

UAE – a snapshot



Aerial shot of The Palm with interchange construction in the foreground, UAE courtesy of arabianEye.com

Two extremely important yet invisible international trade barriers that are often overlooked are those of language and culture. Not having an understanding of a country's language and cultural practices can be detrimental to securing good business relationships with your export countries.

This brief has been put together to provide you with advice and recommendations for doing business in the UAE. More detailed information on the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries can be found in the links listed below – the following text is a snapshot:

The UAE is a federation of seven states situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia on the Persian Gulf, bordering Oman and Saudi Arabia. The seven states, termed emirates, are Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain.

It is considered that Abu Dhabi and Dubai, two of the most popular emirates for British export, are more accustomed to Western culture than other countries in the region. Although English is more widely spoken in these two states and some business practices appear to resemble Western styles, it should **not** be presumed that Abu Dhabi and Dubai do business the same as we do!

Language etiquette

- Even if your counterparts do speak English, taking some **translated business cards** with you will show that you've made a huge effort which will help to cement a business relationship. The business cards should be

translated into Arabic on one side and English on the other. The cost is around £50 plus VAT for the design and translation, and then you'd obviously need to get them printed. A few suggested translation providers can be found at:

- the Kwintessential agency (experts on the Middle East languages and culture) – see: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/translation/translation.html> The agency is Somerset-based and the contact there is Neil Payne, tel: 0845-1249615
 - Redtray is another South West agency (based in Bath) which offers translation (see www.redtray.co.uk/translation_services.htm). If you click on 'Redtray Translate' in the top right hand corner of the home page it will lead you to their 10 useful tips about employing a translator. The contact there is Martin MacKain-Bremner, tel: 01225-481889
 - Birmingham Chamber of Commerce's Translation Services. See: <http://www.bgdirect.co.uk/Translating.aspx> . They offer a very quick service for translating business cards although I am sure the other agencies offer that service as well.
- **Website translation** – If you are considering having your website, or parts of it translated, it is recommended that you seek professional advice, given that Arabic is a Cyrillic language and encoding/technical aspects need to be considered. Advice should be sought on localising the website for this region's markets in order to optimise search engines and ensure that certain images and colours that you may use for your UK or other markets, do not offend your UAE counterparts.
 - **Learn a few simple phrases of Arabic!** – RLN SW has a number of podcasts on the website, which include meet and greet phrases. Please see: <http://www.rln-southwest.co.uk/Pages/Publications/Podcasts.html>
You can also find several podcasts under: <http://www.roughguides.com/website/travel/Phrasebooks/default.aspx>
There is also a languages section on a BBC site, with a particular section dedicated to Arabic: See http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/yoursay/lost_for_words/other_languages/come_on_have_a_guess_arabic.shtml
You can also find some phrases and useful information about the Arabic language at: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/language/arabic-phrases.html>
 - If your product(s) is/are of a technical nature, a useful document to take to any business meetings or trade shows is a **Glossary of Terms**. You can compile this yourself by creating a list of terms on the left hand side in English. You can then use one of the above translation providers to translate this for you. There is a minimum charge of £50 plus VAT.

Cultural etiquette

A few cultural considerations to bear in mind are:

- Business in the Middle East focuses on **relationship** practices, deeming it necessary to build relationships with your counterparts in order to do business effectively.
- **Timings** of meetings – these could take place at any time of the day (or night)! People and relationships take precedence over punctuality and precise scheduling.

- **Religion** – A growing number of Muslims are prevalent in the UAE (see: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/545016-thousands-turn-to-islam-in-dubai---figures> and religious festivals and customs need to be considered when doing business with the UAE. Further information regarding this can be found in the links.
- **Women** – when addressing a female Middle Eastern counterpart, you should shake her hand **only** if she extends it to you first. Avoid excessive eye contact.

RLN SW recommends that businesses have some exposure to the business culture of another country prior to going into the market. This is particularly important for Middle Eastern countries. The level of exposure would usually depend on your objectives, for example, anything from a short exploratory trip to a long term business relationship. A wealth of cultural information is available through the links listed below.

If your relationship with the Middle East moves towards longer term, cultural training/coaching is recommended. Costs for personal one to one training vary considerably, depending on the provider, and can range from £40 per hour up to over £1000 per day per person. Kwintessential (details above), who are Middle East experts, would be able to help with this.

Further language, cultural and country information can be found at the following websites:

http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=United_Arab_Emirates

This site provides really useful information including: making appointments, business dress, welcome topics of conversation, what you should know before negotiating, pace of business, negotiating and contacts

Cultural and country information can be found at:

<http://www.hejleh.com/countries/uae.html>

http://www.rlnsw.com/Pages/Publications/cultural_briefings.html

The Arab British Chamber of Commerce is another good place to go for information on the Middle East. They also display some useful briefings for the region, including one for UAE:

http://www.abcc.org.uk/business_services/country_profiles.cfm?cit_id=671&countryProfile=yes&FaArea1=customWidgets.countryprofile_show_2

This site provides useful information, including daily news by Middle Eastern country/region

http://www.ameinfo.com/united_arab_emirates/

More detailed information on each of the individual UAE states can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates