

JAPAN BUSINESS CULTURE REPORT

This report is designed to support and complement existing cultural information available through the UKTI posts in Japan (see www.rln-east.com/culture). It adds value in that it provides evidence and information from discussions and interviews with those 'out there in the field' with regard to Japanese business culture. Its primary purpose is to help better prepare UK businesses for approaching the Japanese market for the first time.



2007.

The information contained in this report is based on a number of sources, including the three UKTI Japan culture workshops in Sep 2006 and Feb & Oct 2007 in Histon, discussions with both English and Japanese businesses and business support agencies in Japan, information from UKTI culture sheets and pod cast, UKTI Japan's 'Information for Business Visitors', and a visit by project staff to Japan in September

The report focuses solely on Japanese language and business culture, and has been written in an informal style to reflect the comments made by those we met. To provide a range of views and establish consistency, we have cross-referenced comments from a number of sources as identified above. Much of the report focusses on the business culture of Tokyo and Osaka. As a first port of call we would recommend the UKTI posts in the cities of Tokyo and Osaka.

Although the report focusses on answers to specific questions posed by clients, it is important to emphasise the similarities between Japanese and British business culture, as the report may otherwise seem somewhat intimidating! These similarities include a general penchant for fairness and politeness, a focus on relationship-building, a desire for longer-term partnership, and an overall tolerance towards the British and willingness to help the overcome cultural differences. Careful planning, attention to detail, unprecedented efficiency, and involvement of colleagues at all levels within an organisation are Japanese traits which are attractive to the UK contact.



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The report addresses 6 main questions. These questions are those raised by UKTI clients we have talked to:

1. What are the initial impressions companies have of Japan when they first visit?
2. How do you know whether a meeting is going well, and what negotiating styles are used? Sometimes I am not getting straight answers to my questions. Am I making myself understood clearly?
3. I have not heard from my potential contact for some time. Does that mean I have been unsuccessful?
4. How would Japanese clients react to me as a female supplier?
5. What about the language?
6. What about the intricacies or formalities of greeting and social graces?

1. What are the initial impressions companies have of Japan when they first visit?

At a UKTI Japanese business culture workshop held in Histon in Cambridgeshire on both 8 September 2006 and 2 February 2007 clients were asked for their first impressions of visiting and doing business in Japan. Initial reactions included these following comments.

There is a very precise and thorough business culture, couple with an emphasis on quality in everything they saw. Tremendous care is taken with all aspects of doing business, and there is cleanliness and order wherever they went. There is a highly respectful and traditional culture, and excellent & healthy food. There was also common consensus that it appeared difficult to gauge reactions in meetings & negotiations.



An opening statement, and theme throughout the workshop, was that Japanese business culture is embedded in the traditions of Japanese history, and these traditions manifest themselves in various forms during your business relationship. Family history as well as national history is considered important.

The foreign languages most used appear to be (in order) English, Chinese and Korean, and this is reflected in public signposting and company documentation that we saw. The British are generally respected in Japan.

2. *How do you know whether a meeting is going well, and what negotiating styles are used? Sometimes I am not getting straight answers to my questions. Am I making myself understood clearly?*



On many occasions some of the decisions which you would expect to be made during a meeting would in fact have already been discussed and made in advance, and the meeting may be more of a formality. It therefore makes good business sense to do as much preparatory work in advance and ensure regular correspondence with potential meeting partners prior to the negotiation or presentation so that you can gauge initial reactions. It would also be good if your contact in Japan could exchange some preliminary dialogue to elicit likely reactions to what you have to propose. This is a well-known process called "nemawashi" or "going round the roots." Japanese like to place emphasis on harmony. You may therefore not receive direct answers to direct questions.

It is also useful to have a Japanese colleague or contact with you, as (s)he will usually be able to follow the subtleties of the meeting and gauge visual reactions better than a UK guest. (S)he could also prompt you as to where you are going wrong and where there are particular strengths you could emphasise. In many cases you will need to be prepared to factor in the time and cost of a follow-up meeting.

A good sign is when you are invited to a second meeting, which is common practice where they have liked what they have heard. Do not be put off by this, rather treat it as a measure of success. If you are not invited for a second meeting and do not receive immediate positive feedback, then this is sometimes a sign that you offer needs more thought and discussion. A first meeting may be simply to build an initial understanding of each other without dealing directly with the business in hand. An interpreter may also be able to pick up on subtleties of communication.



Your host or client will often not be willing to state personal opinions in front of colleagues, particularly senior colleagues, so beware of asking questions which are too direct and may cause embarrassment. The presence of your Japanese agent or local contact will boost your credibility and enable your

Japanese hosts or potential clients to be more at ease. The presence of this 'insider' will also help with language issues.

Equally, a client may want to obtain a consensus from colleagues on what you are proposing, and this consensus may require separate internal discussions which take time. Although on the whole senior or older staff in a Japanese company have a greater decision-making role, on occasion a more junior member of staff may have more 'power' due to their specialist knowledge or experience, and you will need to allow time for these internal relationships to work their course.



Other useful tips are (1) to send your Japanese contact a summary of any notes of your presentation in advance as well as a summary of the team's competencies so that (s)he may have a chance to read through them and discuss internally (b) add Japanese annotation and (c) use the evening drinks session to reinforce any ideas or proposals!



The Japanese believe that everyone who is involved needs to be at meetings so these tend to be quite large. The most senior person may say little or nothing, leaving the presentation and discussion to a junior member. To learn who is most the senior, watch who is served tea first! Seniority of seating is normal with the most senior furthest from the door. The Japanese are comfortable with periods of silence for reflection, If they fall silent, resist the urge to burst into speech. The Japanese also appreciate restraint in gesture, in dress and in tone of voice.

The Japanese seem to be comfortable with paradox, and if you accept that sometimes logic does not always follow to a finite conclusion you will find it easier to do business in Japan.

3. I have not heard from my potential Japanese client for some time. Does that mean I have been unsuccessful?

There is a clear hierarchical system in Japan, so do not be surprised if your proposal needs to work its way through several layers of management and internal consultation. This could at times take up to a month, and lengthy periods of decision-making are again common in business practice. Once a decision has been made, however, expect the implementation to be thorough and precise.

Relationships are very important in Japanese business, and do not underestimate the importance of the social activities taking place after work (eating, drinking, general socialising). It may take a long time for you to build good relations, and this cannot be done remotely from the UK. The Japanese like to know what you as a person are like before they do business with you. It is during these activities that your Japanese client may be 'testing' you to get a feel for what type of person you are and whether (s)he feels (s)he can do business with you. Take the time to invest in these relationships, which may take months (if not longer) to come to fruition.

Japan is a network society, bound by rules and standards of behaviour. Conformity is expected and a Japanese proverb explains that 'a nail which sticks up must be hammered down.' 'He is a team player' is a highly paid compliment. Japan is a collective society hence Japanese people tend to do things together, this is especially the case in decision making, which is a time-consuming collective process called '*nemawashi*'. This process can be challenging to foreigners but when the Japanese are ready, things can move very fast.



Personal dignity, or *face*, is very important to the Japanese, so they work hard to save *face*, to give other's *face* and to avoid others losing *face*. It is therefore an indirect culture and you always need to read between the lines. A Japanese business person may not wish to offend by giving a negative response to your proposal, therefore be prepared for such as response to be clouded in general terms or delaying tactics.



The Japanese are generally hungry for information which they then need to absorb and consider, therefore feedback may not come immediately. Equally, Japanese colleagues may need to discuss the issues under consideration to verify that they have mutually understood what is on offer. If you are asked the same question more than once, this may be because your Japanese contacts need to be sure that they have

understood all the information you are presenting so that they can report to superiors.

The Japanese like to get to know business partners over a period of time. Expect many meetings in which no business is discussed but in which your prospective partners get the feel of you. When the Japanese make agreements, it is for long term. Human interaction on a regular basis is important for building relationships and can help overcome or avoid miscommunication.

With some products (such as household electronics) globalization is having an effect on colour schemes, for instance, where previously popular colours (red in China, gold in the Middle East) are being replaced by standard black or grey units.

4. *How would Japanese clients react to me as a female supplier?*

They will treat you differently than they would a female Japanese business contact as they know you are from overseas. There are also several Japanese companies where senior staff are female, and the Japanese are having to adjust to this trend. We would still recommend, however, that you make sure your job title in Japanese adequately communicates your seniority. Many Japanese SMEs are still dominated by male senior staff.



In some Japanese companies where a Japanese female member of staff may be more senior than her male colleagues, English is sometimes used to avoid the use of 'female' Japanese language to male junior colleagues, as this 'female' language is usually reserved as deferential to Japanese men. It is best to wear skirts which fall below rather than above knee level, if this is the chosen attire. Many business women also wear trouser suits these days

5. *What about the language?*

At first sight written Japanese is complex and daunting, as it can consist of three different alphabets all mixed together. **Hiragana** is phonetic and is used as the 'traditional' Japanese alphabet, and in crude terms appears to be a series of upright 'shoelace' characters (eg: であるにとどまっている). There are 48 hiragana characters. **Katakana** is used to phonetically transliterate 'imported' words, and in crude terms appears to be a series of short straight and bendy lines (eg: ヒルトンホテル). There are 46 katakana characters in total, and we are led to believe that you can learn them in a couple of afternoons. **Kanji** are Chinese characters which are pictorial (eg: 東京, meaning "Tokyo" and "大阪" meaning "Osaka").

Some examples: in the sentence "私は残念である" (meaning "I am sorry") the first character is kanji, the second hiragana, the third and fourth kanji, the fifth, sixth and seventh hiragana. In the sentence "私はヒルトンホテルにとどまっている。" (meaning "I am staying at the Hilton Hotel") the first character is kanji, the second hiragana, then there is a row of 7 katakana characters to translate Hilton Hotel, then a series of hiragana

characters to present the verb and postpositional phrase (the grammar of place).

We found the revised Romanized 3rd edition of the book "Japanese for Busy People Book 1" by the Association for Japanese Language Teaching (ISBN: 13-978-4-7700-3008-5) extremely clear and well thought-out, with exercises to reinforce the main points of grammar and new vocabulary carefully presented and organised at a logical steady pace.

The Hiragana Alphabet:

あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o				
か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko	き ya kya	きゆ kyū	きよ kyo	
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so	し ya sha	しゆ syū(shu)	しよ syō(shō)	
た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to	ち ya cha	ちゆ chyū(chu)	ちよ chyō(chō)	
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no	に ya nya	にゆ nyū	によ nyō	
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho	ひ ya hya	ひゆ hyū	ひよ hyō	
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo	み ya mya	みゆ myū	みよ myō	
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo				
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro	り ya rya	りゆ ryū	りよ ryō	
わ wa			を wo					
ん n								

The
Alphabet:

っ p,t,s,k	* sometimes	は wa	へ e	を o			
が ga	ぎ gi	ぐ gu	げ ge	ご go	ぎ ya gya	ぎゆ gyū	ぎよ gyō
ざ za	じ ji	ず zu	ぜ ze	ぞ zo	じ ya ja	じゆ jyū	じよ jyō
だ da	ぢ chi	づ zu	で de	ど do			
ば ba	び bi	ぶ bu	べ be	ぼ bo	び ya bya	びゆ byū	びよ byō
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so	し ya sha	しゆ syū(shu)	しよ syō(shō)
た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to	ち ya cha	ちゆ chyū(chu)	ちよ chyō(chō)
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no	に ya nya	にゆ nyū	によ nyō
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho	ひ ya hya	ひゆ hyū	ひよ hyō
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo	み ya mya	みゆ myū	みよ myō
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo			
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro	り ya rya	りゆ ryū	りよ ryō
わ wa			を wo				
ん n							
っ p,t,s,k	* sometimes	ハ wa	へ e	ヲ o			
ガ ga	ギ gi	グ gu	ゲ ge	ゴ go	ギ ya gya	ギユ gyū	ギヨ gyō
ザ za	ジ ji	ズ zu	ゼ ze	ゾ zo	ジ ya ja	ジユ jyū	ジヨ jyō
ダ da	ヂ chi	ヅ zu	デ de	ド do			
バ ba	ビ bi	ブ bu	ベ be	ボ bo	ビ ya bya	ビユ byū	ビヨ byō
パ pa	ピ pi	プ pu	ペ pe	ポ po	ピ ya pya	ピユ pyū	ピヨ pyō

Katakana

If you have time, study the katakana alphabet. This will ensure that you are not completely alienated by the language on arrival. Once you can read words, you will be surprised at how many can be deciphered. It will also help you find your way using maps (beware of English maps, they will not help you read Japanese street signs!).

It is important to translate literature and other promotional material (including key website information) into Japanese. Although many distributors deal with foreign suppliers, it is useful to have a Japanese interpreter on hand. The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Japanese phrases cannot be overestimated. A guide to how to best use an interpreter can be found on the UKTI international

communications website page <http://www.rln-east.com/resources/how-to-guides.asp>.

Useful phrases and more advanced telephone dialogues can be found on http://www.rln-east.com/materials/receptionist_phrases.asp which is a basic language lesson focussing on telephone Japanese. Financial support for Japanese language training in the East of England is available via the LCIT (Language & Culture for International Trade) programme, which provides a sliding scale of match funding (50% over 24hrs for 5 staff or more down to 50% for 10hrs for 2 staff). For more details see www.rln-east.com/funding and www.rln-east.com/lcit.



In terms of the Japanese learning English, they learn the Roman alphabet at elementary school but may have difficulty with pronunciation although they are very good at reading and writing. In recent years the JET (Japan English Teacher) programme, has brought English speakers into schools and universities as Language Assistants which has to a small extent helped alleviate this problem, although there is debate as to how effective this has been. On the whole, the Japanese education system does not lend itself to learning spoken English. Windows has hiragana embedded in its software, and this is usually accessed during typing by the Alt-Del keys.

UKTI's publication "Information for Business Visitors" contains the following useful information: The Embassy maintains a list of interpreters who are willing to work for visiting British business people. Their charges are less than half normal commercial rates.

The interpreters are perfectly competent to deal with general business conversations. But they are not normally specialised or professionally qualified interpreters. Anyone expecting to have a very technical or difficult discussion, especially one involving specialised terminology, should consider employing a properly qualified interpreter from one of the agencies which provides these services. The Embassy can supply a list of such agencies if required. The main hotels in Tokyo can also arrange interpreters at fairly short notice, although their costs, too, are normally higher than those charged by the interpreters on the Embassy list.



The interpreters on the Embassy list normally need to be booked some time in advance, but occasionally they are available also at short notice (although this may mean that we are unable to get your first choice of interpreter).

The Embassy is always glad to introduce business people in need of interpreters to one of those on the list. But the Embassy is not an agency and cannot therefore be responsible in any way, either on matters of payment or conditions under which the interpreters work, or for the standard of services which are provided by interpreters.



An interpreter's availability to do overtime cannot be guaranteed, unless arranged in advance. If interpreters are invited to lunches, dinners or parties, it should be made absolutely clear whether the invitation is being extended for social reasons or whether they are being asked to work overtime. In this way misunderstandings can be avoided. The interpreters should always be paid in cash and they will also normally expect full

payment for cancellations unless made well in advance.

Type of work	Description	Tokyo		Outside Tokyo
		Full day	Half day	Full day
A	General ie non-technical seminars, presentations, press conferences, speeches (consecutive interpretation only); Technical company visits and trade fairs	Yen 32,000	Yen 20,000	Yen 34,000
B	Non-technical company visits and trade fairs	Yen 27,000	Yen 16,000	Yen 29,000
C	Bilingual receptionist work (no interpretation)	Yen 15,000	N/A	Yen 15,000

Tokyo is defined as the Tokyo Metropolitan area consisting of Tokyo's 23 wards (or "ku" in Japanese). Outside Tokyo includes all municipalities (cities, towns and villages, or "shi", "cho" and "son" in Japanese) in the outer areas of Tokyo, in addition to the other prefectures. Trips to Outside Tokyo areas will be charged at a full day rate (ie no half day rate).



A full day means between 3½ and 7 working hours plus a one-hour lunch break. A half day is up to 3½ hours. If a half day runs over 3½ hours, the full day rate will automatically become payable. Trips outside of Tokyo will be charged at a full day rate (ie no half day rate). For overtime in excess of 7 hours, Yen 4,000 will be charged per hour or part hour for A & B types of work, and Y2,000 for C type of work. Before 8 am

and after 6 pm an extra Yen 1,000 per hour or part hour will be charged in addition to the usual daily rate and/or hourly overtime rate for A & B types of work, and Y500 for C type of work.

All rates are calculated from the time of meeting up with the interpreter until the client and interpreter part company ie including travelling time. The interpreter should also be paid for any time spent in a preliminary briefing meeting. Higher rates may be payable in certain circumstances, depending on the nature of the work and the availability of interpreters. Travel expenses



are met by the client in addition to the basic fee. For cancellations, a full fee is charged in the case of cancellation on the day of assignment or the previous day for whatever reason unless the interpreter herself cancels. In the case of cancellation with less than a week's notice, it is 30% of the normal fee.

It is most important to provide informative materials about the client's background and about the subject matter of the assignment, eg company brochures, product catalogues, as far in advance as possible (the more technical the subject, the more detailed the information required). At the minimum you should at least provide a briefing or have a discussion with the interpreter regarding the purpose of your visit before holding any meetings.

6. What about the intricacies or formalities of greeting and social graces?

An initial sub question of this was 'do I use first names or surnames when talking to my client, and how do I react when they start using their first name?' Many Japanese names have meanings (eg: Akemi means 'beautiful', Akira means 'intelligence', Keiko means 'respectful child', Takashi means 'eminence', Takeshi means 'brave'). The first name follows the surname, and most Japanese family names consist of two characters. The Japanese commonly address each other by family name, usually attaching an appropriate title such as 'san' (eg: Sato-san).



If a client starts using their first name in e-mails, you may follow suit, but remember to include the title. The names of Japanese contacts are written in 'kanji' (Chinese characters) and the names of foreigners in 'katakana' (a system used for writing words borrowed from other languages). A useful website for transliterating English names into Japanese is <http://www.takase.com/Names/NameInJapaneseA.htm>. It is good practice to have your Japanese name on the reverse of your business card, and it will

help your client with the pronunciation of your name. Equally important is your job title, as emphasis is placed on these.

In response to the question 'do I bow or shake hands?' we can advise that bowing is the usual custom between Japanese, although handshakes are starting to be used even between Japanese and almost always with Western visitors. There are 3 angles at which to bow depending on the seniority of the person you are addressing, ranging from a simply nod of the head (junior staff) to a full 90° bow (senior staff). It may well be that your Japanese client bows after you have bowed, and you will not need to bow further. It is useful to know the basic greetings and farewells for these occasions. It is also customary to present business cards with both hands whilst bowing.



Clients also asked about which gifts they should take and when & how they should present them. It is not a Japanese custom to open gifts when presented with them. The more power the contact has, the more expensive or unique the gift should be. Given the Japanese affinity with national history and identity, gifts which are typically English or with Royal connections would be appropriate. Be prepared in case the Japanese client does not have a gift prepared and they will need to hunt around for one at short notice – best to take advice from your agent or local contact before your

meeting begins.

The presentation of the business card is an important ritual, which you should learn. You should offer your card with both hands and receive your counterparts' card with both hands, keeping the card at approximately chest level. It is acceptable to place a card on the table in front of you and this can be quite useful should you forget the name or title of the card bearer. You can respectfully place it in your wallet or at the back of your cardholding case. Under no circumstances should you write on, damage or hand back a card as this is considered rude. Try to have your business card printed in English and Japanese.



This is your chance to get to know the Japanese and build a relationship with them. When offices close at about 7 pm, colleagues often go out to eat or drink together. Don't miss an opportunity to join them. Things normally stop around 9pm as people often have a one or two hour commute home. Always offer to reciprocate hospitality at the same level as you received it. Office gifts can be exchanged but don't open them. They won't open yours in your presence.

Top Tips for Doing Business in Japan:

The following is an extract from UKTI's publication "Information for Business Visitors". It contains ten top tips on doing business in Japan.



Despite what some books say about the uniqueness of Japan, there is nothing mystical about doing business in this country. Business is business here as elsewhere, and increasingly cosmopolitan. So you need not worry unduly about the niceties of Japanese etiquette. But a few general points are worth remembering:

1. Take things slowly. English comprehension is usually not as good as it appears. Many Japanese are too polite to let you know when they do not fully understand. Keep what you say simple and straightforward. The same is true if an interpreter is used. Speak in short bursts which can be easily translated. Don't ask rhetorical questions. Don't use sporting metaphors. Only make very simple jokes, if you have to. And don't try to do business in Japanese unless you are very confident indeed. For follow-up meetings at least, you should provide your own interpreter, as a matter of basic courtesy.

2. Never be late. Punctuality is crucial ! Tokyo is a crowded city which can be difficult to get around. Leave plenty of time to allow for traffic hold-ups. Keep to the timetable for your meetings. Don't try to change or cancel appointments at the last minute unless you have absolutely no alternative. Don't overrun the designated period unless your interlocutor clearly wants to extend it.

3. Take business cards with you and have plenty available. They should be printed in Japanese on the reverse and be standard size (90 x 55mm). Business cards in other sizes do not fit the card boxes which sit on practically every Japanese desk and so are likely to be discarded.



4. Construct a short but warm introductory statement for each meeting. This should not be a sales pitch. It should explain why you are here, how long you will be here, the sort of people you are seeing and any particular previous contact you have had with Japan. You could refer briefly to the long-standing warm ties between the UK and Japan. If appropriate/possible, show interest in your host's background, education, family, hobbies etc. Give information about your own if asked. This is part

of the sharing of contacts which helps to build up a relationship. No need to go over the top. But it does no harm to indulge in some well-placed flattery.

5. Then, after you and your interlocutor have made your respective introductory statements, make your sales pitch. Decide what are the five or six crucial points you want to get across. Do not be worried if you feel you wish to refer to a previously prepared note. Your interlocutor may well do this.



6. Do not be afraid of silences. Sit tight and wait for something to happen. It is a common Western flaw in the Far East to feel that silences have to be filled. In negotiations, for instance, this normally means that the Westerner ends up conceding something.

7. If, on the other hand, you are on the receiving end of a barrage of detailed and apparently pointless questions, try to bear with them and answer them. This is both a sign of interest in your business and a means of testing a potential partner.

8. Personal posture is important. Sit firmly in chairs at meetings even if they are armchairs. Do not slump, don't cross your legs and maintain a fairly formal style. Don't blow your nose noisily. Don't drink tea offered to you before your host has invited you to do so. Shake hands at the beginning and at the end of meetings.

9. If you are taking gifts, make sure that they are well wrapped, if possible professionally. Tatty wrapping paper is a British disease; as are tatty, cheap gifts. They indicate a discourtesy to the recipient. Do not give the gift until the end of the meeting. Do not be fazed if you have given a gift and not received one. You will have scored a point. Don't open the gift immediately upon receiving it: if it is not very good, you will embarrass your host. If you open it, your host will also have to open yours and that could embarrass you.



10. Accept offers of hospitality with the same grace with which they are made. Entertainment outside the office is another way in which Japanese hosts test a potential business relationship before committing themselves fully. Try to enter into the spirit of things. On taking the first drink at meals, toast your host by raising by glass to him/her and to those around you before you drink. Don't drink until it is time for these toasts to take place. And if you are called on to sing - have a go ! If your Japanese hosts are able

to enjoy themselves singing with you, they will probably enjoy doing business with you.

Above all, be patient. Do not expect quick returns. They may come. But for many Japanese companies, the emphasis is more on developing the sort of trust and mutual confidence that will lead to a strong, enduring relationship than on getting down to business instantly. This is why Japan is a market requiring a strategic approach rather than an opportunistic one. It is also why the potential for long-term achievement is so great.

On a practical 'food note' we found it useful to take a small notepad and copy down the names of food in the restaurant windows which we wanted to eat. Menus are a useful way of practising katakana, and major railway stations offer a variety of good value eating houses.

UKTI and Other Support:



There are a number of business support organisations in Japan who are well positioned to assist the UK company doing business in Japan (see www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk then go to export-countries-Japan). We recommend the UKTI offices in Osaka and Tokyo as a first port of call. JETRO, the Japan External Trade Organization (www.jetro.go.jp) have office space which is made available free of charge

for up to 50 working days for companies setting up office or other facilities in Japan, and also provide free access to local advisors and consultants in a number of fields (a list of these is provided whilst you are over there, and you put your name down next to the appropriate advisor).

The British Chamber of Commerce in Japan (www.uknow.or.jp) have a set of useful 'dos and donts' on their website. They confirm that industry clusters in Japan include biotechnology and life sciences around Kyoto & Osaka, automotive and aerospace in Nagoya and Kawasaki (near Tokyo), creative & media in Kyoto and Tokyo. The British Market Council in Tokyo also support events and initiatives which support UK trade and investment with Japan.

The Export Communications Review (ECR) is a heavily subsidised UKTI scheme which aims to assess your company's international communications capability and generates an action plan. It covers areas such as communications planning, translation of literature, website localization, language and culture skills, and use of interpreters. Further details, including a sample ECR and link to the online application form, can be found on www.rln-east.com/ecr.

We also recommend that you undertake the (again subsidised) Online Market Introduction Service (OMIS) through which UKTI colleagues at the British Embassy in Tokyo or Consulate in Osaka can undertake informed market research and establish appropriate personal introductions to potential contacts in the market. As such, it is often the first port of call for selling into Japan.

Further Reading:

Further useful academic reading can be found in Jon Alston's and Isao Takei's book "Japanese Business Culture & Practices" (ISBN: 0-595-35547-1) which, although slightly out of date (it is written around the time of the last recession) contains a thorough review of Japanese business culture. The book has an American slant.

Of particular interest are chapters 3.15 'Meetings Japanese Style' which discusses the various types of meeting you may encounter, and chapter 4 which discusses negotiating tactics. The latter includes sections on the Japanese mindset, socialising, knowing priorities, the use of silence, slow decision-making, preparations, invisible negotiators, gift giving, who speaks first, interruptions, asking questions, attention to detail, dislike of certainty, the negotiating team, and tactics & procedures.

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