S. totalling \$446.6 billion the same year. Canada is the top trading partner in most U.S. states and our companies operating south of the border directly employ more than 870,000 Americans.

Our two countries have a profound and multifaceted partnership and alliance, strengthened by shared values and interests. We're both committed to promoting diversity and inclusion, like working in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

Our trade and investment agreements offer Canadian companies access to the American market. The Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) seeks to stabilize trade between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, and abolish tariffs and other trade barriers.

The top industry sectors for Canadian foreign direct investment projects in the U.S. are software and IT services, financial and business services, real estate, industrial equipment and food and beverages.

5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

1. **Be on time:** Americans appreciate punctuality. Being late for a meeting is regarded as a sign of disrespect to your partner or client. In the U.S., it's widely accepted that "time is money." Meetings typically run 30 to 60 minutes, with a clear agenda.
2. **Body language:** Always start the meeting with a firm handshake while making eye contact. Don't be tactile because Americans don't really like physical contact. Do your homework in advance in order to participate in small talk and avoid awkward silences. Americans enjoy chatting about anything and everything before negotiations to create a relaxed atmosphere. Conversely, they don't appreciate the sometimes-oppressive silence that can be encountered in other cultures before a meeting begins.
3. **Communication:** Americans don't beat around the bush. Don't be surprised or offended by their frankness. Americans take a pragmatic approach to negotiations and business meetings, and they express their views in a straightforward manner. Disagreements are best delivered in non-confrontational terms ("I see your point, but..."). Aim for a "win-win" approach. Americans say what they mean, so "yes means yes, no means no and 'maybe' isn't a polite way for saying no—it really means maybe."
4. **Business relationships:** When conducting business, Americans are looking for key elements:
 - › A good price-performance ratio;
 - › A technological or commercial advantage; and
 - › Strict respect for delivery deadlines.

Americans leave little room for the unexpected. You must convince them that the product or service proposed will bring them added value and that they'll generate income with your proposal. You only have a few minutes to convince them, so remember the importance of the "pitch." Americans are focused on the deal and results. They don't need a relationship to make a deal. Relationships can be built over time. They do seek "likability" and signs of trust in business partners such as truthfulness and friendliness.
5. **Network, network, network:** Networking is essential in America to develop business contacts (breakfasts, seminars, lunches, etc., are all important opportunities). At most networking functions, business cards are used to exchange contact information. Americans usually dispense with formality and use first names. But when you first meet, use the title and last name of your counterpart.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC's country and market info page about [the United States](#).
- › Visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service pages about [the United States](#).
- › Visit the Canada-United States Chamber of Commerce [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Michael Gonsalves](#), senior regional manager, Atlanta, and [Sanaa El Maazi](#), associate regional manager, Chicago.



INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

- › The U.S. has maintained its position of being the world's largest economy since 1871 and makes up almost a quarter of the global economy.
- › With a land mass of 9.834 million square kilometres, the U.S. is the third-largest country in the world—nearly as big as the entire continent of Europe. It's also home to about 45 million immigrants—more than any country in the world.
- › A tourist mecca, the U.S. is the third-most visited country by international tourists after Spain and France.
- › An important business hub, the U.S. has 575 of the world's 2,000 largest companies, according to *Forbes* magazine.
- › At 8,891 kms, the U.S. shares the world's longest land border with Canada.
- › More than half of the 50 states—26—have names with native American origins.
- › The U.S. accounts for 21% of energy consumption globally and has the world's highest-per-capita energy consumption. America is second in the world in energy production.
- › Founded in Arkansas in 1962, Walmart is the world's largest private sector employer, employing 2.2 million people.
- › The U.S. is at the centre of global invention: Airplanes, computers, cellphones, potato chips, and light bulbs are just a few examples of American ingenuity.
- › The U.S. film industry is the largest, oldest, and most profitable film industry in the world. According to research firm, IBISWorld, the American film industry generated about \$33 billion in 2019.

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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