

***Cross-Cultural
Selling***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Michael Soon Lee, MBA and
Ralph R. Roberts with Joe Kraynak**



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About the Authors

Michael Soon Lee is a professional speaker, a marketing guru, and the leading expert on selling to people from diverse cultures. He has served as a marketing director for the State of California, a professor of marketing at several universities, and a producer for the ABC Television Network. Lee has written three books on selling to multicultural customers: *Opening Doors: Selling to Multicultural Real Estate Clients* (Oakhill Press), *Selling to Multicultural New Home Customers* (New Home Specialist), and *Marketing to Multicultural Credit Union Members* (Credit Union Executives). In addition, he has spoken around the world on the subject of selling to customers from other cultures since 1985. He has been an award-winning salesperson as well as sales manager of large franchised companies and small independent firms. Lee is the first Asian American to earn the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation in the history of the National Speakers Association. In the past 20 years, some of his 1,000-plus clients have included Coca-Cola, General Motors, Boeing, State Farm Insurance, Coldwell Banker Real Estate, the National Association of Realtors, and the National Association of Home Builders. To find out more about Lee and the products and services he offers, visit his Web site at www.EthnoConnect.com.

Ralph R. Roberts's sales success is legendary. He has been profiled by the Associated Press, CNN, and *Time* magazine, and was once dubbed by *Time* magazine "the best selling Realtor in America." In addition to being one of the most successful salespeople in America, Roberts is also an experienced mentor, coach, consultant, and author. He has penned several successful books, including *Flipping Houses For Dummies*; *Foreclosure Investing For Dummies*; *Foreclosure Self-Defense For Dummies*; *Advanced Selling For Dummies*; *Mortgage Myths: 77 Secrets That Will Save You Thousands on Home Financing*; *Foreclosure Myths: 77 Secrets to Saving Thousands on Distressed Properties!*; *Walk Like a Giant, Sell Like a Madman*; and *52 Weeks of Sales Success* (all published by Wiley Publishing); and *Protect Yourself from Real Estate and Mortgage Fraud* (Kaplan).

Although Roberts has many varied skills and interests, his true passion is selling . . . and showing other salespeople how to boost their sales and profits. In *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies*, Roberts teams up with the top cross-cultural selling guru in the world to reveal practical tips and tricks for expanding sales into the ever-growing global marketplace. To find out more about Ralph Roberts, visit his Web site at www.AboutRalph.com.

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Dedication

From Michael: To my family, whose sacrifice enabled me to write this book, and to the hundreds of salespeople over the years who freely shared their successes and failures in selling to multicultural customers. I trust that you and those who follow in your footsteps will benefit from the information contained herein.

From Ralph: To the many salespeople, companies, and organizations I have mentored and coached who have actually had the sticktoitism to put into practice the lessons they have learned . . . and succeeded because of it.

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Introduction

The multicultural marketplace is on the rise and about to explode. According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth, total purchases by Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and Native Americans in the United States already exceed \$2 trillion annually. That figure is bigger than the economies of all but the nine largest countries in the world and is expected to rise to \$3 trillion by 2011.

These groups and others could become your customers if you demonstrate a sensitivity to their cultures and meet their unique needs. Unfortunately, without special knowledge, training, and practice, the average American salesperson is ill-prepared to take advantage of the opportunity. In fact, simply by sticking to their traditional sales pitches, many salespeople are destined to offend multicultural customers without ever realizing it. All they know is that the customer left all of a sudden without buying anything.

As any experienced salesperson knows, selling isn't about pushing products or services onto unsuspecting people who don't want them. Successful selling is based on building trusting relationships with customers so you can understand their wants and needs and then show them how you can accommodate them. The challenge is that people from cultures other than yours don't always develop relationships in the same way as you do, and they may not want the same products and services as your traditional clientele.

Cross-cultural selling is nothing more than adjusting your sales practices, presentation, and products to meet the unique needs of multicultural customers. Although it may sound simple, you must be constantly aware of how culture affects your interactions so you can continuously adapt to your buyers. In *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies*, we show you how.

About This Book

You may be missing out on incredible sales opportunities and not even realize it. As a salesperson, this should concern you, at least a little. After all, if you miss these opportunities, they become easy pickings for your competition. This book can help you boost your sales by broadening your appeal and reaching out to customers of races and cultures that differ from yours.

This book's goal is to transform you from a one-dimensional salesperson into a multidimensional sales professional — someone who's better equipped to deal with diversity in the marketplace. Although we encourage you to read this book from cover to cover to maximize the return on your investment, *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies* facilitates a skip-and-dip approach. It presents the information in bite-size pieces, so you can skip to the chapter or section that meets your current needs, master the concepts there, and then skip to another section or set the book aside for later reference.

As soon as you begin to implement some of our suggestions, you can expect to see positive changes in the way your multicultural customers shop and buy from you. For every step you take to accommodate them, they take a step closer to becoming lifelong customers and referring friends and family to you.

Conventions Used in This Book

Compared to other selling programs and books, *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies* is anything but conventional, but we do use some conventions to call your attention to certain items. For example:

- ✓ *Italics* highlight new, somewhat technical terms, such as *ethnic store*, and emphasize words when we're driving home a point.
- ✓ **Boldface** text indicates key words in bulleted lists and steps to follow in numbered lists.
- ✓ `Monofont` highlights Web site, blog, and e-mail addresses.

In addition, even though three authors contributed to the writing of this book, when you see “we,” that's Michael and Ralph talking. When Ralph or Michael is telling a personal story, we'll clearly identify who's talking. Joe's more of the silent partner in this project — the wordsmith, the guy responsible for keeping you engaged and entertained and teaming up with the editors to make sure everything is explained clearly and thoroughly.

We use several special terms throughout the book, too. Here they are, complete with our definitions for them:

- ✓ **Multicultural:** Having more than one cultural background. A multicultural marketplace includes people from different cultures. A multicultural customer, on the other hand, is someone who either has parents from two different cultures or was raised in one culture and is adapting to life in another culture — for example, an Asian who now lives in America.

- ✔ **Cross-cultural:** Dealing with people from cultures that differ from your own. Cross-cultural selling is a skill that anyone can develop to market and sell more effectively to consumers from other cultures.
- ✔ **Diversity:** The presence of a wide range of variation. Although diversity can refer to any differences, including gender, age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and physical ability, we focus solely on cultural differences in this book.
- ✔ **People of color:** Yes, all people have some color, but we're talking about anyone who isn't Caucasian, including Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and Native Americans. This term can apply to new immigrants as well as longtime Americans who still feel influence from another culture.
- ✔ **Minority:** A group whose population is smaller than the predominant population in the area. Please don't let the term get under your skin — to us, it's just a number thing.

We wrestled with terminology in labeling the racial/ethnic majority of the United States. The Census Bureau refers to this group as White (non-Hispanic). Throughout the book, we refer to members of this group as Caucasians, Anglo Americans, and Whites. None of these terms is completely accurate — few people on the planet are really “white,” few American citizens are literally Caucasian, and “Anglo” implies England — but these are the most common terms currently in use.

Finally, we use the term *Hispanic* interchangeably with *Latino* and the term *African American* interchangeably with *Black*, because different people in these groups may prefer one term or the other or neither. The only way to know what any customer you're working with wants to be called is to ask.

What You're Not to Read

Feel free to skip any sections you feel as though you've already mastered. If, for example, you're already well aware of how potentially lucrative it can be to sell to other cultures, you can safely skip Chapter 2 and immediately start discovering ways to tap that potential. If you want to dive right in and start developing cross-cultural selling skills, you can jump right to Chapter 4. Of course, you can always come back to the earlier chapters later.

You can also safely skip anything you see in a gray-shaded box. We stuck it in a box for the same reason that most people stick stuff in boxes — to get it out of the way so you wouldn't trip over it. However, you may find the stories and brief asides uproariously funny and perhaps even mildly informative (or vice versa).

Foolish Assumptions

The biggest assumption we make in this book is that you've already had some basic training on the fine art of selling; you're a salesperson, service provider, customer service representative, or business owner who's succeeded in your own market but hasn't attracted a significant number of diverse clientele. Specifically, we assume you already know the basics, which are covered in *Selling For Dummies* (Wiley) by Tom Hopkins. Hopkins gets you up to speed in a hurry on the art of selling, the need to know your products and your customers, and how to sell effectively throughout the seven-step selling cycle. If you're looking to take your sales career to the next level, check out Ralph's *Advanced Selling For Dummies* (Wiley).

Another foolish assumption we make is that you're open-minded. Clients from other cultures can seem to do some pretty silly and perhaps rather annoying things. From their perspective, however, you may do some pretty silly and rather annoying things yourself. The key to becoming a natural at cross-cultural selling is to be open to the fact that people from other cultures have different beliefs and behaviors. Diversity is what makes our world such an interesting and astounding place in which to live.

We also assume that you're committed to practicing what you discover in this book. Practice makes you comfortable dealing with clients from different backgrounds, and your clients will feel comfortable buying from you.

How This Book Is Organized

We wrote this book so you could use it in either of two ways. You can pick up the book and flip to any chapter for a quick, stand-alone minicourse on a specific cross-cultural selling topic, or you can read the book from cover to cover. To help you navigate, we took the book's 18 chapters and divided them up into five parts plus an appendix.

Part I: Mastering the Multicultural Mind-Set

In this part, we reveal the incredible untapped potential of the multicultural marketplace, test your cross-cultural sales aptitude, explain the challenges of dealing with a more diverse clientele, and assist you in your early stages of developing cross-cultural competency.

Part II: Multicultural Marketing and Beyond

Sales and marketing people often think they can generate multicultural sales simply by adding a little diversity to their marketing and advertising campaigns. Depending on the market they target, they may add Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, or others into the mix to broaden an ad's appeal. Although this is certainly one component of multicultural marketing, you really need a more comprehensive program.

This part shows you how to revamp your marketing materials to give them a global appeal, introduce other aspects of multiculturalism throughout your company, give your establishment a multicultural makeover, and bring in new products that appeal to your target market. By the end of Part II, you won't just *look* multicultural friendly, you'll *be* multicultural friendly.

Part III: A Crash Course in Cross-Cultural Sales

In this part, we provide you with a crash course in cross-cultural sales, showing you how to meet and greet customers, build mutual trust and respect, adjust your sales presentation, tune in to signals that indicate a readiness to buy, close the sale, and effectively negotiate with people who were born and raised to haggle.

Part IV: Taking Your Game to the Next Level

In this part, we offer suggestions on how to enhance customer service, generate more word-of-mouth referrals, and start building a more diverse sales team to serve the multicultural market more effectively. You also find out how to become an integral part of a diverse sales team. If you're not a person of color, you discover the advantages of being part of such a group.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Every *For Dummies* title comes complete with a Part of Tens — two or more chapters that each contain ten strategies, tips, tricks, or other important items to keep in mind. In *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies*, the Part of Tens busts ten myths about multicultural customers and reveals ten common stereotypes that people from other cultures often have about Americans.

As an added bonus, this book includes an appendix, in which we offer some insider information on differences you can expect in specific cultures. The appendix also includes a cross-cultural holiday calendar, so you won't miss a holiday sale opportunity ever again.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, we've sprinkled icons in the margins to cue you in on different types of information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll see and a brief description of each.



We want you to remember everything you read in this book, but if you can't quite do that, then remember the important points we flag with this icon.



Tips provide insider insight from behind the scenes. When you're looking for a better, faster, cheaper way to do something, check out these turbo tips.



"Whoa!" This icon appears when you need to be extra vigilant or seek professional assistance before moving forward.

Where to Go from Here

If you're not convinced that investing effort in pursuing multicultural customers is worth the trouble, check out Chapter 2. If you're already convinced, but are unsure of just how much you'll need to change, check out Chapter 3, where we provide a brief quiz to assess your knowledge and skills.

Chapter 4 is a required course. Think of it as Cross-Cultural Selling 101. Here, you master all the basics on which you can build your future success.

Chapters 5 and 8–13 contain most of the practical advice you need to market and sell to multicultural customers, but if you skip Chapters 6 and 7, come back to them later when you have time. They show you how to put a comprehensive program in place so an individual salesperson or an entire company can realize the full potential of the new global marketplace.

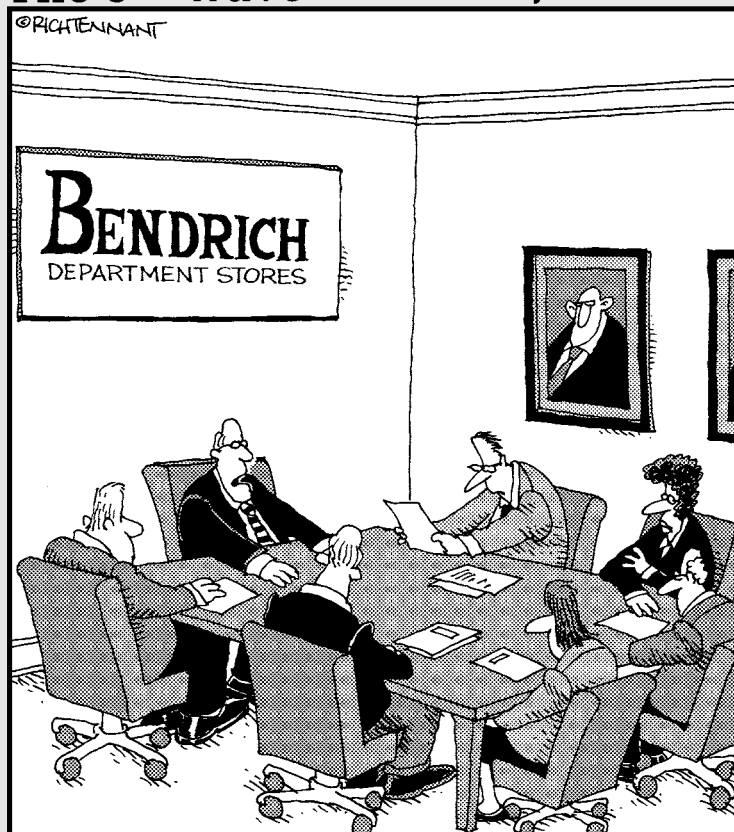
As for the remaining chapters, they all contain practical information that can take your business to the next level. Even though we don't consider them part of the core curriculum, you'll be missing out if you choose not to dig through them for some additional gems.

Part I

Mastering the Multicultural Mind-Set

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Appealing to a multicultural marketplace? That's not a bad idea. Benson—let's start playing some Tito Puente in the elevators."

In this part . . .

Most salespeople talk and act before they think, but we're assuming you're not the average salesperson. You think first and plan ahead. You get your head in the game before you step up to the plate.

In this part, we help you start thinking about cross-cultural selling and the types of adjustments you may need to make. We reveal the profit potential of the multicultural marketplace, test your cross-cultural sales aptitude, help you understand the challenges of dealing with a more diverse clientele, and assist you in your early stages of developing cross-cultural competency.

Chapter 1

Expanding Your Market

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the concept of diversity and why it matters
 - ▶ Recognizing the upside of establishing a multicultural appeal
 - ▶ Adapting to the current reality of the international marketplace
 - ▶ Making integral changes to the way you do business
-

If you cater only to clients who look like you, act like you, and buy like you, you're essentially saying no to dessert, because you're passing up a chance at savoring a slice of a \$2 trillion pie. That's how much money minority consumers in the United States spend each year on products and services, and that figure is rising.

Like most salespeople and business owners, you may skip dessert, but you certainly don't want to miss an opportunity to expand your sales into new markets. Unfortunately, you may be limiting your income potential and not even know it by sending messages to the multicultural marketplace that essentially tell consumers to stay away. This kind of miscommunication is common when people from different backgrounds meet. You need to make only a few adjustments to overcome the cultural barriers, but those tweaks can make all the difference in the world.

This chapter gives you an overview of what it takes to attract customers from other cultures. Here, we offer a brief primer that defines key terms and concepts, and shows you how to bridge the gap and expand your appeal to the multicultural marketplace, whether you sell directly to consumers (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B).



When you begin to consider tapping the potential of the multicultural marketplace, lose the us-versus-them mentality. We're all part of this marketplace, whether we admit it or not. As the late great statesman and hugely successful Wall Street investor Bernard M. Baruch once said, "We didn't all come over on the same ship, but we're all in the same boat."

Grasping the Concept and Effects of “Cultural Diversity”

Most people in the United States are born with an understanding of “cultural diversity.” After all, this country is the great melting pot or salad bowl or whatever metaphor you want to use to describe the unique mixture of people of different races, colors, and cultures who have chosen to live in the land of opportunity. Depending on where you grew up, you probably went to school with African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Middle Easterners, Native Americans, Poles, Irish people, Italians, or Germans. If you’ve ever visited the homes of people from different cultures, you probably discovered that they ate different foods, decorated their homes a little differently, and had their own unique customs.

When you’re doing business with people from different cultures, particularly nowadays when immigrants tend not to melt as quickly into the same pot, cultural diversity may take on new meanings and significance. Many of these groups want to retain their culture and language while still learning American ways and the English language.

In the following sections, we define some key terms to preface our discussion of cultural diversity, cover important distinctions between cultural tendencies and stereotypes, point out the value of identifying cultural tendencies, and help you begin the process of becoming more aware and accepting of different cultures.

Defining a few important terms

Before jumping into discussions of cultural diversity and how it relates to the way you sell goods and services to people from other cultures, it’s important to agree upon definitions of some key terms. In the following sections, we explain what we mean when we say *culture*, *diversity*, *cultural diversity*, and *cross-cultural selling*.

Defining “culture”

Officially speaking, *culture* is a shared set of values, beliefs, and behaviors that may have little or nothing to do with ethnicity or race. In other words, ethnicity and race are nature, whereas culture is nurture — culture is learned. The United States, for example, is composed of many ethnic groups, yet most of us often share common values, including freedom, individualism, privacy, equality, time consciousness, materialism, directness, and assertiveness. Some people claim that a culture needs to share a language, too, but we’ll leave that up to opinionated politicians and pundits to debate.

No Tupperware for Middle Easterners?!

Back in the 1970s, my (Ralph's) second in command, Lois Maljak, was a sales manager for Tupperware. Her mentors advised her not to do parties for Middle Eastern clientele because Middle Easterners didn't understand the premise of throwing a party to sell merchandise.

Well, Lois went ahead and tried it anyway. She had great success. Although her Middle Eastern clientele didn't exactly do Tupperware parties like most people — a couple of hours in the evening and a few desserts — they certainly grasped the concept. In fact, they really knew how to throw a party. They usually held their parties during the day, serving full, lavish meals

and doing much more socializing than product demonstrations. And the people who attended the parties usually placed orders because they were great cooks and loved the product.

Selling the Middle Eastern clients on the idea of selling products at parties could take a little more effort, but the return on that investment was usually well worth it — consistent bookings and great sales. The guests became the salespersons, and the salesperson became the trusted supplier. Some of Lois's customers became a part of her sales team, which led to a host of success stories.



Culture can influence people's relationships with one another, their feelings about money, and their attitudes toward business. Becoming sensitive to the values, beliefs, and behaviors of people from other cultures can help you adjust the way you sell to these consumers and customize your products and services, as needed, to meet their unique needs and wants. When you make the necessary changes, your multicultural customers are more likely to feel comfortable doing business with you.

Defining "diversity"

Diversity is just a more politically charged version of *variety*, both of which Americans generally embrace. Just walk into any grocery store or pharmacy and check out the variety of toothpaste. One leading toothpaste manufacturer alone has more than two dozen varieties of toothpaste. Colleges and universities make a point of promoting the diversity of their student bodies and professors. We even seek diversity in our cellphones, pimping them out with custom ringtones, skins, and dozens of add-on features.

Yet, when we find ourselves in a roomful of people, we tend to feel uncomfortable around those who may differ from us in some way. Studies show that people in a crowd naturally gravitate toward those who they perceive are more like themselves.

Adapting can be difficult. People are afraid they'll have nothing in common to talk about or that they may say something insulting. Rather than take the risk, most people shy away from any sort of interaction with those to whom

they don't feel an affinity. Although you can gain new insights and experiences from talking with someone who may be different from yourself, it's often easier to avoid the person.



Although anyone who avoids interacting with people from other cultures loses out, as a salesperson or business owner, you have even more to lose in the form of money from lost sales opportunities.

Defining “cultural diversity”

In the previous two sections, we define *culture* and *diversity* separately. Bringing the two together, we arrive at *cultural diversity* — a group consisting of individuals or collections of individuals with different sets of values, beliefs, and behaviors. Obviously, the world is culturally diverse. Some countries are more culturally diverse than others; for example, most people consider the United States more culturally diverse than, say, Poland or Switzerland. Neighborhoods, schools, and businesses can also be more or less culturally diverse depending on the composition of their membership.

Defining “cross-cultural selling”

As a seasoned sales professional, business owner, or manager, you probably have a pretty good idea of what *selling* entails, but what's this *cross-cultural selling* thing all about?

The term *cross-cultural* merely means comparing or dealing with two or more cultures. In this book, that means you sell to someone from another culture. As you know, selling is about building solid relationships with your customers and clients. With *cross-cultural selling*, you discover ways to increase sales by building better relationships with people from other cultures.

Separating cultural tendencies from stereotypes

Throughout this book, we use several qualifiers, including “sometimes,” “often,” “many,” and “some.” Honestly, we're not trying to waffle on sensitive issues. We use so many qualifiers because we want to be careful not to cross the line from describing cultural tendencies to establishing dangerous stereotypes.

Many people around the world, for example, think Americans are always in a hurry. Most Americans would agree that many of us exhibit this tendency. In fact, the United States is the birthplace of fast food, microwave ovens, one-hour photo processing, and instant messaging (even e-mail was too slow for us). After all, “time is money,” as many of us like to say. Does this mean

that absolutely everyone in this country is preoccupied with time and is in a hurry? Absolutely not! And to say so would be to stereotype Americans. Stereotyping removes people's humanity by painting everyone with the same broad brush.

However, cultures do exhibit certain similar characteristics, and knowing these tendencies can enable you to serve the needs of people from specific cultures more effectively. People from Japan, for example, value relationships perhaps even more than the products or services you're selling. Knowing this tendency can improve your ability, as a salesperson, to sell to customers from Japan. You know upfront that you have to spend more time building a relationship before delivering your sales presentation.



Although we point out cultural tendencies that can help you customize your products and services, and adjust your sales presentations to people from different cultures, bear in mind that the only way to know what a specific customer believes or wants is to ask. Never stereotype any customer for any reason. Always treat everyone as an individual.

Flip to Chapter 4 for more about separating stereotypes from cultural tendencies.

Studying cultural tendencies to predict behavior

Although using cultural tendencies to predict behaviors may not exactly be politically correct, statisticians follow this practice on a regular basis. Auto insurance companies study patterns all the time, for example, to set insurance rates. If you have a teenage son who just started driving, you know exactly what we mean. Even though your son may be the most highly skilled defensive driver in his class, he's still going to get stuck with a higher rate, because male teenage drivers *tend to* have more accidents.

Advertisers are even more obsessed with studying trends; they spend millions of dollars a year segmenting their customers by age, income, gender, leisure activities, and hundreds of other factors. Music producers often target their recordings to specific ethnicities and age groups. Automobile manufacturers design cars and trucks for specific segments of the population. If these groups and others can use cultural tendencies to their benefit, so can you. Simply knowing that Asians tend to be more visual can improve the success of your sales presentation, for example. Likewise, being aware that when customers from haggle-friendly cultures offer you a super low price, they're actually sending you a strong buying signal that can improve your chances of making the sale if you take the right approach with them. In Chapter 4, we show you ways to become more sensitive to differences in other cultures.

Identifying the cultural impact on your business

Minority populations, including Hispanics, African Americans, Middle Easterners, and Asians, are expanding rapidly almost everywhere in the United States. Discovering a part of the country that's not affected by the rapid growth of at least one of these groups is rare.

Your life has probably been affected to some degree by this shifting demographic, but the change may have been so gradual that you barely noticed. Perhaps a few more ethnic restaurants have appeared on the landscape or a few more minority-owned nail salons or dry cleaners. Maybe you noticed a neighborhood newspaper printed in a foreign script or heard unfamiliar languages or accents in your local grocery store or while taking public transportation.

When you begin to see more businesses from other cultures in your neighborhood, this is usually a clear sign that populations of people from these other cultures are on the rise in your area. As a salesperson or business owner, you should see this as an opportunity — these new business owners and consumers are going to need not only products and services specific to their culture, but also basic goods and services.



Talk to your local chamber of commerce, Board of Realtors, Welcome Wagon, and other groups dedicated to welcoming newcomers to the community. They can likely clue you in on population and demographic shifts in your area. See Chapter 2 for more information on getting the latest demographic details.

Embracing the Global Rule

Many salespeople say that the way they relate to multicultural customers is to simply treat everyone “the same.” This may seem like the right approach on the surface, but it can actually turn out to be not such a good idea. New parents often say that about their children, too, until they’ve been parents for a few years and realize that each of their children is a unique individual with different needs, desires, talents, and passions.

Not only is treating everyone the same impossible, but it's also undesirable. It's tantamount to saying that if a customer came into your store with a Seeing Eye dog and a white cane because she was blind, you would just hand her a brochure to “read.” You'd never even think for a moment of doing

something like that. Instead, you would adjust your presentation to meet the customer's needs by reading the brochure to her and perhaps letting her touch or sample the product.



For similar reasons, you want to adjust your presentations to meet the unique needs of people who are culturally different. This is the *Global Rule*. Everyone knows that the Golden Rule is to “treat others as you would like to be treated.” The Global Rule goes one step further: *Treat others as they would like to be treated*. When you begin to practice the Global Rule, you soon discover that becoming more sensitive to other peoples' cultures doesn't require a great deal of extra effort, but it does require increased awareness, training, and sensitivity. Flip to Chapter 3 for details on assessing your awareness and Chapter 4 for the scoop on increasing your awareness.

Overcoming cultural snobbery

Far too many Americans are cultural snobs, wondering why people from other cultures would ever think of moving here if they have no intention of speaking and acting like Americans. The answer is that a good percentage of new immigrants (35 percent according to the U.S. Census Bureau) eventually do become U.S. citizens.

In fact, a poll of Hispanics conducted for the Spanish-language television network Univision claimed that 94 percent of Hispanics believe that citizenship is important. To prepare for citizenship, many attend school at night to learn English and American history after working 10–12 hours or more a day and 6 or 7 days a week.

These immigrants, especially the adults, can't adopt a new language and an entirely new way of life overnight. If you studied a foreign language in high school or college, you're probably well aware of how difficult it is just to become familiar with the basics, let alone master the nuances of the language.

It's helpful to remember that the American culture is only about 200 years old, while some other cultures have been in existence for thousands of years. This may help explain why it can be even harder for immigrants to leave their culture behind when they arrive here.



Transitioning to a different language and an entirely new way of life can take a tremendous amount of time and effort, so lifelong Americans need to be patient. Although new immigrants may try to act like Americans, you need to make some adjustments while they transition to their new culture. If you're willing to adapt, you have an excellent chance of winning over these customers for life. And we can show you how.

Taking cultural influences into account

I (Michael) have spoken to more than 25,000 salespeople since 1990, and most agree that Middle Eastern, Hispanic, and Asian customers tend to want to negotiate the sales price of a product much more than someone who grew up in the United States. Does every Middle Eastern, Hispanic, or Asian customer insist on negotiating the sales price? Absolutely not! However, if these salespeople encountered someone from one of these cultures who wasn't a skilled negotiator, they would sense that something was unusual.

Although new immigrants in this country may try to become Americanized, they may still have cultural influences from their ancestors that influence the way they feel about money and about buying products. For example, my parents (Michael) instilled in me at a very early age that owing money is shameful. This ancient Confucian principle runs counter to Americans' tendency to charge every purchase from groceries to gasoline. Neither extreme is probably wise, but the fact is that different cultures have different beliefs about borrowing and saving.

Spotting Opportunities in the Multicultural Marketplace

The term *multicultural marketplace* inspires yawns among many ill-informed salespeople who think these niche markets represent nothing more than chump change. When we start to lay out the real numbers in dollars and cents, however, their eyes open wide, and their ears immediately perk up. The numbers are pretty impressive and represent tremendous opportunities for any business willing to invest a little effort in tapping into these markets.

In the following sections, we explore the collective purchasing power of multicultural markets and the potential upside for your business.

Measuring the purchasing power of other cultures

As the minority population has grown, its *purchasing power* (the financial means to purchase products and services) has also grown, but at an exponential rate. According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth, the combined purchasing power of the multicultural market has grown from \$1.39 trillion in 2000 to more than \$2 trillion in 2007 and is estimated to reach \$3 trillion in 2011.

This growth has far outstripped growth in the traditional White market. The Selig Center estimates that Hispanic purchasing power rose 307 percent from 1990 to 2007; Asian buying power increased 294 percent; Native Americans

were able to buy 190 percent more during the same period; African American buying power increased by 166 percent; and White buying power rose by only 124 percent.



Given the rate of exploding growth among multicultural consumers, you can expect more of your income to be from customers from other cultures, and this trend is expected to continue far into the foreseeable future.

Identifying the potential upside for your business

Statistics about the increased national buying power of minorities may not be sufficient to convince you of the potential upside for your particular business in your corner of the country. You can look up demographics for your markets on the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site at www.census.gov, but that may not tell you much, either. Sure, you can pull up a fact sheet that lists the total population of a given area and breaks it down into different groups, but the information can only act as a starting point at best and may even be misleading. For example, a new-home builder in Dallas found that while Asian Indians accounted for only about 2 percent of the city's population, they often comprised as much as 90 percent of the builder's home buyers.



For the most accurate and inexpensive source of data about the potential multicultural market for your company, look to your own experience and gather information from your staff and your competitors (see Chapter 2 for additional information):

- ✔ Ask your staff how many people from other cultures check out your goods on a daily basis without buying anything. This gives you a pretty clear indication of how much of the multicultural market is slipping through your fingers.

Probe a little further to explore possible reasons why people are shopping without buying. For example, your staff may notice that people ask about products or services you don't offer, or they may sense that shoppers don't feel welcome — your store or personnel may not be friendly or helpful enough for their tastes. By identifying the causes for your customers' dissatisfaction, you can often begin to identify solutions.
- ✔ Subtly engage your competitors' staff in a conversation to find out their experience in dealing with consumers from other cultures. If your competitors are selling well in the multicultural marketplace, you're doing something wrong. Find out what they're doing that you're not.

If you sell fairly expensive items, such as appliances, furniture, cars, or homes, and notice that multicultural customers visit repeatedly without making a purchase, you're definitely missing out on excellent opportunities. While consumers from other cultures often have money to spend, they rarely

have time to waste coming back to the same business. For some reason, they're attracted to your business but don't feel comfortable enough to buy from you. No need to panic, though — in the following section, you find out about the adjustments you can make to appeal to multicultural clientele.

Adapting to Changing Markets

In business, the fact that the only constant is change is almost cliché. Products are constantly being updated, markets fluctuate, and technology transforms everything almost daily. The composition of the marketplace is also in constant flux, becoming increasingly diverse.

The salespeople and business owners who thrive in the face of the ever-changing markets are those who are willing and able to adapt. Instead of fighting change, they embrace it. As a result, they're constantly gaining ground in the battle for market share.

Making your business more attractive to people from diverse cultures probably requires a lot less than you may expect. You just need to be sensitive to cultural differences. With a little training and practice, you'll be well on your way to making the necessary adjustments. In the following sections, we introduce several ways you can adapt in order to lay claim to your multicultural market share.

Getting a marketing makeover

Marketing and advertising professionals know exactly what is necessary to market effectively, because they've been doing it for years — studying the lifestyles and needs of their target markets to create a profile of the target consumer. The profile may indicate that the biggest opportunities are to be had by appealing to working-class people who live within a 10-mile radius of the store. It could be local middle-class people who own RVs. Or perhaps the target market is upper-class international travelers. Marketers and advertisers carefully study the target profile to decide which products and services may appeal to the group and how they can most effectively present their products and services to those consumers.

Unfortunately, many companies fail to realize that this same approach works just as effectively for the multicultural marketplace. To reach multicultural customers, you must get to know their lifestyles and needs. Trying to appeal to Hispanics is not enough, for example, because of the great amount of diversity among the Hispanic population. Some Hispanics have lived in the States much longer than others. Some are more Americanized. All of this can have an impact on your marketing strategy.

Revisit all of your marketing materials and decide what you need to do to make them more appealing to people from other cultures. In Chapter 5, we show you how to create a marketing campaign that has broad appeal. This includes making the following changes:

- ✓ Translating marketing materials into the language of your target consumers
- ✓ Removing anything that could offend the sensibilities of the cultures you want to attract, including cultural stereotypes
- ✓ Crafting ads directed at specific markets
- ✓ Communicating your commitment to family values
- ✓ Generating positive public relations in minority communities in your area and on the Internet

Reaching beyond marketing

Marketing can bring people through the doors or persuade them to call your office, but it can't guarantee a sale. Everyone in your company needs to be prepared to accommodate the new customers who require assistance. If the customers don't feel welcome at your place of business or feel that they're not treated with sensitivity to their culture, they won't buy from you. You can't blame it on the marketing, even though many companies do just that.



In addition to changing your marketing, train your frontline staff to make them culturally competent. Make sure they know and practice the Global Rule — treating customers as those customers want to be treated rather than making assumptions (see the “Embracing the Global Rule” section earlier in this chapter for more info). Studies show that people from every culture make purchasing decisions based on how they're treated.

In Chapter 6, we take you beyond multicultural marketing to show you how to build a comprehensive program that treats customers the way they want to be treated from initial contact to closing.

Tweaking your products and services . . . or not

Depending on what you sell, changing your marketing and packaging may not be enough to appeal to your multicultural clientele. You may need to make fundamental changes to your product line and the services you offer. To appeal to the increasing influx of Mexican immigrants, for example, many

grocery stores around the United States have added a Mexican foods section. Likewise, pharmacies often carry selections of personal-care items that are more familiar to customers from various cultural backgrounds.



You may or may not need to change your product line or the services you offer, but you should certainly consider it. The best way to find out whether a change is in order is to be direct — survey your customers. When interacting with customers from other cultures, ask whether they found everything they were looking for. Ask whether they have any recommendations for products they would like to see you carry or services you could offer.

After you know what your customers want, it's up to you to decide whether offering those new products and services is worth the effort. After conducting this research, the choice is up to you. See Chapter 7 for more details on offering in-demand products and services.

Mastering a new meet-and-greet strategy

Making a good first impression is of the utmost importance with any prospective buyer, but it's even more of a challenge when dealing with people from other cultures. Many cultures, for example, are simply uncomfortable with the standard handshake. In fact, any assumptions you make about how people want to be greeted may offend the other party and compromise your chances of making the sale.



In Chapter 8, we explain in great detail the do's and don'ts of meeting and greeting people from other cultures, but if you're looking for a quick tip to get you through the day until you can get around to reading Chapter 8, here it is: *Wait for the customer to make the first move.* If the customer reaches out to shake your hand, bows to you, or approaches you for a European kiss on the cheek, follow suit. Greeting customers as they like to be greeted is crucial for building positive relationships that lead to successful closings.

In Chapter 8, you also discover how the significance of eye contact varies around the world and what various forms of eye contact really mean. It can be just the opposite from what most Americans expect.

Adapting your sales presentation

As a salesperson, you're already well aware of the fact that you have to communicate differently with different people. You speak one way to men and another way to women, one way to young customers and another to more mature individuals. In the same way, your presentation will be much more effective if you adjust it for different cultural groups. In Chapter 11, we provide details on how to adapt your sales presentation and techniques, but in general, you can expect to make the following adjustments:

- ✔ Spend more time building relationships and trust (we devote Chapter 9 to this topic).
- ✔ Educate consumers more on basic features and benefits of your products and services (don't assume that your customers already know the basics).
- ✔ Adapt your presentation to learning styles that are more predominant in certain cultures.
- ✔ Become more family focused when dealing with clients and their children.

Many salespeople deliver a top-notch presentation but drop the ball during the follow-through. Because of their cultural illiteracy, they may misinterpret what the customer says or does as rejection, when the customer is really sending some strong buying signals. As a result, salespeople often fail to close sales with highly qualified buyers. For tips on picking up buying signals from multicultural clientele, check out Chapter 10. In Chapter 12, we reveal techniques for closing the sale.

Some people feel that working with multicultural customers requires more time than it's worth. Hopefully, the people who feel this way are your competitors, because you discover in Chapter 2 why being patient is well worth your time and effort.

Honing your negotiating skills for different cultures

Americans generally don't like to haggle. We expect people to set a fair price for whatever they're selling. If the price is too high, we don't buy the product, we see if someone else is offering the same product for less, or we look for a less expensive version. We trust that healthy competition will keep prices in check. We shop. We don't haggle.

Other cultures have transformed haggling into an art form. Merchants knowingly set prices a little high, realizing that customers are going to negotiate a lower price. When American salespeople meet people from these cultures, the salespeople quickly get flustered because the haggling never seems to end. In some cases, even after the customer signs off on the purchase, he still tries to negotiate a better deal!



As a salesperson who wants to sell to people from other cultures, you'd do well to acquire some self-defense maneuvers and become a black-belt negotiator. Otherwise, you'll see your commissions and company profits quickly disappear under the onslaught of constant haggling that's common in some cultures. In Chapter 13, you can begin training to earn your black belt in sales negotiating.

Building your referral business

Referral business . . . ahhh! The dream of every salesperson on the planet is to have a business built exclusively on referrals. No cold calls. No advertising. Just kick back and watch the eager customers stream through your door.

Although selling to cross-cultural customers may take a bit more time and effort to bring customers up to speed on your products and services, you can expect a big payback in the form of referral business. When immigrants arrive in this country, they don't know whom they can trust. They fear that merchants are going to take advantage of them because of their unfamiliarity with American products, services, and customs. So when they find a salesperson they can trust, they're quick to pass the word along to their friends and family members.



Not only does your superior service get you more referral business, but the referral customers already trust you, so you don't need to spend as much time building relationships and consumer confidence. Customers arrive ready to buy.

In Chapter 15, we explore referral opportunities in greater depth and show you how and when to ask clients for referrals without seeming too pushy.

Building a Diversity-Friendly Business

Advertising how diversity friendly you are is useless if you don't deliver diversity friendliness when your customers arrive. That would be like marketing a hamburger joint as a five-star restaurant. As soon as the customers pulled up to the curb, they'd realize the farce and keep driving.

If you're going to do diversity, do it right. Make sure your business and your staff communicate an openness to those from other cultures and a willingness to meet their needs. The following sections can get you started on the right track.

Modifying your store or office

Here's a homework assignment for you: The next time you go grocery shopping, jot down your grocery list as you normally do, but this time, take it to an ethnic grocery store and try to get everything on the list. If you are like most Americans, as you wander through the aisles, you probably feel the following:

- ✓ **Unwelcome:** You probably feel like you don't belong. You are a minority. The owner and other shoppers are probably looking at you wondering what you're doing here.

- ✔ **Confused:** You don't know where to look for the items you want because everything is arranged differently, the packaging is unfamiliar, and signs and labels may be in another language.
- ✔ **Disappointed:** The store doesn't carry the products or brands you want. The selection seems limited.

Now you have an idea of how multicultural customers feel. If you don't make some adjustments to your store or office to make it more culturally friendly, customers from other cultures are likely to feel uncomfortable when visiting your establishment.



In Chapter 7, we provide some tips and techniques you can implement to make your store or office more culturally friendly without turning off your traditional clientele. Simply put yourself in others' shoes, realize what it is about your establishment that may make it feel foreign and intimidating, and then develop ways to make it more friendly, such as

- ✔ Adding signs in the languages that your customers speak
- ✔ Packaging products in a way that makes them more appealing to different cultures
- ✔ Surveying customers to determine products and services they want and then adding these to your offerings
- ✔ Changing the décor to make your establishment feel more comfortable to other groups

Forming a multicultural sales team

Diversifying your sales force can make your business more appealing to customers from other cultures. You don't need to have Hispanic salespeople to work with Hispanic customers or Asians selling to Asians, but exhibiting an openness to other cultures can make everyone feel more welcome.



By embracing diversity not only in your customers but also when building your sales team, your business stands to reap several benefits:

- ✔ Customers from different cultures see that your business clearly values their culture and their people.
- ✔ A diverse sales staff can train one another on how to interact more effectively with people from other cultures.
- ✔ If your sales team has multilingual salespeople, they can assist in communicating with customers who don't speak English and in translating marketing materials.

Building and managing a multicultural sales team, including Caucasians, can be quite challenging. You often have to deal with different communication styles, deep-seated stereotypes, language barriers, counterproductive behaviors, and differences in how people view authority and make decisions. Although the benefits of having a multicultural sales team can be significant, you really need to develop the team with advanced planning and forethought if you want to realize those benefits. In Chapter 16, we show you how.



Failure to account for cultural differences when assembling a multicultural sales team can result in an increase in conflict, dissension, and mistrust, and a decrease in efficiency, productivity, and sales.

Extending diversity throughout your business

Your frontline staff are the greeters, receptionists, cashiers, and others who deal with prospective customers when they first arrive. These people are the face of your business. You can extend diversity to other parts of your business as well, by hiring people from other cultures to fill other positions that aren't as visible to customers and by purchasing goods and services from minority-owned businesses. The more you interact with a variety of people from other cultures, the more culturally aware you become and the more inroads you have into their communities.

Hiring and retaining people of color, however, is not quite the same as employing Anglo Americans. You have to make some fundamental changes in the way you recruit, hire, and manage people from other backgrounds to account for cultural nuances. Chapter 16 explains how to do this.



Everything you do to make yourself, your business, and your products more appealing to customers from other cultures requires time and effort. The same is true when it comes to finding, hiring, training, and retaining multicultural personnel. Most businesses that make the investment, however, discover that the long-term benefits far outweigh the costs.

Chapter 2

Realizing the Incredible Untapped Potential of the Multicultural Market

In This Chapter

- ▶ Gauging the purchasing power of your multicultural customers
 - ▶ Recognizing the growing diversity in your markets
 - ▶ Overcoming the assumption that ethnic customers shop only at ethnic stores
 - ▶ Gaining a competitive edge in the multicultural marketplace
-

Far too many business owners and salespeople dismiss the multicultural market for one reason or another without even trying to appeal to this growing marketplace opportunity. Many are completely unaware of the potential boost in sales and profits. Others are still in denial that the American economy has gone global. And still others falsely assume that people from other cultures prefer shopping at ethnic stores and buying from people who share their background.

This chapter explores the myths that surround multicultural sales opportunities and shows you how you can gain an edge over competitors who are likely to be overlooking these opportunities themselves.

Taking the Pulse of Multicultural Purchasing Power with a Survey

Why bother trying to cater to the multicultural market? For the same reason that businesses exist in the first place: to make money (and the fact that if you really believe in your product, you want to introduce it to *everybody*). The multicultural market accounts for a total of \$2 trillion in sales annually.

More than 20 cents of every dollar in the United States is spent by multicultural consumers, and that number is growing rapidly. Here's how the spending breaks down by groups for 2007 (the last year for which statistics are available):

- ✔ \$8,552 billion, European Americans
- ✔ \$862 billion, Hispanic Americans
- ✔ \$845 billion, African Americans
- ✔ \$459 billion, Asian Americans
- ✔ \$57 billion, Native Americans

Unless you're selling all over the United States, these numbers aren't likely to mean much to you. What you want to know is how much of every dollar being spent in *your* industry and *your* market is being spent by multicultural customers. Is it 20 cents of every dollar? More? Less?

Later in this chapter, in the section "Observing the Changing Face of Your Marketplace," we encourage you to do some market research to gather specific numbers along with other data to create an accurate analysis of your market's cultural makeup. One of the best, fastest, and least expensive ways to find out the profit potential of your multicultural marketplace, however, is to conduct a survey, as shown in the following sections.

Formulating general questions your survey should answer

Before you conduct any sort of market research, decide on the general types of information you want your survey to collect. You may want your survey, for example, to collect data that enables you to answer the following questions:

- ✔ What specific ethnic group or groups are in my service area?
- ✔ What sorts of products and services are they looking for or buying?
- ✔ Where are they currently getting the products and services they want or need?
- ✔ How do they shop for these products and services?
- ✔ Can I serve their needs without substantially lowering my profit margin?
- ✔ Are ethnic stores in the area already serving this market? If so, how will we be different from them?



As a salesperson, you probably know through firsthand experience that you have major groups of multicultural customers or prospects in your area, although you may not be aware of specifically where they're from. One way to find out is simply to ask your existing customers, "Where are your ancestors from?" One word of caution: To avoid discriminating against anyone, it's crucial to ask every customer the same questions, not just those who appear to be "different" from you.

Asking questions about people's place of origin not only provides you with valuable market information but also can lead to some very interesting conversations. Just think, by simply asking about people's backgrounds you can take an around-the-world tour without losing one piece of luggage!

Opening your mind to the possibilities

To help you start to see the opportunities, here's a list of businesses commonly frequented by multicultural customers and some of their more frequently requested products and services:

- ✓ **Banks and credit unions:** Loan and savings products that meet the needs of new immigrants, wire transfer services, and operating hours that match the community's needs
- ✓ **Car dealers:** Vehicles with colors and options that appeal to ethnic consumers
- ✓ **Equipment rental companies:** Tents, stages, stoves, and equipment for ethnic weddings and other celebrations
- ✓ **Food stores:** Specialty foods that appeal to different cultures
- ✓ **Hair salons:** People who know how to cut, style, and care for ethnic hair
- ✓ **Healthcare providers:** Culturally competent and sensitive doctors, nurses, and staff who are aware that different cultures tend to have different health issues and concerns
- ✓ **Hotels:** Rooms and amenities that make multicultural travelers feel at home
- ✓ **Insurance companies:** Home, auto, and life protection products that meet the needs of multicultural clients
- ✓ **New-home builders:** Homes that appeal to the unique needs of multicultural customers
- ✓ **Party supply stores:** Supplies and decorations for ethnic weddings and other celebrations
- ✓ **Real estate companies:** Agents who know how to find homes that appeal to different ethnic groups
- ✓ **Restaurants:** Country-specific foods (such as stir-fry dishes, sushi, fajitas, and vegetarian dishes) and drinks (such as beers, wines, tapioca-flavored beverages, and more) that multicultural customers may want
- ✓ **Tour companies:** Visits to sites that people from other countries may be interested in seeing, including universities, religious sites, museums, and parks

Developing your questionnaire

The purpose of a survey is to determine when and where customers shop for products or services that are the same or similar to those that you offer. For example, one survey of people who purchased ethnic produce in the past year showed that about half shopped for ethnic foods once a week, nearly 40 percent shopped more than once a week, and only 20 percent shopped less frequently than once a month. This is why so many ethnic grocery stores are springing up around the country!

Following are some questions to get your survey started:

- ✓ Where do you shop for X products (or services)?
- ✓ How frequently do you purchase these products (or services)?
- ✓ How much do you typically spend on these products (or services) in a month?

In the following sections, we provide sample questions for several important survey topics, including business hours, staffing, inventory, travel time, and pricing. You can use the information from your survey to improve your product or service for multicultural customers.

Business hours, staffing, inventory, and customer service

To determine your hours of operation, the proper level of staffing, the inventory needed to cater to a multicultural clientele, and the level of service they expect, consider asking the following questions:

- ✓ Do you purchase these products (or services) more in the spring, summer, fall, or winter?
- ✓ What products (or services) do you wish we carried (or offered) that we currently do not?
- ✓ What one thing could we do to better serve you?
- ✓ Do you tend to shop more during the week or on weekends?
- ✓ Do you tend to shop more in the morning, afternoon, or evening?

Willingness to travel farther

Knowing how far prospective customers are willing to travel to obtain the products and services you offer can help you determine the sales potential that various groups represent. Most multicultural customers look for businesses that are within a 10-mile radius of their home or office, but they'll travel 20 miles or more, if necessary, to find what they want. So the farther



people are willing to travel to your business, the bigger your untapped multicultural market. To gauge how far people are willing to travel, ask the following questions:

- ✓ How far would you travel to obtain X products (or services)?
- ✓ How likely would you be to change to a different supplier if a closer one were available?

Willingness to pay more

Almost all customers are likely to pay a premium for products and services that they want but can't obtain conveniently, although it can be tricky to get them to admit that they would be willing to pay *more*. To find out whether prospective customers would be willing to pay a premium for your product or service, consider adding the following questions to your survey:

- ✓ If X products (or services) were offered locally, would you be willing to pay a little more for them?
- ✓ If so, how much more?



A survey of ethnic food shoppers found that about half of the respondents would be willing to pay a premium for ethnic produce. Twenty-five percent of respondents said they would pay up to a 5 percent premium, with another 14 percent saying they would pay up to 10 percent more to obtain the groceries they wanted. Your results are likely to vary based on the following:

- ✓ **Income level:** Obviously, the more money people earn, the more able they are to pay a premium to get what they want.
- ✓ **Gender:** Studies show that women are more likely to pay a premium for ethnic products than are men.
- ✓ **Ethnicity:** Some cultures may be more willing to pay a little extra to get what they want depending on locality and type of product.

Creating or buying a mailing list

So who should you survey about what products and services to provide and what you should charge? The easiest place to start is in your own backyard. Do you have a mailing list of your current customers? If not, now is a good time to develop one, assuming you have a fair number of customers from other cultures. (If you have very few or no such customers, you can purchase a mailing list, as explained later in this section.) Gather the following information from your existing customers:

- ✓ Customer name
- ✓ Spouse or partner's name
- ✓ Mailing address
- ✓ E-mail address
- ✓ Birthday
- ✓ Anniversary
- ✓ Children's names
- ✓ Favorite item they buy from you
- ✓ Season, day of the week, and time of day they usually buy
- ✓ How they usually pay (cash, check, or credit card)
- ✓ Why they buy from you (price, selection, and so on)



Collect this information from all of your customers, not only your multicultural customers. Otherwise, you'll create the impression that you're singling out certain individuals or groups. Provide your frontline sales staff with a stack of cards and have them ask customers whether they've filled one out yet. Provide an incentive to your frontline sales staff to collect completed cards and to your customers for taking the time to fill them out. Holding a contest for staff and a prize drawing for customers usually works well.

If you haven't collected information from your customers, consider contacting a mailing list broker in your area. A broker often can provide mailing lists that group people by ethnicity. Call and ask for their "list of lists," which shows all the categories of names they maintain. Many list brokers provide information based on census data, which can identify people by race. Some can provide Hispanic surnamed households, and others may have identified Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other specific Asian groups.

Conducting your survey

After you have your questionnaire and a mailing list, conducting your survey is a simple matter of stuffing envelopes, mailing out your questionnaires, and then entering the results into a spreadsheet or database program.



To increase the response rate for your questionnaire, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope, making it free and easy for recipients to respond. You can also increase your response rate by rewarding respondents with something like a coupon for a discount on their next purchase or entering their name into a drawing for an attractive prize.

Observing the Changing Face of Your Marketplace

No matter where you live, work, and sell, you've likely seen the face of your marketplace change over the past few years. Your customer base may be aging, or you may be experiencing an influx of customers from a younger generation. Perhaps a higher percentage of your customers are now women, or maybe you're seeing a growing population of Hispanics.

Whatever changes are occurring, having a firm grip on trends related to population, economy, public opinion, family structure, and consumer behavior is essential for effective strategic planning. Although changes in demographics, economic conditions, and sociological trends can't accurately predict the future, they do allow you to forecast a variety of potential developments. In the following sections, we show you how to evaluate changes in your market and begin adapting to those changes.



Just because you may not see a steady stream of multicultural customers flowing into your store or office on a daily basis doesn't mean they aren't living and doing business in your area. Perhaps they simply steer clear of you and your store or office because they don't feel comfortable doing business with you or you don't offer what they want. Also, even if your market research shows that people of few cultures live and work in the area you serve, people outside of your service area may represent a substantial market. As we explain earlier in this chapter, many people will drive a long way to get the products or services they want and need from someone they trust.

Researching the cultural composition of your service area

Whether you're a business owner or a salesperson, you're well aware of the need to know the people who are buying your products and services — who they are, what they buy, how they shop, and how they prefer to pay for stuff. You may know, for example, that allowing people to pay with credit cards can boost your business.

To develop a multicultural marketing and sales strategy that's both effective and profitable requires that you have a good sense of your marketplace's cultural makeup. In the following sections, we reveal various ways you can gather the necessary data.

Getting free data from the Census Bureau

Why pay for data if you can get it for free? One of the easiest (and cheapest) places to obtain demographic data is the U.S. Census Bureau Web site at www.census.gov. With a click of a computer mouse, you can check the national, state, county, and even city populations of various groups, including Hispanics, Blacks (African Americans as well as Kenyans, Nigerians, Haitians, and others), Asians (people from the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent), Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, and American Indian and native Alaskans. The Bureau also tracks the total number of immigrants from almost all the European and Middle Eastern countries.

Paying for professional reports

You can hire professional market research organizations to assist you in determining the cultural composition of your service area and its potential impact on your business. A custom report may cost as much as \$10,000, depending on the amount of data you request and the level of analysis. A custom report can usually provide information on any area of the country you specify. Following are several companies that may be able to assist you with your research (this information was accurate at the time of writing):

African American market research companies

AAR—All About Research (www.marketresearchaar.com),
708-562-9500

Aeffect Inc. (www.aeffect.com), 847-267-0169

Almiron-Caban Bilingual Research Inc., 718-523-9323

Applied Marketing Research Inc. (www.appliedmr.com), 816-442-1010

Braun Research Inc. (www.braunresearch.com), 609-279-1600

CR Market Surveys (www.crmarketsurveys.com), 312-376-1250

Ebony Marketing Research Inc. (www.ebonymktg.com), 718-320-3220

JRH Marketing Services Inc. (JRHMarketingServices.com), 718-786-9640

Asian market research companies

361 Degrees Consulting Inc. (361degrees.net), 626-309-0532

Asia Link Consulting Group (asialinkny.com), 212-721-5825

GC Global LLC (www.gcglobalresearch.com), 718-623-2266

iW Group Inc. (www.iwgroupinc.com), 213-239-8129

Kang & Lee Advertising (www.kanglee.com), 212-375-8130

New American Dimensions (www.newamericandimensions.com),
310-670-6800

Hispanic market research companies

Almiron-Caban Bilingual Research Inc., 718-523-9323

BRC Field & Focus Services (www.brc-field.com), 602-258-4554

Hispanic Research Consultants (www.hispanicresearchconsultants.com), 972-450-8400

Improdir Marketing Research & Consulting, 512-261-0234

Latin Facts Research (www.latinfactsresearch.com), 818-986-4820

Latino Life, 973-728-1382

MBC Research (www.mbcresearch.com), 212-679-4100

Planet Latino Market Intelligence Inc. (www.marketplanetlatino.com), 305-940-0930

Roslow Research Group (www.roslowresearch.com), 516-883-1110

Utilis Research & Consulting (www.utilis-research.com), 212-939-0077

WestGroup Research (www.westgroupresearch.com), 800-999-1200

South Asian market research companies

Allied Media Corp. (www.allied-media.com), 703-333-2008

ASB Communications (www.asbcommunications.com), 212-216-9305



You may be able to save a considerable amount of money if a market research company already has generated a report for your industry and geographic area. Shop around to try to find a company that has already done the work for someone else, but make sure the report isn't more than 6 to 12 months old; otherwise, the data may be too dated to be of value. Simply contact any of the companies listed in this section and ask whether they already have a report for the targeted demographic in your market. You can also contact the trade association for your industry for recommendations of market research companies.

Automating your analysis with market research software

Some market research companies not only gather and deliver demographic data to your doorstep, but they also provide you with software that enables you to analyze that data in various ways (for a fee, of course). Here's just some of the information and analyses such software can deliver:

- ✓ **Demographic estimates and forecasts:** Outlines characteristics of different populations and how they're expected to change in the future.
- ✓ **Demographic software and mapping:** Enables you to circle a street on a map to obtain detailed data on the people who live there.



- ✓ **Custom data development:** Provides any information you want in any format you want; you supply the data.
- ✓ **Location analysis:** Gives you any demographic information you want about a specific location.
- ✓ **Trend analysis:** What tendencies are developing in your service area?
- ✓ **Market analysis:** What is the current composition of your customers?
- ✓ **Sales potential analysis:** What possible opportunities exist?

To check out some of the marketing research software currently available, check out the following Web sites:

- ✓ www.Aprimo.com
- ✓ www.Claritas.com
- ✓ www.Digivey.com
- ✓ www.QuestionPro.com
- ✓ www.SurveyMethods.com

Painting a portrait of your typical multicultural customer

The ultimate goal of market research (including the data you collect by conducting your own surveys, as we describe earlier in this chapter) is to develop an accurate *customer profile*. This is a detailed portrait of who your typical multicultural customer is: What specific culture are they from? Who makes the purchasing decisions in the family? Where do they live? What are the major income levels of these customers? What specific products and services do they look for?

After you've developed an accurate customer profile, you need to determine whether this market segment is large enough to be profitable and if it is, what you need to do to begin tapping into this market. You can accomplish this by answering the following questions:

- ✓ What is the average purchase per person?
- ✓ How often do they buy?
- ✓ Are they seasonal or regular shoppers?
- ✓ What's our profit margin on this basket of goods?
- ✓ How does our selection of products and services compare to those who are already serving this market?

- ✔ What products could we *up-sell* (offer accessories or other items) to these customers?
- ✔ Where do they currently shop?
- ✔ Do they purchase by cash or credit?
- ✔ Do they buy out of necessity or choice?
- ✔ What aspects of the product do they value?

To answer some of these questions, simply crunch the numbers by using your handy-dandy spreadsheet program (or call your accountant to do it for you). To answer some of the more complex questions, you need to trust the force — use the data you collected to formulate an educated guess as to whether a particular group’s business is worth pursuing. One of the best questions to ask yourself at this point is whether you can afford *not* to pursue a particular market — are you willing to hand the business to your competitors?

Enlisting current clients to help you gain a competitive edge

Dissatisfied customers are notorious for remaining unhappy but never saying or doing anything to improve the situation. Just think of how many people you know who refuse to eat at certain restaurants because they had one bad experience but never said a word to their server or to management. Getting your customers to open up about their experience with you and how they think you can improve that experience is like striking gold, especially when you’re trying to establish yourself in the multicultural marketplace.

Studies show that Hispanics are the least likely to complain about poor service to the management or staff. The bad news is that they’re most likely to tell their friends and family not to do business with the company that provided it.

Talk to your multicultural patrons and ask them what you need to do to make them, and others like them, more comfortable. Consider doing surveys, as we explain in the earlier section “Taking the Pulse of Multicultural Purchasing Power with a Survey,” to gather additional data.



Encourage your frontline employees to gather information directly from customers. If you’re using surveys, offer an incentive for each completed survey they collect. One company has a board full of balloons containing cash and gives its staff members one dart for every fully filled-in questionnaire they obtain. At the weekly staff meeting, they get to pop balloons for \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20 bills, or more. This is not only fun, exciting, and immediately rewarding, but it also reminds everyone to ask customers to fill out the survey.



Consider developing your own personal advisory board composed of trusted individuals and customers with diverse backgrounds — people who know your industry and the customers you’re trying to reach. This group may consist of your accountant, attorney, a chamber of commerce representative, multicultural marketing experts, community leaders, travel agents, ethnic restaurant owners, and several customers from different backgrounds. Your advisory board can keep you abreast of developments in the local area as well as offer ideas for breaking into new markets.

Avoiding the temptation to lump people together

Regardless of how you collect market data, be careful not to make gross generalizations regarding certain racial or ethnic groups. Many of the “macro” groups, such as Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians, are comprised of numerous “micro” groups. Consider the following:

- ✓ At least six major groups call themselves Hispanic or Latino: Mexicans, South Americans, Central Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Spaniards. Each is distinct and unique. For instance, not all Latinos speak the same Spanish; some may not even speak Spanish at all. People in many parts of Spain speak Catalan which is somewhat similar to Spanish yet distinct and different. In Brazil, most people speak Portuguese.
- ✓ At least 17 separate and distinct subcultures comprise the people Americans call Asians, including Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Thais, and Vietnamese. They don’t speak the same languages, eat the same foods, or share similar cultural practices and beliefs. In fact, a Chinese person may be quite insulted if you mistake her as being from Japan or Korea, and vice versa.
- ✓ Speaking of Asians, many people don’t consider people from India to be Asians, even though they live in Asia, right across the border from China. Furthermore, you

never want to confuse Asian Indians with Pakistanis or other groups of Asians. India and Pakistan have had an uneasy relationship for centuries. One of the reasons is that they have religious differences — the majority of Indians are Hindu, whereas most Pakistanis are Muslim. Another gulf between the two groups is language — Indians primarily speak Hindi, whereas Pakistanis generally speak Urdu.

- ✓ Blacks can be African American or people from Africa, Jamaica, Haiti, or any of a hundred other locations around the world. Obviously, African Americans have their own preferences for food, music, and entertainment and have little in common with Black immigrants, say from Kenya or Ethiopia. Their needs are also different when it comes to items such as clothing, cars, and other products.

To further complicate the issue, the length of time someone has been in the United States can impact their buying habits, preferences, and other behaviors. The more *acculturated* a person becomes, the more she tends to conform to mainstream consumption patterns. New, *first-generation* immigrants, for example, are likely to have vastly different preferences than their children — the second generation, born and raised in their new country. This can make a huge difference in how you may have to adjust to your customers’ needs.

Ditching the cookie-cutter franchise approach

If you're part of a franchise, the franchisor probably provided you with a template for operating your business. Unfortunately, although these business templates are usually comprehensive enough for running an efficient business, they almost never address how to be sensitive to people from diverse cultures. You want to customize your operations to meet the special needs of the customers in your area.

It's not good enough for grocery stores, for example, to have a Hispanic or Asian foods section. If this were sufficient, you wouldn't see so many ethnic grocery stores springing up in many parts of the country. For instance, Arizona has more than 60 Food City stores that cater

specifically to ethnic markets. These stores not only provide the foods specific groups want, but they also make an effort to hire employees who reflect their target customers, assure that their store layouts are comfortable for them, and aim promotions and sponsored events toward multicultural consumers.

The cookie-cutter approach to running a successful business in the United States is becoming less and less effective, particularly as the marketplace becomes more diverse. Do your research and customize your sales, marketing, and product line to appeal to the unique needs of your customers.

Customizing products and services for the multicultural marketplace

Adjusting the way you market and sell products and services is nearly useless if the products and services you're selling aren't what your customers need or want. You also have to adjust your line of products and services to meet your target market's demands. Following are some examples of the types of changes you may want to consider:

- ✔ Although goat meat isn't commonly found in most American grocery stores, it's a staple for many people from Africa, the former Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia.
- ✔ Ethnic families tend to be larger than Caucasian families (yes, even Catholic Caucasian families), so many home builders are designing homes with more bedrooms.
- ✔ Cosmetics must be formulated for unique skin colors and types. Some cosmetic manufacturers have departments specifically responsible for developing products for different cultural groups.
- ✔ Hair salons must be aware of differences in cutting and styling the hair of various ethnic groups and also must carry products that are familiar to these groups. Asian Indians, for example, prefer their hair to be cut with scissors rather than electric shears.

- ✓ Many ethnic communities are attracted to fresh produce. In areas with large numbers of Caribbean Island residents, you'll find breadfruits, plantains, cherimoyas, and mangos. In areas with many Chinese families, you'll commonly see bok choy or Chinese cabbage.
- ✓ Unlike many Caucasians, Latinos love to go grocery shopping. They spend twice the time per visit (on average) as non-Hispanic consumers. The same is true of Asians. A smart grocer knows this is an opportunity to sell more than just food items to these customers. In many ethnic grocery stores, you'll find clothing, jewelry, over-the-counter medications, and other nonfood-related items.



More and more Caucasians are starting to shop at ethnic stores. If you're a retailer who's not offering multicultural merchandise, you could be missing out on a golden opportunity to expand sales into both markets. Americans of all ethnic backgrounds are becoming more sophisticated in their tastes and are increasingly using international ingredients in their dishes and other products in their homes.

- ✓ Banks and insurance companies are beginning to tailor their products to meet the unique demands of specific ethnicities.
- ✓ Studies show that the most popular color for cars in Japan and Mexico is white. In China, buyers tend to prefer black or silver. In South Korea and Brazil, the most popular color for cars is silver. In addition, many Asians tend to feel that an automatic transmission is essential but air conditioning is a frill. Car dealers may want to consider these and other facts when stocking their inventory.
- ✓ Hospitals are teaching their nurses and doctors new methods for providing culturally competent healthcare.



Any salesperson and company can increase sales to multicultural customers by figuring out their preferences and accommodating them. Start collecting data about the preferences of multicultural customers in your industry and market, as we explain earlier in this chapter, and then make the adjustments necessary to appeal to your clientele. See Chapter 7 for more details on adapting your product or service for diverse clientele.

Realizing the Edge You Have over Ethnic Stores and Salespeople

When you start seeing ethnic stores popping up all over the landscape, it's tempting to throw in the towel. After all, how can you possibly compete with businesses designed from the ground up to cater to the needs of ethnic consumers?

For the reasons we provide in the following sections, this type of defeatist thinking is wrongheaded. You can never assume that an ethnic customer prefers shopping at an ethnic business or buying from an ethnic salesperson. In fact, people from many cultures actually prefer dealing with someone who doesn't share their cultural background.

Wide selection and fair prices trump ethnicity

The main reason that people patronize ethnic businesses is not because “one of their own” runs the business or works there. Multicultural customers patronize these businesses primarily for two reasons:

- ✓ **Selection:** The business offers the products and services the person wants or needs. Whether it's a video rental or grocery store, these specialty shops cater to what their customers want.
- ✓ **Price:** Products and services are offered at a competitive price — not necessarily a low price, but competitive in relation to how accessible the product or service is. If you want a loaf of Jamaican Easter bread, for example, you can expect to pay more than \$12 a loaf!



Ambience also plays a role in where customers shop. Many ethnic stores have a small-market feel, because that's what customers are used to back home. Check out Chapter 7 for tips on how to give your store or office a friendly feel.

Customers' craving for a wide selection is almost universal, and it gives you a potential edge over small ethnic stores that often offer a limited selection of goods. According to Hispanic American Central, for example, 84 percent of Hispanic women prefer to buy their groceries from traditional supermarket chains. Another survey of customers who regularly shop for ethnic food indicated that approximately three quarters of those who purchased produce shopped at more than one store for their ethnic produce because of limited selection.

Many other establishments are known to cater to different ethnicities, including Russian bakeries, French laundries, kosher meat stores, and other businesses that make a good living in the specialty markets. If these businesses can survive and thrive, what specialty items could you sell to attract a wider clientele?

As a merchant who caters to a wider market than ethnic stores do, you may even be able to purchase in bulk and offer your products at more competitive prices. Sometimes simply offering everything your customers need in a single location makes you more competitive in terms of price. If your customers have to travel to three stores to do their weekly shopping, they're wasting a lot of time and money.

Ethnic people don't always prefer ethnic businesses

Assuming that people of a certain ethnicity prefer ethnic stores is like assuming that all Czech or Slovak people love to listen to polka music. The fact is that ethnic businesses may have several things working against them:

- ✓ Limited selection, as discussed in the preceding section
- ✓ Poor location — out of the way or maybe not in the best part of town
- ✓ Limited parking
- ✓ Ethnic business owners who may be more likely to leak information about a customer's buying habits to the community



Your store or office can often be more competitive than a comparable ethnic store in convenience, selection, price, and service. How? Here are a few ideas:

- ✓ Ethnic stores tend to be rather small operations and not very Internet savvy. To gain a competitive edge, develop a Web site where customers can get the most out of their shopping experience online or off. See Chapter 5 for details.
- ✓ Consider rewarding your customers for their loyalty. Offering discounts on large purchases or bonus bucks that customers can use toward purchases is often enough to show your appreciation. If several of your customers have young children, sponsoring a fair or a day at a local park or amusement park can be a real perk, in addition to making your clients feel like they're part of the family.



Finding a new customer costs almost three times as much as keeping an existing customer. Repeat customers also tend to buy twice as much as new customers, because after they have bought from you, the barriers to purchasing (fear and mistrust) have been lowered. In addition, repeat customers often lead to referral customers.



How often have you received a birthday card from a salesperson or store? Southwest Airlines does this without fail. What would this kind of gesture say about you?

- ✓ Many ethnic people shop at establishments and buy from salespeople who support their community. If you donate to local charities, let your customers know by posting the charity's fliers in your windows or placing "Proud sponsor of . . ." at the bottom of your local newspaper ads. Chapter 5 has details on how to make a name for your business in your community.

Ethnic customers may steer clear of ethnic salespeople

Salespeople often falsely assume that ethnic customers have a strong preference for working with salespeople from their own culture. Chinese prefer to buy from Chinese, Polish prefer to buy from Polish, and so on. Evidence proves that this isn't so. The truth is that unless a tremendous language barrier exists, many customers don't care about the cultural background of their salesperson. What they want is a salesperson who's sensitive to their culture. Of course, as we explain in Chapter 16, having a staff member on hand from the culture you're trying to serve can't hurt; it also can help make everyone in your business a little more culturally competent and your customers a little more comfortable.

In fact, some customers may deliberately look for a salesperson who isn't from their culture. They may be concerned that if they're negotiating with someone from their own culture, that person may know all of their bargaining tricks and techniques, so they may not get the best deal. Many conclude that negotiating with someone who is more naïve is the best way to get a good deal.

Another common trait of some ethnic groups (Asians and Hispanics, for example) is that they tend to be very private about their financial affairs. A common belief in these cultures is that if you share personal financial information with people from your own culture, they may disclose it to others in their community.



If an ethnic customer approaches you, don't automatically assume that he would prefer a salesperson of his same ethnicity. Unless he seems extremely uncomfortable with you or his own ability to speak English, treat him like any other customer, but always be on the lookout for signs that his culture may influence the transaction. If you treat your customers with sensitivity to their culture, they'll be happy to buy from you, regardless of your ethnic background. Part III gives you a crash course on the cross-cultural sales process.

Watching Your Competitors: Are They Adapting?

Part of your role as a salesperson or business owner is to constantly keep an eye on what the competition is up to. (Ideally, you want to be keeping an eye on them in your rearview mirror.) What products are they carrying? What

services are they offering? What is their pricing structure? In the new global economy, you must also know if and how they're adapting to multicultural influences in your marketplace.

In the following sections, we reveal effective strategies for using what you discover from the competition to improve your appeal to the multicultural clientele in your area.



Businesses similar to yours may not be your only competition. Anyone who competes for the same consumer dollars that you do is your competition. Video games, movies, television, live theater, sporting events, musical concerts, and amusement parks, for example, all vie for the money people spend on leisure activities. At first glance, they may not seem related, but a closer look shows they obviously are. Keep this in mind when doing your competitive analysis.

Using competitive intelligence (and avoiding industrial espionage)



The mere mention of competitive analysis conjures up images of corporate spies stealing insider information, but competitive intelligence or analysis differs from industrial espionage:

- ✓ *Competitive intelligence* is a legitimate way to gather publicly accessible information (from Web sites, corporate publications, patent filings, annual reports, advertisements, press releases, and onsite store visits) to determine another company's strengths and weaknesses and see what it's planning. Large companies often have entire departments devoted to gathering information about competitors. You can certainly do the same on a smaller scale.
- ✓ *Industrial espionage* can involve electronic surveillance, theft of trade secrets, bribery, blackmail, and other unlawful activities.



Before becoming an industry supersleuth, familiarize yourself with the Economic Espionage Act (www.economicespionage.com/EEA.html) that governs the legalities of gathering competitive intelligence.

Businesses and organizations are becoming increasingly transparent as they attempt to conform to disclosure laws and regulations, and market themselves and their products and services on the Web (via Web sites and blogs). Some companies even allow their employees to launch their own blogs to broadcast to the world what the company is doing now and planning for the future.

You can gather an incredible amount of useful competitive intelligence simply by knowing where to look:

- ✔ **Businesses or stores:** Visit your competitors' businesses and act like a customer to see what ethnic products and services they may offer, their prices, the amount of ethnic traffic they receive, and other pertinent issues.
- ✔ **Web sites and blogs:** Most businesses and many salespeople have their own Web site or blog and often post annual reports, press releases, and advertisements. They may also offer an area where customers can post comments about the level of service received as well as reviews of the company's products.
- ✔ **Google and other Internet search tools:** You can search for new developments in your industry, price ranges for products you sell, which products and services your competitors offer, and more. Look for industry-specific directories, databases, archives, and search engines, which you can use to conduct research on companies, industries, and business publications.
- ✔ **Commercial research reports:** You can purchase market research that provides economic and competitive analysis, but always check first to see if comparable information is already available for free on the Internet. You just need to be willing to invest the time required to search for it.
- ✔ **Frontline staff:** Receptionists, cashiers, and other personnel who work directly with customers can be a tremendous source of information. Clients and vendors don't feel intimidated by receptionists and often share information with them that they would never think of sharing with a salesperson or manager. Clear the route for your frontline staff to deliver to you any information they pick up. Tell your staff the kind of information you want, such as complaints, compliments, questions, concerns, and requests for products or services you don't currently offer. Some companies have a monthly contest for the best piece of data provided by staff with a nice prize as a reward.

Some savvy businesses deliberately keep clients and vendors waiting for 10 to 15 minutes in the reception area just to increase the chances the receptionist may overhear valuable conversations.

- ✔ **All staff:** Enlist the assistance of everyone in your organization. Encourage them to share any competitor ads, fliers, or other marketing materials they come across. If they have friends or family who shop at stores that are similar to yours, ask them to complete a short questionnaire about why they choose one establishment over another, what products they buy, and so on.



✔ **Key individuals:** Develop relationships with key people who can help you, including community or religious leaders, top people in your local chamber of commerce, major suppliers, multicultural marketing experts, diversity consultants, journalists, and even well-connected customers. Building relationships with experts can keep you ahead of opportunities that may be developing for your business. Again, if they are a part of your advisory board (see the earlier section “Enlisting current clients to help you gain a competitive edge” for details), you already have this relationship.



Don't fall victim to paralysis by analysis. Instead of spending all of your time gathering and analyzing your competitive intelligence, spend some time planning and then executing your plan to make your business more competitive. In Chapters 6 and 7, we show you how to build a strong foundation.

Staying a step ahead of the competition

Chess masters are superior players because they don't simply think about their next move. They think about their opponent's next five moves and their own next five or ten moves for gaining a strategic edge. In the same way, you must outthink your competitors. Put yourself in their shoes and ask: How are they going to adapt? What are they likely to do to gain market share?

Most companies start with baby steps. They may modify their marketing materials, add a couple of products or services, or devote a section to their stores that caters specifically to a certain ethnicity. These small changes usually fall short and can even drive prospective customers away; customers may view these changes as token gestures rather than a true commitment to them. This is why a supermarket's ethnic foods section has little impact on deterring large ethnic food stores from successfully entering the same marketplace.

To assist you in predicting what your competitors may attempt in an effort to outdo you, consider the following factors that customers often deem most important:

- ✔ Price
- ✔ Selection
- ✔ Brand names in stock
- ✔ Delivery times
- ✔ Installation services
- ✔ Warranty (including period and what's covered)

- ✓ Language capabilities of staff
- ✓ Credit terms available
- ✓ Return policy
- ✓ Location (convenience, parking, and multiple locations)
- ✓ Appropriate atmosphere
- ✓ Hours of operation
- ✓ Knowledgeable and experienced staff
- ✓ Personalized services
- ✓ Customer education



To stay several steps ahead of the competition, focus on as many items in this list as possible. If your competitors are focusing only on price and selection, while you are focusing on price, selection, hours of operation, attractive return policies, and personalized services, you are going to win.



Competing on price alone is a loser's strategy that requires no talent, skill, or planning. In fact, customers are often willing to pay a premium for convenience and quality customer service. You may want to use a few popular products and services as loss leaders in a strategy to up-sell other products, but if your entire business becomes a loss leader, you'll soon go out of business or be so disappointed that you'll wish you were out of business. One of the most effective ways to beat your competition is by adjusting your sales presentations, as we outline in Chapter 11.

Competing with ethnic businesses



The overall strategy for competing successfully with ethnic businesses is no different than the strategy for competing with nonethnic businesses: offer customers more of what they want and need. Following are some ideas on how to implement this strategy to compete specifically with ethnic businesses:

- ✓ **Increase your selection.** Ethnic stores usually do a great job offering specialty products, but ethnic customers often prefer one-stop shopping. Immigrants, in particular, are very time conscious because they work long hours, so they appreciate having all of their needs met at a single location.
- ✓ **Offer convenient hours.** You may need to stay open on nights and weekends when ethnic customers have time to shop. Your research can help you determine your potential customers' normal work hours so you can plan to be open when they're available to buy.

- ✔ **Strengthen relationships.** What all people often value most is relationships. If you can see your customers as more than just “transactions” and build deeper interactions, they’re likely to be more loyal to you. Get to know their names, what cultures they hail from, what their unique needs are, and more. Everyone likes being treated like they’re special and not just a number.

After gathering your competitive intelligence and analyzing it, you may realize that you simply can’t compete with a particular ethnic business in your area. In such cases, you have two options:

- ✔ **Take what you can get.** Do your best to attract as many multicultural customers as possible, but remain on the lookout for opportunities to capture more ethnic business. The business environment can change quickly. As long as you continue to do your homework, you remain in a strong position to capitalize on any changes.
- ✔ **If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.** Perhaps you can set up an arrangement where you refer customers to an ethnic store for items you don’t carry and they do the same for you. Heck, it never hurts to ask.

Chapter 3

Assessing Your Cross-Cultural Sales Readiness

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting in touch with any cultural bias you may have
 - ▶ Assessing your existing cross-cultural selling skill set
 - ▶ Developing an international perspective
-

A large part of becoming a master of the multicultural marketplace consists of becoming a master of your own thoughts and behaviors. The culture in which you grew up may be so deeply ingrained within you that you begin to think that differences in other cultures are peculiar at best and perhaps even wrong.

If you want to increase your sales with multicultural consumers, you have to unlearn some of what your own culture has taught you and replace that knowledge with accurate information about other cultures.

In this chapter, we attempt to increase your awareness of what your culture has taught you, test your multicultural aptitude, and offer suggestions about how to adapt to the realities you're likely to experience in other cultures.

Analyzing Your Own Cultural Lens

Every individual has a unique cultural perspective, even if the person happens to have an identical twin. This perspective is the product of how the person was raised, what she was taught, what she read, and everything she observed and experienced. You aren't born with a cultural perspective; it's something you gain from experience, and what you have experienced throughout your life influences how you interact with others.



To begin your journey of adapting to meet the needs of customers from diverse cultures, you need to have a firm grasp of your own feelings and beliefs. This enables you to begin to recognize that you don't have to be governed by your beliefs and behaviors if they're innately different from those of people from other cultures. The differences arise primarily because of what you and others were taught growing up.

In the following sections, we assist you in getting in touch with the American cultural perspective and any cultural biases you may have. By first acknowledging where you are, right now, you have a clearer idea of the challenges you may need to overcome.

Recognizing the American perspective

Americans, especially those who never travel to other countries or have the opportunity to mingle with people from other cultures, tend to have a somewhat limited view of the world and how people should look and act. Just remember the first time someone handed you a pair of chopsticks and told you that people in some countries use them to eat their meals. You probably thought it was a joke or that people who ate with chopsticks were weird. Were they completely unaware of the existence of forks and spoons?

You don't see this so much in Europe and other areas of the world where neighboring countries are so close. France, for example, is surrounded by the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Andorra, and Monaco. Europeans are reminded on a daily basis that people from other countries and cultures not only exist but are a quick Euro Rail ride away. (Of course, Europe, as a whole, tends to have its own Eurocentric perspective, too, as the Holy Roman Empire proved.)

Having a limited world view is natural for people who are somewhat isolated from other cultures, regardless of whether they live in the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia, or anywhere else in the world. However, this limited view can affect the size of your paycheck when it restricts your ability to communicate and do business with others.

To understand how limited your world perspective may be and how it can negatively affect your relationships with customers from other cultures, think of how you would feel and react in the following situations:

- ✓ After many weeks of negotiations, your client signs a purchase agreement. A week later, he calls to renegotiate the contract.
- ✓ Your customer makes an appointment to see you at noon and shows up two hours late, acting as if showing up at all is a big favor.

- ✔ A client invites you to his home to have dinner with his family. This in itself pushes your boundaries, but you decide to go anyway. The main course? Sea slugs.
- ✔ You are a male salesperson meeting a male client for the first time. He greets you by hugging you and then kissing you on both cheeks.
- ✔ You reach out to shake a client's hand. She recoils, looks down, bows her head, and then takes a step backward.
- ✔ You're sitting with your client and the client's children. One of the children is writing with her left hand, and the father scolds her for doing so, forcing her to use her right hand instead.

If the phrase, “that’s wrong” crossed your mind when reading any of these scenarios, you definitely have the American perspective instilled in you, at least to some degree. All of these practices are common in different parts of the world.



As an American, you come from a culture that’s only about 200 years old. Some of the people you meet come from cultures that are thousands of years old. If you’ve ever traveled to a foreign country, you probably found it difficult to adapt to that country’s ways. Just think of how much more difficult it can be for people from other countries to leave their culture behind when they come to the United States. Think of yourself as a gracious host — you want to make your guests feel as comfortable as possible in your home. This means changing the way you treat them rather than expecting them to instantly change their ways.

Tuning in to your own cultural biases

Almost everybody has cultural biases. In America, for example, many people think that football is superior to soccer, carp is an inedible fish, and you’re immoral if you’re late for a meeting. To become more in tune with your own cultural biases, offer your perspective on the following:

- ✔ Which religion is best?
- ✔ What would you never think of eating that people from other cultures eat regularly?
- ✔ How should people dress?
- ✔ At what age should children be allowed to drink alcohol?
- ✔ Should a woman and a man who aren’t married be allowed to drive alone together?
- ✔ What do you think of someone who doesn’t like to work independently and requires constant positive reinforcement?

- ✔ What do you think about praising colleagues in front of a group of peers?
- ✔ What do you think about confronting colleagues in front of a group of peers?
- ✔ Should people who have an issue with you talk directly with you about it?
- ✔ If people have difficulty speaking your language, do you feel that they are less intelligent than you are?

If you're like most people, you have an opinion for many of the items in this list. You probably have a strong opinion about at least a couple of the items. Most Americans, for example, were incredulous when they read a story about an American woman in Saudi Arabia who was jailed and beaten for sitting at a table with a male colleague at a local coffee shop. This isn't to say that all Saudis share the belief that a woman shouldn't be alone with a man in public or that they approve of the treatment of this woman. But it demonstrates just how violent cultural clashes can be when people believe that their perspective is the correct one.



Be honest about how you feel and what you believe. In some cases, you may not want to change your cultural practices because you truly believe that another culture's beliefs are wrong or dangerous. Analyzing other cultural behaviors, however, may lead you to believe that some differences aren't all that important, making you a little more tolerant of other people's perspectives.

Testing Your Cultural Competency as a Salesperson

On your first visit to an optometrist, she doesn't immediately hand you a pair of glasses and a bill and send you on your way. First, she gives you a vision exam. Perhaps you have 20/20 vision and don't even need glasses. Maybe you see better out of one eye than the other. Perhaps you have myopia or an astigmatism. The results of her vision exam help her write the prescription for corrective lenses, contacts, surgery, or other treatment.

The same applies to the way salespeople view and treat people from cultures different from their own. Some salespeople naturally have many of the skills required to adapt their sales presentations and other aspects of the way they do business. Others require much more training and have to put more effort into it.

In the following sections, we test your cultural competency and lead you through the process of checking your answers and scoring your exam. After you've completed these steps, you'll have a clear idea of areas you've already mastered and areas you need to work on.

Put on your thinking cap: Taking the test



On EthnoConnect.com, I (Michael) have several free online quizzes that can help you determine how much you know about dealing with customers and clients from other countries and cultures. If you register (by entering your name and e-mail address) and take a quiz online, you can have your quiz automatically graded. The free quizzes include the following:

- ✓ Company Cultural Competency Quiz
- ✓ Multicultural Marketing Quiz
- ✓ Multicultural Negotiations Quiz
- ✓ American Cultural Awareness Quiz
- ✓ Salesperson Cultural Competence Quiz

We've compiled questions from several of these quizzes to develop a custom quiz specifically for salespeople. To determine your cultural competency as a salesperson, answer all 30 questions in this section. In the following sections, we lead you through grading and scoring your answers.



In the quiz, we introduce the concepts of *high-context* and *low-context cultures*. To answer these questions, you need to know what these terms mean. These terms were introduced by Edward T. Hall in his book *Beyond Culture* (Peter Smith Publisher).

- ✓ A **high-context culture** relies more on history and tradition to communicate. Individuals require fewer words because everyone in the group understands the context, which conveys much of the meaning. People from high-context cultures, such as the Japanese, Arabs, and Greeks, also tend to be more group oriented and focused on building and maintaining strong relationships.
- ✓ In **low-context cultures**, individuality is highly valued and people spend more time explaining and providing information to bring one another up to speed. In low-context countries, including the United States, Germany, and Switzerland, individual initiative and achievements tend to carry a higher value than they do in high-context cultures.

1. The group that is least likely to object to receiving advertisements by direct mail is:

- A. Whites
- B. Hispanics
- C. African Americans
- D. Asians
- E. Middle Easterners

- 2. What is the most appropriate greeting when first meeting a male multicultural customer?**
 - A. Shake his hand because this is the universal greeting
 - B. Pat him on the back
 - C. Wait for him to do what's comfortable for him
 - D. Present your business card
 - E. Bow because this is the most common greeting in the world
- 3. If a female customer doesn't put her hand out to greet you, what should you do?**
 - A. Hold out your hand so she'll know to shake your hand
 - B. Pat her on the back
 - C. Kiss her on the cheeks
 - D. Nod in her direction to show respect
 - E. Simply smile because this is universal
- 4. How far should you stand from a multicultural customer when conversing?**
 - A. About 2 feet
 - B. About 3 feet
 - C. A little closer than normal
 - D. A little farther than normal
 - E. Whatever distance the customer sets
- 5. Which group would likely stand the closest when talking to a salesperson?**
 - A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 6. When exchanging business cards with a multicultural customer, you should be sure to:**
 - A. Bow as you present it
 - B. Accept their card with your left hand
 - C. Present your card with both hands
 - D. Hand the person your card with the wording facing you
 - E. Always ask the customer for two so you can staple one into his file

- 7. When storing a multicultural customer's business card, you should:**
- A. Staple it into your file
 - B. Punch holes in it so you can put it into a Rolodex file
 - C. Paper clip it into your file
 - D. Glue it into your file
 - E. Put it in your shirt pocket
- 8. It is acceptable to make notes about multicultural customers:**
- A. On the back of their business cards
 - B. On the front of their business cards
 - C. On a separate notepad
 - D. On the back of one of your own business cards
 - E. On the front of one of your cards
- 9. One word you'll probably never hear from a Japanese customer is:**
- A. "Yes"
 - B. "No"
 - C. "Maybe"
 - D. "Okay"
 - E. "Sorry"
- 10. Which group would most likely be attracted to a product described as "unique, special, one-of-a kind"?**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 11. A product demonstration with Hispanic buyers is likely to be most effective by:**
- A. Giving them a manual to read
 - B. Letting them try it for themselves
 - C. Showing them a diagram
 - D. Verbally explaining its operations to them
 - E. Playing them a video

- 12. A product demonstration with Asian buyers is likely to be most effective by:**
- A. Giving them a manual to read
 - B. Letting them try it for themselves
 - C. Showing them a diagram
 - D. Verbally explaining its operations to them
 - E. Playing them a video
- 13. A product demonstration with African American buyers is likely to be most effective by:**
- A. Giving them a manual to read
 - B. Letting them try it for themselves
 - C. Showing them a diagram
 - D. Verbally explaining its operations to them
 - E. Playing them a video
- 14. If multicultural customers constantly look down during a sales presentation, it probably means:**
- A. They don't like what you're saying
 - B. They don't understand you
 - C. You need to try harder
 - D. They respect you
 - E. They're distracted
- 15. When a multicultural customer plans to finance a major purchase, what should you never ask?**
- A. How much of a down payment do you have?
 - B. How many years do you want to pay back the loan?
 - C. Have you been preapproved for a loan?
 - D. What amount of loan would you like?
 - E. Do you have a favorite bank?
- 16. When discussing financing with Hispanic buyers, you shouldn't be surprised if many:**
- A. Have no credit history
 - B. Think they must have perfect credit to get a loan
 - C. Believe there is discrimination in lending
 - D. Want to pay cash
 - E. All of the above

- 17. When discussing financing with African American buyers, you should never directly ask about:**
- A. Previous borrowing experience
 - B. Credit life insurance
 - C. Beliefs about discrimination in lending
 - D. How much of a down payment they intend to make
 - E. Their credit score
- 18. The group most likely to apply for a loan online is:**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 19. What's the major difference between high-context and low-context cultures?**
- A. High-context people want to build a relationship before they buy
 - B. High-context people prefer detailed contracts
 - C. Low-context people want to know their salesperson personally before they buy
 - D. Low-context people place importance on job titles
 - E. Low-context people value long-term relationships
- 20. Which would be a high-context culture?**
- A. The United States
 - B. Sweden
 - C. Germany
 - D. China
 - E. Great Britain
- 21. When working with a group of high-context buyers, who is most crucial to the buying decision?**
- A. The eldest person
 - B. The youngest person
 - C. The elder son
 - D. The elder daughter
 - E. They all are

- 22. When talking with new immigrant buyers who show no body language, which would be a definite buying sign?**
- A. Smiling
 - B. Nodding
 - C. Talking in their own language
 - D. Laughing
 - E. Asking questions
- 23. What does signing a contract usually mean in low-context cultures?**
- A. The end of negotiations
 - B. The start of negotiations
 - C. More discussion is expected
 - D. You should expect to renegotiate major items
 - E. You'll need a mediator
- 24. "Nibbling" is common among high-context cultures, which usually means:**
- A. Expect meals with these customers to take longer than usual
 - B. Expect to give concessions before a contract is signed
 - C. Expect to give concessions after a contract is signed
 - D. Expect to negotiate over a meal
 - E. Expect negotiations to be quick
- 25. Which gesture is most universally offensive?**
- A. Pointing with the finger
 - B. The "OK" sign
 - C. Thumbs up
 - D. Keeping your hands in your pants pockets while talking
 - E. Whistling at the opposite sex
- 26. Salespeople from which cultural group are most likely to clash with African American customers:**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners

- 27. Which group is least likely to openly complain about poor service?**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 28. Which group is most likely to openly display emotions during negotiations?**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 29. Which group is least likely to try to negotiate the price of your product?**
- A. Whites
 - B. Hispanics
 - C. African Americans
 - D. Asians
 - E. Middle Easterners
- 30. Which thank-you gift would be least appropriate for Asians?**
- A. Watch
 - B. Box of candy
 - C. Pen and pencil set
 - D. Key chain
 - E. Kitchen utensils

Checking your answers

After you complete the quiz in the previous section, you can mark which questions you answered correctly and which ones you missed. Here's the answer key:

- 1. The group that is least likely to object to receiving advertisements by direct mail is:**

B. Hispanics

As a group, Hispanics are rarely targeted by direct mail organizations, so they tend to object the least to receiving such ads. (Flip to Chapter 5 for details on marketing.)

- 2. What is the most appropriate greeting when first meeting a male multicultural customer?**

C. Wait for him to do what's comfortable for him

Don't automatically stick out your hand. Wait for him to do what's comfortable for his culture. (See Chapter 8 for additional strategies and tips on meeting and greeting customers.)

- 3. If a female customer doesn't put her hand out to greet you, what should you do?**

D. Nod in her direction to show respect

After you've nodded in her direction to acknowledge her presence, you can move on with your presentation.

- 4. How far should you stand from a multicultural customer when conversing?**

E. Whatever distance the customer sets

Let the customer set the distance that's comfortable for him. Good customer service dictates that you do what your customers want.

- 5. Which group would likely stand the closest when talking to a salesperson?**

E. Middle Easterners

People from the Middle East seem to prefer the most intimate personal space.

- 6. When exchanging business cards with a multicultural customer, you should be sure to:**

C. Present your card with both hands

Always present your card with both hands with the lettering facing the customer. Accept their card with your right hand, because the left hand is considered to be "unclean." Asking for two cards implies you'll likely lose one of them, which is an insult.



- 7. When storing a multicultural customer's business card, you should:**

C. Paper clip it into your file

Business cards represent the customers in many cultures. Stapling the card is equivalent to shooting the customer in the head with a nail gun! All the other actions, with the exception of the paper clip, are unacceptable.



8. It is acceptable to make notes about multicultural customers:

C. On a separate notepad

Writing on the customer's card is equivalent to writing on his face!
Writing on your own card disrespects it as well.

9. One word you'll probably never hear from a Japanese customer is:

B. "No"

Japanese don't like to be disagreeable. In fact, they have 17 different ways to say "no" without ever uttering the word!

10. Which group would most likely be attracted to a product described as "unique, special, one-of-a kind"?

C. African Americans

African Americans tend to prefer products that are customized for their special needs and tastes.

11. A product demonstration with Hispanic buyers is likely to be most effective by:

B. Letting them try it for themselves

Studies show that Hispanics tend to be more hands on than other cultures, preferring to actually examine and operate products as opposed to hearing about their features. (Check out Chapter 11 for additional tips on tweaking your sales presentation to accommodate different cultures.)

12. A product demonstration with Asian buyers is likely to be most effective by:

C. Showing them a diagram

Studies show that Asians tend to be more visual than other cultures, preferring to look at pictures, charts, and graphs. This is because their language is built on pictures.

13. A product demonstration with African American buyers is likely to be most effective by:

D. Verbally explaining its operations to them

Studies show that African Americans tend to be more verbal than other cultures. Historically, they've had to rely on verbal communications to pass along history and other information.

14. If multicultural customers constantly look down during a sales presentation, it probably means:

D. They respect you

Many cultures believe that looking others in the eye is rude and intrusive. So to show others respect, they avoid eye contact.

- 15. When a multicultural customer plans to finance a major purchase, what should you never ask?**

A. How much of a down payment do you have?

Many groups, particularly Hispanics and Asians, tend not to trust banks, so they may keep cash hidden in and around their homes. Asking about the down payment may make them feel more vulnerable to home invasion robberies. Instead of asking specifically about the down payment, it's safest to show the customer a menu of choices, such as the cash down payment and monthly payments required for a 10, 20, and 30 percent down payment loan. The one they show the most interest in is the one they can most likely afford. (For more about differences in how various cultures think about financing, check out Chapter 11.)

- 16. When discussing financing with Hispanic buyers, you shouldn't be surprised if many:**

E. All of the above

Having no credit history, thinking perfect credit is necessary to get a loan, believing there's discrimination in lending, and wanting to pay cash are very common beliefs, especially among newly immigrated Hispanics.

- 17. When discussing financing with African American buyers, you should never directly ask about:**

B. Credit life insurance

Many African Americans have an aversion to life insurance because of a previous history of discrimination.

- 18. The group most likely to apply for a loan online is:**

C. African Americans

Many African Americans believe that they're less likely to be discriminated against if they apply for a loan online.

- 19. What's the major difference between high-context and low-context cultures?**

A. High-context people want to build a relationship before they buy

High-context cultures value long-term relationships, so a customer with this background will want to get to know the salesperson before he buys.

- 20. Which would be a high-context culture?**

D. China

China and most Asian as well as many Spanish-speaking countries tend to be high-context.

- 21. When working with a group of high-context buyers, who is most crucial to the buying decision?**

E. They all are

In high-context cultures, group decision making is common, so the consensus of the group is vital to closing a sale. (Chapter 10 offers additional insights on how to pick up on buying signals in various cultures.)

- 22. When talking with new immigrant buyers who show no body language, which would be a definite buying sign?**

C. Talking in their own language

Smiling and laughing often indicate uneasiness or lack of understanding, and nodding usually means the buyers are listening but not necessarily agreeing with you. Talking in their own language means they have moved to the emotional level of buying. It's easy to talk about product specifications in a language you learned from a book, but to discuss how you'd feel when you owned a product or used a service usually requires you to speak your native language.

- 23. What does signing a contract usually mean in low-context cultures?**

A. The end of negotiations

Signing a contract in low-context cultures usually ends negotiations. On the other hand, it begins negotiations in high-context cultures where bargaining can continue up to and beyond delivery of the product. (For more about negotiating with customers from other cultures, check out Chapter 13.)

- 24. “Nibbling” is common among high-context cultures, which usually means:**

C. Expect to give concessions after a contract is signed

Nibbling is asking for additional concessions after the contract is signed.

- 25. Which gesture is most universally offensive?**

A. Pointing with the finger

Pointing with the finger is generally the most universally offensive gesture. Many cultures consider it rude or even obscene. In most cultures outside the United States, the entire closed hand or a head nod should be used to indicate a specific direction.

- 26. Salespeople from which cultural group are most likely to clash with African American customers:**

D. Asians

Asians are at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from African Americans. From eye contact to personal space preferences to showing emotions in public, they are the most different.



27. Which group is least likely to openly complain about poor service?*B. Hispanics*

Although Hispanics are less likely than any other group to complain about poor service or faulty goods, they're also more likely to tell relatives and friends to avoid buying from customer-unfriendly companies.

28. Which group is most likely to openly display emotions during negotiations?*E. Middle Easterners*

Middle Easterners tend to be very emotional and emphatic as part of their negotiating technique.

29. Which group is least likely to try to negotiate the price of your product?*A. Whites*

European Americans come from nonnegotiating cultures where only large purchases are regularly bargained on.

30. Which thank-you gift would be least appropriate for Asians?*A. Watch*

Watches and clocks tend to remind Asians of the “winding down of life,” so giving a watch would be taken to mean “I wish you were dead.” Probably not the sentiment you had in mind! (For additional advice on giving appropriate gifts, check out Chapter 15.)



How'd ya do? Scoring the test

To score your test, total your number of correct answers. You can then determine just how knowledgeable you are about selling to customers of diverse cultures:

Your score: _____

26–30: Outstanding! You're culturally competent and probably have many diverse customers. Heck, you probably could've written this chapter.

21–25: Very good. With a few minor adjustments, you'll be well prepared to take full advantage of the multicultural marketplace.

16–20: Pretty good. You can handle most situations, but could use some fine-tuning to obtain more multicultural sales.

12–15: Fair. You're not about to get kicked out of a foreign country for a major faux pas, but you're not ready for the United Nations, either.

< 12: Yikes! You'd better stay away from cross-cultural selling until you get the proper training. Keep reading.

Refocusing Your Cultural Lens

Think back to some belief you held as a child that, in the process of growing up, you eventually were forced to question and then dismiss. It may not just be your concept of Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, but perhaps it was something you were taught in Sunday school, an unbreakable rule your parents told you about the opposite sex, or even some scientific fact you learned in grade school that was proved to be untrue by the time you reached high school.



What happened to make you change your mind? You obtained new information that refuted what you previously thought. Education and experience tend to do this to people. The more you discover about life and about the world you live in, the more your belief system and perspectives are challenged and eventually changed.

If you scored low on the cultural competency quiz earlier in this chapter, your case isn't hopeless — not by a long shot. You simply need to start refocusing your cultural lens, as explained in the next sections.

Giving yourself an attitude adjustment



Most differences between people that can be traced to cultural differences aren't wrong, they're just different. The first step in being more accepting of cultural differences is to purge the word "wrong" from your vocabulary. You've probably gotten a bad haircut at one time in your life and asked an acquaintance what she thought of it. Perhaps she said, "Well, that's different." You knew she didn't like it, but at least she tried to be nice about it. Take the same approach toward cultural differences, at least until you can truly accept the differences you notice.



Here's an exercise that can help you physically experience how difficult it may be for you to accept a variation to something that you have become accustomed to over time:

1. Cross your arms as you normally would.
2. Make a mental note which hand is on top.
3. Uncross your arms and refold them with the opposite hand on top.

You probably find the new position of your crossed arms uncomfortable because you're so used to doing it the "right" way. But if you had to, you could probably get used to folding your arms the new way. This is what becoming culturally competent is all about. You have to become aware of what you view as "normal" really is and adjust to other people's ways of doing things differently.

Throughout this book, but especially in Chapter 4, we offer plenty of advice on how to develop cultural competency. After you know the basics, the more you practice, the more comfortable you become.

Building empathy and understanding

Americans have an old saying about understanding another person by “walking in his shoes.” This is exactly what you need to do to begin understanding how people from other cultures are likely to feel when they try to navigate the traditional American culture they encounter in the United States for the first time.



To walk in the shoes of someone who has a different background, perform one or more of the following exercises:

- ✓ **Empathy walk:** Have a friend blindfold you and then lead you around a familiar setting like his home or office. You'll both learn what it's like to be blind, and he'll experience what it's like to lead someone who is blind. Then reverse roles.
- ✓ **Foreign language immersion:** Go with a friend to a religious service that is delivered in a language you can't understand (Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Greek, Korean, or some other language). For a short time, you'll experience what it's like for people who don't speak English to try to understand our language.
- ✓ **Mind trip:** Take ten minutes and imagine you're a stranger in a foreign country where people don't speak English. Then list 20 things that would be challenges for you and how you would deal with them.

Chapter 4

Developing Cross-Cultural Competency

In This Chapter

- ▶ Moving six steps closer to multicultural competency
 - ▶ Overcoming a limited cultural vision
 - ▶ Brushing up on the basics of respect
 - ▶ Immersing yourself in different cultures at home and abroad
 - ▶ Gathering information from people in the know
 - ▶ Becoming more willing to accept change
-

Before you can excel at selling to multicultural customers, becoming a student of culture is essential. It's sort of like acquiring a new language. You have to brush up on the general rules and regulations that govern your own culture and then explore and begin to accept the similarities and differences in other cultures. Success hinges on your ability to drop your defenses, accept differences, and practice some customs that may be uncomfortable to you for the sake of putting your customers more at ease.

This chapter steps you through the process so you move as quickly as possible from point A to point B . . . or from point B to point A, depending on your cultural perspective.

The Six Essential Steps to a Multicultural Mindset

Discovering and adapting to other cultures is a lifelong process. Fortunately, it's also a fairly enjoyable process, assuming you approach it with the right attitude and an open mind. In the following sections, we walk you through the six-step process:

1. Recognizing any lack of awareness
2. Acknowledging differences between your native culture and others
3. Acknowledging your need to acquire more information and knowledge about other cultures
4. Actively seeking the knowledge you need
5. Adapting to other people's native cultures
6. Continuing to learn, adapt, and practice so your actions and behaviors feel more natural



As a citizen and longtime resident of the United States, you may have a knee-jerk reaction to resist change. After all, this is your country. Why should you have to change to accommodate the differences of people from other cultures? If they want to deal with you on your home turf, *they* should change, right? Wrong!

- ✓ First, realize that common courtesy demands that whenever someone visits your home, you should make accommodations to make them feel comfortable.
- ✓ Second, resisting change is counterproductive — it only makes your job more difficult. Change is going to occur despite your best efforts to resist it. (See the later section, “Embracing Change,” for more details on this concept.)

Step 1: Recognize any lack of awareness

Everybody starts out pretty clueless in terms of recognizing racial, ethnic, and cultural differences between themselves and others. When people are growing up, family members and friends are the only point of reference. Playmates are just that — kids who live in the same neighborhood and pretty much share the same experience of growing up. For example, I (Michael), an Asian American, grew up in a very White neighborhood. As a result, until I started going to school I thought I was White. Who knew?

Whenever I begin assisting someone in developing cultural competency, this is exactly the premise with which we begin: Being *ethnocentric* doesn't necessarily imply that you're prejudiced or discriminatory. It simply means that certain racial, ethnic, and cultural differences lie outside your realm of experience. Increasing your exposure to different cultures can begin the process of transformation from ethnocentric to cosmopolitan.

Step 2: Acknowledge the existence of cultural differences

After becoming aware of other cultures, many salespeople choose to overlook or dismiss any cultural differences and instead choose to deal with the situation by “treating everyone the same.”

Of course, this approach is ineffective at its best and counterproductive at its worst. Why? Because although *you* may be able to overlook your cultural differences and minimize their importance, prospective customers may be unable or unwilling to do the same. Their customs may be very important to them and so ingrained that “treating them the same” can make them very uneasy and perhaps even turn them away.



Acknowledging cultural differences and then investing the time and effort in adapting to those differences is crucial if you want to appeal to multicultural clientele. The penalty for failing to develop cultural competency is loss of business and market share.

Step 3: Acknowledge a need for knowledge

According to a proverb often attributed to the Chinese or Persians:

He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool . . . shun him.

He who knows not and knows that he knows not is a child . . . teach him.

He who knows and knows not that he knows is asleep . . . awaken him.

He who knows and knows that he knows is wise . . . follow him.

Step 3 requires that you become like a child — someone who is aware that you don’t know much about other cultures but are ready, able, and eager to discover all sorts of useful and fascinating customs. Because you’re reading this book, we conclude that this is the stage you’re currently at. Congratulations! You’re halfway through the transformation process.



Even if you’re not an Anglo American, you can benefit from multicultural training. Just because you grew up outside of White, middle-class America doesn’t automatically make you an expert on cultures outside your own. In fact, you may need training to understand how your Anglo American customers think and act.

The first step in the quest for new knowledge is to put your ego aside and be willing to seek assistance. Becoming sensitive to cultural nuances isn't a skill that most people can pick up on their own.

Step 4: Actively seek knowledge

Everyone has *cultural blind spots* — certain beliefs and behaviors in other cultures that a person either doesn't see or simply can't comprehend. The tendency is to judge these beliefs and behaviors in terms of right and wrong instead of trying to understand them.



To open your mind to cultural differences, you must constantly challenge your own beliefs. One of the most effective ways to gain knowledge is to ask people about their culture, food, language, and beliefs. Trust us, they won't be offended. In fact, you'll usually find that people are more than happy to educate you about their culture. They would much rather spend some time sharing their insights with you than become the victim of false assumptions. (See the later section, "Asking the Experts," for additional information.)

Exploring cultural differences doesn't have to feel like work; it can be fun, fascinating, and delicious, as we reveal later in this chapter. It's usually quite exhilarating to discover the truth behind many cultural myths. For example, did you know that fortune cookies were invented in the U.S., not in China? Were you aware that burritos aren't a common food in Cuba?

Of course, as a salesperson or business owner who wants to expand into the multicultural marketplace, you're probably looking for more practical and useful facts than trivia about fortune cookies and burritos. As you explore different cultures, you're going to discover information that can be very valuable in helping you hone the following skills:

- ✓ Meeting and greeting customers without offending them (see Chapter 8 for more details on this process).
- ✓ Explaining the benefits of your products and services in a way that customers appreciate (see Chapter 11).
- ✓ Avoiding going into panic mode and actually celebrating when customers start talking in their own language (see Chapter 10).
- ✓ Negotiating effectively with born-and-bred hagglers (see Chapter 13).
- ✓ Increasing your referral business from your multicultural clientele (see Chapter 15).



The skills you develop in working with customers from other cultures will enhance your relationships with your traditional customers as well. Through this process, you'll become more perceptive to the unique needs and behaviors of every individual you meet during the sales process.

Step 5: Adapt to other people

Knowing how to do something and being able to do it are two entirely different animals. You can know how to golf, for example, by watching Tiger Woods swing a club, but going out on a golf course and actually shooting under par is the real challenge.

As soon as you have an understanding of your multicultural customers' backgrounds, start putting it into action by practicing what you've discovered. Sure, you're going to make some mistakes at first, but the more you practice, the more natural you become and the fewer mistakes you make. When people recognize that you're making an effort to accommodate their cultural differences, they're going to be very forgiving and are usually willing to meet you at least halfway.



Adapting to other people doesn't mean forsaking your own beliefs and behaviors, but instead tweaking your actions to help others feel comfortable. It's no different than when you have your extended family over for a party. You may refrain from smoking because Aunt Liz is allergic or avoid discussing politics with Uncle Bob because it always ends in a shouting match, but you can still enjoy yourself in spite of having to make these adjustments.

Step 6: Continue your education

As the old saying goes, "If you're not making mistakes, you're not learning anything." The key to developing cultural competence is to be open-minded, willing to forgive your own mistakes, and dedicated to keep trying.



Culture is complex, so don't expect to develop a mastery of all cultures overnight or simply by reading this book. Even the most globally astute salespeople are always in the process of discovering new cultural differences they were unaware of and making adjustments to how they treat their customers. It's truly a lifelong process. Pick up a little bit every day. By the end of the month, you'll have made an incredible amount of progress, and you'll be light-years ahead of your competition.

Changing Your Vision to Reach beyond Cultural Stereotypes

You can't judge a book by its cover, nor can you judge a person solely on looks or the way the person dresses, speaks, or acts. Some eccentric people who prefer to dress down have plenty of money to spend and really have their acts together, as you discover if you spend a little quality time with them.

Unfortunately, the human tendency to jump to conclusions can often be counterproductive to business. In the following sections, we explain the limits of stereotypes and the dangers of language elitism; we also show you how to expand your vision by becoming more aware of certain cultural tendencies.

Understanding how stereotypes can limit your vision

Making general observations and noting tendencies can be a useful first step in developing an understanding of just about anything. As children, for example, we first discover how to identify dogs and cats and birds. Only later do we discover the differences between a German shepherd and a toy poodle or the unique personality and behaviors of the family dog. Only with experience do we realize that every animal is unique, although the general classifications still continue to help us identify and understand them.

The same is true when we become adults and begin to encounter people from different backgrounds. At first, we can be almost blind to the fact that every person in a culture is an individual. We tend to base our expectations on and judge individuals by our limited understanding of the group. As you may expect and can readily observe in the real world, this can be a dangerous approach to dealing with people, resulting in negative stereotypes that can lead to misunderstandings.



Throughout this book, we point out some general inclinations within certain groups, but we have to warn you not to get too comfortable with these classifications. They're just a first step toward the ultimate awareness that every human being is unique. Stereotypes can compromise your relationships with customers and kill sales. Be sure to avoid the following actions:

- ✔ Try not to judge people by how they're dressed or the vehicle they drive. Looks can be deceiving, as we point out in the nearby sidebar "Just a bum?" and can result in the loss of very good customers and prospects. In Brazil, for example, people try to look poor on purpose, because people who are rich in that country often get kidnapped and held for ransom. To protect their safety, people there tend to avoid the bling.
- ✔ Similarly, avoid looking down on customers because of the job they currently hold. Many foreign professionals coming into the United States may not be able to practice their previous careers here, but it doesn't mean that they're unintelligent or lack the money to buy your product or service. It's not unusual to find doctors from India, engineers from Pakistan, or scientists from the Philippines working as custodians, security guards, or housekeepers when they first arrive in the United States.

Overcoming language elitism

For some reason, in the United States, a lot of people think that English should not only be the official language, but that it should be the *only* language. Native-born citizens often assume that anyone who can't speak English fluently is a little on the dumb side. Instead of trying to communicate in a manner that the other person can grasp, many people simply talk much more s-l-o-w-l-y and LOUDLY, assuming that the person just needs to hear the words a little more clearly to understand them. Remember that even medical doctors, attorneys, and professors from overseas, Mexico, or French-speaking provinces of Canada must learn our language starting with their ABCs.

Just a bum?

I (Michael) was working in a real estate office many years ago when I rode an elderly gentleman on a bicycle wearing a paint-spattered T-shirt, torn jeans, and work boots. I heard the agent assigned to greet visitors mutter under his breath, "I'll bet this guy wants to rent a mobile home," and he immediately led the man to the rental department.

Two hours later the man left, and a smiling rental manager explained to us that the gentle-

man owned several large apartment buildings, which he liked to fix up himself. He was looking to buy another 50- to 70-unit building in the area. The rental manager, who also happened to be a licensed real estate broker, gladly offered to assist.

The customer was a bit eccentric but obviously knew a thing or two about real estate investing, and he certainly wasn't the bum his appearance first implied.



Be careful in making assumptions about a person's ability or inability to communicate with you. An immigrant who doesn't speak English is no less intelligent, and perhaps even more intelligent, than your average native-born, English-speaking American citizen. On the other hand, just because an immigrant speaks English doesn't necessarily mean she understands you. Becoming fluent in a second language is difficult. Most people have to translate English into their first language, formulate a response in their native tongue, and then translate it back into English. This is easier said than done (or perhaps easier done than said). For guidance on how to communicate more effectively with clients who aren't fluent in English, turn to Chapter 11.

You may notice that people from some cultures tend to nod their heads more than expected when they're talking with you. (If they're nodding off, you may want to liven up your sales presentation.) As we point out in Chapter 8, in many cultures, people nod as others speak to show respect and demonstrate that they're paying attention. Don't necessarily take it as a sign that the person is agreeing with you or is willing to buy what you're selling.

You also need to be careful about how you interpret accents. For some reason, Americans generally have decided that some accents are better than others. French is sexy. Brits sound sophisticated. Germans speak with authority. As for Asians, many Americans think these accents are simply "hard to understand." The best approach is to do what your mother always told you — if you can't think of something nice about a person's accent, think nothing at all. Just accept it as something different.

Expanding your vision with cultural tendencies

Cultural tendencies and stereotypes are on opposite ends of the spectrum. While stereotypes can limit your vision (as we explain earlier in this chapter), an awareness of *cultural tendencies* expands your world, allowing you to form a deeper understanding of why people in certain groups tend to think and act the way they do. The following list describes some of the more common cultural tendencies you're likely to encounter:

- ✓ Asians and Hispanics tend to negotiate everything all day long. They have a good reason for doing this, as you see in Chapter 13.
- ✓ Many Asians tend to believe in *feng shui* (many don't, too). (This ancient Chinese practice involves arranging objects to maximize positive energy flow and achieve harmony with the environment.) Your customers' belief in feng shui may influence how you lay out your store or office, as you see in Chapter 7, and other aspects of how you do business with people who subscribe to its tenets.
- ✓ Many Asians tend to be frugal, which is an integral part of Confucian culture.

- ✓ Asian Indians or Pakistanis may want a great deal of information before making a decision.
- ✓ African Americans tend to be religious, especially the old schoolers, so watch your language in their presence (which is a good habit to get into anyway).

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Respecting Clients from Other Cultures

Every consumer wants to be treated with respect, but multicultural customers may expect the opposite because of the way they've been treated by culturally unaware salespeople. As a result, they can be even *more* sensitive to how you treat them or how they perceive you're treating them. If they walk into your business and they don't feel the love, they're very likely to quickly walk out.

Every day, American retail and service companies that desperately want and need more business unwittingly turn away potential customers simply because they don't know how to foster positive relationships with their multicultural clientele.



According to the 2005 Yankelovich MONITOR Multicultural Marketing Study, 68 percent of African Americans, compared with 46 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, say how a store treats customers based on race is extremely important in deciding where to shop. All ethnic groups tend to be sensitive to their treatment in stores, restaurants, offices, and other public places.

The media is somewhat responsible for the current state of affairs. Stories about discrimination, prejudice, and profiling can make anyone who doesn't look and act like an average American (whatever that is) more than a little jumpy and defensive. Likewise, stories that portray certain ethnic groups as gangsters, drug dealers, and thieves can cause retailers to be hyper-vigilant when upstanding multicultural citizens enter their establishment.

In the following sections, we guide you in the process of developing a sense of respect for all of your customers.

Grasping your own sense of respect

Everyone wants to be treated with respect, including people in countries outside the U.S. We may have different names for it and slightly different concepts of what respect really means, but everyone's notion of it basically

boils down to the same thing: being treated as an equal and with courtesy. Of course, every culture has its own subtle nuances, as the following examples illustrate:

- ✔ European Americans tend to call it *honor*, while African Americans refer to it as *respect* (remember Aretha Franklin’s song “Respect”?).
- ✔ In Asia, honor is known as *face*, and many there would rather die than lose face. In fact, ancient Samurai warriors were required to kill themselves if they brought disgrace to the emperor. This would restore honor to their families.
- ✔ In Latin America, honor is known as *respecto*. You first respect yourself and then your family. The Hispanic culture, however, believes that if you don’t respect your parents, you can’t respect yourself. This differentiates the Latino culture from the American culture, in which we tend to ignore and even disrespect our elders by making jokes about “old-timer’s disease,” “senior moments,” and other stereotypical elderly ailments.



We tend to agree with the Latino culture’s view of respect, but we’d add that if you don’t understand what respect means to you, you’re going to have a much tougher time treating your customers with respect. Take a moment to reflect on how people must treat you in order for you to feel respected, and make this your starting point for how you treat them.

Taking a lesson in etiquette



The longer an immigrant family has been in the United States, the more *acculturated* (adapted to the new culture) they become, and the less likely they are to exhibit traditional characteristics of people from their homeland. However, culture is deeply ingrained in the psyche, and even after four or five generations in this country, people can still hold on to a few beliefs and other traits of their ancestors.

So what does this have to do with respect? And how do you go about treating customers with respect? It all starts with going beyond the Golden Rule: “Treat people the way you would like to be treated.” In today’s marketplace, you must follow the *Global Rule*: “Treat people the way they want to be treated.” However, this assumes that you know how others want to be treated.

In the appendix, we provide detailed guidelines for treating people from other cultures respectfully, including Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and even current Americans. We get even more detailed by

splitting our coverage into subgroups; for example, different rules govern how you treat different groups of Hispanics, including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. The guidelines we lay out in the appendix can get you up to speed on steps you can take to make customers from specific cultures feel respected. After you know what people *expect*, you're better equipped to show people *respect*.

Acquiring Cross-Cultural Skills with a Dash of Fun

As an entrepreneurial salesperson or business owner, you probably already know that work doesn't have to feel like work. It can be fun, and we believe that the effort required to develop cross-cultural sales skills is perhaps the most fun, fascinating, and rewarding endeavor a person can ever have the pleasure of doing. To assist you on your voyage of discovery, we present several suggestions in the following sections that you can use to gain more insight into other cultures. We start slow with easy stuff, like eating out at ethnic restaurants, and then proceed to more challenging activities.

Imagine this: You're about to embark on a journey to foreign and exotic lands. You'll treat your taste buds to new cuisines and your olfactory organs to exotic aromas; expose your ears to new music, voices, and sounds; open your mind to new ideas and beliefs; behold a rainbow of colors; and discover wonders you may never have otherwise imagined.

Dining out at ethnic restaurants

Need an excuse to eat out? Then consider doing a little cultural research at a local ethnic restaurant. If you live in or near a big city, you should have plenty of ethnic restaurants from which to choose — Chinese, Thai, Ethiopian, Mexican, Japanese, Cuban, Korean, Indian, Middle Eastern, African American soul food, or you name it. Ever since the beginning of time, food has bridged the gap between cultures and convinced people of the value of sitting down together at the same table.



Just be sure you choose an eatery that's at least somewhat authentic. Dining out at the Super-Duper China Buffet in the local strip mall or at any of the many Mexican franchise restaurants is not likely to put you in touch with traditional foods and customs.



One of the easiest and most delicious ways to acquire cross-cultural skills is to dine at various ethnic restaurants a couple of times a month. And don't forget to bring a stack of business cards with you. You never know where you're going to meet your next customer.

Admittedly, you have to do a little more than stuff your face with ethnic food. Use your dinner date as a catalyst for discovering more about the culture and cuisine. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ✓ Before you go to a Mexican restaurant, research the differences between Mexican, Spanish, Cuban, South American, Central American, and Puerto Rican foods. You can find plenty of information on the Web.
- ✓ Prior to visiting an Asian restaurant, look up foods from China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, and research the rules of dinner etiquette for the different countries. Most eat with chopsticks, but the Chinese pick up the rice bowl and scoop food into their mouths, while the Japanese, being more formal, leave the bowl on the table and use chopsticks to bring the food to their mouths.
- ✓ Before heading out to an African American restaurant, research the origins of the cuisine. You may be surprised to find that soul food has roots in Africa as well as the southern United States.
- ✓ In advance of dining at an Indian or Pakistani restaurant, explore the differences between the two cuisines. The meat selections and spices are quite varied.



Don't be afraid to ask questions about the foods. People who own ethnic restaurants want you to be familiar with their culture and their foods. If they're proud enough of their culture to open a restaurant, they're probably proud enough to share their customs and beliefs as well.



When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Don't, for example, step into a traditional Ethiopian restaurant and demand a knife and fork. Food is served on a platter in the center of the table, and patrons are expected to eat with their fingers. Don't worry; your server will usually provide your table with an ample supply of hot, damp towels to wash your hands. Follow the customs of the land — even if that land is located in the middle of the United States.

Attending ethnic fairs and celebrations

When you can't get away to a foreign country, the next best thing is to attend a local ethnic fair or celebration. Most big cities are proud to sponsor a host of annual cultural celebrations, including Cinco de Mayo, Chinese New Year, the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival, African American History Month and

Kwanzaa celebrations, Asian Indian Diwali observances, Greek festivals, German Oktoberfest, Italian or Polish heritage celebrations, and other occasions.

At most of these events, you'll surely find plenty of food stands, but check out the cultural exhibits as well. Watch or join in the ethnic dances, view the artwork, check out the culture's history and beliefs, and talk to the people (ask lots of questions; see the upcoming section, "Asking the Experts," for some suggestions). Mingle with the folks you meet, and make a few friends who can introduce you to the culture. Take a sincere interest in discovering more about other people, and you'll soon find that they're happy to educate you.

Visiting different houses of worship

Most people who hold deep, sincere religious beliefs are more than willing to share those views and their ceremonies with visitors. Although you may be intimidated when first visiting an unfamiliar house of worship, it's a great way to meet people on their own turf. Whether it's a rousing African American Baptist service or a more subdued Buddhist service, you get to experience cultural and language differences firsthand.



People can be very protective of their beliefs, so tread carefully. Just as taking communion in a Catholic church when you're not a member is a big no-no, other traditions have their own rules that you need to be careful to honor. One of the best ways to prepare for an enlightening visit is to ask someone who's familiar with or perhaps even already attends the house of worship to accompany you — perhaps a customer or colleague or a leader in the local community. Have the person explain the significance of the service and meanings behind various ceremonies before you go; you never want to carry on a conversation during the service.

Visiting ethnic districts in your area

If you're fortunate enough to live in or near a major metropolitan area, you probably have quick access to some of the best cultural research centers in the United States — ethnic districts and neighborhoods.

Probably one of the oldest and best known examples is San Francisco's Chinatown. Although you can certainly find plenty of shops specially designed to attract tourists, Chinatown is also the place where local Chinese people buy their fruits, vegetables, meats, and groceries. During a brief walk

down Grant Avenue you'll notice many cultural differences, such as the way people greet each other, how close they stand to one another while shopping, and the haggling with shop owners that seems to go on incessantly.

Just a few blocks away, you can visit the Italian neighborhood of North Beach with fresh-cooked pasta for sale, as well as round-the-clock bocce ball games. Not far from there is Japantown. On the other side of town, you can discover Russian and Irish communities. In the Fillmore District, you find many Black businesses and restaurants, and the Mission District is home to Latino food and stores.

If you sit on a bench in any ethnic district and try to notice the differences without being judgmental, your eyes are opened to a whole new world. Look closely and you're likely to notice differences and similarities.



Strike up a conversation with one or more shop owners and try to get them talking about their customers. Chances are pretty good that they're dealing with many of the same challenges that you face in your business. Ask questions about differences in how their customers shop and make purchase decisions and the products and services that are in highest demand. What you discover should help increase your success with customers of all cultures.

Joining ethnic chambers of commerce

In most major cities, you can find chambers of commerce for different groups, including Black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, or Native American business communities. Try searching the Internet or contact your local chamber of commerce to see if someone there can give you any leads. Some cities are home to so many different groups that they have a multiethnic chamber alliance or similar group that periodically brings them all together. You may also discover regional chambers of commerce in some areas.

After you locate an ethnic chamber in your area, get involved in its business and social activities. You can host an event at your store or office, which can provide an opportunity to promote your business as well as meet people.



One of the fastest ways to get recognized in any organization is to chair a committee or serve as an officer. This essentially sets you on stage, where you become highly visible to the group's members. Find out what volunteer assistance is needed, and offer your time and expertise. As soon as you find out how they run a fund-raising auction or golf tournament, you're likely to be appointed chairperson of the event. After gaining visibility in this position, you may consider running for office — maybe serving as a member of the board of directors or as secretary, treasurer, vice president, or even

president. Being of a different ethnic background is bound to get you noticed, but you have to show commitment to the group over time if you want the members to do business with you.

Reading ethnic newspapers and magazines

Do you want to know what people from other cultures are thinking, what grabs their interest, and how ethnic businesses are already pitching their products and services to this market? Then pick up a few ethnic newspapers and magazines and flip through them when you have some time. You may need some assistance from a friend or staff member who speaks the language to help you figure out what the headlines say, but the first thing you're likely to notice is that the audience views world events very differently than do mainstream Americans. You can instantly gain insight to the other culture's perspective.

You can usually pick up ethnic newspapers (often for free) in ethnic neighborhoods or business establishments or by visiting your public library. You can also read many of these publications online.



Also, look carefully at the ads in these publications. On close examination, you're likely to notice that the words in these ads convey an entirely different message than similar ads targeting Anglo American consumers and that the ads probably focus on different features of a product or service than you may expect. You're likely to see that trust is often more important than low price and that relationships are crucial in making the sale.

Take the road less traveled

When you travel to a foreign land, get off the beaten path and avoid the tourist traps. I (Michael) once flew to New Zealand with a group from the United States to speak at a convention. After 16 hours on the plane, we were tired and hungry. Unfortunately, the first place my travel companions wanted to go was an American fast-food restaurant.

Why would you travel 6,500 miles to go to an establishment that serves the exact same food in Auckland that you can get in Akron, Ohio . . . and

is proud of it? Sample the local cuisine and ask the locals to teach you about the different foods.

Do your homework. Find out where the historic sites are located and hire a local tour guide to take you around. (Let the person know that you don't want to simply follow the tour buses.) When visiting the ancient city of Pompeii, my traveling companions and I found an Italian university history professor who literally wrote the book on this attraction, and he agreed to give us a special tour.

Traveling far and wide

Becoming a minority in a different country is perhaps one of the fastest ways to develop cultural competency. First, it enables you to empathize with minorities in the United States. You get to know how it feels to be the only one in a room with a different complexion who isn't fluent in the language and who is unfamiliar with the traditions and customs of those around him.

Moreover, travel transports you to the very origins of the culture and immerses you in a setting where everyone around you naturally practices the customs and traditions of the land. Assuming you don't isolate yourself with your fellow traveling companions, you quickly begin to pick up on the culture's nuances after a few days.



Before you embark, be able to say a few basic words and phrases in the other country's language. The people there will sincerely appreciate your efforts. Even the French, whom Americans tend to stereotype as rather cold and aloof, quickly warm up if you can at least say "hello" and "goodbye" in their language.



If possible, talk with anyone on the plane sitting near you who may be familiar with your destination. Ask him for tips on interesting places to visit and eat and traditional cultural events to experience. Seatmates are usually eager to share their experiences and insights on a long flight.

Attending an ethnic studies course

You don't have to immerse yourself in a foreign language to broaden your understanding of other cultures. Plenty of colleges, universities, and community colleges offer ethnic studies classes. These programs generally cover the history of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and others in the United States. Some of the topics these courses typically touch on include the following:

- ✓ History
- ✓ Identity issues
- ✓ Family values
- ✓ Immigration patterns
- ✓ Religion
- ✓ Ethics
- ✓ Art, music, and dance
- ✓ Beliefs and rituals
- ✓ Literature



Ethnic studies courses can be heavy on the academic and light on the practical. Nonetheless, they can be interesting and helpful in understanding multicultural customers.

Learning another language

Learning to communicate in a foreign tongue is certainly easier said than done, but if you're willing and able to invest the time and effort, it's one of the best ways to discover another culture and bridge the gap with customers who already speak the language.

One of the most fascinating aspects of any language is the influence it has on the culture itself and the thinking and behaviors of its people. The German philosopher Heidegger wrote that humanity lives in the house of language, meaning that a person's thoughts and expressions (the content of what they think and say) are heavily influenced by their language (the form that their expressions take). Consider, for example, the fact that the Chinese alphabet consists not of letters or an alphabet but of pictures — in fact, China is where the expression “A picture is worth a thousand words” originated.

Language studies can lead to other fascinating discoveries. If you take a course in Mandarin Chinese, for example, you're likely to find out that Mandarin is spoken in mainland China and Taiwan but not in Hong Kong. A Spanish class is likely to give you a better understanding of the English language, because of the many similarities between English and Spanish rules of grammar.

The mere thought of picking up a new language can be overwhelming, but you don't have to master a language to reap the benefits. Just becoming familiar with a few words and phrases is often an excellent way to demonstrate to customers that you're sincerely interested in them and committed to serving them and their community. Being able to speak and understand the basics of a foreign language can also make travel more enjoyable.



The quickest way to master a new language is through an *immersion program*. With most immersion programs, you take the course at a college or university in a country where the language is spoken. In other words, you study Spanish in Spain or Mexico or another Spanish-speaking country, or you study Mandarin Chinese in Beijing. You usually attend the program for a week to several months or longer. In an immersion program, you not only speak the language 24 hours a day, both inside the classroom and on the streets, but you can also experience your host country's food, history, sights, and culture. Of course, these programs aren't cheap. Including airfare, a typical immersion program may cost several thousand dollars for just one week, but just think of all the fun you'll have! If you consider it a working vacation, the cost isn't that unreasonable.

If an immersion program doesn't strike your fancy, consider taking an inexpensive foreign language class at a community college. Classes typically meet once or twice a week for 12 to 18 weeks, and that's usually the only time you have to really practice the language. Gaining mastery can take several years, but if you're committed to it and you don't mind picking it up slowly, this is a definite option.

Asking the Experts

Many people are afraid of insulting others by asking them about their differences, which may be the biggest contributor to cultural illiteracy. In reality, *not* asking ultimately offends more people, because then you end up approaching the person in a state of ignorance. Instead of knowing how the person would prefer to be greeted, for example, you have to assume, and assumptions can be pretty dangerous.

Just imagine how much damage you could do by making false assumptions about what other people wanted. Instead of asking everyone at the table whether they would like salt or pepper, for example, you simply start seasoning their food for them. Or say you run up to a woman you've only met once and give her a big hug. As Americans, we're accustomed to asking probing questions of people in our own culture, but when it comes to dealing with others whom we understand *even less*, we're more reluctant to ask them about their needs, desires, and expectations.

Unfortunately, without a clear understanding of other cultures, people tend to assume the worst, such as the following:

- ✔ When a customer refuses to shake hands, you may assume she's unfriendly or rude. She may simply be uncomfortable with this form of greeting, just as many longtime Americans are uncomfortable hugging anyone except their closest relatives.
- ✔ When a customer backs away, you may think she doesn't like you. She may just be trying to establish a more comfortable distance.
- ✔ When a customer doesn't establish eye contact, you may take it as a sign that the person doesn't respect you or want to hear what you have to say, when it actually means the opposite.
- ✔ When a customer starts speaking in his native tongue to others in his party, you may assume you've lost the sale. This type of conversation is actually a strong sign that the person is interested.



Go ahead and ask people about their food, language, cultural practices, and beliefs. They want you to understand them. If you don't ask your questions, you have no hope of hearing your customers clearly through the *cultural static*. (Cultural static consists of unspoken thoughts and unanswered questions about a person's background that clutter your mind that then interfere with your ability to communicate.) Here are common and important questions that often go unasked, creating cultural static:

- ✓ Where are you from?
- ✓ What is your ethnic heritage?
- ✓ What is your native language?
- ✓ What does the colored dot on the forehead signify?
- ✓ Why do you wear a turban?
- ✓ Why do you wear a head scarf?
- ✓ Why do you wear ethnic clothing in America?
- ✓ Why do you hand me your business card with both hands?
- ✓ Why won't you look at me when I'm talking to you?
- ✓ Why do you have to negotiate over every little item?
- ✓ Why do you sign a contract and then continue to negotiate?
- ✓ Why don't you do as Americans do when you're in this country?

If you've ever thought any of these questions or something like them and didn't ask, you unintentionally created cultural static that kept you from clearly hearing your customers' wants and needs. You can't develop cultural competency and trusting relationships if you don't ask questions to satisfy your curiosity and listen to the rationale that gives rise to the differences between you and others.



How do you cut through cultural static? Simple. Go ahead and ask any question that pops into your head and recognize that it probably won't be interpreted as offensive. People from diverse cultures would prefer that you ask and get it out of the way. What you'll discover is that ethnic people generally enjoy talking about their backgrounds. People from cultures outside this country know that some of their practices can seem strange to Americans, and they want to welcome you into their world. Once inside, you're likely to find that seemingly odd behaviors actually make a great deal of sense.

Embracing Change

People tend to get set in their ways at the expense of their happiness. The fact is that change occurs whether or not you accept it. Resisting it simply saps your energy, wastes precious time, and can make you bitter.

Sure, change is disruptive, but think about it. We'd venture to guess that some of the biggest changes in your life led to the most happiness; for example, graduating high school or college, getting married, having children, starting a business, and changing careers can all be highly stressful and challenging, but when you look back, you see that they resulted in the greatest amount of personal growth and opportunity.



The same is true when your market becomes more diverse. If you dig in your heels and refuse to change because “I’ve always done it this way” or because “They immigrated here, so they should be the ones to change,” you’re likely to miss out on a golden opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. You may even jeopardize your survival in the new global economy.

Realize and accept the fact that change brings about uncertainty. What worked before isn’t necessarily going to be effective today and in the future. You can start small, such as just eating an ethnic food that you’ve never tried before, and then work your way up to greater challenges, like mastering a new language.

Purchasing this book was your first step in changing the way you do business with multicultural customers. Now you’re ready for bigger challenges.

Part II

Multicultural Marketing and Beyond

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"We've always been interested in expanding our company profile in the Asian community. That's why at this year's Asian Fest, we're sponsoring a hot dog eating contest."

In this part . . .

One of the first things you need to do to start selling in the multicultural marketplace is to revamp your marketing materials — translate them into the target language, if necessary, and retool them to appeal to your audience. In this part, we show you how.

We also show you how to maximize your appeal to other cultures by implementing changes throughout your company in sales, marketing, customer service, and finance; redesigning your office or store; and introducing new products and services that your target market may find more appealing.

Our goal in this part is to assist you in going beyond the point of *looking* multicultural to the point of *being* multicultural.

Chapter 5

Building a Marketing Campaign with Global Appeal

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a brutally honest look at your current marketing campaign
 - ▶ Giving your marketing efforts a multicultural makeover
 - ▶ Choosing media that promise the most bang for your buck
 - ▶ Generating positive PR in the communities you want to serve
-

You may be the most culturally astute salesperson in the world, but if your marketing campaign is plastered exclusively with photos of white, middle-class Americans or worded in such a way that fails to appeal to customers from other cultures, you may be turning away a huge segment of your potential market.

Marketing (and advertising) is never enough, of course. After you get folks from your desired market segment to call or visit, you need to persuade them to buy, return, and refer you to everyone they know. Getting them to call or visit, however, is the first item of business, and that's all about marketing. (Throughout this chapter, we use the terms *marketing* and *marketing campaign* as umbrella terms that cover marketing, advertising, public relations, and branding. Although we're well aware of the distinctions, we prefer to use *marketing* as the general term to describe all efforts to get the word out about whatever you're selling.)

In this chapter, we offer some strategies and tips to adjust your marketing materials in a way that makes them much more appealing to people of other cultures, and we help you choose the right media to reach the people who need to hear your message.



In this chapter, we focus on the nuances of adjusting your marketing and advertising to appeal to multicultural consumers. To brush up on the basics, check out *Marketing For Dummies* by Alexander Hiam and *Advertising For Dummies* by Gary Dahl (both published by Wiley).

Critiquing Your Current Marketing Campaign

Critiquing your current marketing campaign is like trying to get advice from a therapist. You describe all the problems you're having and everything you're doing to deal with those problems. When you're done, your therapist looks at you and asks, "And how's that working for you?" This is exactly the question you should be asking about your current marketing campaign, but you can break it down even further:

- ✔ What results would indicate that my marketing campaign is having the desired effect on my target market?
- ✔ Is what I'm currently doing achieving the desired effect?

The big mistake that most companies and salespeople make is that they have no means of coming up with answers to these questions, or no means for *quantifying* the results. They simply roll out their latest marketing campaign and then sit back in the hopes of getting a feel for how it's working. They say stuff like, "Well, I feel like it's working" or "It seems to be bringing in more business." Your time and money, however, are too precious to "trust the force." In the following sections, we explain how to review your current marketing campaign with a clear eye so you know exactly what you need to change.

Even the experts struggle to attract diverse customers

According to *Advertising Age* magazine, professional marketers are hiring more specialists and spending more money than ever to reach the exploding multicultural market. However, the magazine points out that even the experts are divided over how best to attract the attention of multicultural consumers, and they're not sure whether they're getting good returns on their investments.

The magazine cites a survey commissioned by recruiting firm Heidrick & Struggles that reveals

that a great deal of confusion exists over how to most effectively target Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians. In fact, one longtime ad exec said that marketers don't understand the ethnic market any better than they did 20 years ago. Although everyone seems to recognize the importance of multicultural marketing, getting management's support for such efforts can be a monumental challenge.



Start your multicultural marketing program by having your advisory board review your current advertising and public relations efforts. Obtain feedback about how appropriate your marketing approach is for the new customers you're trying to reach. Perhaps your approach is fine as is, but don't count on it; your present campaign probably wasn't designed for multicultural audiences. (See Chapter 2 for details on forming an advisory board and on painting a picture of your business's typical multicultural customer.)

Tracking your results



You can't gauge the effectiveness of your marketing efforts if you haven't gathered any data, because you need a baseline from which to measure success. Gathering data when you don't know what you're looking for is a little like hunting for mushrooms in the woods when you don't know which ones are edible — it can be a waste of time at best and dangerous at worst. Here's the type of data you need to gather to measure the success of your current campaign:

- ✓ How many customers call or visit your business on a daily basis?
- ✓ What are the ethnicities of these customers?
- ✓ What's the average dollar amount each customer spends?
- ✓ What sorts of results are you expecting?

Answers to these questions, along with estimates of the size of your multicultural market (see Chapter 2), will give you a clearer idea of just how big your potential market is, your share of the market, and whether the results of your marketing efforts are living up to your expectations.



You can collect data on the effectiveness of a specific marketing effort in several ways:

- ✓ Design a special coupon for each publication you advertise in. When you collect the coupons, you can tell which publications they came from.
- ✓ Ask your business telephone service provider or hire a marketing company to provide you with a service that tracks call-ins. Such a service allows you to assign a special phone number to each ad. When a customer calls that number, the system records the number that the customer called, and you can track where callers are seeing your ads.
- ✓ Instruct your frontline staff to ask every customer how they happened to hear about you and tally the results.
- ✓ Conduct ethnic consumer focus group interviews to determine the impact of various components of your marketing program.

After you have gathered the necessary data, enter it into your handy-dandy spreadsheet program or whatever software you use to analyze market data. You can compare your expectations to the real numbers to get a general idea of whether your current marketing campaign is a roaring success, a costly flop, or something in between. The next section shows you how to calculate the actual return on your investment.

Calculating your ROI (return on investment)



Though you can get a vague sense of the return on your investment (ROI) by observing changes in the demographics of who shows up at your business, you should calculate the actual dollar amount of the return on your investment. It's a pretty easy formula:

$$\text{ROI} = (\text{Payback} - \text{Investment}) / \text{Investment} \times 100\%$$

For example, if you generate \$3,000 additional sales through a newspaper ad campaign that cost \$1,000, your ROI is 200 percent:

$$\text{ROI} = (\$3,000 - \$1,000) / \$1,000 \times 100\% = 200\%$$

This means for every one dollar invested you received two in return, which is truly a sign of a worthwhile campaign, compared with the return on other advertising media as well as previous marketing attempts.

Generally speaking, the higher the ROI, the more successful your marketing campaign. If you're losing money or your ROI falls short of your goal, however, don't scrap it entirely. Sometimes a few minor tweaks can deliver the desired results.



You can also assess your marketing success in terms of market share. First, do some general market research, as we explain in Chapter 2, to find out the percentage of ethnic families and consumers in your marketing area. Then answer this question: Based upon your company's overall market share, are you getting your share of ethnic consumers? As long as your multicultural market share is pretty comparable to your overall market share, you're doing fairly well.

Aiming Your Campaign at Your Target Market

A common mistake, even among professional marketing people, is to take a buckshot approach to marketing by targeting "multicultural customers." For your marketing materials to have the most impact, however, you're better off

aiming at a smaller target — not only an ethnic group, but a group within that group. This subgroup may consist of people with a different level of acculturation or socioeconomic status or a specific age group. (For more about acculturation, see “Adjusting for different cultures and levels of acculturation,” later in this chapter.)



Make an effort to connect with local ethnic organizations, including chambers of commerce and houses of worship, as suggested in Chapter 4. In addition to increasing your exposure to different cultures and customs, these establishments are good sources of information, and they may have business lists that you can get on for a minimal donation or fee. Supporting other ethnic programs and events can generate a high level of loyalty for your business and products.

In the following sections, we offer some guidance on how to build a more targeted campaign. See Chapter 2 for details on how to determine your business’s target market.



The changes to your marketing campaign need to be more than skin deep. Yes, you do need to revamp your ads and displays to make them more appealing to your prospective multicultural customers, but you also need to get your timing right, scale back your verbiage for high-context cultures, adjust for different levels of acculturation and cultural beliefs, avoid potentially inflammatory language or stereotypes, and translate your ads into the language of your target market. Perhaps most important, you need to make sure you have staff on hand who can serve the hordes of multicultural customers that your marketing efforts will draw to your business. In the following sections, we show you how to attend to all of these tasks.

Getting the timing right

Great salespeople, particularly those who specialize in retail sales, never miss seasonal opportunities, such as Christmas, or special days, such as Mother’s Day or Valentine’s Day. At least they *think* they never miss these opportunities. Salespeople who lack cultural competency often miss out on these same opportunities in the multicultural marketplace because they’re unaware that customers from other cultures follow a different calendar. For example:

- ✓ Mother’s Day (Día de las Madres) is observed on May 10 in Latin American countries, rather than on the second Sunday in May as in the U.S.
- ✓ In mainland China and Taiwan, Valentine’s Day is observed in July rather than February. Valentine’s Day is so special in Japan that the Japanese celebrate it on two days. On February 14, only women give gifts to their beaus, and on March 14 the men take their turn.

- ✓ On December 26, Kwanzaa, the African American celebration of traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement, is celebrated but has nothing to do with Christmas.



To get more in tune with differences in other cultures' calendars, check out our cross-cultural holiday calendar in the appendix. Also, consult with an expert from the culture you're targeting to make any further adjustments to your marketing calendar.

After you identify holidays and other dates of importance to your multicultural clientele, do some research to find out more about these special days and the customs that surround them. By developing a better understanding of these occasions, you're in a better position to ensure that your advertisements and promotions are in line with the spirit of the holiday.

Trimming the fat: Less is more

Marketing people often are tempted to deliver as much information as possible about their product and its benefits, but many multicultural customers come from very high-context cultures where less is more. As we explain in Chapter 3, these folks rely more on nonverbal communications, facial expressions, and body language to convey meaning, instead of being obvious and redundant with words. In low-context cultures, such as the United States and Germany, ads tend to be wordy and in your face. High-context cultures prefer ads that more subtly convey the message with graphics and implied meanings.

Take a look at the two ads shown in Figure 5-1. The low-context Oil and Natural Gas Industry ad (Figure 5-1a) relies almost exclusively on words as well as facts and figures to convey meaning and persuade. The ad includes a photo, but it's so small that it's almost invisible and really doesn't directly relate to the ad copy. The high-context Citgo ad (Figure 5-1b) relies mostly on the picture to convey the meaning. Words are kept to a minimum. The image dominates the ad and is designed to stir emotions and create good feelings about the advertiser. Unfortunately, the multicultural kids in the picture are in the back and nearly invisible — almost as an afterthought.



The moral of the story: Say less, sell more.

Adjusting for different cultures and levels of acculturation

Every culture has its own “thing” or more appropriately, its own “things” — certain values that influence people's behaviors, including how they shop for and decide to buy goods and services. But keep in mind that these cultural influences can diminish over time as future generations become acculturated.

Figure 5-1: A minimalist approach is generally more appealing to customers from high-context cultures.



In the following sections, we explore some of these more influential values and highlight specific instances in the real world.

A sample of value-related tendencies

Almost all cultures on the planet have been around a lot longer than the American culture, so they've had time to develop long-standing values, such as these:



- ✔ Established cultures may prefer tried-and-true products as opposed to new-and-improved ones. The Latino, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures have long histories and tend to appreciate longevity.
- ✔ African Americans have developed their own music, dance, foods, and other cultural basics. They want to know that you're an integral and long-standing part of the community before trusting you with their money. Because of their history, they can be a bit mistrustful at first until they see that you're committed to them and not just their money.
- ✔ Asian Indians and Pakistanis tend to gravitate toward products that are perceived to be "high class." They're also willing to pay for the higher quality and prestige these items offer.
- ✔ Native Americans often want to know that you're sensitive to the environment as well as their community.

- ✔ Russians can be very frugal given the shortages many have experienced in the recent past in their home country. They tend to have traditional European tastes which are different from American preferences.

A look at family structures

According to Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” This is certainly true, but even happy families tend to differ across cultures. Consider the following examples:

- ✔ The average American family used to consist of a father, mother, and one or two children, but today it’s much smaller than in the past.
- ✔ Hispanic and Asian families regularly consist of a father, mother, several children, grandparents, and often cousins. Children tend to live at home longer than in traditional American families, and they may even continue living there with their spouse after marriage. (This practice can actually save you money on marketing because you can reach more people with the same advertisements.)
- ✔ African American families are predominately of two types: traditional family structures, much like Anglo American families, and female head of household families. Make sure the images in your advertisements convey the type of family you’re selling to. In the African American culture, god-parents can be an integral part of the family structure to help encourage children and teach strong values by setting a good example. You may want to include them in family photos in your marketing materials.

Segmenting the market based on different acculturation levels

A study by Nielsen PreView divided Hispanics into three segments:

- ✔ **Most acculturated:** More than one third of the Hispanic population falls into this category. They speak mostly English, and their buying habits are very similar to the general market.
- ✔ **Bicultural:** More than half of Hispanics in the U.S. are bicultural and bilingual with buying habits that closely resemble the

general market. However, those habits can vary depending on the brand, category, region, and other factors.

- ✔ **Least acculturated:** The least acculturated Hispanics have buying habits that are the most different from the general market. These folks generally prefer items and shopping experiences like they would find in their homeland.



Keep in mind that minority families tend to be younger and larger, which not only accounts for their explosive population growth, but also means you target them differently (as explained in “Aiming Your Campaign at Your Target Market”). For example, in 2005, the median age of Caucasians in the United States was around 40 years old, while the average ages of Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians were 27, 30, and 35 years old, respectively. For the same year, the average family size of Whites in the United States was 2.1, whereas the average Hispanic family contained 4.7 members.

The importance of different acculturation levels

The longer you’re in a country, the more you tend to adapt to the cultural habits and ways of thinking. This is what *acculturation* is all about, and it results in creating ethnic subgroups — first-, second-, and third-generation populations — each of which responds differently to a company’s marketing and advertising.



Your target market’s acculturation level influences how you market to them. First-generation immigrants, for example, are much more likely to have preferences and tastes of their homeland and be more comfortable seeing or hearing ads in their native language. Customers who’ve lived in the United States longer tend to have acquired more traditional American tastes and be more fluent in English. See Chapter 9 for more details on selling to immigrants of different generations.

Acculturation varies according to more than just how long a person has been in the States. It also depends on how different the person’s native language is from English, how the person was raised, her age, education level, economic status, type of neighborhood where the person lives, and other factors. Generally speaking, however, new immigrants are less likely to speak English fluently and are less acculturated than people who’ve been here for several generations. So, how long have some groups been in the U.S.? Following are some valuable statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (from 2000):

- ✓ Nearly 70 percent of people from Asia were born outside the U.S.
- ✓ Forty percent of Hispanics in the U.S. were foreign born.
- ✓ Eight percent of Blacks were foreign born.

Accounting for cultural beliefs

Marketing professionals are so attuned to American beliefs and superstitions that they rarely step on consumers’ toes by mistakenly introducing offensive elements in their ads. You’re not likely to see the number 13 given a prominent

position in any ad, for example. Likewise, advertisers tend to avoid the color red (which reminds Americans of blood) and religious symbols (which could turn people off).



When developing marketing materials to advertise to other ethnic groups, you still have to remain aware of colors, numbers, and symbols that can turn customers away. They're just different colors, numbers, and symbols, depending on the group. For example:

- ✓ Red is the color of death in Korea.
- ✓ White is the color of death in China and Japan, where red is considered good luck.
- ✓ Purple signifies death in Mexico.
- ✓ In most western cultures, red symbolizes passion, love, or danger.
- ✓ The number 4 for most Asians is equivalent to the number 13 in America.



To truly understand the power of the number 4 in Asia, consider the fact that a Chinese tea set generally comes with five cups rather than four. Most Asian merchants avoid packaging products in sets of four or labeling them with a "4," even on the price tag. Even a bank advertising loans at the low interest rate of 4.44 percent could be bad. One day I (Michael) got an uneasy feeling driving next to a truck that prominently featured the business owner's phone number as "444-4444." Although it may be memorable to most people, if your phone number contains unlucky digits for your customers, using an alternative contact number when trying to appeal to them would be wise. Many may find it easier to pass you by than take a chance dialing an unlucky phone number.

- ✓ The number 7 is unlucky in Ghana and Kenya but lucky in India and the Czech Republic.
- ✓ Dogs are considered unclean in Muslim countries. In Scotland, police had to issue an apology to Scottish Muslims who became upset when the police department included a photo of its popular 6-month-old German shepherd police pup on a postcard used to advertise a new nonemergency phone number.
- ✓ The number 8 for most Asians is the equivalent to the American "lucky 7." Some people believe in lucky numbers so much that recently a gentleman in Taiwan paid \$1.5 million for the personalized license plate "8888." Before you scoff at that, you may want to ask yourself, "Where does someone get \$1.5 million for a license plate?" Could it be because he believes in numerology?

For additional culture-specific do's and don'ts, check out the appendix.

Grasping the origins of superstitious numbers

Many Asians believe that the number 4 is unlucky. Upon first hearing that, most Americans think it's just a silly superstition. But the Chinese have a perfectly reasonable explanation for their fear of the number 4. In Chinese, the number 4 is pronounced "sei" in Cantonese, whereas the word for death is also pronounced "sei" with a slightly different accent. They are similar in Mandarin as well.

Because the words for 4 and death sound so similar, Chinese people try to avoid the number 4 whenever possible in phone numbers, addresses, and even in pricing. When you think about it, this belief isn't so different from the American belief that the number 13 is unlucky, and we also avoid its use in hospitals, hotels,

high rise buildings, and elsewhere. Different but not so different, eh? Because the words for 4 and death also sound similar in Japanese, they likewise try to avoid the number whenever possible.

Similarly, many cultures have lucky numbers. In China the number 8 is thought to be fortuitous because it's pronounced "baat" in Cantonese, while the word for rich is also pronounced "baat" but with a different accent. Many Filipinos like the number 7 so much that former President Ferdinand Marcos used to write all of his laws in seven parts and would keep visitors waiting for exactly seven minutes. In the United States, many people consider the same number lucky.

Avoiding potentially offensive stereotypes

Want to upset your Hispanic customers? Choose as your company's mascot a Chihuahua who speaks with an exaggerated Hispanic accent or a bandit who loves to steal tasty corn chips from unsuspecting consumers. If you'd rather upset the Asian community, select the right font — some English text that looks "Oriental."



To avoid making such mistakes, consult with someone who's mastered the sensitivities of your target market — preferably one or more people who are members of this market and understand the issues that can trigger a backlash. In the nearby sidebar, two multicultural experts highlight the importance of making comprehensive rather than merely cosmetic changes to your marketing program.

Repopulating your pictures

The first rule in multicultural marketing is to get some people in your photos who are in the *same* ethnic group (not sort of the same) as the people you're targeting. For example, Asians can tell the difference between pictures of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, or Filipinos.

Relying on specialists to make comprehensive marketing changes

Howard Buford, president and CEO of Prime Access Inc. (www.primeaccess.net), a company that develops multicultural marketing and advertising campaigns aimed at urban audiences, suggests that companies partner with experts who know how to reach their target audience:

“One of the big mistakes that is almost always done by mainstream advertising agencies is to treat talking to African Americans as a casting issue, keeping everything else in the advertising the same, such as the dialogue, wardrobe, and the product benefits. Huge mistake. Not only can it not have a good result, but it can actually backfire and look phony and inauthentic. It ends up making that brand look like they don’t really understand African Americans. African Americans are not a darker version of white Americans.”

The late Virgil Scott, former CEO of Anderson Communications (www.AnderCom.com), a company that provides programs focused on vital health issues affecting the African American community, reinforces the need to work with specialists:

“Many ad agencies are not truly multicultural experts. They’ve expanded their business because their current general market clients say, ‘Hey, we’ve got this Black thing going on. Do you guys want a shot at it?’ They don’t really have the history, the knowledge, or the savvy to really target Black folks because they don’t know them. So how do you avoid stereotypes? You gotta make sure you’ve got a partner who knows Black people and that Black people aren’t a project but a way of life.”

These admonitions are true for marketing to any specialized target audience.



One of the easiest ways to remind people of their minority status is to shove a picture in their face that is completely void of anyone looking remotely similar to themselves. This is exactly what you *don't* want to do. By including people of their race or culture, you give them the feeling that they belong with the product or service you’re selling.



Also keep in mind the different definitions of what constitutes a family. For the African American community, you may have different photos of both a male and female head of household and several children, along with a godparent or two. A Hispanic family may be comprised of a father, mother, several children, cousins, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. An Asian family may include several generations of children living at home along with their families. (See the earlier section, “A look at family structures,” for additional information.)

As you’re composing or selecting the graphics for your ads, keep in mind that images (not just pictures of people) can also evoke strong emotions, some of which may be culturally influenced. Be careful to include culturally appropriate images. Some images can be downright offensive to some groups, such as the eagle, which is the symbol of death in the Middle East, and clocks, which are the symbol of death in China.

Talking the talk in the target language

One of the first and most basic steps in adjusting your marketing materials for ethnic markets is to convert everything into the target language and create *in-language ads* (ads in the consumer's native tongue). This effort alone shows you care. In the following sections, we assist you in gauging the importance of converting your materials into your customers' native language and explain why you have to do more than simply change the words. We also give you pointers on how to hire a translator or interpreter.



Translating consists of converting the written words of one language to another; *interpretation* generally refers to converting the spoken word. Two different modes of interpretation exist:

- ✔ **Simultaneous interpretation** is where the interpreter immediately speaks the message in the target language while listening to it in the source language. This is how verbal communication takes place at the United Nations.
- ✔ **Consecutive interpretation** is where the interpreter says the message in the source language after the speaker pauses. This mode is most commonly used in business. Always look at your customers, even when the interpreter is speaking.

In other words, you translate when you write; you interpret when you speak.

The importance of switching to your customers' language

Customers' language preference depends a great deal on their level of acculturation (see the "Adjusting for different cultures and levels of acculturation" section earlier in this chapter). Following are general guidelines on the relative importance of translating your materials into the prospective customer's target language for various ethnic groups and acculturation levels:

- ✔ New immigrants who are highly "Americanized" tend to watch, listen to, and read mostly English media. You may still need to modify your message, but converting it into another language is unnecessary and probably ill-advised if you find yourself targeting this group.
- ✔ Most businesses that are trying to attract Hispanics make the mistake of pursuing only the most acculturated groups and stick with English. Make sure that your most likely prospects can respond to your offers in the language they're most comfortable with.
- ✔ South Asians can present a unique challenge to marketers. This market encompasses the Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Nepalese cultures, which consist of more than 30 languages and more than 300 dialects. However, according to the 2000 census, about 88 percent of these were Asian Indians.



Although most South Asians are fluent in English, you can't simply aim ads to this group in English. In reaching these markets, some experts recommend advertising that features English dialogue interspersed with some South Asian words — what they call “Hinglish,” a mixture of Hindi and English.



In radio and television ads, be very careful about the interpretation. It's not enough to know you have a large potential Chinese customer base, because that language has many different dialects. Find out which dialect your prospective customers use. For instance, most longtime Chinese Americans speak the Cantonese dialect, whereas newer immigrants are more likely to speak Mandarin. The only way to know which dialect is going to be most effective is to survey your customers; we explain in Chapter 2.



The message is more than just the words

Talking the talk means more than just saying the exact same thing in a different language. It means retooling your message in a way that makes your audience more receptive to it. You must translate not only words but also culture. Start from scratch to craft a message that's likely to appeal to prospective customers on both an informational and emotional level.

If you're marketing homes to Asians who are inclined to follow the guidelines of feng shui, for example, you may want to highlight features of the home that comply with those guidelines. You probably wouldn't highlight the same features if you were selling homes to Americans for whom feng shui was not an issue.

A translator or interpreter who has experience with the culture can assist you in composing an appropriate and appealing message and avoiding any potentially offensive words or phrases. When you have a draft of your ad, ask your multicultural advisory board (see Chapter 2) to review it and provide feedback.



Make sure you know exactly which group you're targeting. You don't want to make the mistake of translating your marketing materials into Japanese for a Chinese market. You're probably thinking, “Well, yeah, duh!” but this happens more often than you may think.

Picking a good translator or interpreter

Converting one language into another is a skill that few people in the United States have mastered, so finding the right person for the job is often a tremendous challenge.

- When hiring a *translator*, look for someone whose first language is the one you don't know — the language you need to convert *to*. If you're converting English to Spanish, you usually want to hire a native Spanish speaker. Also look for someone who has experience in your industry or



area of need, such as legal, business, or medical; this person is going to have a better grasp of special words and concepts. Translators usually get paid by the page or even by the word.

For best results, provide the translator with additional guidance, such as how you plan to use the translated document, how accurate the translation needs to be, how much material you have to translate, and your deadline.

- ✓ When hiring an *interpreter*, recognize that just being bilingual doesn't qualify a person to interpret, especially if you're in an industry that uses highly specialized vocabulary. If you're selling houses or cars, most bilingual people can probably handle the interpretation. If you're selling pharmaceuticals or computer networking equipment, however, look for an interpreter who has some experience in the field. Interpreters are compensated by the hour or the day.

If your needs are modest — you need someone to interpret very basic words and concepts — a child could do it, quite literally. If the customers are accompanied by their child who knows English, the child can assist in identifying your customers' needs and explaining your products or services. If, however, you're involved in complex transactions involving legal documents, such as contracts and loan papers, hire a professional.



The American Translators Association has a free downloadable booklet called "Find a Translator or Interpreter" at www.ATANet.org.



Avoid hack jobs. If you've ever tried to assemble a bookcase or Ping-Pong table made in India, China, or Bulgaria, chances are pretty good that you've encountered bad translations of instructions to English. Sure, you get English words, but the meaning is entirely mangled. Translating your marketing materials like this is worse than not translating them at all.

Anticipating increased volume

Don't invite people to a party if you don't have enough food and refreshments to serve everyone. Although this may seem obvious, it's exactly the mistake many businesses make when they begin marketing to ethnic communities. They're ill-prepared to serve the customers whom they're marketing to.



Before you launch your marketing campaign, make sure you have everything in place to provide quality customer service. Here are a few items to consider:

- ✓ **Properly trained staff:** If you're going to advertise in a different language, have at least one person on staff who speaks that language (see Chapter 16). Here's a cautionary tale: A large pizza chain in Los Angeles decided to try to capitalize on the huge and growing Hispanic population by sending

discount coupons to Hispanic-surnamed households. Unfortunately, the company had an insufficient number of Spanish-speaking employees to take orders. As a result, the company ended up causing more damage to its reputation in the Hispanic community than if it had never tried to reach out to it.

- ✓ **Foreign language signs:** If you have signs around your business or store that customers commonly read, have them translated into the target language. (See Chapter 7 for details.)
- ✓ **Foreign language brochures, menus, forms, and documents:** Get all of your printed materials that you hand out or show to customers translated into the target language. This may include contracts, disclosure statements, and financial documents.

The Most Bang for Your Buck: Picking the Right Marketing Media

When marketing to prospective customers, you can have the best brochure, print advertising, and radio and TV ads on the planet, but if you don't deliver them through media that reach your target consumer, your efforts are in vain. For multicultural customers, you must be even more focused in your efforts.

It's like going fishing. If you want to catch a particular type of fish — bass, for instance — you have to get everything right; use the right bait, fish in the right spot at the right time of day, present your lure or bait in a way a typical bass is going to find appealing, and so on. If you overlook one item, you're likely to fail. You can have the best bait or lure in the world, for example, but unless you toss it where the bass hang out, you're not going to hook one.



One baffling tactic is to produce a radio, TV, or newspaper ad entirely in English and then tack on something at the end like “Hablamos español.” First of all, how would a customer even know what the ad is about if he doesn't understand English? Second, it shows that you consider the customer's language an afterthought. Ads must be targeted to specific groups. This is a common mistake for those who are new to multicultural marketing.

In the following sections, we assist you with your choice of media.

Selecting mainstream media

Whether the use of *mainstream media* (newspapers and television and radio stations) in marketing to multicultural consumers is effective can vary a great deal depending on whom you're trying to reach and how you go about it.

Generally speaking, the coverage by these outlets is too broad to effectively reach ethnic customers, so the return on investment can be rather disappointing (see the “Calculating your ROI (return on investment)” section earlier in this chapter).

However, a 2007–2008 Yankelovich multicultural marketing study (www.Yankelovich.com) shows that some ethnic consumers are even more receptive to advertising than most Americans. About 60 percent of African Americans and Hispanics, for example, say they “enjoy looking at or listening to advertising” compared with only 30 percent of non-Hispanic Whites. This means that your ad can be up to twice as effective as expected when targeted to these groups. The study goes on to stress that ethnic consumers have distinct preferences and respond to different emotional triggers than Whites do.



Every television and radio station has a rate card that lists the number of people it reaches at various times of the day. Some break these numbers down by age, ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics. Newspapers have similar information about their readers. Check to see whether they’re a match for the audience you’re trying to reach. Certain TV and radio programs also attract specific groups of viewers or listeners. Don’t waste money on media that have little or no market penetration into the groups you’re trying to reach.

Advertising through ethnic media

The growth of ethnic media in the United States is brisk. In New York City alone, you can find more than 150 ethnic newspapers reaching every conceivable group. These are the outlets that really penetrate ethnic markets — the types of newspapers where you’ll get the most bang for your buck.

As revealed in the nearby sidebar “Tapping the emotional power of ethnic media,” ethnic media have much higher penetration into ethnic markets. You want to deliver a solid punch that focuses your marketing efforts exclusively on your target market. Ethnic media make this possible.



First, find out which media your customers access for information and entertainment. You can do this through your own market research, as discussed in Chapter 2, or by examining some of the publications that your customers are likely to read, as we suggest in Chapter 4.

When examining print advertising, look past mere circulation numbers and ask for *pass-along figures* — the number of people who actually read the paper (not the number of subscribers). The good news is that in ethnic households, three to five people are likely to be reading the same paper (a pass-along figure of three, four, or five for one subscription); this can significantly lower the cost of reaching customers.

Tapping the emotional power of ethnic media

According to a study led by Bendixen & Associates (www.bendixenandassociates.com), a Miami-based public-opinion polling firm, ethnic media is more effective than general-market media in reaching diverse consumers. The survey showed that 84 percent of respondents to a telephone survey received news and information from ethnic media outlets. For instance, Spanish-language media reach 89 percent of California Latinos; media with a focus on African American interests reach 79 percent of African American Californians; and Asian American ethnic media reach 75 percent of the Asian population in the state.

According to a national poll conducted by interTrend, most Asian Americans preferred seeing in-language ads, while only 17 percent preferred English. In addition, the National

Association of Realtors has done research on in-language advertising and found that ads in Spanish are much more effective in reaching Hispanics. They discovered Spanish-language commercials are 61 percent more effective at increasing awareness, 57 percent more effective in message comprehension, and nearly 4.5 times more persuasive.

So why would bilingual customers rather see and hear advertising in their native tongue rather than in a language they're trying to learn? Studies show that people automatically use their most familiar language when discussing emotional issues, and money can certainly be one of the most emotional of all subjects. They then switch back to English when the communication becomes less emotional.

Most major cities have newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations that serve ethnic groups. Contact a local advertising agency that has experience reaching the ethnic community.



Hispanics are especially fond of television and radio. Spanish-language television can be particularly effective in reaching Hispanic customers. Univision, the largest Spanish-language television network in the United States, reportedly has a penetration rate of more than 97 percent of Latino households! However, national outlets, such as Univision, Telemundo, Azteca America, and TeleFutura, may not be appropriate for local and regional businesses. Check with your local media representative to see what she can do for you. Another source of information is the Nielsen Hispanic Television Index (www.nielsenmedia.com/ethnicmeasure/hispanic-american/indexHisp.html).

Harnessing the power of the Internet

In terms of how effective the Internet is at enabling you to reach ethnic groups, that really depends on the group:

- ✔ Asians tend to use the Internet more than Caucasians.
- ✔ Hispanics and blacks use the Internet a little less than Caucasians.
- ✔ Latinos tend to provide e-mail addresses on the Internet more than the general U.S. population.
- ✔ As socioeconomic status rises, so does Internet usage.

According to Jeff Yang, vice president and consumer strategist for Iconoculture (www.Iconoculture.com), “Asian Americans are far more likely to use the Internet for product comparison than any other group. Over 80 percent of adult Asian Americans have used the Internet on a regular basis, and it remains one of the most powerful media for cracking this particular nut. Beyond that, Asian Americans are also more likely to use online banking than any other group. So I don’t know how many credit unions have actually taken that step yet, but it’s become a very powerful tool to sell into this market.”



If you don’t have a Web site or blog yet, set one up as soon as possible. You can launch a blog in about 15 minutes. You don’t necessarily have to set up an eCommerce Web site where customers can place orders and make payments, but most people at least do some research online before they run out and buy stuff. So make sure you’re reaching those people if they’re your market. For assistance with building a Web site or blog, check out *Building a Web Site For Dummies* by David A. Crowder or *Blogging For Dummies* by Susannah Gardner and Shane Birley (both published by Wiley).



James Wong, vice president of marketing for e21 Corporation (www.e21mm.com), offers several additional recommendations:

- ✔ Link from your home page to in-language pages for people who may not speak English as a first language. (This can depend on the acculturation level of the potential customer. We discuss acculturation in detail earlier in this chapter.) Make sure you use a translator who’s familiar not only with the language, but also with the culture and the products or services you’re selling, as we explain in the section “Picking a good translator or interpreter” earlier in this chapter.
- ✔ Use opt-in e-mail to stay in touch with customers. eNewsletters can be very effective if you have the recipients’ permission to send them.
- ✔ Use Internet portals to target online consumers. Some Internet portals have a fairly sophisticated way to slice and dice names for local businesses. (An *Internet portal* is simply a site that provides links to other Web sites or search tools to help people find what they’re looking for. By having your Web site or blog added to portals that people in your target market are likely to use, you can begin to tap into the traffic that flows through the portal.)



Some portals that can be helpful include:

- African American portal: www.UrbanMecca.com
- Asian American portal: www.Kineda.com
- Asian Indian portal: www.IndoAmericanCommunity.org
- Hispanic American portal: www.HispanicPortal.org

Another option is to establish a presence on popular culture-specific Web sites, including the following:

✔ **African American sites**

- BET.com
- BlackEnterprise.com
- BlackRefer.com
- BlackVoices.com
- EverythingBlack.com
- NetNoir.com
- Tbwat.org (The Black World Today)

✔ **Asian Pacific Islander sites**

- AsianWeek.com
- FilipinasMag.com (Filipino information)
- GoldSea.com
- HmongNet.org (Hmong information)
- LittleIndia.com (Asian Indian information)
- LittleSaigon.com (Vietnamese information)
- PacificMagazine.net (Pacific Islander information)

✔ **Hispanic sites**

- TheHispanicAmerican.com
- HispanicBusiness.com
- Latina.com
- Quepasa.com
- Telemundo.yahoo.com

✔ **Middle Eastern sites**

- ArabSites.com
- MiddleEastDirectory.com

 **Native American sites**

- NativeCultureLinks.com
- NativeWeb.org

Establishing a Community Presence

Community sells, both online and off. Being a trusted member of the community is like setting up shop in a small town, where word-of-mouth advertising prevails. You become the go-to guy or gal for whatever it is you're selling. The only downside is that you need to *earn* community support, and you may have to work at it a long time before you see any return on your investment. We reveal what you need to know in the following sections.



Although community marketing certainly requires more time and effort and takes longer for you to make cultural inroads than most traditional ad campaigns, it certainly can be worth the effort in the long run. At the beginning of any relationship, people of all cultures are going to exhibit some reluctance and reticence. After they get to know and trust you, however, they're more likely to patronize your business and send even more referral business your way.

Only long-termers need apply: Committing to the community

Marketing to ethnic communities is not a one-shot or short-term effort. You have to make a long-term commitment and develop a lasting presence. Many companies, for example, seem to believe that all they have to do to appeal to the African American community is to take out ads during Black History Month. As Howard Buford of Prime Access Inc. explains, "That's a common mistake. First of all, there's too much clutter, because a lot of competitive companies end up doing their one advertisement during that month. You don't really break through, and it doesn't really say anything about your product. It just kind of says, 'We value African American history.' One thing that African Americans look for is not just an advertising campaign that runs for three to six months. They're looking for a consistent, ongoing presence in their community that is meaningful to them."



Establish partnerships with the communities you want to serve, because you can't succeed unless the community and its members succeed. Your goal is to show them that they can't be as successful without you. You can often make a long-term commitment to ethnic business and community organizations through ethnic chambers of commerce (see Chapter 4 for more on

getting involved with these groups). You can also reach many of these groups through religious organizations that serve these communities (see the next section for details).

How do you show ethnic communities that you're a valuable partner? According to Jeff Yang, a multicultural marketing consultant, you gather the leaders together and form a partnership. Here's the advice that Jeff offered a bank client, which is applicable to any business:

"It's becoming ever more important for the grass-roots leaders to be in touch with the decision makers at the local branch. Pull all the leaders and decision makers together: the bank managers and executives, community leaders, the heads of chambers of commerce, business leaders (of businesses both large and small), membership institutions that draw large numbers of potential customers, and so on. Then, you basically tell them, 'Look, we're treating this as a partnership. We know that we have a lot to offer you, but more importantly, you have a lot to offer us. Let's share ways in which we can do that together.' Now, if this is done properly, you have the beginnings of something that can prove extremely powerful."

Getting involved in special events

Community is particularly important in high-context cultures, including Hispanic and Asian groups (see Chapter 3 for more on high-context cultures), and one of the best ways to get your foot in the door is by supporting cultural fairs and community events, such as the following:

- ✔ Cinco de Mayo and Día de las Muertos events are common in Hispanic communities.
- ✔ Chinese New Years and the Cherry Blossom Festival are events often held in Chinese and Japanese communities, respectively.
- ✔ Indian Independence Day and Divali celebrations are celebrated in South Asian communities.
- ✔ Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Kwanzaa are opportunities to reach African Americans.
- ✔ Ethnic music festivals.
- ✔ Ethnic heritage celebrations.
- ✔ Ethnic dance troupes.
- ✔ Culturally specific sporting events.
- ✔ Fundraising events.
- ✔ Nonprofit efforts by ethnic groups.

- ✔ Service organizations' efforts.
- ✔ School events.
- ✔ Cultural institutions.
- ✔ Ethnic chambers of commerce events (see Chapter 4 for more about chambers of commerce).
- ✔ Health fairs.



For a comprehensive calendar of special holidays and celebrations, check out the appendix.

In most cases, you can offer to sponsor the event or set up and run a booth, but if you're not sure how to get involved, ask. Contact the leader of the group that's hosting the celebration; she'll be glad to educate you.



Think outside the booth. Everyone sets up a booth, so think creatively. Ask the organizers about the products and services that people in their community really need. Following are a couple of ideas that can get your creative juices flowing:

- ✔ One credit union has had great success partnering with local police departments in a Kid ID program that fingerprints children to help identify them if they are abducted or turn up missing.
- ✔ Healthcare tie-ins are very effective in attracting ethnic groups, particularly Hispanics and African Americans. If you're in the healthcare industry, consider stationing a health information van at the event and providing free screenings for common conditions that particularly affect your target market.
- ✔ Consider teaming up with local ethnic restaurants to explore co-promotional opportunities. As we point out in Chapter 4, food is an important part of cultural celebrations and often serves as a bridge between cultures. The door to a culture's heart is often through its stomach, so familiarize yourself with the unique aspects of the foods of the customers you serve.



Don't dive into a community event without checking the water first. Such over-enthusiasm can be costly and time consuming. Here are some criteria to consider when choosing events:

- ✔ Is this event consistent with the image I want to project?
- ✔ Does the organizer have a track record of producing successful events?
- ✔ What is the organizer's reputation in the community?
- ✔ How many times has this event been held?
- ✔ How many people usually attend?
- ✔ Are potential customers for my business going to attend?

- ✓ Is the cost worth the benefit?
- ✓ How will I measure the value of my investment?
- ✓ How long am I willing to invest in this event?

Turning face time into cash

Calculating the ROI on public relations efforts, such as renting a booth at an ethnic fair, can be a bit of a challenge. Bill Imada, president of iW Group (www.iwgroupinc.com), which specializes in marketing to Asian Americans, notes that many marketing directors and other executives complain that they give out thousands of pens or other novelties at multicultural fairs and other events but are unclear on what they're getting in return (their ROI). They're concerned that while such activities increase their visibility, they have no idea of how this translates into sales.

Imada says companies should work toward turning face time into cash. He suggests that company representatives give away items that people will stand in line for at these events. Although the items don't need to be expensive, they do need to be unique, useful, and clever. As people wait to get their gift, you can ask them to complete a short survey, including their contact information.



Imada suggests that you can stretch your public relations dollars by offering a chance to win a trip for two to Hawaii or the Bahamas. He did a campaign at an Asian American gathering for Bank of America and AT&T in conjunction with an airline. To qualify for the prize, people had to complete six questions about their banking, long-distance telephone service, and travel purchases. In this one campaign, they collected more than 16,000 completed surveys, which became lead-generation sheets for the bank, telephone company, and airline. To calculate their ROI, all these companies had to do was track the resulting business from these leads and use the ROI formula provided in the earlier section "Calculating your ROI (return on investment)."

Generating positive PR

Public relations (PR) consists of obtaining publicity for yourself or your company for free or for very little money. You can do this by appearing at a community event, such as a parade, or having the media run a news story about you.



While "free" always sounds good, generating positive and effective PR is very difficult, and the results can be even harder to predict. You must have experience, timing, and skill to get the PR machine cranking out positive messages about you and your organization.

If you feel you have what it takes, here are ideas on how you can start generating your own positive PR:

- ✔ **Contact news media in your market area and let them know you're an expert on whatever product or service you're selling.** Send them a packet complete with your business card and résumé or curriculum vitae, along with a cover letter about your areas of specialty, your eagerness to speak with the press, and the fact that you're available at a moment's notice.
- ✔ **Sponsor a community initiative.** If you notice a way that you can team up with other businesses and organizations in your area to promote improvements for the multicultural community, take the lead.
- ✔ **Do the right thing.** Acting with integrity and doing good deeds pays PR dividends. In fact, sometimes you reap more benefits when you do the right thing and say nothing about it, as the nearby sidebar illustrates.
- ✔ **Issue press releases to let the media in your area know what you're doing to help the communities you serve.** Make sure you word it in a way that sounds more like news and less like an advertisement. If you can submit photos along with the story for the visual media, it greatly increases the likelihood that the media will use it.

Partnering with nonprofits

Teaming up with groups that already have established ties with a community you'd like to target not only stretches your advertising dollars but can increase your credibility and multiply the impact of your efforts. This is why it's smart to consider partnering with nonprofit and governmental organizations.

Do the right thing

Perhaps the best way to understand how to conduct an effective public relations campaign is to see how it's been done.

When I (Michael) was chairman of the board of a credit union in the San Francisco Bay Area, thieves broke into a local high school softball team's locker room and stole all of its uniforms and equipment for the upcoming season. We jumped into action and allocated \$5,000 from our marketing budget to replace everything the team had lost.

The coach and school principal were so appreciative that they called the local media. When we presented them with the check, almost every local radio and television station, along with many of the area newspapers, ran the story. One advertising agency estimated that our investment netted us more than \$30,000 worth of publicity. That's not the reason we donated the funds, but the publicity we received was certainly a pleasant, unexpected surprise. So always be on the lookout for opportunities to turn negative news into positive outcomes for the people in your community.

It takes more than just running an ad in a newspaper

Deb McLean, vice president of marketing and business development at Carolina Postal Credit Union (www.cpcuonline.com), says you must meet the leaders of the community you're trying to reach:

"Meet the leaders, get your introductions, and then make your presence known. You cannot just run an ad in the newspaper. You've got to get out there and be seen. . . . We always have a booth at a festival. We're always there, and we're always promoting

our products and talking to people, and saying we can help. . . .

"The two most important things are to raise the awareness that you're there and committed, and then do the little extra things like participating with the local community groups or programs. Do a little something extra, because it reinforces that you're committed to the community. This is how you get referrals."

Start by contacting the chamber of commerce in your area and ask for a list of nonprofit organizations. Then decide which ones would make appropriate and logical partners. If a partnership makes sense, find out how you can assist with their efforts. One way may be to cosponsor events, such as fundraisers or educational seminars. These can help the community and raise the visibility of both organizations at the same time.

Here's a short list of high-profile nonprofit associations you may want to consider working with:

- ✓ American Cancer Society
- ✓ Battered women's shelters
- ✓ Boy Scouts of America
- ✓ Boys and Girls Clubs of America
- ✓ Churches
- ✓ DARE programs
- ✓ Easter Seals
- ✓ Girl Scouts of America
- ✓ Local fire departments
- ✓ Local police departments
- ✓ Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)
- ✓ Schools
- ✓ United Way
- ✓ Volunteers of America



Giving money and buying space in an organization's program is great, but to make the most of these marketing opportunities, invest your time as well as your expertise.

Expanding your outreach efforts

Business owners and salespeople often ask us for ideas about how to get more involved in ethnic communities and demonstrate their commitment to these groups. They often assume that the opportunities are limited, and they feel (unnecessarily and quite mistakenly) that these communities are freezing them out. The fact is that the opportunities are almost too numerous to list. Here are a few:

- ✓ **Social service organizations:** Programs such as Catholic and Lutheran social services, Goodwill Industries, and others already provide various services to underserved populations. Getting involved in supporting English as a Second Language programs can be especially effective in reaching first-generation immigrants.
- ✓ **Athletic team sponsorships:** Sponsoring sports organizations with large numbers of ethnic players can be a good way to build relationships with their community and increase your visibility. Although Hispanics share Americans' love for soccer and baseball, and most Japanese are also enamored of baseball, don't forget that other cultures have favorite sports and pastimes that don't appeal to most Americans. For example, people from Asian cultures value martial arts and Ping-Pong, while folks from India and Pakistan enjoy a good game of cricket.
- ✓ **Law enforcement-sponsored programs:** Police departments, the highway patrol, and other law enforcement groups may be able to assist you in reaching culturally diverse groups. They often have child-safety programs, drug-awareness projects, child-identification systems, and more, and are always in need of sponsors and volunteers.
- ✓ **Other businesses:** Travel agents, immigration attorneys, and ethnic restaurants that are already serving the communities you're trying to reach may be looking for people just like you to provide additional products and services to their customers. These are often the real centers of influence for new immigrants.



To get the most out of your sponsorships and volunteer efforts, make them PR events. According to Howard Buford, you can increase the visibility of your community marketing by developing publicity around it: "Do community events, sponsor youth organizations and church choir groups, and then put PR behind it. By taking this approach, you not only reach those immediate audiences as a sponsor, but you let a much larger audience know you're sponsoring." For more about spreading the word about activities in which you're involved, see "Generating positive PR," earlier in this chapter.

Making Yourself a Referral Magnet

Attend any marketing class at any college or university across the country, and you're likely to hear the professor say something like, "The absolute best form of marketing is word-of-mouth advertising." This is definitely true, because referrals are free and carry a great deal of weight when a friend or relative suggests that you buy from a specific store or salesperson. Concentrate your efforts first on developing referrals. If you still have some time, energy, and resources left, then advertise.



Multicultural customers are more likely than any other purchaser to give referrals — if you know how to earn the right to ask for them. It's so important that Chapter 15 is devoted entirely to this topic.

Chapter 6

Developing a Comprehensive Program

In This Chapter

- ▶ Strategizing your team's plan of attack
 - ▶ Making cross-cultural sales a companywide goal
 - ▶ Implementing your plan and assessing its success
-

Overhauling your marketing programs, as we explain in Chapter 5, is an essential first step in attracting ethnic customers, but it's not enough to persuade them to make a purchase, become a lifelong customer, and send referrals your way. To achieve these goals, you need to become an integral part of the ethnic community and demonstrate that you're making a long-term commitment (see Chapter 7). If you own or manage a company, you also need to make fundamental changes in staffing and the way you do business. If you're an independent salesperson, you can do this all by yourself.

Throughout this chapter, we offer guidance about how to implement companywide changes that really make a difference. Transforming your company requires that you take the following three steps:

1. Develop a strategic sales plan that includes clearly defined goals and tools for assessing its success.
2. Encourage everyone in the company to contribute their efforts toward expanding the business into multicultural markets.
3. Implement your plan, assess its effectiveness, and make any adjustments necessary.



Unless you own the business or are the acting CEO, you may not have the power to implement any of the changes we recommend in this chapter. Does that mean you can skip this chapter? No, but nice try. Do what you can from your current position to influence the direction your company takes. In addition, you can work with the owner or management to make your company more multicultural. If the top leaders aren't behind you, it can hurt the company's bottom line.

Drafting a Strategic Plan

Giving your business a multicultural makeover consists of much more than simply making a few cosmetic changes, which far too many organizations do. They may have their brochures translated into a different language, run multilingual ads, or start stocking a few ethnic products as token efforts.

As we explain in the following sections, you need to perform three essential steps to develop your comprehensive strategic plan:

1. Strategic analysis
2. Strategic direction setting
3. Action planning

After you've completed these steps and have a plan in place, you need to obtain support from both internal and external stakeholders. (We talk about gaining buy-in from management and staff in the later section "Getting Your Entire Company on Board.") You can then implement your strategic plan, evaluate it, and fine tune it, as explained in the later section "Implementing and Evaluating Your Plan."



General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." In other words, your strategy probably won't go as planned, but the time and effort you invest in thinking about how to proceed makes you much more capable of implementing the necessary changes and dealing with unexpected challenges.

What exactly is "cultural competency"?

In short, *cultural competency* is the chameleon-like ability to "blend" with people who look, think, and act differently than most of the people you normally spend time with. Dr. Andrew Erlich of Erlich Transcultural Consultants (www.etcethnic.com) in Woodland Hills, California, offers a more formal and precise definition:

"Cultural competence means understanding your own culture and how you react to others' differences, improving your own

intercultural communication, endeavoring to reduce your stereotypes, valuing diversity and different perspectives, and being flexible and adaptable in dealing with cultures other than your own."

Erlich goes on to say that, "As most people travel through life, they begin to move down the road to understanding ethnic groups and cultures different from their own. How far down the road they travel depends on how hard they are willing to work to change their own perceptions."

You are here: Strategic analysis



Before setting out on any journey, you need to figure out where you are currently to establish a point of reference. You have no clear idea of the changes you need to implement in your company until you first take stock of your company and the current environment in which it's operating. To audit your current resources and the business environment, take the following steps:

1. Examine the changing demographics of your customer base.

Which group or groups are increasing and which are decreasing? How will new demands for products and services affect your business? (In Chapter 2, we show you how to obtain this data through market research or by hiring a company to gather the data for you.)

2. Check out any strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats you face.

What are your competitors doing or not doing to capitalize on the new consumers in your area? You may need to do your own field research to check out the competition. Visit competing businesses and act like a customer to determine what adjustments, if any, they're making. Also visit ethnic stores for deeper insights. At the same time, honestly assess your company's strengths and weaknesses in terms of serving the needs of your multicultural marketplace. Do you already have culturally literate staff in place whose expertise you can tap to further your efforts?

3. Look at what's going on in your social, economic, political, and regulatory environment.

When it comes to selling to diverse customers, your primary focus is usually on the social and economic data (see Chapter 2), but political and regulatory factors can often come into play. To stay ahead of changes that may impact you, read the local section of your city's newspaper, watch the local television newscasts, and be an active member of your industry's trade association.



During the analysis phase, involve everyone in your company. Let them know why you're developing a multicultural sales strategy and ask for their input and support. For instance, you can ask your staff to do some field research of their own to identify products and services in high demand. You can also get them involved in surveying customers, as we recommend in Chapter 2. This gives them a sense of ownership and makes them more willing to implement the changes later. Stress the fact that the strategic plan is going to benefit them as well as their customers.

Knowing where you're going: Strategic direction setting



After you've spotted an opportunity, you're ready to move on to stage two — setting your course. At this stage, you set goals for your multicultural sales strategy. To be truly effective, your goals should be S-M-A-R-T:

Specific: Exactly which products or services are you going to sell? Which multicultural groups are you going to attract? (The data you gather in Chapter 2 can help you answer these questions and others to make your goals specific.)

Measurable: How much more in products or services would you like to sell to your target group? Consider starting with the goal of achieving multicultural market share that's at least equivalent to your current overall market share. For example, if your business currently accounts for 10 percent of the market, shoot for achieving 10 percent of the multicultural market or more.

Attainable: Do you have the resources to market and sell to multicultural customers? You not only need the money in your budget but also the expertise to accomplish your goals. If you don't have the necessary expertise, don't despair — you can hire them. In Chapter 2, we provide a list of companies that can assist with market research. In Chapter 5, we offer guidance on finding companies and individuals qualified to assist in marketing. And in Chapter 16, we encourage you to diversify your staff and show you ways to approach this task.

Realistic: Does everyone believe that your multicultural sales initiative is achievable? Have you been successful in opening up new markets in the past? If not, what's different about this attempt that ensures its success? Only you and your team can determine what you consider realistic, given what you've accomplished together in the past.

Timely: Specifically when will you achieve your desired level of sales? A time frame enables you to measure your progress toward reaching your goals. As you develop your action plan, as we explain in the following section, you determine just how timely your goal can be.



Involve everyone in your organization when it comes time to set goals. Their involvement at this stage should increase their support for the project. Clearly communicate your intent to attract customers from other cultures (and explain the benefits of doing so, as covered later in this chapter in the section "Getting Your Entire Company on Board"). Schedule a goal-setting meeting to get everyone's buy-in. You can then hold separate meetings for strategic planning and scheduling and, depending on the size of your company, you can meet individually with each department to help the employees in those areas develop plans for meeting the department's unique goals.



After you've developed an overall vision and direction, break it up into a list of five to seven *action items* — mini-goals you need to achieve to meet or exceed your main goal. The action items provide everyone with a clearer idea of the “how” behind the “what” and “why.” The “who” and “where” can come later, as we outline in the following section.

Gearing up: Action planning



Your strategic direction serves as an outline for the changes you'll be implementing. The process for your multicultural initiative should be no different from the one you use to accomplish any other top business goal. Action planning gets down to the nitty-gritty — the details:

1. Assign a tactic or method by which you plan to achieve each goal specified in your strategic direction.

If one of the goals for a grocery store is to sell more bok choy to Chinese customers, for example, one tactic may be to distribute fliers in Chinese at the local Chinese church. (For more about translating marketing materials, check out Chapter 5.)

2. Identify one or more people in charge of taking responsibility for the steps necessary to achieve the stated goal.

Using the bok choy example, the marketing director may be responsible for getting the flier translated, having it printed, and obtaining permission to hand them out after a worship service. The produce manager would be responsible for estimating the additional bok choy that would be needed and ordering it. The clerks would be in charge of stocking the extra produce and getting signs printed in Chinese. Human Resources would make sure that at least one clerk who could speak the appropriate dialect of Chinese was on staff during the sale. The sales manager would have the duty of making sure that the project is on track each step of the way.

3. To ensure that all tasks are carried out, set a specific deadline for the project and a timeline to keep everyone on track.

Attach a deadline to every responsibility assigned in Step 2. For example, the marketing director may need to have fliers translated and printed and have permission to hand them out in two weeks. The produce manager may need to ensure that the additional bok choy is on hand on a certain date.



Consider creating a graphic model of your plan to make it easier for your staff to visualize and remember. For example, organize the main five or six points as a color pyramid. Then develop the action plans to support each step on the pyramid (the steps needed to achieve the ultimate objective, which is to increase sales and market share).

Getting Your Entire Company on Board

A house (or an organization) divided cannot stand. If one or more members of your organization are opposed or even lukewarm to the idea of pursuing ethnic customers, your efforts are going to be diluted, and your multicultural initiative is going to have less of an impact.

Everyone in your organization needs to offer their full, enthusiastic support. In the following sections, we offer some suggestions on how to motivate others to join your efforts, especially your frontline staff — the people who have the most contact with customers.

Adjusting your corporate culture

In just about every business, the corporate culture starts at the top and trickles down to the masses. If the boss is involved in fraudulent activity, you can bet that at least a few underlings are ripping off the company or defrauding customers. If the boss is committed to volunteerism and building strong communities, everyone else is likely to follow that lead.

The same is true in terms of commitment to multiculturalism. It has to start at the highest levels of leadership. The people at the top of the corporate ladder must show a genuine interest in hiring and treating all workers with a sense of fairness and respect. They must demonstrate a commitment to learning about other cultures and accepting and accommodating differences among and between people.



The key to creating a diversity-friendly team or company is to create an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable talking about their differences. If workers are willing to discuss their own differences as well as those of their customers and co-workers, you'll be able to overcome your own multicultural challenges and answer your own diversity questions.

Identifying the potential impact of key departments on multicultural customers

Every department, every staff member, and everyone who's even remotely associated with your organization can have a positive or negative impact on your sales to multicultural customers. As highlighted in the nearby sidebar, even subcontractors and vendors have the power to attract customers or drive them away.

Some departments and personnel, however, have a greater potential impact on customers. Obviously, anyone in sales or marketing and your frontline staff, including receptionists and cashiers, have the most influence, but other departments and personnel can play an important role as well. In the following sections, we highlight some key areas that demand the most focus.



Everyone in your business can benefit by reading this book. For the bare minimum, have them read Chapter 4, which starts them on their way to developing cultural competency. Additional training may be required, depending on how closely and in what capacity they work with customers from other cultures. Later in this chapter, in the section “Offering a crash course in cultural competency,” we provide a list of topics your training program should cover.

Marketing

Although your marketing people may have little or no direct contact with customers, they're in charge of painting the portrait that the ethnic community uses to judge your company. So it's critical for these folks to understand how your target customers influence your goals. Make sure your marketing people obtain the training they need to attain an acceptable level of cultural competency. Chapter 4 provides a good start, but your marketing personnel can gain additional expertise by checking out Chapter 5. Even with the best training, however, you may need to outsource your multicultural marketing to advertising agencies that specialize in your target customers.



If you do have to outsource your multicultural marketing, get your marketing staff's buy-in. They must understand the need for a multicultural marketing initiative, recognize that they lack expertise in this area, and be willing to learn from experts. We can cite plenty of instances in which marketing staffs have sabotaged these kinds of efforts because they didn't buy into the program before it was initiated.

Sales

Salespeople play perhaps the most significant role in attracting members of ethnic communities. They're often the first people in an organization whom customers meet, which is why we include several chapters specifically on this topic primarily for salespeople (see Part III in particular). Because of their close contact with multicultural buyers, they must surmount language barriers, contractual idiosyncrasies, endless negotiating, and more. Obtaining training in cross-cultural selling, as provided in this book, is essential.

Even a vendor or subcontractor can affect *your* business

A new-home salesperson recently related a story about a cement truck driver for a large home builder who insulted prospective Asian buyers. He grew frustrated driving behind a group of obviously lost Asian home buyers who were looking for the stake that marked the lot for their new home. He couldn't pass them because they were weaving from side to side blocking his path.

When the buyers finally found their lot and pulled over, the frustrated truck driver yelled out the window, "Why don't you go back to where you came from!" This had a negative impact on the shocked Asian buyers who decided they didn't want to live in a community where people treated them like this.

Unbeknownst to them, the driver was a subcontractor and not an employee of the builder, yet his actions still affected the builder and the builder's sales rep.

To avoid similar fiascos, communication is key. Let everyone, including your vendors, know about the importance of your multicultural clientele. They need to understand that everything they do that affects your bottom line also affects theirs, perhaps even more so if you were to choose another vendor as a result of any poor decisions they may make. On the other hand, if your vendors ask the right questions of their own customers, they have the potential of referring business to you.

Cashiers

Cashiers are like the Rodney Dangerfields of the retail industry — they get no respect. Many businesses treat them merely as entry-level employees, and so that's what they get — clock punchers who simply ring up orders, take money, swipe credit cards, and bag the goods. Managers who treat their cashiers with respect realize that they can be profit centers for the business. This is particularly true in respect to multicultural customers. As profit centers, cashiers can benefit your business in at least two ways:

- ✓ They can treat multicultural customers the way they want to be treated to keep them coming back.
- ✓ They can perform field research, recording the changing demographic, asking customers questions (such as whether the customer was able to find everything she was shopping for), and sharing the information with managers and other departments. (See Chapter 2 for more about asking important questions of customers.)



To tap the full potential of your cashiers, train them in cross-cultural relations and reward them for their efforts in collecting and providing you with valuable market data. See "Offering a crash course in cultural competency," later in this chapter, for guidance in training your staff.



Receptionists

Receptionists in service organizations can be vital to closing sales to multi-cultural customers. From the first meeting forward, customers judge your organization by how well it treats people. In the office of a doctor, accountant, attorney, travel agent, or other service provider, the first person “treating people” is the receptionist.

Provide your receptionist with the training required to achieve cultural competency. If your receptionist can speak a few words in the language of the customers you’re trying to attract, this is an added bonus. If she’s fluent, so much the better.

Customer service

As a customer, how often have you dealt with a company’s customer service personnel and decided to never buy anything from that company again based on your negative experience? If you’re like most people, you’ve probably had more than one such encounter. You may have bought the best product from the best company and loved the salesperson, but one bad experience with customer service eclipsed all of your previous good feelings for the company. That’s how important customer service is, so provide these frontline employees with the necessary training, as explained later in this chapter, in the section “Offering a crash course in cultural competency.”



One factor that can wield a strong influence over your customer service department’s attitude toward multicultural customers is the type of feedback it receives from these customers. Not all cultures have the same outlook when it comes to commenting on experiences with service providers. For example:

- ✓ Many Asians are reluctant to give a score of ten on a ten-point scale on satisfaction surveys because, as a collectivist culture, they may not want to embarrass you by making you stand out from your group. They may rate you only a five or six while providing a glowing review. If you want top scores from these folks, let them know from the start that it’s important you receive the score you deserve and that you’ll lose face with your boss if you don’t. You may even joke that you “won’t be embarrassed” by a high score if you’ve earned it. If you want to know why this is necessary, turn to Chapter 14.
- ✓ People from some cultures, such as Hispanics, tend to be reluctant about expressing their complaints to customer service. Instead, they simply stop buying from you and tell their friends and family to avoid your business. Customer service personnel must be encouraged to be proactive in asking for honest feedback by asking open-ended questions. They should also report any unresolved issues to management for follow-up.

Flip to Chapter 14 for more information on tweaking your employees’ customer service skills.

Service/repair

Service people can have a dramatic impact on customer satisfaction as well as referrals that the company may receive. How they handle repairs is crucial. Probably the most important aspect of satisfactory service is educating the customer about not only the issue at hand, but also about preventive maintenance that can save time and money in the future.



Many ethnic customers feel guilty that they aren't able to spend enough quality time with their families. Their jobs may require them to work six or seven days a week for ten or more hours a day. They greatly appreciate when you take the time to show them how to do simple maintenance themselves to save time and money in the long run.

Information technology



IT guys and gals are known for keeping a low profile, so they're unlikely to cross paths with any of your customers (ethnic or otherwise). They can, however, certainly assist you in improving customer service; for example, you may want to track point-of-sale (POS) information a bit differently when you start a multicultural sales program. This requires the support and input of your information technology (IT) staff.

Finance

Customers from other cultures may have a completely different attitude toward financing than your longtime American customers; they may avoid it altogether. This is certainly not a problem if your customers insist on paying cash and have sufficient means to do so. However, if you're selling big-ticket items, your financing department may play a key role in making those goods affordable. To accomplish this, they need to master cultural competency skills as well.



If you sell big-ticket items that can be financed, carefully explain your various loan programs to any customer who wants to take advantage of this option. This is especially true of folks who don't speak fluent English or may not be familiar with American financing rules and practices. Getting a loan for the first time can be an intimidating and frightening experience.

Manufacturing

Delivering products on time is crucial to building trust, especially with multicultural customers who may be more suspicious of you than your traditional clientele. To build a reputation as a reliable supplier, underpromise, overdeliver, and make sure that manufacturing follows the same approach.

Manufacturing personnel rarely interact directly with the customer, yet they can have just as profound an impact on multicultural sales as frontline staff. They must be aware of schedules and what the sales staff promised. Manufacturing may need to be reminded of the importance of reporting any inability to meet a promised deadline to sales as soon as possible.

Research and development

Research and development (R&D) departments in large companies can assist in identifying new opportunities in the multicultural marketplace. These folks must remain on the lookout for opportunities to adapt existing products or develop new ones to meet the needs of this new consumer. Creative companies are discovering that ethnic groups have different tastes, skin color, hair types, and preferences, all of which open opportunities to sell new products and services. We go into detail on adapting your product or service to the needs of multicultural customers in Chapter 7.

Human Resources

If you received diversity training back in the '80s or '90s, you may be a little reluctant to go there again. Early forms of this training were usually delivered by the HR department and typically contained a heavy dose of guilt — reminding attendees of all the injustices done to ethnic groups over the past 200 years or so.

The newer cultural competency training is much different. It's marketing and sales driven and views diversity as an opportunity to serve all customers better. Unlike "diversity training," cultural competency training is generally well received by staff members, who find it valuable in helping them interact more comfortably with customers on a daily basis.



Although your Human Resources department must be willing and eventually able to provide cultural competency training throughout the company, the staff may not be qualified quite yet to provide this training. Cultural competency is a very specialized field — trainers need to know how culture can affect each department and provide guidance about how to become more accommodating to diverse clientele. This isn't like putting on a sales or time-management seminar. Until your in-house trainers get up to speed, you may need to bring in some specialists. Here are some training companies that specialize in this area:

- ✓ The Diversity Training Group (www.diversitydtg.com)
- ✓ EthnoConnect (www.EthnoConnect.com)
- ✓ Novations (www.novations.com)
- ✓ The Partnering Group (www.thepartneringgroup.com)

Convincing others of the need to change

People don't want to be told what they already know; for example, they don't want to hear that they should, out of the kindness of their hearts, be more accommodating to people who speak other languages or have different cultural backgrounds. Browbeating reluctant staff members only results in damaging morale and putting everyone on the defensive.



A more effective approach is to point out the potential business benefits of cultural competency for your company and everyone who's a part of it — increased sales and profits, enhanced job security, higher customer satisfaction ratings, and the potential for higher pay, as well as bonuses and improved benefits.



Just as you must sell products and services to your customers, you must sell the benefits of cultural competency to your personnel. The information we provide in Chapter 2 can help you develop an effective sales presentation.

Dealing with resistance to change

No matter how well you sell the value of cultural competency to your team, you're likely to bump heads with at least a couple of people in your organization who are going to resist your efforts. These are probably the same people who oppose just about anything new, like relocating the water cooler. People's reasons for resisting change are usually pretty much the same:

- ✓ **It's too risky.** They either fear what could happen if they change, or they just prefer to stick with what's familiar.
- ✓ **It's not worth it.** They don't see the potential benefit. This is when you really have to sell the benefits of doing things differently.
- ✓ **They don't get it.** They have no model to follow to change their behavior. This is why you must implement cultural competency from the top down. Following someone else's lead is easier than going it alone.
- ✓ **They're afraid they'll fail.** To overcome this fear, show them that the road to cultural competency is paved with small adjustments, not major changes. Achieving small but measurable victories bolsters their confidence and willingness to adjust.
- ✓ **They're afraid their job will get harder.** Again, you need to sell the benefits of cultural competency and the fact that it will make working with all customers easier.
- ✓ **They're overwhelmed.** Becoming culturally competent may seem like an unnecessary burden being piled on top of an already full plate. However, people can always find time for activities they feel will benefit them — so sell it!

It's always best to identify resistance to change before it derails your efforts. Resistance may take many forms, including active or passive, overt or covert, individual or organized, aggressive or timid. Recognize that change can evoke deep and powerful feelings and that fear is often expressed as anger. Be willing to have frank discussions to let people blow off a little steam and confront their fears. Your entire staff must embrace the change on both a rational and emotional level.

Offering a crash course in cultural competency

This book is your crash course on cross-cultural sales, but as we stress in this chapter, you need to make everyone in your company culturally competent to maximize results and get everyone in the company on board. An effective cultural competency training program for the entire company should, at a minimum, cover the following topics for all departments:

- ✔ **Development of culture:** How cultures develop and their impact on the workplace, including relationships with customers.
- ✔ **How cultures think and act differently:** Because of our uniquely American background and experiences, we think and act differently from those outside our own culture (see Chapter 3).
- ✔ **The cultural lens:** Americans tend to look at the world through our own lenses and, as a result, tend to believe that what others think and do differently from us is wrong. Everyone on staff needs to realize that differences are merely differences. (See Chapter 3.)
- ✔ **The cross-cultural opportunity:** By becoming culturally competent, staff members can more effectively serve customers and boost sales and profits. By presenting facts and figures about the multicultural market potential in your area (see Chapter 2), you can get staff members to buy into your plan to expand into this market and contribute to the company's success.
- ✔ **The cross-cultural challenge:** People of color tend to want different products and services, and they establish relationships differently. By developing an understanding of other cultures, staff members are less likely to insult or disrespect customers by mistake and are more likely to help the company win customers for life as well as obtain plenty of referral business. (See Chapter 4.)
- ✔ **Time differences (polychronic versus monochronic cultures):** How different people view time and the importance of being on time for scheduled meetings and events can seriously affect relationships and ultimately sales:
 - *Polychronics* are group oriented and future oriented, like Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners. They tend to view deadlines as suggestions rather than as impenetrable barriers, so they may not show up for appointments on time or provide loan documents in a timely fashion. They often view monochronics as aggressive and pushy when it comes to time.
 - *Monochronics* are individualistic and present focused, like Americans, the Swiss, and Germans. Deadlines are hard and fast. They tend to view polychronics as passive, disorganized, and perhaps even unreliable and disrespectful of their time.

- ✔ **Competitiveness versus cooperation:** Some cultures, such as Americans and Brits, tend to be competitive, while Hispanics and Asians are cooperative. Cooperative cultures usually make buying decisions as a group, whereas competitive cultures are more likely to make decisions as individuals.
- ✔ **Individualist versus collectivist:** In individualistic cultures, such as those in the U.S. (including African Americans), Australia, and England, you're expected to look after yourself and your family. These cultures value directness and freely speak their minds. In collectivist cultures, such as Asia and Latin America, people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that protect everyone in the group in exchange for unquestioned loyalty. These cultures value harmony and tend to avoid direct confrontation. (In Chapter 11, we discuss the need to adapt your sales presentation to people from collectivist cultures. In Chapter 16, we discuss the challenges of managing staff members who've been raised with collectivist values.)
- ✔ **High-context versus low-context cultures:** High-context cultures, including the Japanese, Chinese, Arabs, and Greeks, rely more on context and subtle cues for communications. More is implied than overtly stated, and words are secondary to context. Low-context cultures, including Americans, Scandinavians, Germans, and the Swiss, tend to be more obvious in their communications. Words are explicit and are crucial to understanding. (See Chapter 3 for more about high- and low-context cultures.)
- ✔ **Meeting and greeting:** People don't all meet and greet in the same way. Frontline personnel must know how to properly welcome customers into your store or office. This important ritual sets the tone for a successful relationship between you and the client. (See Chapter 8.)
- ✔ **Proxemics:** This is the science of personal space and affects how close you stand to another person while conversing. Proxemics may be culturally determined. Japanese people tend to stand the farthest away, Americans are in the middle, and Middle Easterners usually stand the closest. Letting customers set their own comfort zone is key to making them feel comfortable. (See Chapter 8.)
- ✔ **Physical contact:** People around the world differ in the amount of physical contact they make during a sales transaction. Studies show that people from the U.K. touch each other least often, while those in Puerto Rico touch each other the most. Again, staff must adjust to the level of physical contact that the customer sets. (See Chapter 8.)
- ✔ **Negotiating versus nonnegotiating cultures:** One of the biggest challenges that staff must be trained to overcome is the constant negotiating of some cultures, including Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners. They must understand that haggling is a way of life in many parts of the world, and they need to be prepared to handle it. This is so important that we devote all of Chapter 13 to it.



You can approach the task of training your staff in any number of ways. Having everyone on your team read this book, including Chapter 4 (on developing cross-cultural competency), Chapter 8 (on greeting customers), and Chapter 14 (on honing customer service skills) ensures a basic level of cultural competency. If you have the resources, you can also develop your own course based on the content in this book or hire a company that specializes in diversity training, as explained earlier in this chapter. If you do decide to provide your own training, make sure that your staff reads the required materials and that they practice the exercises in Chapter 8. However, recognize that cultural competency training requires specialized skills because it can bring out strong emotions and deep-seated prejudices. Done incorrectly, it can cause more damage than good. When in doubt, call a professional.

Implementing and Evaluating Your Plan

You have a plan to give your business a multicultural makeover. Everyone's on board and has received at least some basic training in cultural competency. You're now prepared to put your plan into action.

In the following sections, we offer some guidance on how to more effectively implement your strategic plan and monitor it to ensure its proper and complete execution. We then show you how to do a postmortem to identify areas that could use some work.



To improve the potential success of your plan, have everyone involved attend and participate in a planning meeting. Draft the plan and obtain feedback from all participants. While you're in the process of executing the plan, make sure everyone remains in contact with one another. Having a communication plan in place is a good idea; specify the preferred mode of communication (in-person meetings, videoconferences, e-mail, phone, instant messaging), how often people need to touch base, the point of *contacts* (people ultimately responsible for getting everything done on time), feedback channels, and any other communication issues you need to address.

Showtime! Project implementation

During the implementation phase, you and your team haven't much more to say. You just wait for the director to holler "Action!" and then play your assigned roles and hope everything proceeds as scripted.

The only real activity the manager should have to attend to at this point is monitoring — making sure every task has been carried out and making adjustments, if possible, for whatever's not working quite right. Using the example introduced in the "Gearing up: Action planning" section earlier in

the chapter, did the flier get translated into Chinese or was it translated into Japanese by mistake? Was it printed? Was permission obtained to distribute them? Were they handed out? Was the extra bok choy ordered, stocked, and clearly marked? Did everyone meet their deadlines?



Your company's owner, CEO, or other high-level executive should be responsible for issuing regular reports (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) comparing progress and objectives. By having communication come from the very top, you convey the sense that this is a top priority and ensure that everyone involved continues to support the initiative and remains enthusiastic. The organization will value what management values. For more about inspiring enthusiastic support companywide, see "Getting Your Entire Company on Board," earlier in this chapter.

Doing a postmortem: Post-project evaluation

As soon as the dust clears from your latest multicultural initiative, meet as a group and examine the results. Was this particular project a roaring success? If not, what went wrong? Were there any surprises? What would you do differently next time? Was the effort worth it? Calculate the return on your investment, as explained in Chapter 5, in terms of both time and money.



Regardless of the financial success of your collective efforts, you and your team should celebrate the completion of every project. Just the fact that the team developed and accomplished goals is cause for celebration and lays the groundwork for future success.



To avoid disappointment, which can often mislead you into thinking that your efforts aren't worth it, lower your expectations, at least at first. Early on, you're likely to see only a modest increase in diverse customers and not all that much of a bump in sales. Over time, however, ethnic traffic and purchases should increase considerably, as long as you stick with your efforts. Upon implementing a successful multicultural marketing initiative, for example, banks and credit unions often see an increase in only low-profit, small savings accounts, rather than in high-profit loans or credit cards. As a result, many choose to abandon their efforts. What they don't realize is that they're being tested. Multicultural customers want to see how they're treated with ordinary transactions before they commit to anything larger. If your company ends its efforts before building solid relationships, your customers will never trust you enough to step up their relationship with you. Bear this in mind as multicultural customers begin to show interest in your business.

Chapter 7

Building Your Diversity-Friendly Place of Business

In This Chapter

- ▶ Restructuring your establishment to make it more appealing to people from other cultures
 - ▶ Looking at packaging and prices from your customers' point of view
 - ▶ Bringing your products and services in line with demand
 - ▶ Diversifying your supply lines to buy from those who buy from you
-

Most establishments in the United States are designed with traditional Americans in mind — people who were born and bred in the United States — with little regard for new arrivals. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. After all, if you travel to Mexico, you're not likely to see many stores that cater specifically to American tastes. In fact, you'd probably be disappointed if Mexico became too Americanized.

In a way, the same holds true for stores and offices in the United States. You probably don't want to transform your store or office into a replica of what you can find in foreign lands, but you do want everyone who enters your establishment to feel comfortable. You want people from other cultures to dig the digs and be able, without too much effort, to find the products and services they're looking for.

It's a little-known fact that how your store or office is designed and decorated can attract or repel customers, regardless of their culture. In this chapter, we show you how to make a few adjustments to your place of business (and to your products and services) to create a more universally appealing ambience and product selection.



The devil is in the details, and so are the dollars. When you're trying to become the business of choice for the ethnic market in your area, the little things you do add up. Whether you own the business, manage it, or are selling products and services on behalf of it, pay attention to every last detail.

You want to make sure that each aspect of “the customer experience” gives you the greatest chance of making a sale, gaining a customer for life, and increasing your referral business. In Chapter 16, we encourage you to take this one step further by diversifying your sales team as well.

Retooling Your Establishment from the Outside In

To get a feel for how prospective customers from other cultures may feel when they step out of their world and into yours, take a trip to your local Asian or Hispanic grocery store, as suggested in Chapter 4. Does the store carry the products you need? Can you locate everything easily? In all likelihood, the store would need to make some adjustments to encourage you to shop there. After you return from your trip, you’ll better understand the need to make some adjustments to your store or office to attract your target customers. The question is: What adjustments do you need to make?

As you’ve probably guessed, the adjustments depend on the customers or clients you’re trying to attract (see Chapter 2 for details on sizing up your clientele). Designing a store that’s more attractive to Hispanics and easier for them to navigate is going to require a much different strategy than designing one that’s more friendly to African Americans, Asians, Middle Easterners, or another group.

In the following sections, we provide specific recommendations on the types of adjustments you need to make to your business’s exterior, interior, and service hours, depending on the group or groups you’re trying to attract. See the later section, “Adapting Packaging and Pricing for Diverse Clientele,” for details on changing the appearance and pricing of products and services themselves.

Making a great first impression

The first impression is the most important one, and it begins with marketing and advertising, as discussed in Chapter 5. Your storefront design, however, gives you that rare second opportunity to make a good first impression.

Assuming your marketing campaign is effective, it should drive consumer traffic to your establishment. The next step is to make your shop’s exterior inviting enough to draw these same people inside. In the following sections, we offer some practical advice on how to choose a location and create a storefront design that’s more effective in drawing customers from the parking lot inside. We also give you tips on how to arrange your entryway and floor plan so those customers don’t turn around and walk right out.

Location, location, location

If your business location is already well established, we're not about to recommend that you uproot your place of business and relocate to where your target customers live, work, and shop, but if you're just starting out or are looking to expand your operations, consider location carefully. Research your customers' demographics, as discussed in Chapter 2, and consider choosing a location where you're likely to see a lot of foot traffic from multi-cultural customers if you need it. When choosing a location, put yourself in your customers' shoes and consider the following:

- ✔ **Convenience:** Is the site on a bus line or within walking distance of your customers' neighborhood? Is it easy to drive to? Does it have sufficient parking?
- ✔ **Location:** Is the site located near other businesses your customers frequent?
- ✔ **Space:** If you're planning a new store, does the lot have sufficient space to build a store and expand in the future? If you're already established in a store or office, does the building have enough space for you to expand into if your business grows?
- ✔ **Visibility:** Does your store stand out (in a good way)? Will passersby be drawn to it? Will people who know the address be able to spot it easily? Your signage may be able to help increase your visibility; see the section "Amending your signage" later in this chapter.
- ✔ **Safety:** Is the neighborhood safe? Are the parking lot and streets well lit at night?



If you're having trouble choosing an ideal location, consider using specialized software to analyze your options. You can purchase software that uses factors such as sales, demographics, square footage, and demand to determine the optimum site for a store. Such software is currently available from companies including Digital Geographic Research Corporation (www.DigitalGeographic.com) and Plan Magic (www.PlanMagic.com).



The location for an office that provides services isn't as crucial as the site for a retail outlet, because you generally don't need high foot traffic around an office. If you offer services that your customers want, they'll drive a long way to get to your facility. Of course, a convenient location is always best, but it may not be as essential for an office as it is for a store.

Adjusting your window dressing

You may think people are people, but what your window dressing communicates to passersby may mislead them into believing that your retail business caters only to an exclusive group of customers. Just think about it: Are you going to shop at your local discount store dressed in a suit? If you've decided to dress down for the day, are you going to feel comfortable shopping at a high-class clothing store where everyone's walking around in suits?

The same is true for multicultural customers. A Hispanic, Black, or Asian shopper, for example, is probably not going to feel very welcome if all of your posters, mannequins, and womenquins look like Caucasians. In fact, studies show that when people of color don't see images that look like them in an ad, the ad doesn't even register in their minds. This is true of your window displays, as well.



Manufacturers today can produce mannequins and other window-dressing products that realistically depict all races and ethnicities, so there's no reason not to have a display window that's representative of all the customers you serve. Ask your vendors whether they have posters designed for customers of other cultures. If you use mannequins for displays, consult the company from which you buy or rent your mannequins to explore your options. Also check with your window display provider about the options they may have.

Creating a grand entrance

When multicultural customers cross the threshold into your store or office, you've just scored a great achievement, but you have no guarantee that they'll stay. It's easy to turn around and walk out. We're fairly certain that you've done the same yourself upon entering an establishment where you didn't feel welcome.



After your prospective customers are inside, keep them there by making them feel at home. Think of your entryway as the foyer of your home. You want your guests to feel as though they've entered a sanctuary — a place that will ultimately help them find what they need.



If you're redesigning the entryway of your store, try the following to make shoppers feel welcome and not overwhelmed:

- ✓ **Clearly mark the aisles.** Bookstores and groceries typically mark their aisles to help shoppers find what they're looking for.
- ✓ **Add a store map.** If your store is fairly large, consider placing a map at the entrance that shows a bird's-eye view of where everything is located. Malls, large hardware stores, and retail outlets often use maps to help customers navigate.
- ✓ **If you're targeting new immigrants, make sure your signs and maps are bilingual.** See Chapter 5 for more about translating materials into another language.

If you're redesigning your office's entrance, make sure the physical environs of your lobby immediately strike your customers as an inviting and comfortable place to do business. Spend some time considering the effect that certain color schemes, artwork, photos, and furnishings are going to have on someone

from the culture you're trying to appeal to. If possible, seek the assistance of someone from your target culture in choosing your office décor. See "Adding diversity-friendly décor," later in this chapter, for additional suggestions.



Does your office have a waiting area? If so, subscribe to some magazines that your new clients may find interesting. You can take a poll or just subscribe to a few and look at which ones get dog-eared or "borrowed" most often. Also make sure the reading material is in your clients' language. This is a small gesture that speaks volumes about your care and concern for them.

Redrawing your floor plan

Have you ever stepped into the grocery store that you've shopped at every week for the past ten years only to find that everything has been rearranged? You probably felt confused and betrayed by the very people you've been handing your money to all these years. Here you are, ready, able, and willing to buy stuff, and you can't find anything you want! You've fallen victim to some cruel and unusual shell game.

Customers and clients from other cultures can feel the same way if they walk into your store only to discover that nothing is where they think it should be or that your office is arranged in such a way as to bring everyone in it bad luck.

Sometimes, especially with stores, your customers simply need some time to get acclimated. A grocer can't inconvenience other shoppers by moving the dairy section to the other end of the store, for example, just to make a certain group of customers more comfortable. Marking the aisles and including a map of the store, as discussed in the preceding section, is usually sufficient.



An effective floor plan should directly expose customers to new merchandise and draw them to promotional end caps. It should also feel open and inviting while maximizing sales per square foot. When it doesn't accomplish these goals, it's a good sign that you need to revisit your floor plan and make some adjustments. Do some of your own field research to obtain ideas for modifying your floor plan. You can also benefit from retail space-planning software, such as Smart Draw (www.SmartDraw.com), or by seeking the assistance of a consulting firm. Display fixture manufacturers may also provide free floor plans for arranging their products.



In an office, however, you can make clients feel downright uncomfortable with the furniture arrangement, particularly in the waiting room. To overcome some of these problems and make everyone feel happier and more energetic, many businesses are embracing *feng shui* (a philosophy and methodology for arranging items in a given space to increase harmony with the universe), as explained in the nearby "Feng what?" sidebar.

Feng what?

Feng shui is the ancient Chinese practice of arranging objects to maximize positive energy flow (*chi*) and achieve harmony with the environment. Literally meaning “wind and water,” feng shui is widely practiced in the United States by Asians as well as non-Asians. This ancient art is based on placing objects in a room in such a way as to promote health, harmony, and prosperity. To understand feng shui and energy flow, you must understand the following two basic rules:

- ✓ Good luck travels in curved lines.
- ✓ Bad luck travels in straight lines.

In feng shui, a red, eight-sided device called a *bagua* is used to determine optimal placement of furniture and other objects in a room. Red is the lucky color for Chinese people, and 8 is the lucky number for Chinese and other Asians. A feng shui master uses the *bagua* as a map to determine how energy moves inside your office or store, and usually adheres to the following tenets of feng shui:

- ✓ Clutter blocks the free flow of energy in a room, so keep the décor simple and organized.
- ✓ Because clutter blocks the positive flow of energy, open up your floor plans.
- ✓ Bright lighting, open spaces, and light colors all create positive energy.
- ✓ Because bad luck travels in straight lines, avoid furniture, display cases, or desks with sharp corners.

- ✓ Avoid long, straight corridors — again, straight lines = bad luck.

Builders sometimes design their floor plans in accordance with the principles of feng shui. They often make sure that the stairs don't lead directly to the front door so the good luck won't escape every time you open it, and they avoid a straight sightline from the front door to the back, which would create negative energy.

Even businesses that we consider distinctly American are embracing the principles and practices of feng shui. According to the Associated Press, a McDonald's in Hacienda Heights, California, is using feng shui to create positive energy flow for customers by replacing plastic chairs with leather, bringing in live bamboo plants, and installing glass panels where water trickles down. According to the owner, the purpose of the décor change is to create a soothing setting that encourages diners to come back.

If you're interested in maximizing the energy flow in your store or office contact a local feng shui master who can do a reading on your store or office and suggest the most favorable layout. You can often find these practitioners in your local telephone book, on the Internet, or through martial arts stores and Chinese herbalists. For a complete guide to the art of feng shui, check out *Feng Shui For Dummies* by David Daniel Kennedy and Lin Yun and *Feng Shui Your Workspace For Dummies* by Holly Ziegler and Jennifer Lawler (both books are published by Wiley).

Adding diversity-friendly décor

If you retool the exterior and entryway of your establishment but don't make any corresponding adjustments inside, your customers are likely to experience a disconnect when they walk through your front door for the first time.

To establish a smooth transition from the parking lot into your store or office lobby, some adjustments to the interior décor may be in order. In the following sections, we offer some guidance.



Large retail stores around the world look very similar due to layout and visibility restrictions. Your walls are probably already covered with merchandise, making it more difficult to add diversity-friendly décor. In most cases, you're limited to adjusting the signage, product displays, and the products themselves (we discuss these topics later in this chapter). With a bit of creativity, however, you can always find a way to add a touch of cultural flair.

Checking out your wall hangings

Walk the perimeter of your store or office and take note of what's hanging on the walls. Are your walls packed with photos of yourself and your family, advertising images of Caucasians, your college diplomas and other certifications, religious icons, or racy calendar girls? You may be so accustomed to these displays that you don't even realize that some people may find them offensive.



Invite a few people you know from the culture you want to appeal to into your store or office and ask them for a second opinion. If you have someone on staff or a loyal customer with the cultural background of your target clientele, ask the person for feedback. If you've established a multicultural advisory board, as discussed in Chapter 2, ask members for their input. Then replace any wall hangings that could drive customers away with something more attractive. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Be inclusive without being obvious. The pictures in your store or office shouldn't pander to customers from other cultures, but they should reflect the type of customer you'd like to serve. Many cultures, for example, value family, so photos showing you with family and friends or with other happy customers in the community may be more appealing than photos of yourself accepting awards.
- ✓ If you're trying to attract new immigrants, make sure that any posters you hang on your walls are in their native language.



Many of your distributors probably already have bilingual or foreign language posters that speak directly to the multicultural customers you're trying to attract, but they may not think to offer the materials to you. You have to ask.

- ✓ If you're redesigning your office, work with a designer who's sensitive to multicultural tastes, especially those of the customers you're trying to serve. The right designer can suggest paintings, curios, and other knick-knacks that have a subtle cultural flavor.
- ✓ Although decorating your walls with college diplomas and other certifications is always a good way to show that you're qualified to serve your clients, consider adding some photos of your family and friends. Although education is important to many groups, family is often more significant to them and says more about your character than the school you attended.

Coloring yourself multicultural

Whether you're redesigning your window displays or giving your entire store or office a makeover, remain sensitive to how people from different cultures interpret various colors. Colors that Americans associate with celebrations may represent somber occasions in other cultures.



In the United States, for example, white symbolizes purity and a fresh beginning; brides get married in white dresses. In much of Asia, however, white symbolizes death; instead of getting married in white, you get buried in it. Unless you're in the business of selling caskets, decorating your store or office with bouquets of white chrysanthemums may be a big mistake.

Here's another example: In Mexico, purple is the color of death, so if you're trying to appeal to Hispanic clients, you probably want to steer clear of the local florists' lavender collection. Likewise, you may want to avoid using too much purple in your office decor if you're trying to attract Japanese customers; purple is generally reserved for members of the royal family. Consult a culturally competent decorator about appropriate colors to use for your customers.

To find out more about using the right colors in your decorating scheme, check out Chapter 5.

Accounting for cultural numerology

Certain numbers carry a special significance in various cultures. In the United States, for example, many buildings skip the 13th floor, while lotteries around the country offer "Lucky Seven" lottery tickets. For many Asians, the number 4 represents death, while 8 is their "lucky seven." Remember that the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, began at 8 p.m. on the eighth day of the eighth month, August.

Whether you're stocking your store with products, setting prices, or arranging tables in a dining area, do the math to find out whether it adds up to trouble. If you're trying to appeal to Asians who think the number 4 is unlucky, for example, don't pack products in sets of four, include the number 4 in the price, or even sell golf balls in packages of four. Consult your advisory board or others from the culture whose business you're pursuing to identify any numerological superstitions.

A manager of a fast-food restaurant was trying to appeal to Asians, and she nearly made the mistake of installing 44 seats in the dining area, until she realized that the number 4 is as unlucky for Asians as the number 13 is for Americans. To avoid "double death," she found room to add an extra seat to bring the restaurant's total to 45.

For more about lucky and unlucky numbers in other cultures, see Chapter 5.

Amending your signage

Signage is a fancy word that refers to all the signs you use in and around your business to communicate with customers. (Signage goes beyond décor in that it provides potentially valuable information to customers.) To ensure that your signs are communicating the right messages effectively, consider the following suggestions:

- ✓ Form a focus group of target customers to walk around and through your store or office and evaluate your signage. Make sure signs are visible, attractive, in the preferred language of the customers you want to attract, and are free of anything (including numbers or colors) that your target customers may find offensive. Even a clock with a logo behind it may turn customers away because of its association with death for many Asians.
- ✓ Don't forget to include directional signs from your parking lot or garage to your establishment and directions within your place of business to restrooms, smoking and nonsmoking areas, customer service stations, exits, and safety zones.
- ✓ Place multilingual signs, as well as maps, in high traffic areas in the target language. (Make sure the signs are in the correct language for the customers you serve — for example, the Spanish spoken in Spain is quite a bit different from the Spanish spoken in Mexico.)



To reduce the cost of adding multilingual signage, place separate signs below your existing signs instead of having your old signs redone.

Adjusting the height of shelves

In the old days, items were shelved so they were convenient for shoppers. Nowadays, retailers shelve items to boost sales and profits. One of their strategies is to place the items they want to sell the most at the customer's eye level. Multicultural customers complicate this strategy in two ways:

- ✓ What's at eye level for the average American may not be at eye level for Hispanic, Black, or Asian shoppers.
- ✓ The products that average Americans are likely to buy may not be popular with customers from other cultures.



The most effective way to overcome these challenges is to make slight adjustments to accommodate the “average” shopper. Raising or lowering the shelves by a few inches can make a big impact. Moving a few items that are popular with your multicultural customers from the bottom shelves up one or two shelves can also make a difference.

Establishing a dress code for employees

Have you ever wandered around an entire store without running into one staff person who could help you? A salesclerk may have been right in front of you, but the person was dressed in such nondescript attire that you had no way of distinguishing her from the patrons. Imagine how confusing this must be for people from outside the United States.

As a service to your customers, have your frontline employees and others with whom customers are likely to interact wear similar clothing so they can be readily identifiable as staff. The clothing need not be an obvious uniform — just something that helps customers spot the people who can assist them without guessing. Having everyone wear tan pants and a white shirt or simply a shirt with a logo and nametag may be sufficient.

It's amazing how many times I (Michael) have been mistaken for an employee in an office supply or electronics store simply because I'm more professionally dressed than the employees (or perhaps customers just expect an Asian to be high tech). Sometimes I'll just go along with the gag and help the customer to see how long I can maintain the charade. I also love to see the look on the person's face when he sees me in the checkout line right in front of him.



When you're a service provider (not a retailer), you're the product, and how you dress *is* the packaging. Wear clothing that's appropriate to the customers you're serving. In some cases, a polo shirt and khaki pants are appropriate, whereas in other situations, a suit may be required. Studies show that if you dress just a bit more formally than your customers, you convey credibility and authority. Just don't overdo it.

Setting culturally friendly hours of operation

If you've been knocking yourself out to build a multicultural marketing campaign and give your establishment a major makeover but still aren't seeing multicultural customers streaming through your doors, perhaps it's because your business is open only when these customers are at work.



New immigrants to America may work different hours than longtime citizens. If you want their business, you'd better be open when they have time to do business. The old banker's hours of Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. have gone the way of the horse and buggy, especially if you want to do business with people who generally work from early morning to late into the evening. Find out what hours your customers work and keep your store open during the hours that they're available to shop. (You can gather this information through

your own observations or by including a question on a survey, as explained in Chapter 2.) Many businesses that cater to ethnic populations are now open on Saturdays and even Sundays.



If your products and services can be obtained outside of normal retail hours over the Internet, let customers know. Many are Internet savvy and often prefer to shop electronically from the comfort of their own homes after normal business hours.

Adapting Packaging and Pricing for Diverse Clientele

Retailers, including mom-and-pop operations and folks who list items for sale online, are tuned in to the sensibilities of the American consumer. They know how to package items and bundle products in ways to make them most attractive to the masses and how to set price points that are not only competitive but also convey a sense of value.

Unfortunately, the same packaging and pricing models and methodologies don't always have the same effect on customers from other cultures, so you probably need to make some adjustments. In the following sections, we provide the guidance you need.

Repackaging your goods

In the United States, packaging is almost as important (and costly) as the product itself, because manufacturers and retailers are well aware of the need to make a good first impression.

Packaging products so they're attractive to you or your traditional customers, however, isn't necessarily going to make them attractive to shoppers from other cultures. In fact, what you consider attractive, they may consider repulsive. In the following sections, we offer some guidance on how to package goods for various cultures. We start with color, the most important element, followed by shape, graphics, numbers, and (finally) words.

Unfortunately, the manufacturer or supplier usually has more control (in many cases full control) over packaging. Contact your suppliers and ask whether they have different packaging options for different markets (some do). You may also have some control over packaging if you buy in bulk and package items yourself. As a last resort, you can explore obtaining your products from more culturally sensitive sources or import them from the country of origin of your customers.



If you're importing products from your customers' home country (as we describe later in this chapter), the packaging is very likely to follow all the rules we describe in the following sections, in addition to being labeled in the customers' native tongue. The only adjustment you may need to make is to add an English translation if you're trying to sell the product to native English speakers, too. (Refer to Chapter 5 for more about translations.)

Coordinating colors with cultures

Picking the right colors is a key first step in wrapping your products in the right packaging, because color grabs the shopper's attention. Because we cover the general importance of color earlier in this chapter in the section "Coloring yourself multicultural," here we provide you with a quick reference guide to the significance of colors for different cultures (see Table 7-1).

Table 7-1 A Guide to Colors in Different Cultures		
<i>Culture</i>	<i>Positive Colors</i>	<i>Negative Colors</i>
Asian Indians	red, maroon, yellow, dark green, dark yellow	white, black
Asians	gold, red*, green, yellow	white, purple, black, pink
Hispanics	green, red, white, yellow, brown, orange	blue
Middle Easterners	blue (Iran), yellow (Saudi Arabia), green (Middle East, but because it's holy, avoid using it in advertising)	black
Native Americans	earth tones, red, blue, green, yellow	varies according to tribe (ask your customers)
African Americans	bright colors	black
Americans	red, white, blue, green, yellow	black

** Japanese customers may perceive red negatively, because in their home country red is used for price tags on deeply discounted products. Red also has negative connotations for Buddhists because it's associated with death.*

Reshaping your containers

Although the color of your packaging is most important, shape runs a close second. Should you put your product in a cardboard package, a bottle, tube, or can? Of course, what you're selling heavily influences the package you choose, so you have to find out, through market research, how certain products you sell are typically packaged in other countries.



If you're a retailer, packaging will also influence the very products you order. Find out from existing customers what kind of packaging they're used to in their home country. When ordering toothpaste, for example, do your customers prefer it in tubes or pumps?



Being careful with pictures

Packaging often includes images, because we all know that “A picture is worth a thousand words.” But the message communicated by a picture on a package may be offensive to certain members of a particular culture. Here are some recommendations for using images and other graphics wisely if you're designing your own packaging or for ordering goods appropriately:

- ✓ **Avoid images of scantily clad women.** Yes, even on bikini packages. Showing models in skimpy outfits can be extremely offensive to some cultures such as those from the Middle East.
- ✓ **Use fewer words when trying to appeal to high-context cultures.** High-context cultures rely more on imagery and symbols rather than words. Work with a graphic designer who knows how to design packaging for your target group. She should be familiar with the difference between high-context and low-context advertising as well as other cultural nuances. (For more about high- and low-context cultures, visit Chapter 3.)
- ✓ **Avoid certain hot-button images and select positive images instead.** As discussed in Chapter 5, some images that Americans don't think twice about have a powerfully negative association in other cultures. Clocks and watches, for example, generally symbolize death throughout most of Asia. To many Japanese, doves symbolize death (not world peace). Although dogs are a popular pet in the United States, Muslims believe they're unclean, so including an image of a dog on food packaging would probably be a bad idea — unless, of course, you're selling dog food. When you choose images that your customers feel favorably toward, you silently reinforce your commitment to their culture.
 - Southeast Asian Indians like to see mango leaf designs, conch shells, peacocks, and the lotus flower, which are positive symbols. The half moon with stars, however, is specific to the Muslim religion and wouldn't be viewed favorably by Hindus. Many Asian Indians also believe owls and cats to be unlucky.
 - For Asians, pictures of tigers, dragons, bamboo, fish, and flowers are viewed positively, while snakes are generally avoided.
 - For Native Americans, the moon, the sun, eagles, horses, and buffaloes are very positive, while you should avoid pictures of tomahawks, arrows, and feather headdresses, which tend to stereotype members of this group.

- African Americans are often drawn to religious Christian images such as crosses, church steeples, and African ceremonial masks, as well as pictures of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other famous black leaders. Avoid anything having to do with the Civil War and pictures of Confederate flags and plantations.

- ✓ **Promote family values.** Many high-context cultures value family even more than people in the United States do, so images of family are usually a plus, particularly if the images include people from the culture you're trying to appeal to.
- ✓ **Avoid stereotypes.** When including images of people from other cultures, avoid stereotypes. For instance, while using pictures of Mexican Americans when targeting that group is good, showing them wearing serapes or sombreros and taking a siesta beneath a tree is bad.

Keeping numbers in mind

Who would think that a baker's dozen (13 rather than 12) would be popular in the United States, where high-rises often skip the 13th floor to avoid bad luck? Well, we guess nobody's going to complain when they're getting an extra doughnut.

However, items packaged in certain taboo numbers may turn away some of your multicultural shoppers, so you may want to avoid packaging items in groups of four for Asian customers or three for Filipinos. (We discuss cultural numerology in more detail earlier in this chapter.)

If you do happen to get a shipment of products in that are packaged in a taboo quantity, consider repackaging them for your multicultural clientele and ordering a little more carefully in the future.

Labeling your packages in the right language

When selling products to customers who speak a different native language, consider making your packaging bilingual. You can place a label in the other language right next to English label or on the sides of packages so it's readily visible to the customer.



Have the translation done by someone who's familiar not only with the language but also with the culture and the product. You may also need to convert weights and measures, dates, and times; legal text; safety warnings; nutritional facts; and regulatory wording into your target audience's language. If you import products, remember to translate the label into English for customers who prefer English.

Fine-tuning your prices

If you normally have a standard markup on products or services, you may want to fine-tune your prices to create a more effective pricing strategy and avoid any numbers in your prices that send the wrong message. In the following sections, we guide you on developing a pricing strategy to maximize sales and profits and suggest ways to adjust your price points so you don't drive multicultural customers away.

Exploring pricing strategies

Head out on the Web to any of the comparison shopping sites, like Froogle, BizRate, or MySimon, and search for one or two products that tickle your fancy. You'll find retailers offering identical products for vastly different prices. Why? Because strategic pricing is key to earning a profit in retail. Following is a list of common pricing strategies:

- ✔ **High or premium pricing:** Set the price extremely high, and shoppers think that they're getting the best, most exclusive, or most unique item on the market. You can use this approach when you have a substantial competitive advantage such as a well-known brand name, superior service, or product that is scarce and in high demand.
- ✔ **Medium or general pricing:** Charge the going rate and offer superior service, and your customers are going to believe that you offer a bigger bang for their buck.
- ✔ **Low or discount pricing:** Undercut the competition by offering a lower price on a consistent basis. Competing with a low price alone is usually a loser's strategy, unless you're a huge discount retailer. We won't mention any names.
- ✔ **Loss-leader pricing:** Price something below cost to get shoppers into your store so you have an opportunity to up-sell products with bigger markups. Auto supply stores often offer motor oil as a loss leader, for example, because after they get you inside they can up-sell the oil filter, fuel injector cleaner, air filter, windshield wipers, and perhaps even their oil change service.



Every retailer knows that competing on price alone is usually a loser's game, so use your pricing strategy as only one component of a comprehensive plan to appeal to your multicultural clientele:

- ✔ Set a price that's acceptable to multicultural customers. Although your price sells your product or service, the value you add provides your profit margin through increased and repeat business. Value add can be anything from bilingual salespeople to superior customer service after the sale.

- ✔ Implement changes, such as those recommended throughout this chapter, that make these customers feel more comfortable shopping with you than with your competitors who haven't made these adjustments. Building a diverse sales team, as suggested in Chapter 16, can also help.
- ✔ Offer the products and services that your target group(s) want and need (we focus on these in-demand items later in this chapter).



Research not only the ethnic background of your target consumers, but also their socioeconomic backgrounds. Many upscale customers don't want to see inexpensive products on the shelf because that can imply lower quality. On the other hand, working-class customers may not feel comfortable in a store that offers only designer products. Whatever strategy you choose, remain consistent; if you want to be known for offering high-end products at a premium price, don't start offering a group of inexpensive products, or vice versa.

Tweaking your price points

After you have one or more pricing strategies in place, revisit the actual prices you're charging for individual products and services. You may need to make a few minor adjustments to overcome the following:

- ✔ **Psychological price barriers:** Based on their income, certain customers won't pay more than a certain amount for specific products or services. A price of \$10 may seem unaffordable, while \$9.99 sounds just fine. You can increase your sales by staying under psychological price points. For example, back in the 1970s home prices in San Francisco hovered in the \$95,000 to \$99,000 range for a long time because no one wanted to break the \$100,000 psychological barrier. As soon as one house sold for \$100,750, almost all homes in the area started selling for more than \$100,000. Now, you can't even buy a garage in San Francisco for less than \$100,000.
- ✔ **Superstitions:** Keep those no-no numbers in mind. Because Asian customers may interpret a price of \$4.44 as an ill omen or a gesture of insensitivity, you may want to reset the price to \$4.88 to overcome the bad luck with a couple of lucky eights. (We explain cultural numerology in more detail earlier in this chapter.)



Ask your customers about good luck and bad luck numbers they may have. Then try to adjust your prices up or down accordingly.



Test different products at different prices to see where your customers' barriers are. Don't assume that the lowest price will result in the highest sales volume. For many people, styling, choice, customer service, and other factors can be more important than price when deciding what (and where) to buy.

Offering In-Demand Ethnic Products and Services

Serving a hot dog on fine china doesn't magically transform it into filet mignon. And redesigning your establishment, signage, pricing, and packaging; setting more convenient hours; and making a host of other changes won't attract customers if you continue to sell stuff they have no intention of buying.



Perform market research, as recommended in Chapter 2, to identify products and services multicultural customers want and need, and then stock up so you can supply them with the selection they're looking for. You may also gather important insights by visiting ethnic stores, as recommended in Chapter 4.

You can often attract customers from other cultures and boost sales by offering them everything they can get from your competitors, and then some, all in one convenient location, so they don't have to run around so much.

If you're in real estate, for example, you may want to work with a mortgage broker and title insurance company to give house hunters a one-stop shop for financing, buying, and securing title to their home. Increasing the product selection in a retail store can have the same positive effect.



Carry authentic products whenever possible, and import them if necessary. Ask your customers specifically which products and brands they'd like you to stock. All you have to do is ask; don't assume. Be sure to ask about any dietary restrictions your customers may have as well. For example, even trace amounts of alcohol can be offensive to devout Muslims. In England, a major manufacturer of potato chips faced a boycott over this issue. If you don't already know of suppliers that carry the products you're looking for, search the Web. You can search for "supplier" followed by the brand name, or search for the name of the product followed by the culture, such as "Mexican," "Indian," or "Chinese."

If your initial product line for your multicultural clientele is successful, talk to customers about what else they would buy that they can't get locally. Most customers can tell you the brand names of the products they used to buy in their home countries. An online search of that name will likely reveal the nearest distributor. Adding these items can help you expand your product line and gain additional market share.



Always keep mainstream customers in mind. Don't crowd out the items that they favor with too many ethnic products. You could start to lose both sets of customers because ethnic customers also need mainstream products.

Implementing a Supplier Diversity Program

If you sell cars for a living, are you going to buy your insurance from an agent who purchases cars from you or from an agent who buys her cars from your competitor? Of course you're going to lean toward buying your insurance from someone who buys one of your cars.

The same is true of multicultural customers. If they're buying products or services from you, they're going to appreciate when you purchase from them — when you eat at their restaurants, buy products that you need and they manufacture or distribute, and use the services they sell. That's good business for everyone in the community. So when you're in the market for goods and services (for yourself or your company), cast a wide net to locate suppliers and consider buying from the people who buy from you. Any support you offer your local community is always appreciated, and word usually spreads quickly.



Many companies and organizations (including colleges and universities) have formal supplier-diversity programs in place to encourage the use of previously underutilized minorities and women vendors. Organizations usually set a target goal of purchasing around 20 to 25 percent of products and services from underrepresented groups. Should your business be any different?

Part III

A Crash Course in Cross-Cultural Sales

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

Hard sell is out. Soft sell is in. Every salesperson knows that you can't sell anything until you know what the customer wants and needs. That means asking lots of good questions and establishing a relationship before you start pitching your products or services.

You're probably very skilled and experienced with soft selling to customers from your own culture, but selling to people from different backgrounds can be entirely different. What works for most customers may drive these other customers away.

In this part, we reveal the do's and don'ts of cross-cultural selling, making you more sensitive to what works and what doesn't when you're selling to people from other cultural backgrounds. Here you discover effective ways to meet and greet customers, build mutual trust and respect, tune in to signals that indicate a readiness to buy, adjust your sales presentation, close the sale, and then haggle (if necessary) over the price and terms of the transaction.

Chapter 8

Mastering the Meet and Greet

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the basic do's and don'ts of meeting and greeting customers
- ▶ Minding your customers' comfort zone
- ▶ Exchanging business cards — it's more formal than you may think

As the old saying goes, “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.” That pretty much applies to every culture on the planet, but every culture has a different idea about how to create a positive first impression. Some cultures demand direct eye contact, while others find that quite discomfoting. Some prefer to greet with a firm handshake, whereas others would prefer a mutual bow or a kiss on the cheek. Some are notorious “close talkers,” while people in the United States tend to back off.

This chapter can make you more aware of cultural differences in meeting and greeting, and shows you how to treat people the way they want to be treated without having to become clairvoyant.



Go with the flow. Don't insist on being the lead dancer. Let your customer take the lead and do what's comfortable for her, and then you can follow along. If you keep this in mind, you can never go wrong.

The Do's and Don'ts of Greeting and Interpreting Body Language

A successful relationship with multicultural customers begins with properly greeting them. Unfortunately, many salespeople unintentionally offend the very customers they're trying to please when first greeting them.

In the following sections, we present 11 essential cross-cultural do's and don'ts that can steer you clear of trouble and significantly improve the first impression you make with customers or prospective customers from other cultures. These do's and don'ts serve three purposes:

- ✔ They increase your sensitivity to how people of other cultures prefer to be greeted.
- ✔ They assist you in interpreting the body language of people from other cultures so you don't take a gesture the wrong way.
- ✔ They make your greeting and interaction more natural. Each do and don't is accompanied by an exercise you can practice until you're comfortable with the technique.

Don't assume you know how your customer wants to be greeted

Most people, regardless of cultural background, assume that everyone in the world wants to be greeted the same way, and in America, that usually means the firm handshake. Of course, that's a risky assumption to make, given the fact that the most common greeting in the world is the bow, not the handshake. In fact, many people around the world find the handshake downright offensive.



So what should you do? The best rule to follow is that if you don't know what to do, do nothing. Never assume that you know how the person you're meeting wants to be greeted.

In the following sections, we explain how to read your customer's signals, prepare yourself for unexpected greetings, and break yourself of the firm handshake habit.



Picking up on your customer's signals

The safest course of action is to let the customer determine the greeting he's most comfortable with. When you meet someone from another culture, take the following approach:

- 1. Greet the person verbally. (This is always a safe move.)**
- 2. Hesitate a moment before extending your hand, while observing what the other person does.**
- 3. Follow the person's lead. If he extends his hand to shake hands, shake hands. If he bows, bow. If he nods, nod. If he hugs you or tries to kiss you on both cheeks, go with the flow.**



If the pause becomes too uncomfortable, then greet the person as you normally greet people — the person may want to do what's proper in *your* country. Most multicultural men in the United States will extend a hand. Asians may nod as they shake hands. Simply follow the person's lead.

Preparing yourself for the unexpected

Perhaps the worst thing that can occur when you first meet someone is that you hesitate to see what the other person is going to do and then are completely unprepared for what happens next. The other person hugs you or proceeds to kiss you on both cheeks, and the discomfort causes you to recoil. All of your efforts at following the customer's lead are now wasted, and you probably just made a lousy first impression.

By knowing a few typical greetings to expect, you can avoid shock and be prepared to greet the person in the manner to which he has become accustomed:

- ✔ **Limp handshakers:** Many new immigrants have probably seen people shaking hands on television but may have never actually performed the ritual. So don't be surprised or upset if a customer gives you a soft or hesitant handshake. Just return the same greeting. This is often the case with many Asian groups who are much more comfortable bowing.
- ✔ **Huggers:** Most people in the United States can hug someone without feeling too uncomfortable. Just pretend you're hugging the aunt you see only once every two or three years. You may find your Hispanic repeat customers giving you this kind of greeting.
- ✔ **Kissers:** American men are generally uncomfortable having strangers, especially other men, kiss them, even if it's only on the cheeks. We recommend that you go with the flow. Let the person kiss you on the cheek, and expect to get kissed on the other cheek, too, although the one-cheek kiss is most common. Any attempt to turn away after the person kisses you on one cheek and is moving to the other cheek is likely to result in that next kiss landing right on your lips! The French are famous for practicing this kind of greeting, as are many Middle Easterners. Don't be surprised if folks from Southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and Latin America also kiss your cheek. Depending on the country and the situation, the number of kisses can range from one to four and may be followed by shaking hands or hugging, so stay on your toes.
- ✔ **Nodders:** Watch for any head movements and "reply" in kind. In many cultures, the proper way to greet a woman who's accompanying a male customer is to nod in her direction to show respect. The woman may feel uncomfortable shaking hands or being greeted in other ways. We go into more detail about acknowledging women in the later section, "Do drop your hands to your sides in a woman's presence."
- ✔ **Bowers:** Asian people and people from many other cultures around the world bow as a form of greeting. This form of greeting is sometimes used as an alternative by some Americans who are less touchy-feely. The depth of the bow is often determined by the rank of the parties according to a complex set of rules.



Greeting Middle Easterners and Southern Asians (primarily Asian Indians and Pakistanis) can pose a more difficult challenge for most people in the United States, who tend to lump all of these cultures into one group. When meeting someone from a Middle Eastern or Southern Asian background, keep the following in mind:

- ✓ Immigrant men from the Middle East often shake hands with a slight nod or bow and then exchange kisses with other men on both cheeks. Traditional Muslim men may shake hands and then touch the palm of their right hand to their heart as a sign of friendship. Men from this region generally don't shake hands with women or introduce women who accompany them, nor are you expected to shake hands with any accompanying woman. Just nod in her direction as a sign of respect, unless she offers her hand first.
- ✓ Following centuries of British rule, most Hindu Eastern Indians seem to have adapted quickly to Western habits. Shaking hands is normal behavior for both men and women. If a woman is older, a courteous, respectful nod is usually preferred to a handshake. Traditional Indians may greet you with a *namaste*, which is a slight bow with the hands folded prayerfully in front of the chest. Traditional Indian men don't ordinarily shake hands with women. Unless he offers his hand, just nod to him respectfully.
- ✓ Pakistanis generally shake hands with strangers and hug friends. Some men from this country don't shake hands with women. Because Pakistan is a largely Muslim nation, people greet each other with *salaam*, which is the equivalent to our "hello." The salaam is done by bowing with the palm of the right hand on the forehead. *Salaam* means "peace." Note that it's not the same as the Indian namaste greeting.

Practicing different forms of greeting

While following a customer's lead seems simple enough, it takes a great deal of practice to break yourself of the habit of automatically sticking your hand out. Practice following a customer's lead with another salesperson by taking turns meeting each other with different forms of greeting. For example, the other person may do his normal welcome, and you, playing the role of a customer, may not put your hand out at all. In this case, the other person should simply nod to show respect and then begin his presentation.

When it's your turn, you welcome him as if he's the customer, and he can give you a bow, namaste, salaam, or some other greeting. It's then your job to simply return the same greeting and start your normal presentation.



Keep practicing until you get into the habit of letting the customer dictate the form of greeting so that you don't automatically try to shake hands and that it looks and feels natural to you and the person with whom you're practicing.

Do smile

Service with a smile is always important, whether you're greeting mainstream customers or people from different cultures. If you enjoy your job, want to keep doing it for a while, and are committed to growing success, then develop a smile that expresses your sincere joy to see your customer. To every customer you greet, your smile should say, "I'm so glad to see you!" In the following sections, we describe the importance of a warm smile and provide tips on smiling more at customers.

Understanding why a sincere smile goes a long way

Walking into any store or office for the first time can be a frightening experience for any customer. This is your turf, not theirs. To customers from other cultures, your store or office may feel like a foreign country. They're unfamiliar with the products and services, where things are located, and the person with whom they're dealing. They may wonder whether you can meet their needs or whether your company is reliable.

Add to this mix the fact that they may not be completely familiar with the language and culture, and you soon realize that the experience can cause a major case of culture shock. Treat such a customer coldly and you're likely to confirm their worst fears.



To overcome the fear and trepidation a customer feels, always greet customers with a warm, sincere smile. Don't be fake about it. Believe us, they can tell. A sincere smile:

- ✓ Reduces the customer's fear of the unknown
- ✓ Builds trust
- ✓ Makes your customer feel good about herself
- ✓ Makes your customer feel good about doing business with you

Practicing a sincere smile

Have someone watch you interact with a customer and note whether you smile when you first meet her. Did your expression seem sincere? How did the customer react? How often during your presentation did you smile? Could you have smiled more?

If you're not smiling when you greet the person, make a conscious effort to do so. Imagine yourself greeting a friend you haven't seen in quite a while and have been looking forward to seeing. This, along with some practice, should make your smile more genuine.



Smile when talking to customers over the telephone. Put a small, standing table mirror next to your telephone with a note on it that says “Smile.” This should remind you to smile during phone conversations with customers. Call a few friends while smiling into the mirror and ask them how you sound. We bet they’ll tell you that you sound “happy,” “upbeat,” and “positive.” People can actually hear your smile — your voice automatically expresses the tone of someone who’s friendly and helpful. Many people’s first or only contact with you may be over the phone. Leave them with a great impression!

Do drop your hands to your sides in a woman’s presence

If you’re a woman, you’re probably not going to greet other women with a firm handshake. In today’s atmosphere of gender equality, however, men often offer a firm handshake to women to acknowledge the fact that they’re equals. If you’re a salesman, reaching out to shake the hand of a woman from another culture, however, could be taken as a sign of disrespect — to the woman as well as to any man accompanying her.

In the following sections, we reveal a technique that’s suitable for meeting and greeting women from any culture — dropping your hands to your sides.



Most of your competitors are probably offending their customers without even knowing it. You may want to keep the secret of dropping your hands to your sides in a woman’s presence (and the advantage it gives you) to yourself.

Greeting a couple properly



When greeting a multicultural couple, it’s even more important to follow their lead. Often, the man shakes hands, in which case you simply return the greeting. (If he doesn’t, follow our advice in the earlier section “Don’t assume you know how your customer wants to be greeted.”) After shaking the man’s hand, however, drop your hand to your side before turning to any female companion. Many traditional Middle Eastern, Asian Indian, Japanese, and other women are uncomfortable or even forbidden to touch another person who’s not a family member or husband. Touching her, even if you’re a woman, can be offensive not only to her but to her family and spouse as well.

Ah, what to do? Simple. If you turn to her with your hand at your side and she doesn’t extend her hand, simply nod in her direction to acknowledge her presence. Then begin your normal rapport-building process (see Chapter 9).

If the man doesn’t offer his hand, just nod toward him and then turn to the woman with your hands to your sides. If she doesn’t put her hand out, just nod to her as well and proceed with your normal sales presentation.

Practicing dropping your hands to your sides

To practice the technique of dropping your hands to your sides, work with two other people. Together they play a multicultural couple whom you're meeting for the first time. Welcome them in your normal manner, letting them take the lead. The first person greets you however he chooses. You receive the greeting, return it in kind, and drop your hands to your sides before turning to the other person. If the second person greets you, return the greeting in kind. If she doesn't greet you, simply nod in her direction.

This is more complex than the previous exercise because you have two customers who may greet you differently and you must remember to drop your hands to your sides between the two greetings. You and your partners can take turns being the customers and the salesperson so you can all experience what it's like to be in each position. At first this is likely to look and feel awkward, but with practice it becomes more natural.

Do greet everyone in the group

Customers from some cultures are known for turning shopping trips into family outings. You're likely to sell not only to couples but also to their parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and even their children.

To successfully navigate such situations, practice the rule of dropping your hands to your sides that we explain in the preceding section. Turn to the oldest person first, see what kind of greeting you receive, and then return a similar greeting. Look at the person nearest the oldest person and do the same. Continue this process until you've greeted everyone.

If the group contains children, greet them the same way you greet the adults. Avoid the temptation to reach down and tousle their hair. Some cultures interpret this gesture as demeaning or even life threatening (see Chapter 11 for more on this).



Don't be a slouch

Americans generally pride themselves on being casual, friendly people who love to make everyone around them feel at ease. Salespeople may even try to lighten things up by taking on an informal posture — slouching or leaning against a table, a counter, or a wall while speaking with clients. For many salespeople, this informal “posturing” has become a fine-tuned sales skill and a deeply ingrained habit.

Unfortunately, what works well with laid-back Americans may not fly with more formal cultures. Luckily, slouching is curable with a couple of handy exercises (see the “Practicing better posture” section).

Posturing in other cultures

In the United States, proper posture used to be important, but that was 40 to 50 years ago. Now, posture means very little here, even in business. In other cultures, however, posture is still an important part of business and social etiquette. Asians, for example, generally believe that control of the body demonstrates discipline of the mind. Slouching or leaning is taken as a sign of an undisciplined or possibly lazy person.



Some people, like the Japanese, tend to believe that someone who slouches or leans can't be trusted — honest people stand or sit upright with both feet flat on the ground (we explain more about foot placement in the upcoming “Don't cross your legs . . . you may cross your customer” section). If you just follow your first-grade teacher's advice about sitting and standing up straight, you won't kill any sales with your posture. See the next section for tips on breaking yourself of the habit of leaning when talking to customers.

Practicing better posture



Your posture may be so much a part of who you are that you don't even realize when you're slouching or leaning on something. Ask an associate to observe you as you interact with customers and provide detailed feedback on whether you stand straight, sit tall, slouch, or lean. Also, have them tell you what they feel your posture conveys to the customer. Some salespeople's body language conveys confidence, while others' subtly conveys insecurity. You may be surprised to discover what your posture says about you. For more about improving your posture and other business etiquette, check out *Business Etiquette For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Sue Fox (Wiley).

Here's another exercise: Have someone snap some photos of you from the side in different positions — sitting and standing. Is your body upright, or do you unconsciously slouch? Your spine should appear straight, and your head should look balanced on your neck. Your chin should be parallel to the floor, not pointing up or down.

Don't cross your legs . . . you may cross your customer

You may be thinking, “Can't cross my legs?! Are these guys serious?” Yep, we are. In the United States, crossing your legs at the knees or ankles or resting an ankle on the opposite thigh is perfectly acceptable and a whole lot more comfortable than sitting flat-footed. This habit, however, isn't universally accepted. Rest easy: It's a fairly easy habit to break.



Some doctors say that crossing your legs can irritate your hips, strain your back, and cause other maladies. Regardless of what it does to you physically, when selling to multicultural customers, crossing your legs is dangerous.

Pointing your sole — the ultimate insult?

Cross your legs and observe what happens. No matter how you do it, the soles of your shoes are at least a tad bit more visible to those around you. If you rest your ankle on your opposite thigh, your sole is pointing directly at the person to the left or right of you.

How can anyone possibly take this as an insult? Well, the foot is the lowest part of the body, the sole is the lowest part of the foot, and if you've gone shoeless around your house lately, you know that your sole is the filthiest part of your body. When you cross your legs, you point that filthy, lowdown sole of yours directly at someone sitting next to or across from you.

Some people in and around the Middle East actually cross their legs as an intentional, overt insult to another person. In that culture, showing someone the bottom of your foot says you're looking for a fight. Many people from India, Thailand, and elsewhere also interpret this gesture in the same way.



When dealing with multicultural customers, keeping both feet firmly planted on the ground is best — in more ways than one.



Don't cross your arms, either. As a salesperson, you're probably aware that crossing your arms is a big no-no whenever you're attempting to establish rapport with your traditional customers. It conveys a sense of distance in America, as well as in most other countries, like the Philippines. In some countries, like Turkey, it's downright rude.

Practicing keeping your feet on the ground

If you're in the habit of crossing your legs, try to become aware of when you do it. When you notice yourself starting to cross your legs, stop. If you've already crossed your legs, uncross them. The more you practice, the more accustomed you'll be to keeping your feet flat on the floor. Keep at it, and you're likely to stop crossing your legs in about three weeks.

Do mirror your customer's body language

Your body language often carries more meaning than your words, and it expresses your true intentions more honestly, so be really careful about what your body is saying. We cover a couple of specific body language no-no's in the previous two sections — don't slouch and don't cross your legs (or arms). In the following sections, we explain the big do of body language — do follow your customer's lead — and give you pointers on controlling your body language.

Recognizing differences in expressiveness

Everything in America is big, including our body language. Depending on the culture, this can be a good thing or a bad thing. In many cultures, overly expressive body language can come across as being bombastic or loud. In other cultures, our big gestures may seem rather small and demure compared with theirs. It's all relative.



Avoid the tendency to judge others by American cultural standards. Just as you may be louder and more demonstrative than people in some cultures, people in other cultures may be louder and more demonstrative than you.

The following list can help you gauge the grandiosity of your body language for different cultures and provide you with tips on how to rein in your body when necessary:

- ✓ In most Asian nations, people avoid overly expressive body language for fear that they'll betray their inner feelings and disrupt the harmony with everyone and everything around them. Other cultural groups may also be somewhat more reserved in their hand gestures and facial expressions, so observe your clients and follow their lead.
- ✓ Opposite of Asians, African Americans can be very demonstrative with their body language. In fact, they tend to display more emotion and to be more enthusiastic than most white Americans in their gestures and voice inflections. You can usually be less restrained and more demonstrative when dealing with people from this culture but, again, mirror your customer's individual behavior.
- ✓ Middle Easterners and some Hispanics can also be more expressive than European Americans. You may even think they're angry when you see them carrying on a conversation among themselves.

The moral of the story: Try to be aware of the amount of body language your customer uses and *mirror* them by adjusting the amount and breadth of your gestures to match theirs. (For additional do's and don'ts for specific cultures, check out the appendix.)



When dealing with multicultural customers, your safest option is to be conservative in your body language. Keep your elbows at your sides to limit the size of your gestures, at least until you're sure you can be more expressive without making your customer feel uncomfortable.

Practicing control over your body language

Have another person watch your body language and gestures as you interact with a customer, and ask him to provide you with detailed feedback. Have him note whether you mirror your customer's body language. Do you keep your gestures subtle at the beginning? Are you about as expressive as they are without coming across as phony?



First, work on increasing your awareness of the customer's body language, including the types and size of the gestures, and then adjust yours to match. This takes a great deal of practice, but top salespeople have mastered the art of body language, and many credit their success to their ability to subtly mirror their customers.

Do watch your gestures

To people of some cultures, gestures that are seemingly habitual to Americans are obscene or insulting, so be careful. In the following sections, we highlight several of the most common American gestures that can get you into trouble and show you how to modify (and even eliminate) your gestures.



Avoiding some potentially dangerous moves

We don't want to make you overly self-conscious, but you may need to stop using some of the gestures that come naturally to you as a result of your American upbringing. Here are some of the most common gestures to avoid:

- ✔ **Pointing:** In many countries, pointing with the index finger is offensive. In Asia, most people point by cupping the hand with the palm up and pointing with the whole hand. With any customer, using the entire hand to indicate objects or people in the distance is a pretty safe practice.
- ✔ **Beckoning:** In the United States, we commonly place the hand up and repeatedly curl the index finger toward our body in a “come hither” gesture when we want someone to come to us. In a multicultural setting, however, you should use your entire hand to beckon someone. In Asia, for example, people do this by turning the palm down and pulling the fingers in a “scratching” motion.
- ✔ **The “OK” sign:** In the U.S. to show that everything is alright, we generally put the thumb and index finger together to form a rudimentary “OK,” but with multicultural customers, lose this gesture for sure. In Latin America, the “OK” sign generally means “screw you.” In France, it means “you’re worthless.” In other countries, it can have negative connotations as well.
- ✔ **The “thumbs up” sign:** In America, closing the hand with the thumb sticking straight up on the air indicates approval. However, it roughly equates to “Up yours!” in places like Russia, Australia, Iran, Greece, parts of West Africa, and South America (with the exception of Brazil).
- ✔ **Standing with hands on hips:** In many places, including Mexico and the Philippines, this can be interpreted as an aggressive gesture. Unless you’re looking for a fight, keep your hands off your hips.
- ✔ **Standing with hands in pockets:** Although people in the United States commonly stand with their hands in their pockets, avoid doing so with multicultural customers, who may see this gesture as rude or obscene. This sentiment is particularly true in European countries.

Practicing modifying your gestures

Have someone observe you giving your sales presentation to a customer. Ask the person to note any gestures you make. Then go back and ask yourself whether any of the gestures could possibly be offensive to other cultures. As you become more aware of your gestures, you'll begin to adjust, minimize, and eliminate them. Making gestures is often subconscious and subtle, so it takes a great deal of effort and time to modify them.



If you do business in an office or store that has a security camera trained on you, use the tapes to study your gestures and see how customers react to them.

Do minimize the use of your left hand

Estimates have southpaws making up about 10 percent (30 million) of the U.S. population. In fact, being left-handed is so well accepted that many stores cater exclusively to lefties, offering everything from specialized kitchen utensils to computer keyboards. In other countries, however, using the left hand is often considered rude, gross, and even insulting.



In the presence of people from other cultures, you're better off not using your left hand. Writing or (worse) eating with your left hand in front of people for whom left-handedness is taboo can make them very uncomfortable.

Understanding what happens to lefties around the world

At this point, you may be asking yourself, "What happens to lefties in countries where left-handedness isn't permitted?" The fact is that many countries have no lefties — parents train left-handedness out of their children at a very early age.

Particularly in Asia and the Middle East, people consider the left hand unclean and only to be used for personal hygiene purposes. The prohibition against using the left hand is so strong that parents in those countries tie their children's left hands behind their backs until they get out of the habit of using it. Although it may seem cruel to us, in many third-world countries, having one hand for personal hygiene and the other for everything else is essential to prevent the spread of certain diseases.



Having said that, people from other cultures do use their left hands at times, using both hands to pass a platter of food or to present their business cards (we cover business card presentation later in this chapter). What you really need to be careful about is eating or touching food with your left hand.

Practicing the use of your right hand only

If you are left-handed, minimizing the use of your left hand in front of multicultural customers can be a major challenge, so focus on the most important skill first — eating with your right hand. (Writing with your left hand isn't considered nearly as offensive as eating with it.) To train yourself to eat with your right hand, whenever you sit down to a meal, sit on your left hand so you won't be tempted to use it.

If you're right-handed, be aware of those times when you unconsciously use your left hand, even if you're using it merely to take a piece of bread from a basket or plate. To increase your awareness of using your left hand, try sitting on it during meals or tie the fingers of your left hand together with a rubber band. These restraints will make you aware of any tendencies to use your left hand.

Eating with your right hand is the biggie, so if you dine with customers from “right-leaning” countries, focus on proper dinner etiquette. If you never have business meals, practice performing other common tasks by using your right hand only, including jotting down notes and handing items to people.

Don't touch until you're sure

People of many cultures, especially Asians, Brits, and Germans, aren't as touchy-feely as most Americans are. On the other hand, some cultures tend to be much more tactile, encouraging complete strangers to embrace upon first meeting.

In the following sections, we point out cultures that tend to be more hands-on or hands-off, and then lead you through an exercise that can help you adapt more naturally to different cultural preferences.

Noting differences in other cultures

The first step in accommodating multicultural customers' needs is to note the rules of engagement in these other cultures. Following are some of the more important hands-on, hands-off rules for various cultures:

- ✔ If you're a man, never touch a Japanese, Asian Indian, or Middle Eastern woman, even on the arm, because this could come across as the near equivalent of sexual assault. Although touching a man from these cultures (Japanese, Asian Indian, or Middle Eastern) may not be as serious an offense, it could, nonetheless, make them very uncomfortable. Even a female salesperson touching a woman or man from these cultures can cause extreme discomfort, so wait until a customer touches you before you reach out to touch him or her.

- ✔ Puerto Ricans have an even friendlier, effusive culture than ours, so touching is not only permissible but also generally welcome. Follow your customer's lead to determine their comfort level. Researchers observed people from this country in social settings and compared them with other cultures. Puerto Ricans touched each other an average of 180 times an hour, while people in Florida made physical contact only twice an hour. Among the British, no intentional contact was observed at all.
- ✔ Studies show that African American males touch each other while conversing more often than Caucasian males. African American women tend to make physical contact about twice as often as White females. If your customers embrace you or reach out and pat you on the back, feel free to return the gesture.



If you're a physically affectionate person, resist the urge to touch your customers until you're sure they're comfortable with it. Err on the side of being conservative and let your customer take the lead. For additional details on establishing a comfortable distance between yourself and your customer, see the section "Establishing a Comfortable Distance" later in this chapter.

Practicing a hands-off policy

Ask a colleague to observe you as you interact with customers (preferably at least one of whom is from the culture you're trying to attract). Have your colleague note any time you touch the person and how the person reacts. This gives you an objective perspective on how hands-on you really are and whether customers like it. Over time, this third-person perspective can make you more aware of when you touch customers and their reactions to you.

Don't expect eye contact

In most of the do's and don'ts in this chapter, we point out how people from other cultures react to your actions or body language, but just as important is how you interpret and react to their behaviors and gestures. Eye contact is one of the most common areas of misunderstanding between people from different cultures. People in the United States often misinterpret lack of eye contact as a lack of honesty and respect, when people from other cultures mean nothing of the sort when they look down or away.

Seeing eye to eye on eye contact issues

Many groups, such as Asians, particularly the Vietnamese, Japanese, and Koreans, avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect for you. They feel that looking someone in the eye is intrusive and rude, so they look down to honor you. Unfortunately, this can be extremely uncomfortable for Americans.

If a customer avoids their gaze, many salespeople make the mistake of assuming the person isn't buying what they're selling, doesn't respect them, or isn't listening. They then proceed to do everything in their power to "earn" direct eye contact. Lack of eye contact may bother some salespeople so much that they may try to catch the customer's eye by ducking their head down, which is probably just about the worst thing you can do.



The solution to lack of eye contact is fairly simple — look down. You can also use this as an opportunity to show your customers product brochures, rate charts, or other material, because they're looking down already.

As usual, not all cultures behave the same way. Some cultures, including Hispanics and people from the Middle East, value direct eye contact even more than most people do in the United States. In fact, the saying "The eyes are the windows to the soul" is common in the Middle East. People from these groups may make Americans somewhat uncomfortable with their intense gaze. The best advice we can give you is to just get used to it.

Practicing your response to a lack of eye contact

The next time you're working with a customer who doesn't give you eye contact, be aware of your reaction both physically and emotionally. Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Do you try to catch his eye? Practice looking down when he looks down. Keep telling yourself that he's showing you respect and paying attention in spite of his lack of eye contact.

Looking for respect

Differences in attitudes about eye contact can result in serious cultural clashes. In Los Angeles in 1992, Korean stores in African American neighborhoods became targets for complaints because many African American shoppers felt that store owners were being disrespectful. As proof, many complaints cited the lack of eye contact on the part of Korean shop owners.

These disgruntled shoppers were simply unaware that Koreans avert their eyes as a sign of respect. Conversely, African Americans expect very direct eye contact for the same reason. Is it any wonder that this lack of understanding about cultural differences led to ill feelings?

Recognize that for many cultures looking down *is* showing you respect and *is* the way they pay attention.

Establishing a Comfortable Distance

During the late '70s and early '80s, when the “Me” generation was at its height, getting in touch with your *personal space* was a big thing. In high schools across the United States, students were taught that every individual had a zone — an invisible border, which, if breached, could cause intense personal discomfort. At some point in your life, you’ve probably been told that you were “invading” someone’s personal space.

Personal space varies according to individual preferences, but the variation is more pronounced among cultures. In the United States, most people are used to shaking hands and then standing 2 to 3 feet apart. Most cultures, however, prefer spaces that are either much farther or closer. In the following sections, we explain differences in personal space around the world and give you a few pointers on handling these differences.

Surveying cultural differences in personal space

People in some cultures prefer to keep generous distances between them when they interact. In Japan, for example, people rarely get close enough to shake hands — they bow and then step back. Salespeople who aren’t aware of this phenomenon often feel as though they’re trying to yell across the Grand Canyon. They become so uncomfortable that they take a step toward the person who just stepped back. Of course, the person who just stepped back now feels uncomfortable and takes another step back. In some cases, this dance can go on for quite some time.

Then there’s the phenomenon of the *close talker*. If you’ve ever been the victim of a close talker, you know just how uncomfortable they can make you feel, but up close and personal is how many cultures prefer to communicate. Among these are the Hispanics and Middle Easterners, who often hug you and then stand about 6 inches from your face. If you just had the hoagie with onions for lunch, you’re probably wishing you had flossed, brushed, and popped a mint at this point.

Any closer than a couple of feet is way too close for most Americans, so we naturally flee to a more comfortable distance. Of course, this is probably too far away for the other party, so they naturally step forward, violating our personal space. If this continues, your customer ends up chasing you around your store. Obviously, this unintended dance makes communication difficult and uneasy. It’s also not very effective in starting your relationship on a positive footing.

You can check out a variety of cultural comfort zones in Figure 8-1; all distances are approximate, and personal space can vary among individuals.

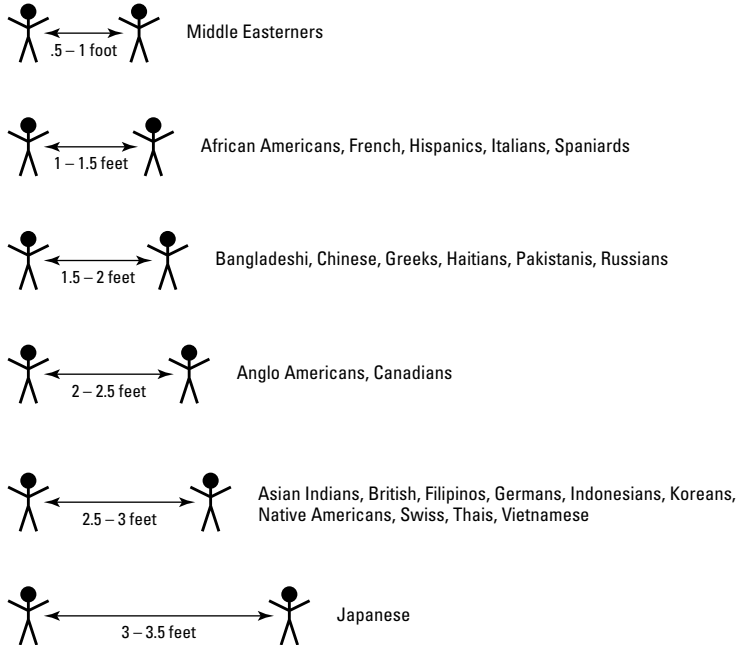


Figure 8-1: These cultural comfort zones illustrate personal space distances for social interaction (such as sales situations).

Standing your ground



When meeting any customer, let her set the personal space she finds comfortable. If, after her initial greeting, she steps back or forward, stand your ground and accept the fact that you're not going to be operating in your comfort zone. You can become more accustomed to different comfort zones, however, by practicing the upcoming exercise. Just don't practice too much — we'd hate to see you become a close talker.



The rules for minding a customer's personal space can apply just as much in an office. If a client gets too close for comfort, simply offer her a seat on the other side of your desk. However, this probably won't deter close talkers who are likely to lean across the desk to close the gap. If this happens, don't withdraw; just be comfortable with the personal space the customer sets. Likewise, if the client leans away from the desk, don't you be the offending party by leaning forward. Just as when you're standing, let customers determine the personal space that's most comfortable for them.

For this exercise, you need a partner, preferably someone you don't know that well, and definitely not your spouse or anyone else you're intimate with.

1. **Stand about 6 feet apart.**
2. **Have your partner start walking toward you slowly.**
3. **When you feel your partner getting uncomfortably close, ask her to stop.**
4. **Note the approximate distance between your feet and your partner's feet. This is your comfort zone.**
5. **Ask your partner to take one more step forward encroaching on your personal space.**
6. **Note how uncomfortable this feels, and recognize that when you violate a customer's personal space, they feel the same discomfort.**
7. **Hold your ground while talking with your partner, resisting the urge to move away.**
8. **Repeat the exercise, this time setting an uncomfortably distant space between you and your partner. Remember to hold your ground, no matter how anxious your feet are to move closer.**



Invading a customer's personal space almost guarantees they won't feel comfortable with you. Standing too far away is a lesser offense, but it still won't put them in the mood to buy.



As you talk to various people throughout the day (other than your customers or anyone else you shouldn't be messing with), note the distance they seem to feel comfortable conversing at, and practice letting them set that distance. If you want to have some fun, after you've determined their preferred personal space, subtly move forward or back as you talk, and watch their reactions. Enjoy the dance!

Exchanging Business Cards with Care and Courtesy

In the United States, people exchange business cards with about as much pomp and circumstance as they deal poker cards. In other parts of the world, however, exchanging business cards is a formal ritual with strict rules of etiquette. These rules cover everything from translating your card to the case you store them in to how you present your card and accept cards from others. The following sections cover all of these rules and offer an exercise that can help you develop the necessary skills to exchange business cards properly.

Translating your card for multicultural customers

Some salespeople want to make customers more comfortable by having their contact information printed in the customer's native language on the flip side of their business card. If you decide to do this, avoid potential embarrassment by having someone who knows both your industry and the appropriate second language do the translation.

When working with a translator, be sure that you know specifically where the majority of your multicultural customers are from and what language they use. For instance, simplified Chinese is used primarily in mainland China, while traditional Chinese is preferred in Hong Kong and Taiwan. For more about translations, check out Chapter 5.



When adding a translation to the reverse side of your card, make sure both sides of the card are identical in terms of colors, logo, type size, and other features. If your cameo shot is on the English side, include it on the foreign language side, too. If the English side is printed in full color, print the flip side in full color, too. Any difference, even calling the special side “the back,” may be taken as a slight to the customer, implying that the American culture and English language are superior to the customer's. Done incorrectly, your new, improved card can do more harm than good.

Treating your own card with respect



In many cultures, the business card literally represents the actual person giving the card. Customers from other cultures where business cards are highly valued expect you to treat not only their business cards with respect, but your own as well:

- ✓ **Don't staple your business card to a document, folder, invoice, receipt, or anything else.** If you need to attach your business card to a folder, buy special folders that have a place to insert or paste a business card, or paper clip the card to the folder. (As you discover in the next section, your card represents you — stapling your card is like putting a hole through your head.)
- ✓ **Don't write anything on your business card.** Again, because the card represents you, it would be the same as writing on your face. This is a good rule to follow in relation to the cards you receive, too.
- ✓ **Carry your business cards in a brass card case.** Avoid leather card cases because the cow is sacred in some cultures, such as those that practice the Hindu religion.

Presenting and accepting cards

Although your business card itself is important, how you present it to a customer or prospective customer can be even more important. Although etiquette varies, the following rules are safe to practice regardless of culture:

- ✓ **Act formal about it.** Presenting a business card isn't a casual activity in most cultures.
- ✓ **Offer your card with both hands, with the lettering on your card facing the customer.** If the customer bows while presenting his card, just do the same.
- ✓ **Explain what your title means to the client and provide the proper pronunciation of your name if it happens to be a tricky name.**



Even more important than how you present your business card is how you accept your customer's card and what you do with it after accepting it. Again, the following strict rules are appropriate for most situations:

- ✓ **Accept the other person's card with your right hand only.** Why? Use of the left hand for most activities is taboo in many cultures. See "Do minimize the use of your left hand," earlier in this chapter, for details.
- ✓ **Spend time examining the other person's card.** Study it as if it were a holy book, because that can be the level of significance attached to business cards in other cultures.
- ✓ **Ask about the customer's title.** Their title probably indicates the person's rank and status, which can be very important to some people.
- ✓ **If your customer has a difficult-to-pronounce name, write it down phonetically as he repeats it — but not on his card.**
- ✓ **Respectfully place the customer's card on your desk or insert it into your card holder.** If you're a man, never put the card in your wallet and then place the wallet in the back pocket of your pants, because you could sit on the card, which would be the same as sitting on your customer. If you're a woman, don't put the card in your purse and let your purse hang below your waist; keep the purse tucked safely under your arm.
- ✓ **Remember that the card represents the actual person, so don't staple the card (just as you wouldn't staple the person) or write on the card.** To attach a card to a file or document, use a paper clip.



Practice exchanging business cards with colleagues. At first, you may feel awkward removing your card from its case and fumbling with it to make sure the lettering is facing a customer as you try to present your card with both hands. Remembering to accept a business card only with your right hand can also be a challenge. However, after practicing this several times, it becomes natural, and others will feel it's respectful as well.

Chapter 9

Building Rapport with Culturally Diverse Clientele

In This Chapter

- ▶ Making sense of relationships in high- and low-context cultures
 - ▶ Clearing language hurdles
 - ▶ Shifting your focus from selling to relationship building
 - ▶ Tailoring your approach for different generations
 - ▶ Getting multicultural names right
-

prominent speaker and business columnist Terry Brock likes to talk about *r-commerce* (*relationship-commerce*), which fuels all other forms of commerce, including e-commerce. As Terry explains it, selling is all about building relationships and then letting the relationship generate business. By focusing on relationships instead of on selling products or services, you actually sell more and have more fun doing it.

R-commerce has even more force in multicultural markets, where people of other cultures may have even less trust in what seems to be a foreign marketplace to them. To break into these new markets, you have to work on building solid relationships and a positive presence with customers and their communities. This chapter shows you how.

Fostering Relationships in High- and Low-Context Cultures

A funny thing happens when you become a top-producing salesperson. You stop selling. You stop worrying about the numbers — about sales quotas and profits and the bottom line. You start talking to people. You build relationships, partnerships, and business synergies.

You stop selling, but you end up earning more than you ever did when you were *trying* to sell, because you tap into the secret of selling — building long-term relationships that are beneficial for both you and your customers. This is especially true for multicultural customers, particularly those who come from high-context cultures, as we discuss in the following sections. (See Chapter 3 for an introduction to high- and low-context cultures.)



Many salespeople ignore multicultural buyers because closing a sale with them can often take more effort. They tend to require more time to get to know you and your company, and may require more thorough explanations of the products and services you offer. They also may want to confer with others inside and outside their family before making a final decision. The fact that multicultural customers generally need more of a salesperson's time and effort is exactly why they represent a golden opportunity for you — the competition for these customers is usually light because many salespeople lack the patience. Invest the time upfront, and you'll soon find that working with all the referral customers your original customer sends your way requires much less effort. For more about referrals, check out Chapter 15.

Establishing trust with high-context cultures



In places like Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa, decisions are based less on facts than on feelings — less on products and services than on the person selling them. Customers from high-context cultures need to feel the love (and trust) before they part with their hard-earned cash, so take the following steps toward building a trusting relationship:

- ✔ **Be honest and genuine.** Most people can spot a phony, so don't try being someone you're not.
- ✔ **Keep your promises.** Don't say you're going to do something unless you're really going to do it.
- ✔ **Highlight the fact that you represent a reputable company.** Anything you can do to show that your company has a good track record can help convince customers that you're trustworthy.
- ✔ **Get involved in their community.** Chapter 5 has all sorts of ideas to help you do this.
- ✔ **Develop a comprehensive program to cater to multicultural customers.** This further demonstrates your commitment to your customer. (You can find more details on crafting a quality program in Chapter 6.)

Catering to the tendencies of low-context cultures

In low-context cultures, relationships still matter, but the deal itself is more important. Americans are a perfect example, because we always seem most interested in the bottom line. We generally want to spend less time getting to know the salesperson and more time talking about the details of the purchase.



Low-context cultures value logic, facts, and directness. Decisions are based more on facts rather than on intuition. After buyers have the facts, they're expected to make a decision. Most of North America and Western Europe comprise low-context cultures, including the United States, Switzerland, and Germany. This may help you better understand these countries' no-nonsense attitude toward business.

Relationship building is still important in low-context cultures, but a strong relationship depends more on your ability to quickly assess a customer's needs and then fulfill them. Here's how to focus on the customer's needs:

- ✓ **Ask questions.** You must know what the person needs before you can sell to those needs.
- ✓ **Provide plenty of relevant information about your products and services and how they can benefit your customer.** Customers from low-context cultures usually have a big appetite for relevant details. Your knowledge positions you as a trustworthy expert.
- ✓ **Get to the point.** Your customer probably doesn't want to spend as much time getting to know you and your company as the product or service they're buying.
- ✓ **Give the facts.** Provide as many facts and figures as you can to back up everything you say. In low-context cultures, trust is based more on proof than on relationships.

Gathering referrals based on trust

Quality relationships tend to generate referrals, regardless of whether the relationships are with customers from high- or low-context cultures. When customers trust you, they're much more likely to refer friends, family, and acquaintances to you.

Even so, as soon as you make a sale, ask for a referral. People who trust you won't hesitate to refer others to you. This is so important that we devote Chapter 15 to exactly how and when to ask for referrals.



The best time to ask for a referral is when a customer thanks you or says something like, “I don’t know how to thank you.” That’s a perfect opening to tell them how they can show their thanks — by referring people to you.

Clearing Any Language Barriers

Salespeople in the United States can celebrate two bits of good news.

- ✓ First, English is considered the universal language of commerce, although that can certainly change.
- ✓ Second, many salespeople who can speak and write only in English are highly successful selling to customers from other cultures both here and abroad.

Even with this good news, you’re likely to encounter some uncomfortable sales situations because of language barriers. Even salespeople born with a silver tongue are likely to encounter language barriers when they’re selling to first- or second-generation Americans. In the following sections, we provide some guidance on what to do and say and what not to do and say that can improve the clarity of your communications.

The basics of breaking down a language barrier



The easiest way to overcome a language barrier in the absence of an interpreter is to use your hands, arms, legs, gestures, facial expressions, emotions, and demonstrations to communicate. Here are some tips for surmounting even the highest of hurdles:

- ✓ **Show some emotion:** Most emotions, such as excitement, joy, fear, frustration, and anger, are universal. Just remember that some cultures are more or less restrained in their expressions, so stay within your customers’ comfort zone. Follow the customer’s lead, as explained in Chapter 8. I (Ralph) like to call this *mirroring* the customer, but you have to do it naturally and subtly, so as not to appear as though you’re mimicking your customers.
- ✓ **Slow down, but don’t shout:** Even if a customer understands English, different people have different levels of fluency. You may be speaking or introducing new concepts so fast that everything becomes a blur to them. Slow down, but avoid cranking up the volume. Immigrant customers who don’t comprehend your words probably aren’t hearing-impaired; they’re more likely just unfamiliar with English.

- ✔ **Draw it:** Some people prefer to see things as opposed to hearing about them, so even the most rudimentary drawing can be much more helpful than trying to repeat your words over and over. Also, finding a picture from a magazine or showing a customer a chart or graph can speak much more clearly than words.
- ✔ **Show without so much tell:** Some people prefer to experience a product for themselves. If possible, let the person try out the product or service.
- ✔ **Ask for help:** If others are around who speak your customer's language, don't be shy about asking for their assistance. People who are bilingual are often willing to translate for those who aren't, whether you're in a store, office, airport, hotel, or some other location. If you have a bilingual member on your sales team, all the better (see Chapter 16 for details on diversifying your staff).
- ✔ **Double-check your customer's understanding:** If you're unsure whether your client has understood your message, try to confirm meanings by asking the question a different way or having her explain information back to you.
- ✔ **Be patient:** The key to overcoming any language barrier is to exercise patience. It's not your or the customer's fault that you can't speak each other's language.
- ✔ **Maintain your sense of humor:** Overcoming language barriers can be frustrating for you as well as for your customer. A smile can help break the tension and make communicating easier.

Faking it — not the smoothest move

I (Michael) am fifth-generation Chinese, so I grew up 100 percent American. Thanks to the California public school system, the only language I speak, other than English, is Spanish.

When I began dating, if things went well with a young lady, she would invite me over to her house to meet her parents. Although I tried to prepare completely for the interrogation I knew would probably ensue, what really caught me by surprise was the very first question. Inevitably a Chinese father would start the conversation with, "What dialect do you speak?" I had forgotten that the Chinese language actually consists of many different dialects, most of which are incomprehensible to the groups that speak other dialects.

Although I didn't speak any Chinese, I did realize that if I revealed this fact to the girl's inquisitive father, I probably would never see his daughter again. So I did what any red-blooded American teenager would do in my situation — I lied. I told him, "I speak Fukienese." Thankfully, the father would usually respond, "Fukienese? We speak Mandarin and three dialects of Cantonese, but Fukienese?" Thinking quickly I just smiled and responded, "It's okay. We'll just use English!"

I felt pretty smug until one day I was introduced to a father who actually spoke Fukienese and who caught me in a lie. That day, I learned a very important lesson: When it comes to culture, don't fib, because it instantly breaks all the trust you've tried so hard to build.

In with the good words, out with the bad

Certain words resonate with some cultures while other words can evoke an unpleasant emotional response, so choose your words carefully. A person's attitude toward certain words arises from whether she is from an *individualistic culture* (one that values directness and where people freely speak their minds) or a *collectivist culture* (one that values harmony and in which people tend to avoid direct confrontation). (See Chapter 6 for more on the differences between these cultures.)

Individualistic cultures are no better or worse than collectivist cultures — they're just different. As such, each group must be approached differently, and that approach includes the words you use. In the following sections, we provide some guidelines for choosing words that appeal to most people in either individualistic or collectivist cultures.



To tell the difference between an individualistic and a collectivist culture, remember this Japanese saying that pretty much sums up the collectivist philosophy: “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.”

Words that resonate with individualistic cultures

When selling to individualistic cultures including Caucasian Americans, Black Americans, Canadians, the British, and others, consider using words and concepts they're likely to find appealing, including the following:

- ✓ You, me, yourself, mine
- ✓ Discover, unearth, detect
- ✓ Special, rare, unique, one-of-a kind, custom
- ✓ Guaranteed, warranted
- ✓ New, first-time, improved
- ✓ Affordable, economical, inexpensive
- ✓ Best, superior, unsurpassed, choice

Words that resonate with collectivist cultures

When selling to people from collectivist cultures, including Hispanics, Asians, Middle Easterners, and others, the most appealing words celebrate the group rather than the individual:

- ✓ Family, together, belonging
- ✓ We, us, our, ours
- ✓ Learn, knowledge, wisdom, education

- ✔ Modest, harmony, cooperation, collaboration, sharing, working together, community, collective
- ✔ Guaranteed, warranted, assured
- ✔ Tried, proven, traditional (the equivalent of “proven” but opposite of “new”)
- ✔ Safety, security, protection
- ✔ Consensus, agreement
- ✔ Closeness, group, children, society, bonds, relationship



When presenting a product or service to customers from collectivist cultures, demonstrate humility. Although most of your customers want to be assured that you offer the best products and services, people from other cultures may interpret overt comparisons as you putting down your competition. This can cause you to lose face. Instead, just tell them what you do best.



Words to use cautiously in all cultures

A couple of hot-button words resonate with people of almost all cultures but in different ways:

- ✔ Money (important in all cultures but not always to the same degree or in the same way)
- ✔ Free (important in all cultures but may raise suspicions if a trusting relationship hasn't been established)



In addition, when selling to multicultural Americans, avoid saying the words “honestly” and “frankly.” Unless you give them reason to think otherwise, they'll assume you're being truthful and forthright. Reminding them how frank and honest you are can give them cause to question your ethics. As the Queen in *Hamlet* says, “The lady doth protest too much.”

Avoiding jargon — honestly!

In sales and many specialized fields, including everything from medicine to mortgage lending, jargon is an occupational hazard. Professionals develop their own shorthand to communicate more efficiently, but to outsiders, the highly specialized lingo comprises an entirely new foreign language.

Imagine a real estate professional saying something like, “When you look at the amortization schedule for a wraparound loan, check to see if it's an ARM or GPM and watch out for acceleration clauses or call options.” If you speak English fluently and can't understand this, just imagine the obstacles it throws in the path of someone who's new to the language. Our advice is to avoid using jargon and present your ideas in plain English.

Bridging the communication gap

When you encounter a prospective client who doesn't speak your language, all is not lost. With a little creativity, you may be able to bridge the communication gap and make the sale. Greg Kraynak, vice president of sales at Cellhire (www.cellhire.com), tells the story of an Italian gentleman who wasn't about to let a language barrier get in the way of his learning more about what Cellhire has to offer:

"At Cellhire, we provide our U.S. business clients who travel overseas the opportunity to rent, on a short term basis, a local number in their destination country. Similar offers are available for international travelers visiting the U.S. We frequently participate in trade shows in the U.S. to make potential clients aware of alternatives to costly mobile roaming rates (and poor call quality) when they leave the country. This past summer we attended a large show in Orlando, Florida, that attracted visitors from all over the world.

"While working the booth I was approached by an Italian gentleman, who spoke very little English. My Italian is no better, as 'pizza' is the only Italian word I can consistently pronounce correctly. I've been in situations like this before. What usually

happens is that both parties realize they've hit a communications brick wall, deliver the universal hand wave that roughly means 'well, we tried,' and then move on.

"Not this guy. He thought he roughly understood what we had to offer and was willing to invest some time to learn more. I happened to have a laptop on our display with a high-speed wireless card connected to the Internet. He motioned to make sure he had my approval to use the PC. I nodded yes, and he navigated us to a translation tool at the following Web address: free-translation.imtranslator.net. In a matter of minutes, we were communicating like old friends. He was firing off questions, and I was responding all in real time with some quick typing and a click of a button. Although the messages came through the computer, the reactions and the buying signs were all the same.

"This software and a little persistence brought us a client that we otherwise would have missed. We all marvel at the power of the Internet, but I could never have mastered Italian in an afternoon to close this sale had it not been for a wireless card and the electronic world of the Internet."

Relationship Building 101

If you have built and maintained long-term relationships, you're already aware that every relationship is unique because every person is unique. People from other cultures are even more distinctive because they grew up so differently from your other customers. As a result, the process you follow for building relationships is going to be much different than usual.

In the following sections, we spotlight some of the cultural differences that affect relationship building and then reveal some strategies for building solid relationships with customers from other cultures.

Noting key differences

America is a country on the go. As such, the average American moves more than 11 times during his lifetime. We make friends easily and leave them behind just as quickly. We generally trust people until they give us good reason not to trust them. People from other cultures often have a different perspective on relationships:

- ✔ **Relationships in many countries tend to be much longer and deeper than relationships in America.** Foreigners often comment that we seem to have many people we call friends but whom we don't know very well. In Asia and Latin America, many people count among their friends people they've known since grammar school or longer.
- ✔ **Multicultural customers are much more likely to be repeat customers.** They stick with the people they trust. In America, on the other hand, customers are often more fickle, going with whichever salesperson or store is currently offering the best deal.
- ✔ **Customers from high-context cultures, such as those found in Latin America and Asia, want to build relationships before doing business.** Americans tend to want to get down to business right away, which doesn't lend itself to building trust with multicultural customers. People from high-context cultures aren't always comfortable with people from low-context cultures. They tend to find Americans rather superficial and always in a hurry. (See "Fostering Relationships in High- and Low-Context Cultures," earlier in this chapter, for more details.)



Take the time to get to know your customers as people first and a paycheck second. Look for common ground upon which you can build a lasting relationship. You may want to start by finding out more about your clients' culture; see "Asking clients about their culture" later in this chapter. This not only makes your interactions more enjoyable, but lowers your marketing costs at the same time through increased referrals (see the earlier section, "Gathering referrals based on trust," for more on this idea).

Skipping high-pressure sales tactics

The hard sell is as obsolete as the door-to-door salesman. Today's customers are too savvy to fall for the line that you're offering them a once-in-a-lifetime deal. Any attempt to pressure a customer into making a hasty purchase decision usually backfires, making the customer trust you even less. This is especially true when selling in the multicultural market.

When you're building rapport and making your sales presentation, ditch the hard-sell approach. We discuss this more in Chapter 12.

Asking the right questions

Good salespeople ask good questions and lots of them. At the beginning, finding common ground to establish rapport is crucial. Common rapport-building questions are similar to those you ask any customer, including the following:

- ✓ Where are you folks from?
- ✓ How many people are in your family?
- ✓ Where do you work?
- ✓ What do you do for a living?
- ✓ Where do your kids go to school?
- ✓ What do you like to do for fun?

During this rapport-building stage, you may feel the urge to start asking the questions you usually use to identify the customer's needs. It's certainly okay to ask such questions, but try to keep the conversation light at this stage. In Chapter 10, we introduce you to questions for assessing the customer's needs.

Asking clients about their culture

Americans are starting to become so politically correct that they're approaching the point of being politically incorrect and perhaps even a little cold. Many Americans are afraid to acknowledge that other people are different, so they avoid asking any questions that could call attention to the person's differences. As a result, they never obtain the information they need to practice the Global Rule: *Treat others as they would like to be treated.*

Asking your clients about their culture enables you to investigate cultural tendencies and understand them better. In addition, gathering information about your customers' cultures helps you meet their needs more effectively and increase sales at the same time.

Breaking through cultural static

Failing to address cultural differences is like having an 800-pound gorilla in the room and not, at least, acknowledging its existence. Without saying a word, that gorilla is going to generate so much tension and distraction (also called *cultural static*) among everyone in the room that nobody is going to be able to have a productive conversation. You have to clear your head by acknowledging your cultural differences before you can ever hope to get past them. After all, if you can't hear your customer, how can you meet his needs?

Minorities in America, including the author (Michael), know they don't look like the average customer you probably deal with on a daily basis. If you don't take the time to acknowledge and gather information about these other cultures, you're always going to have unanswered questions that cloud your communications with people from these cultures. Instead of trying to meet your customer's needs, you're distracted by thoughts such as, "I wonder what country they're from" or "What's the painted dot on that Southeast Indian woman's forehead all about?"

When I (Michael) was helping a Sikh Indian gentleman buy a home, I wondered if people of the Sikh religion wore their turbans in bed or if they took them off. (Don't laugh. I'll bet you've secretly wondered the same thing!) After a few meetings, I finally worked up the courage to ask him. He was happy to explain that they unwrap the 17-foot length of material every night before retiring and rewrap it in the morning. Only then did I realize that he'd been telling me he wanted to buy a townhome and not a condominium. My preoccupation with the turban question had prevented me from hearing this important difference.



Is cultural static keeping you from hearing your customers clearly? Go ahead and ask about their culture, language, dress, or anything else that pops into your head. Most people from other cultures are usually happy to answer any sincere question in order to banish cultural static. They not only want you to understand them, but they also want you to hear their wants and needs clearly.

The talking stain

During Super Bowl XLII, a laundry detergent manufacturer ran what would soon become the famous talking stain commercial. In it, a job candidate who has a brown stain on his shirt is being interviewed. The person conducting the interview is asking questions, but as the candidate is answering, the stain is talking gibberish that makes it totally impossible to make out what the job candidate is saying. (If you're unfamiliar with this commercial, visit YouTube at www.youtube.com and search for "talking stain commercial.")

This is exactly what occurs when salespeople don't acknowledge a customer's cultural differences. Your mind subconsciously focuses on those differences instead of on what the person is saying. As a result, you can't tune into what really matters.

Imagine if you went out to lunch at an Italian restaurant with co-workers and you accidentally smeared spaghetti sauce on your cheek during the meal. In an attempt to be nice about it, your colleagues may not say anything, but no matter what you say or how important it is, they can't hear you. Their minds are focused on only one thought: "You've got spaghetti sauce on your cheek, you slob!"

If they simply acknowledge that you have spaghetti sauce on your cheek, you could wipe it off, and that would be the end of it. Instead, by trying to be nice, they've actually done you a disservice. So do yourself and your multicultural customers a favor: If there's something you're curious about, go ahead and ask about it. Then everyone can focus on the matter at hand.

Showing genuine interest

Most Americans have no idea how to ask another person about his cultural background without offending him. Some of us think it's a compliment to tell someone who appears to be a new immigrant, "You speak English well," but if he's been in this country for many years or several generations, he could feel quite insulted.



So how do you ask about culture? The easiest way is to casually bring up your own racial or ethnic background; your customers may have their own unanswered questions causing static in their minds. Research your family's background in this country and then subtly mention how long ago your ancestors came here. After you've done a bit of self-disclosure, you can then ask, "Where are your ancestors from?" You'll be surprised how people open up when you take an interest in their heritage.

When you express a genuine interest in your customers and their heritage, it's unlikely to come across as insulting. Generally, the only reason someone would take offense at a question about culture is if he thinks you're ridiculing him. We know you would never do this, so you have nothing to worry about.

Asking everyone about their culture



If you're going to ask customers about their culture, you *must* ask all of your customers — not just the ones who aren't Caucasians. Otherwise, you make yourself a target for claims of discrimination. By asking everyone, you overcome this presumption.

Top salespeople find a way to subtly bring up the subject of culture early in their relationships with new customers by explaining that this knowledge can help them serve the customer better. You're likely to discover that asking questions about a person's culture can elicit some fascinating rapport-building conversations, whether your customers are from England, Thailand, or Toledo.

Of course, you may need to approach the subject more gradually with your mainstream customers because it's probably rare that they're ever asked about their culture. If you start asking them questions about their heritage right off the bat, they may think you're a little odd. Start by asking where they're from. If they're new to the area, you can ask questions leading back to where their parents and grandparents are from and eventually work your way into a discussion of culture.

Obviously, the longer your sales presentation, the easier and more natural it is to get into a discussion about culture. In many retail situations, you may never get the chance to bring up the subject, and you'll just have to rely on the information in this book to help you spot cultural tendencies.

Identifying Differences in Generations

Generally speaking, the longer a family has lived in the states, the more *acculturated* (adapted to American culture) they are. Third-generation immigrants, for example, tend to be almost fully Americanized and think of themselves more as Americans than as hailing from a distant land.

How you deal with your multicultural clientele depends on how long the family has been living in this country, so it's important to find out by asking about the person's heritage and how long she's been here.

First-generation Americans

Recent immigrants are generally going to have the most difficulty with American-style English and the least familiarity with American practices. They, more so than longtime residents who share their background, are also more likely to prefer products and services that are similar to those found in their home country. Use the tips we present throughout this chapter and this book to build rapport with and sell your product or service to these folks.



First-generation immigrants in particular may need a bit more education about your product or service because they may not be familiar with it. For example, escrow services, which are commonly used on home purchases in the United States, are unknown in much of the rest of the world. Although educating these customers is essential, you don't want to overwhelm them by telling them everything you know about it. Share information with them on a need-to-know basis.

Second-generation Americans

Second-generation Americans are the first generation to be born in the United States. They're usually bilingual, speaking their parents' native language at home while learning English in school. They share the preferences of most Americans but are also heavily influenced by their parents' country and customs.

Because of their split loyalties, second-generation Americans tend to present the biggest challenge for multicultural marketers. Are they best reached in-language or in English? Do they prefer products and services found in their ancestors' country of origin or American made?

Sometimes language and product preferences depend on which country they're from, where they're currently living, and other factors. For instance, a second-generation immigrant from England or Canada is likely to find it easier to assimilate to the American culture than someone from the Middle East or Asia.

The best way to build rapport with second-generation Americans is to ask questions, follow their lead, and take note of how acculturated they are. Some may act more like first-generation immigrants, whereas others may want to leave the old customs behind.



One way to determine preferences is to simply ask your customers. Another way is to provide items found in their home country or the equivalent products and services from the United States and see how they sell. By carefully tracking sales, you'll quickly identify your customers' preferences. (See Chapter 7 for details on offering imported ethnic products.)

Third-generation Americans

Third-generation Americans are usually very assimilated. They may know a few words or phrases in their grandparents' native language, but for most of them, English is their preferred language, and they may behave much more like long-established Americans than their ethnicity implies.



However, recognize that they may still be influenced by their ancestral cultural practices and beliefs. For example, third-generation immigrants from cultures in which paying cash for everything is the norm may still be hesitant to finance purchases. Be alert to the cultural tendencies you've discovered about your target market so you're better able to predict preferences and behaviors, but don't make any hasty assumptions.

Fourth-generation Americans and beyond

Fourth-, fifth- and sixth-generation Americans are truly Americans in every sense of the word. They're unlikely to speak the language of their ancestors and are likely to have very American tastes.

When building rapport with fourth-generation and longer-term Americans, you can usually treat them the same way you treat most of your customers, but always be prepared for a surprise. Culture runs very deep and can show up in unusual ways. One day I (Michael) got a frantic phone call from my friend Lillian who is a fourth-generation Chinese American. She desperately wanted to know which is the unlucky direction for Asians because she was about to buy a new home. I said to her, "If you don't know, why do you care?" She replied, "I don't, but my parents will never step foot into a house that faces the wrong way." You can see that multicultural Americans can be influenced by many forces.

By the way, many Asians consider north to be an unlucky direction because that's where they believe the devil lives. Therefore, if he sees the front of your house, it reminds him to send bad luck your way.

Taking Names . . . and Using Them Properly

Every successful salesperson knows how important it is to address customers by their preferred names. However, when you've grown up with Smiths and Howards, you may have trouble pronouncing more exotic names, especially the long ones like Athanasopoulos (Greek), Kohanamoku (Hawaiian), or Niratpattanasai (Thai).

Most people who have family or personal names that are difficult for Americans to pronounce or spell are well aware of it. They often take on an easier pseudonym, telling you something like, "Just call me 'John'" or "Just call me 'Mary.'" They want so much to make you feel comfortable that they're willing to take a name that carries some significance in their own language and Americanize it for you. Return the courtesy by finding out how to properly pronounce, spell, and use their real names, as explained in the following sections.

What's in a name?

Surnames can give you a clue about where the customer's ancestors came from:

- ✓ Chinese names tend to be *monosyllabic* — one syllable. The three most popular names in mainland China are Li, Wang, and Zhang, while Chan is number one in Hong Kong, and Chen is most populous in Taiwan.
- ✓ Japanese surnames are usually *polysyllabic* — several syllables. Japan has more than 100,000 different surnames, but the most popular are Sato, Suzuki, and Takahashi, respectively.
- ✓ Prevalent Vietnamese names include Nguyen, Tran, and Vu. About half of all Vietnamese have the family name Nguyen (pronounced *new-when*).
- ✓ Korean names also tend to be monosyllabic. The most common family names are Kim, Lee, and Park, and the three combined account for about half of all Koreans.
- ✓ Among immigrants from India, most people have the name Patel meaning "land owner." Asian Indian surnames are usually based on the region from which the person comes. Sikh men all use Singh as a suffix to their names, although some with this name are Hindu. Sikh women all use Kaur as a suffix to their names.
- ✓ Among Pakistanis, the name Khan is commonly adopted, because it means "lord."
- ✓ Greek names often end in *-os* or *-ou*.

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- ✓ Hispanic surnames are often derived from the father's name, occupation, area of origin, or physical traits, such as Martinez (son of Martin), Rivera (near a river), and Moreno (blackberry, dark complexion). The two most popular Hispanic surnames in the U.S. are Garcia and Rodriguez.
- ✓ Most Italian names really do end in vowels, and particularly common are names that end with vowels enclosing double consonants

like “-etto” (Anthony Benedetto was the original name of singer Tony Bennett).

Many names from these cultures can be very imposing for Americans; for example, Jawahar Swaminathan, who, we're sure, you're hoping will just let you call him “Joe.” Don't despair, these names are very simple if you just break them around the vowels: Ja-wa-har Swa-min-a-than.

Asking your clients to pronounce their names

How many salespeople mispronounce a customer's name over and over during a transaction? Every time they do, they push a dagger into the heart of their relationship just a bit deeper. To get a new customer's name correct right from the start, take the following steps:

1. **Ask your customer to write his name for you on a small notepad.**
2. **Ask him to say his name.**
3. **Repeat the name and ask whether you pronounced it properly.**
4. **Write down the pronunciation of his name phonetically next to or below his name in your notepad.** (Don't write anything on the person's business card for the reasons given in Chapter 8.)

While this process may be embarrassing for a moment, getting the customer's name right will win you a lifetime of appreciation.



Share the correct spelling and pronunciation of customers' names with everyone in the company they're going to meet. It would be a shame to go to all the embarrassment of learning the correct way to say your customers' names only to have someone in finance, installation, or service get it wrong. Everyone on staff represents the company, and if they get the name wrong, the customer believes that *you* got it wrong. Distribute an e-mail message or typed memo to everyone who's likely to be in contact with the customer, and make sure it includes the following:

- ✓ The correct spelling of the person's first and last name
- ✓ The phonetic pronunciation of the customer's names
- ✓ An indication of which is the first name and which is the surname (family name), as discussed in the following section
- ✓ The person's gender (which may not be so obvious from the name)



Staff members often complain that they feel extremely frustrated and embarrassed when they call a customer and don't know how to pronounce the person's name, or whether they're asking to speak to a man or woman. It's up to you to clue them in.

Distinguishing between first names and surnames

In some cultures, the family name (or surname) traditionally comes first. In fact, in ancient China, an emperor decreed that, by law, the family name would be placed first to stress the importance of family. You can probably imagine the confusion resulting from a name like Lee Wong Kong, especially if you're trying to prepare contracts or loan documents. Is he (or she?) following the ancient tradition of putting the family name first or the modern convention of putting the family name last? Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese traditionally put their surnames first.



Unfortunately, if you ask an intelligent person who is not from this country, "What's your last name?" they're likely to tell you the name that comes last, which may or may not be their surname. To get the answer you're looking for, phrase the question like this: "Which is your family name?" This takes some of the ambiguity out of the question.

To further complicate this already confusing issue, in many cultures people carry *two* surnames. Such is the practice among Hispanics — one surname comes from the father and the other from the mother's side of the family. A married Hispanic woman often keeps both surnames, adding her husband's. In general, only one of the names is used in casual conversation, but the full name comes out in business and other formal settings.



When meeting customers from Mexico or Latin America, be prepared to deal with a string of names. Many people from these cultures have a couple of *given names* (what Americans call first and middle names) along with two surnames, such as Juan Jose Martinez Santiago. The first surname (Martinez) comes from the father, while the second (Santiago) comes from the mother. The father's family name is generally the official surname so you'd address the person as Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Martinez. If you're not sure, just ask.

Using the family name first

Americans tend to be relatively informal people who are quick to address one another by first name. Things have become so informal, in fact, that kids are often encouraged to address adults and even teachers by their first name, something that many baby boomers could never have imagined when they were growing up.



In business, the safest option is to start off by putting your formal foot forward. Address everyone as “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” “Ms.,” or their title such as “Doctor” or “Professor,” followed by their family name. Rank and title are especially important to new immigrants. Always address the oldest person in a group first, because age is likely to be highly respected.

Here are some tips on using family names for specific cultures:



- ✓ **A formal greeting is especially crucial for African Americans, who want to be respected from the very first meeting.** In fact, some have been so concerned about this in the past that they’ve given their children first names like King, Queen, or Duke to command respect even when called by the given names.
- ✓ **First names are rarely used in Asian cultures.** In fact, addressing an older Asian by his or her first name could be viewed as highly insulting. This rule is particularly true for older Asian Indian women.
- ✓ **The Japanese are especially formal people who almost never call one another by their given name, even if they’ve known one another for decades.** Instead, they call each other by the last name with the suffix *San* — a respectful, gender-neutral title roughly equivalent to Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Thus, “Yamamoto San” might refer to any person with the surname Yamamoto.
- ✓ **Germans are very formal people who almost never use first names except among friends.** German men and women greet one another with the words *guten tag* and shake hands while maintaining direct eye contact. The handshake is generally very firm with only one “pump.”
- ✓ **The French are fairly formal people and rarely use their first names except among friends.** They greet each other with the word *bonjour*. Men shake hands when greeting one another while maintaining direct eye contact and they greet women with light kisses on the cheeks. Women also greet each other with kisses on the cheeks. The French handshake tends to be fairly soft with many gentle “pumps.”



Wait until the customer asks you to call him by his first name before you get too familiar.

Chapter 10

Investigating Needs and Probing for Buying Signals

In This Chapter

- ▶ Separating serious buyers from looky-loos
 - ▶ Distinguishing between wants and needs
 - ▶ Picking up on obvious buying signals
 - ▶ Identifying more subtle cues
 - ▶ Selling to groups
-

Before you spend a lot of time giving your sales pitch, you want to make sure prospects are serious and qualified to buy. Then you want to know when they're ready to buy.

Unfortunately, most customers never come right out and tell you when they're ready to buy. Their signals tend to be much more subtle than that. In fact, they may not even be aware themselves that they're ready to buy. They may start arguing with you less or arguing with you even more. They may start treating the product as if they already own it — sitting behind the wheel of the car or kicking back in the sectional sofa you just showed them. Perhaps they look to their partner for confirmation. Sound familiar?

As a salesperson, you're probably already pretty adept at sensing when a client is ready to buy something. When you're dealing with multicultural clientele, however, the buying signals can often get crossed and may even lead you to react in a way that blows the sale.

In this chapter, we show you how to separate the lookers from the real buyers and describe the most common buying signals among customers from other cultures. Then we suggest ways to act and respond so you have a better chance to seal the deal.

Gauging a Customer's Initial Interest

Retail salespeople are well aware of this age-old rule: When you look at customers and they immediately look away, they probably don't need or want assistance right now.



Unfortunately, this antiquated rule can cause you to lose sales with your new customers. As you find out in Chapter 8, direct eye contact is quite uncomfortable for people from certain cultures, so even if customers need assistance, they're likely to look away. The only way to know for sure if they need help is to ask them, "What can I help you find today?" This question serves three purposes:

- ✓ It encourages the customer to speak, which can give you an opening to ask more questions.
- ✓ It has a good chance of eliciting a positive response. The customer can't give you a pat answer, such as "No, thanks. I'm just looking."
- ✓ If you don't have what the person is looking for, this question gives you the opportunity to find out what customers expect when they enter your store. Stocking up on what customers are looking for is usually a good idea, as we explain in Chapter 7.



Don't ask the old "May I help you?" because this is likely to generate the usual response across all cultures: "No, thanks. I'm just looking." If your store or business is located in the middle of a mall, perhaps your customers are just looking, but this is a dangerous assumption to make. It's safer to assume that your customers paid a fortune in gas and hunted around for the perfect parking spaces because they're ready to buy something today and they're having trouble finding it.

Are You Serious? Determining Whether a Customer Is Really Motivated to Buy

Not every customer you meet is ready, willing, and able to buy. Some may be window-shoppers or just dreamers. Others may consist of couples who are out on a cheap date or showed up for the free food or the raffle you advertised in the weekend paper. If you have any hopes of being a top producer, you must weed out the serious shopper from the looky-loos so you don't waste enormous amounts of time and energy on people who have no intention of buying something.



Regardless of culture, truly motivated customers exhibit the following three attributes:

- ✔ **They need to buy.** How badly do they need to buy what you're selling? Keep in mind that "need" is relative. A couple who just bought lake-front property may not really *need* a boat, but they *think* they need a boat, and that's what matters. Likewise, buying a new car every year or owning a Rolls Royce is a necessity for some people.
- ✔ **They're able to buy.** Can the customers afford what you're selling or at least afford to finance the purchase and make the payments? We assume you're in sales for the long haul, and that means doing what's best for your customers. Selling them a house, a car, or a timeshare that has them clipping coupons at the end of the month to make ends meet is not what's best for your customers. They'll remember if you do them a disservice, and they'll never buy from you again. Moreover, they'll bad-mouth you to everyone they know, leading to lost business. If the customer can't afford what you're selling, refer her to a more affordable alternative or even a competitor.
- ✔ **They have a deadline to make the purchase.** Most serious shoppers have a definite deadline by which they're going to purchase. Without this target date in their crosshairs, they have no reason to stop shopping for a better deal. Sometimes you can create a deadline for the customer by pointing out the benefits, for example, of making the purchase by the end of the tax year or the beginning of the school year.



If customers aren't serious, refer them to your best competition and move along to the next customer who's sending strong buying signals. Customers who aren't ready to buy carry a double whammy — not only are they highly unlikely to buy something, but they also keep you from selling to someone who wants to buy what you have to offer.

Separating Wants from Needs

If price were no object, everyone would take the top-of-the-line product or service you offer. In reality, people can afford different price ranges, and they really appreciate getting maximum value for what they pay. This is where separating wants from needs comes in.

There's an old saying in sales that, "Buyers are liars." In reality, the reason your prospects may tell you they want your product or service and then turn around and purchase something totally different is because salespeople are often lousy listeners. Customers may think they know what they want, but you have to pick up on the subtle signals they use to express what they really need, which is often quite different from what they tell you.

This form of confusion is particularly common among new immigrant consumers, because they may not be used to the dazzling array of choices we often have in the United States. Walk into a cellular telephone store and

imagine yourself coming from a country where phones are still black, feature a rotary dial, and are attached to the wall. You can see how your customer's focus can become blurred.

To assist your customers in determining what they really want (and need), you need to ask more than you answer, listen more than you speak, and avoid any temptation to make assumptions, as discussed in the following sections.



What's the best method for separating wants from needs? Ask questions if the person comes from a culture that's more verbal; create a list if the person comes from a culture that's more visual. (See Chapter 11 for information on determining the learning style of a particular culture.)

Warming up with a few questions

To identify your customers' wants and needs, ask questions, as you do with any customer. Start with the basics as we explain earlier in this chapter, such as "What can I help you with today?" or "What problem can I help you solve?" The customers' answers tell you what they think they want.

As soon as you know what they *want*, follow up with additional questions to determine what they really *need*. To do so, begin with questions such as the following:

- ✓ Have you bought one of these before? (Don't assume. For example, in 2006 enough cars were available for 84 percent of all Americans, driving age or not, whereas China had enough cars for fewer than 2 percent of its people.)
- ✓ What was your experience with it?
- ✓ Have you used this service previously? (Again, don't assume, especially in the case of new immigrants.)
- ✓ What was your experience?
- ✓ Who in your family would use this the most? (In collectivist cultures, the person buying the item may not be the main decision maker.)
- ✓ How would she use it?
- ✓ What's your deadline for making a decision?

When you begin to ask more targeted questions to assess the customer's needs and lead them through the purchase decision process, ask open-ended questions to get them talking, and then follow up with close-ended questions that help them narrow their choices. The more specific responses to close-ended questions help lead them into making a commitment. In the following sections, we cover open-ended and close-ended (yes/no) questions in greater detail.

Work it!

Most of your traditional customers are likely to have a firm grasp of what they're looking for and can easily describe it to you. Customers from other cultures, however, especially those for whom English is a second language, may not be familiar with the products and services available in the United States and may be less able to express what they want in words.

In short, you're going to give your multicultural clientele more assistance in selecting products and services. One of the best ways you can assist customers is by helping them distinguish between what they need and what they want

so they can make a well-informed purchasing decision. This is especially important if you're selling big-ticket items and need to put together a package that fits your customer's budget.

In short, you need to "work it" — work harder to make a sale. Rest assured, however, that the more customers you close, the easier each subsequent transaction is going to become. As you build a reputation as the multicultural-friendly merchant or service provider, you can expect to see a growing stream of more eager and trusting patrons.



Unless you want a lot of returns and dissatisfied customers, you must uncover what the customer needs, so ask questions before you start trying to sell your products or services.

Asking open-ended questions

Open-ended questions probe the listener for an answer by asking why, how, or "Tell me about . . .". They get the customer talking and give you an opportunity to gather information, qualify sales opportunities, and build trust.



Asking a bunch of yes/no questions (*close-ended questions*; see the next section) too soon not only shuts down the conversation with customers from other cultures, but it can also evoke some misleading responses. In many cultures, for example, customers nod incessantly during a conversation, giving the impression that they're agreeing with you when, in fact, they're simply signaling that they hear you and are listening.

To determine the difference between agreement and mere acknowledgment, be proactive by asking open-ended questions. This gently forces the listener to answer your questions with more than a "yes," "no," or other short response. Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

- ✓ What do you think about this model?
- ✓ How do you feel this compares with the other one?
- ✓ What else would you use this for?
- ✓ If we added this accessory, how would it affect your decision?

- ✔ If we take this away, how would it affect your decision?
- ✔ How do you think this works?
- ✔ How did you . . . ?
- ✔ How could you . . . ?
- ✔ How else could you do that?
- ✔ What's similar about these?
- ✔ In what ways are these different for you?
- ✔ What can you tell me about your needs?
- ✔ Tell me about what else you need.
- ✔ How do you think we could . . . ?



Make sure your open-ended questions ask about matters of opinion rather than facts or knowledge so you don't put your customer on the defensive. Questions should be about what the person thinks or feels — questions that have no right or wrong answer.



People from some cultures, such as Filipinos and folks from other highly educated countries, don't particularly like to ask or be asked questions. Consequently, for them to ask too many questions may make them appear dumb. Therefore, you should check their understanding about loans, financial terms, or other issues by being a proactive listener and giving them an opportunity to offer you the information you need.

Asking close-ended questions

Close-ended questions usually start with verbs, such as “are,” “will,” “is,” “have,” and “did.” These types of questions are often called *convergent questions* because they're designed to bring a conversation gradually to a decision point. The customer can answer these questions with a “yes,” “no,” an amount, such as price they would pay or how soon they want it delivered, or a similar short answer.

Smart salespeople ask open-ended questions to obtain information and then follow up with close-ended questions to close the deal. After they have discovered their client's needs, they narrow the choices by asking close-ended questions such as:

- ✔ Does this make sense to you, so far?
- ✔ Is this the sort of thing you're looking for?
- ✔ Is this the model you want?
- ✔ What color would you prefer?
- ✔ Is there anything else you need to go with this?

- ✓ Will you pay cash or use a credit card?
- ✓ Did you want to take it with you or would you prefer having it delivered?

Listing your client's wants and needs

To assist customers in separating wants and needs, take out a blank sheet of paper and draw a vertical line right down the middle. Ask your client to list in the left column everything she wants from the product or service you offer. This becomes the client's Wants list, so encourage her to dream.

For example, say you're working with a couple who are in the market for a home. Here are some of the amenities they may list:

- ✓ 4 bedrooms
- ✓ 3 baths
- ✓ Family room
- ✓ Formal dining room
- ✓ Gourmet kitchen
- ✓ Fireplace
- ✓ Swimming pool
- ✓ Ocean view
- ✓ Walking distance to a highly rated elementary school

After your clients have completed their wish list, have them review the list and place a checkmark next to each item they consider a necessity. You can put it like this: "If I could find you the perfect home (or car or flat-screen TV or stereo system or whatever) but it didn't have this item, would you still buy it?" If the person says no, then the item gets a checkmark.

They might say, for example, that they absolutely need a three-bedroom, two-bath home with a formal dining room, kitchen, and family room, but the fireplace, swimming pool, and ocean view are extras they could live without. Or, perhaps they could upgrade a basic kitchen to a gourmet kitchen later and could accept a home within a 15-minute drive to a good school.

Now on the right-hand side of your paper, copy all the items that have checkmarks next to them. This becomes your Needs list, which now looks something like this:

- ✓ 3 bedrooms
- ✓ 2 baths

- ✓ Family room
- ✓ Formal dining room
- ✓ Serviceable kitchen
- ✓ Driving distance to a highly rated elementary school



Notice that this is a very different house than the one described in the Wants list. As salespeople, we tend to do too much talking and not enough listening. By leading your customers through this exercise, you know which products or services to consider right from the start.

You should go through this process whether you're selling microwaves, flat-screen televisions, cars, or anything else. This exercise not only tells the customer that you care about her but also helps her make a better decision. Demonstrating this level of concern is particularly important when dealing with people who may not be completely familiar with your product or service or the English language.



After you've separated your customer's wants from her needs, determine how many of her needs your product or service can meet. Obviously, the more needs you can meet, the more motivated your customers will be to buy what you're selling. If your products and services can meet few or none of her needs, you may have to refer her to a different supplier and move on to another customer.

Avoiding the temptation to assume

As you lead your clients through the process of creating their Wants and Needs lists, don't let your own preferences or assumptions influence them. When I (Michael) ask most real estate agents whether a swimming pool is a want or need, for example, almost everyone responds immediately with "want." Then I ask, "What if the client has a child with disabilities whose only form of physical exercise is swimming? Now is the same swimming pool a want or a need?" Of course, now everyone says, "Need."



The only way you can know whether a particular item is a want or need for a particular customer is to ask the right question. As noted in the preceding section, one of the most effective questions to separate wants from needs is, "If this had everything you wanted except this one item, would you still buy it?" If the answer is, "Yes, I'd buy it," then the item is a want. If the answer is, "No, I couldn't live without that," then it's a need.

Detecting Obvious Buying Signals

You can usually tell when customers are ready to make a purchase decision by the questions they ask and the answers they give to your inquiries. Early in your sales presentation, they tend to ask general questions, if they ask any questions at all. They're usually too busy answering your questions at this stage to ask their own questions. At this point, you're merely gathering information about your customers to assess their needs and figure out which products and services would be most suitable. (See Chapter 11 for more about giving your sales presentation.)

After you present your product(s) or service(s), it's your customer's turn to ask questions. If the person isn't interested, he's likely to ask few questions or begin looking for the exits. Serious buyers start asking discerning questions about your product or service or about you or your company — for example, whether the product is offered in different colors or whether it includes a warranty.

In the following sections, we reveal the types of questions customers are likely to ask after your sales presentation and provide strategies for fielding these questions without losing your composure.

Fielding questions from low- and high-context buyers

Multicultural customers who are interested in making a purchase usually ask at least a few questions, but these questions are often much different from the questions you're probably accustomed to answering. If you don't know what to expect, you may be taken off guard or misinterpret a customer's question as a sign that they're not really interested.

Questions generally differ depending on whether your customer has been raised in a low- or high-context culture (see Chapters 3 and 9 for more about these types of cultures). In the following sections, we point out the most common differences and give some examples of the questions you're likely to encounter.

Low-context buyers

Customers from low-context cultures tend to care more about the deal than about you, your company, or any other peripheral matters. They're buying a product or service and they want to know all about it, how much it's going to cost, their options for making payments, and how and when they can expect delivery.



Normally, you'll know that low-context customers, including Caucasians and African Americans, are ready to buy when they ask questions such as:

- ✓ Does this come in any other styles or colors?
- ✓ How much extra do you charge for . . . ?
- ✓ For how long would I normally need your services?
- ✓ Is financing available?
- ✓ What kind of discount is available?
- ✓ When can we start (or take delivery)?
- ✓ Is a warranty or guarantee available?
- ✓ Can I exchange this for something else later?

High-context buyers

Before customers from high-context cultures can feel comfortable buying from you, they typically need to know that they can trust you and the company you represent. They're probably going to be less concerned about details concerning the product and the deal itself and more concerned about you, your company, your family, and your commitment to their family and community.



People from high-context cultures, including Hispanics, Middle Easterners, and most Asians, are more likely to ask questions such as these:

- ✓ How long have you worked here?
- ✓ Do you have any children?
- ✓ Are you married?
- ✓ Who owns this store?
- ✓ How long has this company been in business?
- ✓ Have you solved problems like the one I'm currently experiencing?



Some of these questions may seem intrusive and overly personal, but people from high-context cultures want to build a relationship with you and your company. They're concerned not only about this deal but also want to know that they can count on you in the future. They're planning to do business with whomever they buy from for a long period of time. These questions tell you that they're interested in getting to know you better and move ahead with a purchase. Notice that they are less concerned about warranties or guarantees because their trust in you is all the protection they need.

Answering the same question over and over again

Multicultural customers, whether they come from low- or high-context backgrounds, often ask the same question over and over again. Rarely is this a sign that they're not paying attention or that they can't understand what you're saying. More likely, they're testing to see whether you're going to change your answer. They want to know whether you waffle or are a straight shooter.



You can reword your answer slightly, but remain consistent. If you change answers, you'll come across as someone who can't be trusted. You can relax when answering, however, because when your customers are asking the same question, perhaps adjusting the wording only slightly, they're giving you a clear sign that they're interested in buying whatever you're selling.

Dealing with scary questions without losing your composure

Customers from diverse cultures can often ask some of the scariest questions. Real estate agents, for example, can go into shock when clients of different ethnicities ask a question like, "Do other people like us live here?" With that simple question the clients call attention to the fact that they're different — a topic that the agent was probably trying to avoid at all costs. Even worse, agents are so afraid of violating fair housing laws that they can't even think of a safe answer to give.

While all of this confusion is swirling around in the agent's mind, he usually overlooks the fact that this question is a *huge* buying sign. Why would potential home buyers ask about the composition of the neighborhood unless they're thinking about buying a home there? They want to buy. They want to live there. Just one little thing could perhaps get in the way — they don't want to be the only family of a particular ethnicity on the block. They don't want to be the targets of discrimination.

In retail settings, a multicultural customer may ask if you see many people from their culture or country buying your product. It's usually asked in a lighthearted manner, but don't be fooled — they're deadly serious.

For service providers, a minority prospect may ask a hair stylist, for instance, if she cuts African American hair, or ask you whether you have many Asian or Hispanic clients. The prospective customer may even go to the trouble of sitting outside your place of business to observe the ethnicities of people who go in and out.



When customers start asking direct and very specific questions, they're sending signals that they're ready to buy, even if the questions frighten you. Realize that these questions need to be answered, but *you* don't have to be the one answering them. Point your clients to appropriate sources to answer their questions, such as the chamber of commerce or the reference desk at the local library, and then get them to make the purchase! Otherwise, you're going to be so preoccupied with the questions that you're going to forget to ask for the order.

Tuning In to Subtle Buying Signals

You've probably been trained to look for nonverbal buying signs. Increased enthusiasm and a less defensive posture (uncrossing arms and legs, increased eye contact) are usually dead giveaways that a customer is ready to buy. Unfortunately, customers from other cultures may exhibit few if any of the traditional buying signs you expect to see. Asians, for example, are notorious for remaining completely poker faced, even when shopping for big-ticket items, such as cars and houses.

Fearful of appearing ignorant, many multicultural customers won't even ask questions. Careful not to disturb the good energy around them, they hide their emotions. Even more intimidating, your customers may wander off to a quiet corner and start discussing the deal among themselves in their native tongue.

How can you possibly spot a buying signal when your customers don't appear to be giving off any signals? The truth is that customers from every culture express their intent to make a purchase. It's just that some express their intent more subtly than others. In the following sections, we encourage you to avoid drawing hasty conclusions and show you what to look for so you can become more sensitive to these subtle cues.

Shedding the false assumption that multicultural customers are "looky-loos"

Real estate professionals have a special name for people who drop by open houses on Sunday afternoons with no intention of buying. We call them *looky-loos* — perennial shoppers. Sometimes they want to see how the neighbors decorate their house, find out how much a home like theirs is selling for, or see what it feels like to be inside a \$10 million mansion. They have no plans to buy or sell in the near future. They're just killing time — theirs and yours. In fact, the higher the price or more unique your product or service is, the more looky-loos you're likely to attract. This is why million-dollar homes are usually available to tour by appointment only.

In other industries, many salespeople see customers from other cultures visit their place of business over and over without buying anything. For instance, in car sales these people are called “tire kickers.” It’s easy to jump to the conclusion that these customers are also looky-loos, but nothing could be further from the truth. Multicultural buyers don’t have time to waste window-shopping or visiting your store or office just to pick your brain. These folks commonly work 60 to 80 hours a week and often feel guilty about not being able to spend enough time with their families. When people from diverse cultures repeatedly visit without buying, it’s not only a definite buying sign but a warning sign as well. The warning is that if you don’t figure out how to sell something to them, you’re going to lose an excellent prospect.



If culturally diverse shoppers repeatedly visit your establishment, they want to do business with you. If they leave empty-handed, you’re probably not doing something to make them feel comfortable enough to buy, or you’re not offering the products or services they’re looking for (or making them easy enough to find).



Talk to your advisory board members, as explained in Chapter 2, about this situation and see what they suggest. You may ask a few of them to come in and act as customers to see why multicultural customers are shopping but not buying. When customers visit again and again, they’re signaling a willingness to buy. You must close the sale, as discussed in Chapter 12.

Giving your clients the okay to speak their own language

Ask any sales professional about the one thing that new immigrant customers do that really makes them mad, and they’ll tell you it’s when they go off in a corner and speak to one another in their own language. Most of us think that this kind of behavior is just plain rude, or we assume that our customers are talking about us.

Nothing could be further from the truth. What’s really occurring is that the customers are becoming emotionally involved in the purchase decision, and all salespeople know that emotions sell — people buy on emotion and justify with reason. Most people who speak a second language can reason in that language and deal with facts and figures, but when it comes to expressing emotion, they tend to shift to their native tongue. When discussing complex or emotional issues, it’s natural for a person to revert to the language that he grew up speaking rather than the one he learned in a class.

You may not consider wandering to a distant corner to speak in a foreign language as being a *subtle* signal that your customer is ready to buy; we include it here because it’s a strong buying signal that most salespeople never pick up on. In the following sections, we provide some explanation for this common phenomenon and show you how to use it to your advantage.

Grasping the concept of code switching

Many bilingual people engage in *code switching* — changing between their native tongue and English without even being aware that they’re doing this. This sometimes gives rise to a third language, which is a combination of their mother tongue and English. People who are bilingual in Spanish and English often jokingly refer to their third language as *Spanglish*, while Hawaiians call theirs *Pidgin*. Filipinos who speak Tagalog call their combination *Taglish*, and there are others around the world.



Sometime bilingual people deliberately use their mastery of two languages to gain some privacy. Although this may seem somewhat deceptive, it’s actually a positive sign. Think about the kinds of issues customers may want to talk about in private such as, “Do you think we can afford this?” and “Do you think they might take less than the retail price?” The problem is that the salesperson won’t leave them alone, so they have to resort to speaking a language they know she won’t understand. Recognize that this is still a buying sign.

Providing some space

It’s important to let customers know that they’re free to speak to one another in their own language without offending you. As soon as your customers know that you’re okay with it, you and they will be able to communicate more openly with each other. Your customers are going to breathe a big sigh of relief, too — having to constantly speak in a foreign language, particularly English, can be very stressful.

As an added bonus, you’ll find that your customers are better able to frame their questions when they can figure out what they want to ask in their own language before translating it into your language.



Give customers some space when they start speaking a language you don’t understand by making an excuse to leave the room. This enables them to talk freely without worrying about offending you. Studies show that the longer customers discuss a purchase, the more likely they are to buy it.

Dropping your defenses

Becoming defensive when customers start speaking their own language is perfectly natural, but it can sink your chances of closing the sale. You could make false assumptions that the customers aren’t interested. You may become a little self-conscious or standoffish without realizing it.



Instead of feeling suspicious or offended when customers start speaking to one another in their native language, celebrate the fact that your customers are ready to buy — this is a huge buying sign. After all, why would people talk, in any language, about a product or service they’re not interested in buying? If they were truly not interested, they’d simply leave. When your customers start talking among themselves in their language, be prepared to close. (Flip to Chapter 12 for more on closing sales with multicultural customers.)

Dealing Effectively with Group Dynamics

People in individualistic cultures, such as the United States, tend to be lone rangers when making purchase decisions. We don't generally consult with Grandpa or Auntie Ann when we get ready to purchase a washer and dryer or even a car. The closest we come to group purchases is when a couple buys a home.

So when an entire family arrives to test-drive a car and everyone and their uncle seems to be involved in the purchase decision, most salespeople get a little shaken. They can't begin to guess which person is the decision maker or to whom they should be talking.

Rarely do customers from collectivist cultures (such as those in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and India) make the final decision for a major purchase alone. They usually bring along a spouse or significant other as well as other family members, including parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, and even friends, for emotional and sometimes financial support. This is especially true when they're buying big-ticket items. So when multicultural buyers bring a group of people, it's a definite buying sign.



The general rule of thumb for these buyers is that the larger the purchase price, the more people who will be involved in the decision.

In the following sections, we show you what to expect so you won't be thrown for a loop, and then we give you clues to look for to identify the decision maker. Finally, we remind you (yes, again) not to oversell.

Becoming comfortable with groups

Perhaps the biggest change you need to make when dealing with groups is a change in attitude. When you're accustomed to selling to one or two people, selling to a group can be a culture shock, and if you feel unsettled, your customers can certainly tell.



When multicultural customers arrive en masse, don't jump to the conclusion that they're ganging up on you. The fact that so many people have gathered is a great buying sign. Your customer would never have gone to the trouble of organizing such a field trip if she wasn't serious about making a purchase. No one wants to be embarrassed in front of her peers by walking away without whatever it is she came for. Instead of being intimidated by a group of people, be thankful!



Simply being aware that group shopping trips are standard operating procedure in some cultures can make you a little more comfortable with selling to groups. Greeting everyone in the group, as suggested in Chapter 8, is another way to put everyone, including yourself, at ease. You'll then know everyone in the group and have an idea of how they're all related. In the following section, we show you how to figure out who's really in charge of the decision, which is probably your biggest concern when dealing with more than one buyer.

Identifying the decision maker

When hoards of buyers descend on you, your first question is often "Who's the decision maker?" and it can be difficult to answer. You want to pitch your product to the person or people who are most likely responsible for giving the thumbs up or thumbs down. With most of your customers, you can safely assume that the decision maker is the person who's going to be using the product or service the most or the person who's paying for it. When you're selling to a group from a collectivist culture, however, these assumptions can be totally wrong.



The best approach to discovering who's the decision maker is based on the advice we offer throughout this book — stop assuming and let the customer give you the necessary information. To identify the decision maker, ask the group a closing question early in your presentation and watch how everyone reacts (this works in all cultures).

If you're selling a home, for example, you can ask, "When would you like to move in?" If you're selling a car, you may ask, "What color would you prefer?" You can ask a jewelry customer, "Would you prefer silver or platinum?" Ask the question and then remain silent.

Initially, everyone in the group is going to look at one another, but then all eyes will turn toward the decision maker to deliver the answer. The person everyone is looking at is your decision maker. If you can successfully sell her, the deal's in the bag.

Chapter 11

Adapting Your Sales Presentation and Techniques

In This Chapter

- ▶ Grasping the basic concepts that drive effective sales presentations
 - ▶ Communicating in ways that cross-cultural customers can understand
 - ▶ Working with interpreters
 - ▶ Earning your credibility badge
 - ▶ Formulating some creative financing options
-

Mediocre salespeople think that selling is a universal language in itself. They believe you can apply the same sales techniques and be equally effective no matter where you're selling and to whom. In fact, you'll often hear them boast, "I just treat everyone the same."

Top salespeople know that this is simply not true. Just as you may need to adjust your approach because of a customer's age or gender, you also have to adjust for cultural differences, and the more complex the relationship, the greater the adjustments you need to make. In this chapter, we explain why adapting your sales presentation is so important and then reveal several ways you can change your sales presentation and techniques to make your products, your services, and yourself more appealing to clients from other cultures.



You don't need to scrap your entire sales presentation and start all over. You just have to tweak it a bit so customers with different cultural backgrounds can relate better to it. You also need to consider the differences in generations and levels of acculturation, as discussed in Chapter 9.

Setting the Stage for Change

If you want more business from people from diverse cultures, you must customize your sales presentation to meet their unique needs. You can't take a system that's been effective in selling to your established clientele, no matter their ethnicity, and expect to use it with other cultures — it just won't work, particularly if your sales approach focuses too much on razzle-dazzle and not enough on the fundamentals.

In the following sections, we help you refocus your efforts on becoming a genuine salesperson — one who is customer focused rather than profit oriented.

Credibility sells

Customers buy from people they trust. This is true no matter what you're selling or to whom, but it's even more important when selling to people from other cultures. To foster this trust, adhere to the following guidelines:

- ✔ **You know everything there is to know about the products and services you're selling.** See the later section, "Establishing yourself as the expert," for more on this idea.
- ✔ **You believe in what you're selling.** Most customers can pick up on the subtext of a sales presentation that merely pitches a product to earn a buck. If you don't believe in what you're selling, sell something else.
- ✔ **Your message is consistent.** Any inconsistency is likely to be interpreted as a lie and kill the sale. Moreover, customers need to hear the same message not only from you, but also from everyone else in your company.

For more about how to become a more credible source of information, products, and services, skip ahead to "Boosting Your Street Cred," later in this chapter.



American consumers in general mistrust salespeople because of the misdeeds performed by a few who never should have gotten into the profession. Imagine how much more hesitant a consumer from another country may be to make a purchase because of their lack of familiarity with American contracts, financing, laws, and other aspects of the sale.

Making a case for change

Salespeople often ask, “Do all sales presentations need to be customized?” Our answer is this: “Only if you want people to buy from you.” Attendees at our seminars often cite simple order-taking transactions, such as buying a pair of socks at a department store, as an example. “Why should a clerk care about someone’s culture when all they have to do is collect the money and make change?”

We always respond by saying, “You can buy a pair of socks at a drug store or at Nordstrom’s, but which sale has the higher profit margin and better rate of return?”

Yes, the less complex the transaction, the less you need to be culturally competent. However, if you want to build a long-term relationship and repeat business, you must provide value by educating your customers, and that takes time.

Sales awards don’t matter

Most salespeople in the United States proudly display sales awards on their office walls to demonstrate their success and expertise. If you want to build credibility with people from diverse cultures, put away the awards. Customers from other cultures, as well as many natural-born Americans, put little stock in your sales volume. They don’t care how many sales you’ve done; they just care about one — theirs.



Replace your sales awards with diplomas and certifications and photographs of your spouse, your children, and your friends. People from other cultures generally care more about your family and your education than the number of deals you’ve made.

Don’t sell — educate

Consumers are much more savvy these days, so gimmicks and slick sales pitches rarely work. Regardless of culture, customers usually need two things:

- ✓ They need to feel as though they’re working with someone they can trust.
- ✓ They need to feel as though they understand the product or service and the deal they’re getting themselves into. In other words, they need you to educate them.



The secret to making a sale is no secret, especially for new immigrants. They're even more likely than the general population to be unfamiliar with your products and services, so take them slowly through every step of the process. Studies show that the more knowledgeable a customer is about a product or service, the more they trust their salesperson.

Here's a typical example: Many people could never hope to own a home in their country of origin, but in the United States, the dream of homeownership is well within their reach. Obtaining loan approval may not be an obstacle for them. What's more likely to stand in their way is a lack of understanding of American construction techniques, contracts, escrows, and mortgages. Bring them up to speed on these concepts, and you can watch their trust and appreciation grow. (For more about educating your customers, check out "Getting up to speed on the four learning styles," later in this chapter.)

Brushing Up on Cross-Cultural Communication Styles

Although language is certainly the biggest barrier to clear communication, other barriers exist in how people of different cultures receive and process information and express their thoughts. So even if your multicultural customers speak English, you still may need to make some adjustments for differences in communication styles.

In the following sections, we provide brief descriptions of the different communication and learning styles, show you how to overcome these differences, and offer a couple of exercises for honing your skills.

Sizing up the differences between direct and indirect communicators

You already have some no-nonsense customers — people who get right to the point and always speak their mind. These are your *direct communicators*. At the other extreme are customers who are so afraid of disappointing you that they do everything possible to avoid conflict — perhaps even giving you mixed signals rather than saying no. These are your *indirect communicators*. Most people fall somewhere in between — using one communication style or the other depending on the situation — but they tend to show a preference for direct or indirect communications.

People from direct cultures tend to believe that speaking one's mind and being straightforward conveys honesty and integrity, whereas those from indirect cultures may interpret this approach as being rude or confrontational. They prefer avoiding conflict and are careful not to hurt another's feelings. People from direct cultures may perceive this as being wishy-washy and a waste of their time.

Everyone's different, and each situation is unique, but the following sections describe tendencies in various cultures that can help you adapt more quickly to a certain culture's preference.

Identifying direct communication cultures

Plenty of people in the United States prefer a direct approach. You can also find them in England, Germany, Israel, and Scandinavia — other low-context cultures (see Chapter 3 for details about low- and high-context cultures). In these countries, you commonly hear expressions such as “Don't beat around the bush,” “Get to the point,” and “First things first.” Established American salespeople and business owners already know how to do business with direct communicators because it's the preferred style here.



Direct cultures rely on the literal and precise meaning of the words they use. They prefer explicit conversations where words convey most or all of the message. People with this preference prefer written communication because they don't need or appreciate the subtleties of nonverbal communication. They tend to deal with conflict head-on and trust that further discussion will resolve any conflict. Direct communicators believe that the best way to reduce tension is to say what needs to be said now rather than later.

Identifying indirect communication cultures

High-context cultures such as those in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, or South Europe value a more indirect communication style. They combine verbal and nonverbal messages to convey meaning. Listeners need to read between the lines and pick up on nonverbal nuances — what we in the United States may refer to as “dropping a hint.”

This is not to say that Americans never engage in indirect communications. For instance, when a woman here asks her significant other whether he'd like to watch the movie *Sex in the City* with her for the 15th time, her partner would be wise to be very indirect with his answer. In business, however, a direct approach is almost always preferred in the U.S.



In high-context cultures (in which indirect communication is preferred), much of the meaning comes from what isn't said. Keep reading to find out how to determine the meaning of nonverbal cues.

Tuning in to contextual clues

When conversing with individuals from high-context cultures, be aware not only of the *text* (what they say) but also the *context* (how they say it, who's saying it, where you are, what's currently happening, everything that happened up to this point, and what's likely to happen next). Be prepared to make the following adjustments:

- ✔ **Listen closely to both what the person says and how she says it.** Tune in to the feelings behind the words.
- ✔ **Note who's talking.** The status of the person who's talking (boss versus subordinate, for example) and your status can heavily influence the meaning and significance of the words. High-context people may respond differently to a manager than to a salesperson who says the same thing.
- ✔ **Observe the person's body language carefully and try to pick up on gestures and nonverbal signals.** If a customer appears to be listening to you but has a frown or questioning look on her face, it may mean she disagrees with you or doesn't understand what you're saying. (Flip to Chapter 8 for more information on interpreting gestures and body language.)
- ✔ **Become as familiar as possible with the customers' culture.** This allows you to be sensitive to how the physical setting, relational cues, or shared understandings affect meaning. (Chapter 4 provides tips on developing cross-cultural competency.)
- ✔ **Look for hidden meanings in comparisons or analogies.** People from high-context cultures often use analogies to discuss an issue without directly referring to the actual parties or situation. This is like a patient in a psychiatrist's office who says, "I have a friend . . ." when she's really talking about herself.
- ✔ **Lean toward saying less.** Less is said, more is implied in high-context cultures. See the section "Leveraging the power of silence," later in this chapter for details.
- ✔ **Avoid conflict.** In a culture that communicates indirectly, mentioning a sensitive issue or directly disagreeing with another person is considered insensitive and insulting. Your goal is to maintain harmony with your customers. If your customer disagrees with you, she'll tend to handle it in a way to cause the least tension and avoid embarrassment to others.



Become an active listener, listening with your ears, eyes, and mind. Focus not only on the text, but also the context, emotions, and gestures.

Practicing how to find the meaning in what isn't said

You probably have well-honed indirect communications skills when it comes to dealing with an intimate romantic partner, close family members, or best friends. You communicate more nonverbally than you probably realize because you're so "in tune" with the other person.

The challenge is to achieve this high level of intuitive interplay with total strangers. You must be able to make accurate inferences from clues that your customers provide. This game can drive uninitiated Americans crazy.



To improve your indirect communications skills, practice the following exercise with a partner:

1. Write the names of famous Americans of different nationalities on small pieces of paper.
2. Tape one of the names on your partner's forehead so you can see the name, but she can't.
3. Have your partner tape one of the names on your forehead so your partner can see the name but you can't.
4. Have your partner try to guess the name taped to her forehead by asking you a series of yes/no questions about the person, such as "Am I a woman?" "Am I alive today?" "Am I a politician?" and so on. (Your partner can keep asking questions as long as you keep answering yes. If she guesses incorrectly, then it's your turn to ask a question.)

The person who successfully guesses the name on his or her own forehead first wins.

What you discover from this exercise is that you can deduce a great deal of information merely by asking questions and then following the contextual clues to the correct answer. This is very similar to how people in indirect cultures communicate on a daily basis, except they require far fewer questions because they already have a shared knowledge of many of the answers. It would be like starting the game knowing that all of the names will be of famous Black women who are alive today. This sure makes the answers easier to guess, but now the game isn't as much fun.

Reading your cross-cultural customers' nonverbal cues

If you've been in sales for a while, you've probably attended a seminar or read up on nonverbal communication. You're already well aware that you communicate a great deal with customers nonverbally through gestures, body language, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact or lack thereof.

When communicating with multicultural customers, the nonverbal cues you've used for years can convey quite different meanings than you intend. Here are just a few of differences and similarities:

- ✔ When most of your American customers cross their arms during a sales presentation, they're often on the defensive or disagreeing with what you're saying. When multicultural buyers cross their arms, they're usually just assuming a comfortable posture; don't read too much into it unless you're picking up some other negative vibes as well.
- ✔ Placing a hand over the mouth in the United States usually is a sign that a patron is doubtful or unsure of what they're hearing. This is generally similar in other cultures.
- ✔ When American customers lean closer to you, they're usually showing that they agree with or accept what you're saying. Some cultures, however, are much more formal than Americans and may not close the personal space for any reason, even if they agree.
- ✔ When most U.S. customers laugh nervously, they're usually avoiding the truth. In other cultures, nervous laughter usually indicates that the buyer is embarrassed or unsure about a decision; it may have nothing to do with being insincere.
- ✔ Direct eye contact is generally interpreted as a sign of honesty in the U.S., while averted eyes indicate lying or disinterest. In many cultures, however, looking away is simply a sign of respect and has nothing to do with whether the client is avoiding you or lying to you.
- ✔ Almost universally, customers' pupils expand when they hear something they like and contract when they hear something they don't like.
- ✔ Nodding in the United States usually conveys agreement. In many other cultures, however, nodding simply shows that the customer is paying attention.
- ✔ When customers in the U.S. wince uncontrollably at a proposal, this usually means they're shocked or dismayed. As we point out in Chapter 13, however, flinches from new immigrants are rarely uncontrolled or unintended and are an integral part of their negotiating technique.

Getting up to speed on the four learning styles

Every salesperson has a little teacher in them, and that includes you. You have to teach your customers about your products and services, of course, but you may also need to educate them about contracts, financing, payment plans, warranties, and other components of the purchase process. With multicultural customers, many of whom may be completely unaware of how things work in the United States, education becomes an even more crucial

aspect of making a sale and winning a customer for life. Sharing information builds trust and confidence in your abilities, knowledge, and motives. An educated customer is an appreciative customer.

To be an effective educator, recognize that not everyone learns the same way, and culture can affect the way people absorb information. People from some cultures are more adept at processing verbal descriptions and instructions, for example, whereas others gain a deeper understanding through visuals.

In the following sections, we introduce you to the four learning styles and provide guidance on how to develop a sales presentation that's effective for people who favor different learning styles.

Auditory-verbal

In the United States, most sales presentations are delivered verbally — the salesperson talks to the customer, and the customer listens passively (hence the term *auditory-verbal*). This is fine for people who've been raised in an education system where this is the norm — typically low-context cultures, including the United States, Canada, and most of Western Europe. However, studies show that only 30 percent of all audiences favor the auditory-verbal learning style, which leaves 70 percent who prefer obtaining information through other methods.

Kinesthetic (hands-on)

Experiential education (also called *kinesthetic learning*) is becoming more and more popular in the United States and for good reason — about 30 percent of people learn best by doing. Customers can also be hands-on learners. They may not completely grasp the benefits of your product or service until they try it for themselves.



Research shows that Hispanics tend to be highly kinesthetic and visual-nonverbal learners (see the upcoming section). According to at least one study, Hispanics tend to prefer hands-on learning in structured group activities and the use of drawings and illustrations over listening or reading.

Visual-verbal

Visual-verbal learners, who make up about 20 percent of the population, need to see everything in black and white or, preferably, in color. Instead of listening to you drone on and on about your product, they'd rather read about it themselves in brochures, manuals, and white papers. People in Australia are very visual-verbal.

Visual-nonverbal

The final 20 percent of people are *visual-nonverbal learners* who learn best when information is presented in a graphical format, such as charts, graphs, photos, illustrations, and videos. They love diagrams and can assemble almost anything by just referring to the picture on the front of the box.

Which learning style are you?

Although we all employ a combination of learning styles, most of us tend to prefer one over the others. For instance:

- ✓ If you love listening to lectures or books on CD, you're probably auditory-verbal.
- ✓ If you'd rather try out a product before hearing or reading anything about it, you're likely more kinesthetic.
- ✓ If you love reading for pleasure, it's almost a sure bet that you're a visual-verbal learner.

- ✓ If you're a proficient map reader, you probably prefer visual-nonverbal information.

If you would like a more complete analysis of your learning style, visit www.metamath.com/lswweb/dvcllearn.htm.

Problems arise when you assume that everyone prefers and learns more effectively by employing the learning style that's most effective for you. Your sales presentation is going to be much more effective when you realize that different people have different learning styles and you can identify which style is best for the customer you're currently serving.



Asians tend to be much more visual-nonverbal because many of the Asian languages are based on pictures. According to a 1991 study that focused on the relationship between international college students' learning styles and their academic achievement, "They (Asians) tend not to perform well when the primary mode of instruction is verbal." Anyone who's sold products or services in Asia knows that salespeople have to change to a much more visual mode of presentation when selling in this part of the world.

Developing a presentation that reaches everyone

To connect with people who have different preferred modes of learning, the best option is to create one sales presentation that accommodates all four learning styles — a *multimodal presentation*. In my (Michael's) sales consulting work, I help salespeople integrate hands-on demonstrations into their standard verbal presentation, along with written explanations and graphic material. This way you don't have to worry about which learning style a customer prefers because you have them all covered.



With a multimodal presentation, you may verbally describe a product as you show it or show pictures of it. You can provide handouts or brochures so customers who are more visual-verbal can follow along in the text. You may also include a multimedia presentation complete with plenty of photos, charts, and even video to accommodate visual-nonverbal members of the audience. And for your kinesthetic learners, you can include a hands-on demonstration.

As you can imagine, this makes for a much more interesting and engaging sales program for your customers, while keeping yourself more involved.

Leveraging the power of silence



When a conversation lags, most people in the United States feel the need to fill the empty space with idle chitchat. While Americans are generally uncomfortable with the silent pause, most other cultures are not. Here are a few examples:

- ✔ Asians in general and the Japanese in particular are especially fond of silence. Barging into that empty space suggests to them that you're not a very deep thinker or you're attempting to hide something from them with mindless chatter.
- ✔ Silence plays an important part in communication with Asian Indians. Hindus believe that wisdom and peace come from communion with yourself in silence, such as that which is found in meditation. Successful relations with clients from this culture require that you also become comfortable with silence.
- ✔ Native Americans tend to believe that talk is cheap. After years of being betrayed by fast-talking European explorers, settlers, and politicians, many believe that silence protects them from people they don't know. As a result, these once trusting and open people have become defensive, cynical, and aloof. Today, casual talk in their community is reserved for more established, intimate relationships.



Becoming more comfortable with silence usually requires a little practice. The next time you're driving alone, try turning off the radio. If you're part of a sales team, schedule an occasional lunch for practicing your ability to speak *less*. You may even have a contest in which the person who talks the most has to pick up the tab. Who knows? You may prefer living with a little less chatter and clatter.

On the other hand, some cultures tend to be more boisterous than others. People from Arabic countries, for example, often exaggerate to strengthen and emphasize their points. Instead of stating a simple "no," an Arab may declare, "I swear by God, no!" Some cultures may consider this to be taking God's name in vain, but to most Arabs, this combines a strong statement of position with a declaration of faith. Loudness indicates strength in Arabic cultures, while softness conveys weakness.

Greeks also can be quite emotional in conversation, to a point where outsiders may perceive it to be a heated argument. For Greeks, an outward show of feelings is seen as positive and implies that the participants are engaged in the discussion. The time to be concerned about Greek customers is when they're quiet!

Pitching the benefits, not just the features

As a salesperson, you're probably already well aware of the difference between features and benefits, but here's a brief refresher just in case you need one:

- ✓ **Features:** The qualities inherent in a product or service. For example, a computer may have a 300-gigabyte hard drive and a 200-MHz processor.
- ✓ **Benefits:** Everything a product or service does to make life better for the customer. For example, a computer may have a hard drive large enough to store more than 100 hours of video and a processor designed specifically for video editing — benefits that may appeal to someone who's purchasing the computer primarily to edit video recordings. However, this is not a benefit to someone who only uses a computer to send e-mails. To pitch this feature to them is a waste of time.

In other words, features are product centered, while benefits are customer centered. Although you can point out valuable features of a product or service, you also want to go beyond features to demonstrate how they benefit a specific customer.



You're not the customer, so keep your opinions to yourself to avoid prejudicing your customer. Say you're a real estate agent showing your clients a Cape Cod-style home that's unusual because it has a very prominent roof. You don't personally care for the style, but right now, you have no idea of how they feel about it. If you were to utter some disparaging comment about the roof, you could discourage your clients from buying the home that's perfect for them. The only person who should decide what a customer buys is the customer, not you. After they have made their choice, then the negotiations can begin in earnest.

Spin a yarn, sell more effectively

In the fast-paced business environment prevalent in the United States, we have little time for stories and often lack the expertise in telling a good story. In other cultures, however, storytelling is an important tool to teach, entertain, educate, preserve culture, and even instill moral values. In cross-cultural sales, stories can be a valuable tool in driving home a point that's difficult to communicate through other means.

For example, instead of lecturing a home buyer about why she should make an offer on a home today, I (Michael) often tell the story of a friend who hesitated in a hot real estate market, only to be priced out of the home he wanted by the time he finally made up his mind. He has always regretted it and still pays rent on the same apartment today. As a result of his reluctance, he has little net worth to brag about.

Getting laughs in a foreign land

A salesman was preparing a presentation to deliver to a group of prospective customers in Japan. Advisors warned him against trying to use humor, but he insisted on starting his talk with a joke.

As he told his joke in English, the interpreter translated it, and as soon as the salesman delivered the punch line, the audience started laughing.

After the program, the salesman ran up to one of his bilingual co-workers and said, "I told you my joke would be a hit here in Japan!"

To this, his counterpart replied, "What you don't know is that your interpreter said, 'Our respected speaker has just told an American joke that does not make sense in our language. Please laugh.'"

The moral of this story is don't tell jokes to people from other cultures until you know how humor is received by them.



Whether you're in real estate or another industry, you can always tell stories about customers who made good or bad decisions. Use these stories to help illustrate your point with multicultural customers.

Ditching your humor



Nearly every sales book suggests using humor and even telling jokes to build rapport with customers. Although this is generally fine with longtime Americans, doing so can be a dangerous minefield when selling to newer immigrants. The best advice we can offer when it comes to humor is this: Don't do it.

Using Interpreters Effectively

In Chapter 5, we discuss the importance of translating your marketing materials into your customer's language of preference. After you attract some customers from your target market, follow up by speaking to those customers in a language they understand. This is particularly important as your sales presentation progresses.

As you focus in on the product or service and the details of the transaction, including financing, purchase contracts, and so on, you're more and more likely to encounter a language barrier that keeps you from moving forward. Just because a customer speaks English doesn't mean he necessarily understands it well enough to make a major purchase. At this point, you may need an interpreter.

In the following sections, we show you how to locate a qualified interpreter and how to team up with this person for optimum results. (An interpreter converts spoken language, whereas a translator works with written language. For more about the difference between translators and interpreters and between simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, visit Chapter 5.)

Locating a competent interpreter

When you need an interpreter, it's usually too late to track one down because you don't want to lose the momentum you've built up. Having a bilingual person on your sales team is ideal (see Chapter 16 for tips on building a diverse sales team).

If you can't arrange for a full-time staff member to perform this service, then do some research to find interpreters in your area. Check the phone book, perform an online search, contact ethnic community centers, or contact the language department of a nearby college or university for some leads. If you're located in a major metropolitan area, you may want to contact the nearest consular office for your customer's home country. They often maintain lists of local interpreters.



Perhaps the best way to find interpreters is by obtaining a referral from someone in your industry. This ensures that the person has some experience with the vocabulary you commonly use.

If you don't have a full-time staffer or somebody on call who speaks the language, consider enlisting the services of a telephone interpretation service. Most are available 24/7 and speak at least 150 languages. You usually just have to register, and then you pay for only what you need. Here are a couple of Web addresses for services you may want to check out: www.LanguageLine.com, www.Lle-inc.com, and www.TeleInterpreters.com.

Hiring a suitable interpreter



While translation can be done without the customer present, your success in delivering a face-to-face bilingual presentation hinges on your ability to team up with your interpreter, so make sure you hire the right person for the job. Here are some of the key qualifications to consider:

- ✓ **The person speaks the right language.** Don't hire an interpreter who speaks primarily Cantonese, for example, if most of your clients speak Mandarin.
- ✓ **The person speaks the right dialect.** Many languages have dozens or even hundreds of dialects, some of which may be completely incomprehensible to people who speak a different dialect.

- ✔ **The person's personality is similar to yours in terms of aggressiveness, friendliness, or shyness.** This ensures that your message is delivered in a tone and style consistent with yours. Not to be sexist, but it's generally best for salesmen to hire male interpreters and saleswomen to hire females. A gender gap can further complicate the process.
- ✔ **You're comfortable working with the person.** Otherwise, you're likely to treat the interpreter disrespectfully, which could send the wrong message to your customers.
- ✔ **The person is familiar with industry-specific words and concepts.** For example, few countries outside the United States feature title and escrow systems and other real estate-specific services. Important as they are here, such concepts require skill and patience to explain in English, let alone in another language. The same is true for the medical and legal industries, as well as others.

Be prepared to handle the language challenges you and your customers encounter with patience, empathy, and understanding. Whatever the cost, you're likely to find that good interpreters are worth considerably more than what you pay them.



Spend some time finding the right person. A lousy interpreter can do significant damage to your customer relations. When former President Jimmy Carter visited Poland in 1977, his interpreter butchered his official arrival message. When he said that he had left the United States early that day, the translator told those assembled that Carter had “abandoned” his country. When the religious Carter talked about Polish “desires for the future,” it was translated as their “lusts for the future.” As if that weren't bad enough, the interpreter ended the address by saying, “The president says he is pleased to be here in Poland grasping your secret parts.”



The interpretation of American-style English is difficult. Our language is filled with colloquialisms, acronyms, idioms, slang, and jargon. Add to this the special requirements of technical, industry-specific terms, and the task can be nearly impossible for an inexperienced interpreter. A bad job can easily lead to misunderstandings and even lawsuits. After you have selected a candidate or two, hand him a few documents and ask the person to explain them in English so you can tell whether he understands them well enough. If you have someone on your advisory board who speaks the other language, have your interpreter explain the documents to him in the other language.

Teaming up with an interpreter for optimum results

You're an expert in sales. Your interpreter is a language expert. As an added bonus, your interpreter probably knows more about the other culture than

you do, too. To be most effective, you need to work together. Selling through an interpreter requires much more than simply converting your meaning from English to another language. It means working as a unit to close the sale.

In the following sections, we show you how to effectively team up with your interpreter even before you sit down together with customers or clients to ensure that your presentation is as effective as possible.



When delivering your presentation through an interpreter, you're not simply talking to the interpreter who talks to the customer. You're actually establishing three lines of communication: between you and the interpreter, you and your customer, and your customer and the interpreter. Keeping these lines of communication open, preventing them from crossing, and building rapport between and among all three participants requires planning, practice, and time.

Laying the groundwork

Before you and your interpreter deliver your first presentation, get to know one another, and work together to establish a game plan and exchange important information. During your initial sessions together, attend to the following:

- ✔ Explain any technical terms that are likely to come up during the presentation. An interpreter may have lived in Spain for several years and never had the need to use certain words that you use every day in your business.
- ✔ Ask your interpreter to explain any cultural differences in eye contact, personal space, or other nonverbal issues that are likely to affect your conversations with customers.
- ✔ Ask about any local customs, such as the most appropriate time for a meeting, the customer's concept of time, and any other issues that could affect your meeting.
- ✔ Review your goals for the presentation, including the nature of the transaction and the part you want your interpreter to play.
- ✔ Practice speaking in short phrases and pausing from time to time so your interpreter can catch up. It's a good idea to rehearse your presentation together so your interpreter knows exactly what to expect and you can set a pace that's comfortable for both of you.



Practice a few simple signals with your interpreter so he can let you know when you're speaking too quickly or slowly. Losing control of a conversation is easy when you're speaking through a third party, so consider adding another signal for times when you want to inject something into the dialogue. You may never use it, but it's good to have something agreed upon just in case.

Making accommodations for your interpreter

Interpreting is a difficult and taxing job, both mentally and physically, even for experienced professionals. To avoid burnout, make the following accommodations for your interpreter:

- ✔ **Schedule more time for bilingual presentations.** A 30-minute presentation may require 45 minutes to an hour when presented through an interpreter. Don't hesitate to tell customers why the meeting may be a long one. You may say something like, "I'm going to schedule some extra time for our meeting so I can be sure to communicate everything, answer all of your questions, and make sure we understand each other."
- ✔ **Pace yourself.** Don't expect to be able to deliver your presentation at your normal speed. Your interpreter needs time to process what you're saying, interpret it, and then relate the information to your customer, and vice versa.
- ✔ **Provide water.** Talking can make anyone pretty thirsty.
- ✔ **Take breaks.** You may want to schedule a break every 15 to 30 minutes to keep your interpreter fresh. Every couple of hours, you may want to take a break for snacks. Ask your interpreter what he needs. Don't be shy about telling the customer exactly why you need to stop periodically.
- ✔ **Treat your interpreter with consideration.** Clients often assume salespeople are going to treat them the same way they treat their colleagues.

Conducting a bilingual presentation

You planned well in advance and rehearsed to the point of achieving a certain level of comfort with your interpreter. Now it's showtime — time to present your product or service to living, breathing customers. Here are some tips that can make your presentation much more successful:

- ✔ **Speak directly to your customers, not to your interpreter.** Speaking to the interpreter may come across as being rude.
- ✔ **Don't try to be funny or tell jokes.** Humor is often lost in translation and can end in disaster if not done just right. A story or subject that's perfectly acceptable in our culture can easily offend people from another. Just as bad, it may not be funny in a different language.
- ✔ **Use diagrams and write down any figures you discuss, as you would if an interpreter were not present.** Direct translation of English into other languages is often impossible. Too many words have more than one meaning and may have unexpected connotations in other languages. Common terms in your business may have no direct equivalent in the target language. These visuals can help you get your point across.





As you and your interpreter do more sales presentations together, you're likely to become much better at it, communicating with and through one another almost intuitively. Reward your interpreter well. Finding and training someone new can be very costly.

Boosting Your Street Cred

To be an *incredible* salesperson, you have to be *credible*. This is especially true when selling to customers from other cultures. For your customers to feel comfortable buying something from you, they need to believe you, and to be believable, you must be genuinely respectful, confident, truthful, reliable, and knowledgeable. It also helps to work for a company that has a solid track record and an impeccable reputation.

In the following sections, we highlight several ways you can boost your credibility with multicultural customers.

Establishing yourself as the expert



Every day, the Internet proves that people buy from experts, and customers are often willing to pay more for the privilege of buying from an authority. The salesperson who delivers the highest quality information in a compelling format makes the sale. Before you head out to the sales floor, be sure you can confidently answer the following basic questions:

- ✓ Exactly how does our product work?
- ✓ Who's our main competition?
- ✓ How do we stack up against the competition?
- ✓ What's our pricing structure?
- ✓ Do we offer a payment plan or discount? If so, what kind?

Projecting confidence

Credibility means exuding confidence. Before you begin your sales presentation, make sure you're prepared and well organized. Rehearse and perhaps even memorize your presentation to ensure a smooth delivery. Make sure your presentation leads customers step by step from introduction to closing.



One of the fastest ways to build credibility for a service provider is to conduct public seminars. Being in front of an audience, providing valuable information, and answering questions can earn you instant credibility.

Showing respect to adults and children alike

Showing respect for your customers and their culture is key, especially when meeting them for the first time. Let the customer take the lead in how they are greeted and how they establish relationships. This action alone will put you light-years ahead of your less-educated competition.

In Chapter 4, we discuss the importance of showing respect to your customers. In Chapters 8 and 9, we provide specific strategies for how to demonstrate respect for your customers when you first meet them and how to build rapport over time.

Respect should also extend to your client's children. This is one of the quickest ways to build rapport, especially with customers from other cultures.



Be mindful, however, that an improper gesture can upset the relationship. For instance:

- ✔ Touching the head of anyone from Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia offends their belief that the head is sacred, because it houses the spirit. Because the spirit is not strong in young children, people from these countries believe that touching a child's head could make him ill, and he could die. This is similar to the American belief that the soul lives in the chest area near the heart. Who's to say which belief is more correct?
- ✔ Refrain from touching the heads of African American children. This can be offensive because it can remind some of the slave days when masters would rub the heads of Black children for luck.

Listening to your customers

Although your credibility hinges on what you say and do, it's also affected by your ability to ask questions and listen. Early in your presentation, spend less time presenting and more time asking questions and listening to answers so you can become more sensitive to your customers' needs and wants. (Chapter 9 has the full scoop on asking the right sorts of questions to build rapport early on.)



Listening to your customers enables you to move confidently to the next stage: tailoring your presentation for your customer. Every customer has different wants and needs, so you shouldn't deliver the same presentation to everyone. In the case of multicultural customers, you may need to scale back the amount of information in your presentation. For example, tell your prospective customers only what they need to know and no more. Overwhelming them with too much information can result in them understanding nothing.

Highlighting your company's track record

To build credibility you'll want to spend some time educating your customer about your company's background, particularly if your company has a long tradition of customer commitment.

Customers from other cultures, especially collectivist cultures, often look for a long history of positive service to the community so they know that your motives are honorable and the chances of your institution going out of business are minimal. Many also prefer doing business with family-owned businesses, so be sure to mention this if you represent a family-owned company.



You can increase your credibility by displaying testimonial letters from satisfied customers. Make sure their surnames include the cultural heritage of the customers you're trying to reach.

Honesty is the best policy



Your company may have unbelievably great products and services, but for your customers to believe you, you usually need to be forthcoming about both the pros and the cons — the bad as well as the good. Customers are likely to discover the truth anyway, and it's better they hear it earlier from you rather than later from someone else, such as a competitor. Customers will appreciate the fact that you're not hiding anything.

Explain the entire process: purchasing, financing, delivery, after-sales service, and warranties. The process of buying a home, for example, can be intimidating to any first-time buyer, regardless of culture. Although your sales process may not be as complex as building or buying a home, even the simplest transaction can be confusing, especially for someone who is new to the United States.



Provide a brief overview of the different stages of the process when it makes sense to do so. For example, if you're helping clients find a home, you'll probably want to explain the entire process upfront and then again before they take possession of the property. This is true for any complex purchase where you'll want to provide an overview and then review financing, delivery, service, warranties, and other issues after you close the sale or near closing.

When selling a service, you have to explain what you do and how it will benefit the client. People who buy services typically buy the skills, competence, and attention of a particular person. So you must sell them on you. Having testimonial letters from satisfied clients can go a long way toward giving prospective customers a sense of confidence. When selling a service, it's even more crucial to develop a strong, respectful relationship because you are the product.

Fielding Differences in the Financing of Major Purchases

Ironic, isn't it, that people who have the least need to borrow money have the easiest time qualifying for loans at the lowest interest rates. This is true just about anywhere you go, but if you think it's tough to get a loan these days in the United States, try borrowing money in other countries. In many foreign countries, obtaining a loan for a major purchase, such as a home or car, is reserved for only the very wealthy; the average person has to pay cash for everything she buys.

First-generation arrivals to this country may not grasp just how much easier and common it is to borrow money to buy big-ticket items here. In America, we buy just about everything on credit. In fact, the statement at the bottom of the Statue of Liberty should say, "Give us your poor, your tired, your huddled masses — and we'll give you credit." To have any chance of selling big-ticket items to customers from other cultures, you need to master a few techniques for bringing them up to speed on how financing works in the States.

Taking your time to explain financing options

In the United States, we have a dizzying array of financing options. For instance, home loans can be fixed rate or variable, amortized or interest only, fully amortized or negatively amortized, owner carried or bank financed, and many other variations. One mortgage broker we talked to said he offers more than 400 different loan programs! Credit card companies and individual businesses offer even more options, including interest-free financing, layaway, and installment plans.

Even people born and raised here have trouble deciphering a loan application. Just think how much more difficult this is for someone who's been here only a short time and is just beginning to pick up the language. A "good faith estimate" could easily be mistaken by them as the cost to join a church! So be prepared to spend extra time explaining financing options to multicultural customers. Don't be surprised if you find yourself repeating these concepts by using different learning styles.

Getting the lowdown on down payments

Most salespeople never suspect that the down payment for a loan can be a sensitive topic, but it is for many multicultural customers, especially Hispanics and Asians. In fact, some customers may interpret a simple

question such as, “How much do you have for the down payment?” to be life threatening. Why? Because in their home countries, banks are often mistrusted, so even after moving to the United States, they may keep cash for a down payment hidden somewhere in or around their home. These customers may be afraid that answering questions about the down payment could make them more vulnerable to home invasion robberies. This is why many lenders have trouble obtaining personal financial information from these groups.



TIP

Instead of asking a common question like, “How much cash were you planning on paying for a down payment?”, show customers a menu of choices and then let the borrower choose. Show them the down payment and monthly payment required for a 90 percent, 80 percent, and 75 percent loan, for instance. This enables them to determine whether they have enough savings for the down payment and whether the monthly payments are affordable.

Making exceptions for a lack of credit history

The first credit card you apply for is always the most difficult one to get. You can have a couple thousand dollars sitting in your bank account, and the credit card company still rejects your application simply because you don't have a credit history. Of course, this begs the question: If I can't get credit, how can I possibly develop a credit history?

Many multicultural customers face this same Catch-22. They may come from a long tradition of paying for everything in cash, so they have no credit history, and this can cause them to have a much more difficult time obtaining a loan approval.



REMEMBER

If you're a lender dealing with customers who have a weak or nonexistent credit history, you may need to make some exceptions — give less weight to the credit history and more weight to other factors, such as income and trustworthiness. Some lenders use alternative credit verification factors, such as whether the applicant pays utility bills, cable TV bills, and doctors' bills on time.

Offering creative (yet legitimate) financing

Some cultural beliefs can pose a real lending challenge for financial institutions. One is the Muslim belief that paying interest is a sin. Obviously this runs counter to how items, such as homes, are financed in this country.

With a little American ingenuity, several banks have worked out a solution to overcome this seemingly insurmountable hurdle. These clever banks have developed rent-to-own payment plans so that devout Muslims pay no interest but will own their homes after 20 to 30 years of “renting.” This is the exact same way you can rent to own a television set, but with a larger debt.



If you find that your customers are having trouble clearing the financing hurdle for a loan, consider consulting with your bank and with other financial institutions for ideas. Chances are good that larger financial institutions have dealt with similar challenges in other markets or you can offer your own financing solution.

Up-selling insurance and extended warranties



Credit life insurance is often appealing to family-oriented borrowers because the policy pays off a loan if the borrower dies. Of course, as explained in Chapter 5, any mention of death could be a big turnoff for some multicultural customers, so focus on the positive — the fact that the policy provides security for the surviving spouse and family members.

If you're selling extended warranties, clearly explain the cost and benefits of the program as well as what it does and doesn't cover. Many longtime Americans have difficulty understanding the difference between the manufacturer's warranty and the extended warranty, especially in terms of where one ends and the other begins; this is even more difficult for newcomers to understand.



Customers who haven't grown up in the United States often buy extended warranties and then get frustrated later by a gap in coverage. This can significantly damage your long-term relationship and your chances of obtaining referral business. Make sure your customers know what they're buying or turning down upfront.

Knowing When to Stop Selling

As an experienced salesperson, you already know that when the customer decides to buy, it's time to stop selling. Otherwise, you risk talking the customer out of buying the product or service she's already decided to buy. If you keep flapping your gums, you may inadvertently say something that kills the deal.

A rookie mistake: Overselling your way out of a sale

Overselling is the sign of an overly eager novice. The novice is so determined to sell something that he continues to sell even after the customer has decided to buy.

You've probably been on the receiving end of overselling at some time in your life. You walk into a store knowing exactly what you want, just needing someone to hand you the product and ring it up. Instead, you encounter a salesperson who proceeds to tell you everything he knows about the product and every other

comparable product until you get so confused you just walk out.

The person should have listened to you when you were expressing a strong buying signal — when you asked, “Do you have this in stock?” But instead of taking the order, he proceeded to continue talking, raising all sorts of questions and doubts in your mind.

By picking up on buying signs, you can improve your timing so you know when to stop selling and when to start closing.

This rule is even more important when selling to customers from other cultures. If you continue to push after they've decided to buy, you begin to look suspicious. Your customers begin to wonder whether something is wrong with what you're offering: “Why is this salesperson being so pushy even after I decided to buy?” Customers, especially those from collectivist cultures, want to buy from a trusted friend, not be sold by a suspicious stranger.



The buying sign can come up at any time in the presentation, so remain attentive throughout your presentation. As soon as you spot the sign, stop selling and start closing, even if it's right in the middle of your presentation. This is the point at which haggling, the subject of Chapter 13, will probably begin in earnest. (We discuss obvious and subtle buying signals in Chapter 10.)

Chapter 12

Closing the Sale with Diverse Clients

In This Chapter

- ▶ Conquering phobias that can undermine your closing
 - ▶ Overcoming your prospect's objections
 - ▶ Packing your toolbox with multicultural closing techniques
 - ▶ Ditching high-pressure sales tactics
-

When you begin to notice one or more of the buying signals we outline in Chapter 10, you often need to give your prospective buyers a gentle nudge (or a firm shove) to get them over whatever stands in their way of making a final purchase decision. Given the choice to buy or do nothing, most customers choose to go home empty-handed, because it's easy and safe. However, playing it safe means they leave without purchasing what they want and need, and you walk away without what you want and need — a sale.

In this chapter, we show you how to lead your customers from a point of strong interest to the point at which they decide to make a purchase or walk away empty-handed. We describe various ways to identify less obvious customer objections and explain how to work through them to close the sale.



We stop short of perhaps the most frustrating stage of the closing process — negotiating or, as we like to call it, *haggling*. In many books on selling, negotiating comes before closing. In this book, we give it its proper place — at the end of the closing process — and we devote an entire chapter (Chapter 13) to it. Why? Because generally speaking, Americans don't negotiate the price of most products or services very often, so haggling is usually only a footnote in a chapter on closing. However, when dealing with multicultural customers, negotiating will almost certainly be the last step in the closing process, especially when those customers love to haggle.

Closing: It's All about Conquering Fears

In the process of buying and selling, people can be filled with trepidation. Customers can experience sticker shock or buyer's remorse; salespeople often live in fear that they'll say the wrong thing, come across as pushy, experience rejection, or have to deal with irate customers after the sale. These concerns often get in the way of what would otherwise be a successful closing.



Fear breeds caution. Caution breeds indecision. And indecision leads to lost sales.

In the following sections, we show you how to conquer your customers' fears and overcome your own.

Conquering your customer's decidophobia

Why would someone scan the newspapers, surf the Internet, or flip through the Yellow Pages to find out where they can get what they want, and then look up the directions to your store or office, hop in the car, drive across town, and hassle with parking only to tell you, "We need to think about it?" The answer is: Fear. They're afraid to make a commitment because they could make a mistake, and it's safer (they think) to procrastinate.

Decidophobia — no kidding — is a bona fide phobia that has even made it onto The Phobia List (phobialist.com). The reason people are afraid to make decisions is that they dread making a wrong choice and disdain the painful regrets that result. As a professional salesperson, you must help your customers make the best choice at the moment, because indecision is decision and is often a counterproductive decision for both you and the customer.



The professional salesperson helps buyers realize that not purchasing today means they won't have what they want or need, that their lives won't be richer or fuller, and they'll have to continue to make do with what they currently have or go without. If you truly want to serve your customers, help them come to the decision they already know they want to make by closing them. This begins with the process of asking questions, as explained in Chapters 9 and 10, continues as you present products or services that meet their needs (check out Chapter 11), climaxes when you ask for the order (see "Asking for the Order and Overcoming Objections" later in this chapter), and culminates with successful negotiations (see Chapter 13).

Getting over your own closophobia

Some salespeople are afraid to close a customer — a fear we like to call *closophobia* — because they fear that the buyer will say no. Instead they keep talking and talking about the product or service in hopes that the prospect will eventually say, “Okay, I’ll take it.” (If this approach ever works for you, run right out and buy a lottery ticket, because it’s about as likely to happen as hitting the jackpot.)

Other salespeople fail to close because they don’t want to appear pushy. Again, you have to help the customer come to the decision that she already wants to make. This isn’t pushy; it’s professional.

One of the best ways to overcome any phobia is to confront it. Force yourself to ask for the order, as explained later in this chapter in the section, “Asking for the Order and Overcoming Objections.” When you experience the benefits of asking for the order and see for yourself that nothing scary happens when you do, the fear begins to dissipate.



Closing isn’t some magical trick. It’s a logical process you can use to assist customers in arriving at an intelligent decision that’s in their best interests.

Asking for the Order and Overcoming Objections

You can deliver an Oscar-winning sales presentation and still walk away empty-handed if you fail to do one final thing — ask. You need to ask for the customer’s business or ask for the order. Failing to ask for the order is like wooing your soul mate without ever asking for her hand in marriage, like fishing without ever setting the hook, like . . . well, you can come up with your own metaphors.



As soon as you’ve determined the customer’s needs and shown him how your product or service meets those needs, it’s time to begin closing. Otherwise, he’ll leave without having his needs met. How tragic! As a salesperson, you would have done him a tremendous disservice.

The first time you ask your prospect for the order is the *initial close*, because in all likelihood, you’re going to have to ask again. Your prospect has two possible reactions to your initial close:

- ✔ Give you the order.
- ✔ Express an objection.

Obviously, if you get the order, you've accomplished your goal. Now it's time to shut up, stop selling, and take the order. On the other hand, if your prospect objects, you still have some work ahead of you, as we explain in the following sections.

Overcoming the fear of objection

In the earlier section “Closing: It’s All about Conquering Fears,” we explain some common fears that can often undermine a closing, but we skip one there because it applies specifically to this first stage of the closing process — asking for the order.

Many salespeople fail to ask for the order because they’re afraid that the customer will then express his objections. Yep, this is just like the guy who never proposes marriage because he thinks his girlfriend is going to come up with 101 reasons why they shouldn’t get married.

What most salespeople don’t realize is that objections are positive signs. Until you get an objection, it’s very difficult to close a deal. Objections convey interest. If the customer objects with anger, he may be even more interested. After all, most purchase decisions are emotional. The more emotional your buyer becomes, the closer you are to inking the deal.



Don’t panic when a customer voices an objection. An objection to your initial closing attempt isn’t the end of the world. Most prospects feel they have a duty to raise roadblocks for the salesperson. Sometimes they just want you to earn your money. Relax. Now that an objection has surfaced, you just moved one step closer to getting the order.

Forgetting about ignoring objections

Some sales gurus recommend that you simply ignore objections and they’ll go away. Although that may work with some of your traditional customers, all we can say about attempting this maneuver with multicultural clients is this: Forget about it. To ignore an objection or request for information would be seen as extremely disrespectful in addition to breeding distrust, especially by multicultural buyers.



Take objections seriously from any buyer, regardless of culture. Customers want to know that you’re on their side when it comes to getting something that truly meets their needs and at a good price.

Mining “warm leads” from people who clearly aren’t ready to buy yet



If the customer clearly isn’t interested in making the purchase, try to find out why. If he’s just not ready, ask him when he could be ready or what conditions would make him ready. If the answer is never, then let him go. If he provides you with a target date or conditions that would make him ready in the future, then enter his information into your contact management system. This gives you a list of people to call in the future — people who’ve expressed a need, met you, and know you — your *warm prospects*.

When real estate agents knock on doors, they rarely meet anyone who is thinking about selling their house at that very moment. However, they do run into folks who will be selling in a couple of months, later in the year, or the following year. They know they need to contact these homeowners periodically until they’re ready to sell. These become *warm leads*, and they beat the heck out of making cold calls. You can do the same, whether you’re selling cars, insurance, health club memberships, or anything else.

Losing a customer by winning an argument

Objections often put salespeople on the defensive, but defensive posturing is almost a sure way to lose a customer. Your goal is not to defeat your prospect in a debating contest. Your goal is to get the order.

The key to effectively answering any objection is to establish a common ground. After all, you both want the same thing — you want the customer to purchase your product or service according to the terms that satisfy both of your needs. So drop your defenses, and avoid getting into a verbal shoving match of “Am not,” “Are so.”



Debating a multicultural customer tends to make him feel dumb, which is why avoiding arguments is particularly important with these customers. When you argue, the exchange can cause you to lose face in the customer’s eyes and perhaps make him feel as though he’s lost face as well — and ultimately undermine the sale, too. You certainly know more about your product or service than the customer does, but even if you win the debate, you lose.

Handling specific types of objections

Overcoming objections is like learning to counterpunch in the boxing ring. You need to be aware of the types of punches (or objections) your opponent may deliver — lefts, rights, jabs, hooks, undercuts, and so on. By knowing

what's coming, you can more effectively parry his attacks. In the following sections, we cover the six most common objections and offer suggestions on how to overcome them.



Any objection can be the result of not focusing on your customer's true need. Review the list of wants and needs (see Chapter 10). Could you be concentrating on the wrong need?

Your customer doesn't need your product or service

One of the most common objections that customers raise is that they don't really need what you're selling:

"We don't need it."

"We're satisfied with the one we currently have."



This is a put-off similar to "We're just looking." To deal with this, just respond, "Why do you say that?" This question forces the customer to move away from a generic answer and give you a more thoughtful response, such as, "It's not in our budget." This kind of detail gives you the opportunity to say, "Well, let me tell you about our fabulous financing plan. . . ."

If the customer really has no need for what you're selling, you should have determined this when assessing their wants and needs. If he's just come to realize that he has no need, then why is he wasting your time? Let him go.

Your customer lacks the authority to make a decision

This is the pass-the-buck excuse. The customer is afraid to make the decision and wants to hang the responsibility on someone else:

"My spouse won't let me buy it."

"I have to check with my attorney, accountant, taxidermist, whoever."

This is a common stall tactic and tells you that the customer needs more information. New immigrant customers often use this tactic because they may not be familiar with your product or service and may not understand English completely. You can deal with this objection several ways:

- ✓ Try to determine what information the customer needs, provide it, and then ask again for the order.
- ✓ Persuade the person to buy on the condition that if the person who has authority says no, the customer can return it.
- ✓ Ask to speak to the decision maker. (Of course, this means redelivering your sales presentation, which is why it's so critical to involve all the decision makers from the very start.) For more about selling to groups (two or more decision makers), turn to Chapter 10.

Your customer isn't comfortable with deciding right away

Buyers, particularly multicultural customers, often try to cop out by saying they need some more time to think things over in the comfort and privacy of their own homes. They'll say something like:

"Do you have some literature I can take home?"

"We don't have time now."



This is a good sign that you haven't yet established enough trust for them to buy. To build trust, offer a guarantee. This immediately undercuts any grounds for the objection and reduces the fear of making the wrong decision. Customers can often exchange a purchase for a store credit or an upgraded product, making them happy and keeping their money in your business.

Your product or service isn't a priority for your customer

Financially responsible shoppers attend to their hierarchy of needs in the order of those needs. Paying for food, housing, and medical care are usually the top priority, so when money is an issue, you're likely to hear the following objections:

"We need to think about it."

"We have to deal with other priorities first."

Dealing effectively with these objections usually requires more digging:

- ✓ Your customer may be confused by too many details. Focus on his main reason for wanting to buy.
- ✓ Your customer really does have other priorities that are more important, in which case, you should help him identify an option that's affordable or encourage him to come back when his situation has changed.



We believe that selling nonessential items to people who are struggling to make ends meet is unethical. Your mission is to do what's best for your clients. Don't push the sale. Take down the customer's information and contact him periodically to determine whether his needs have changed.

Your presentation hasn't persuaded your customer

Sometimes prospects are simply not persuaded by your sales presentation, in which case you're likely to hear objections like the following:

"This isn't for us."

"We've tried others and they didn't work."

"We've never heard of your company/brand/so on."

An objection isn't rejection

An objection is only a request for more information. Your customer may be confused and unclear about something you said or something you failed to mention. By addressing the sales objection, you give your prospect new and additional information. Armed with this extra data, your customer can develop a new and favorable opinion about the decision to purchase your product or service.

On the other hand, rejection tells you that your customer doesn't want to buy. You'll know rejection when you hear it in the form of the word "no" or when you see your customer walking out the door and not looking back. As long as the person hasn't uttered the word "no" or something that sounds an awful lot like

"no," and as long as he hasn't fled the premises, continue to answer objections and ask for the order.

When a customer says no, I (Ralph) take it to mean "know" — as in the customer doesn't yet *know* enough to say yes. I then proceed to either provide the customer with more information or ask additional questions to find out what's preventing him from saying yes.

Even rejection can be cause to celebrate. If you discover that a customer is truly not interested, then you can focus your attention and efforts on someone else who is. If the person is interested but not ready to buy, then you have some potential future business to look forward to.



We're sorry to have to break the bad news to you, but your sales presentation probably needs some work. You haven't sold your customers on the value of your product or service and how it differs from the competition. It's crucial with multicultural customers to empathize with their situation by using the "feel-felt-found" closing, which we describe later in this chapter. A more basic approach is to start all over knowing what you know now:

- 1. Summarize all the reasons the customer said he needed your product or service.**
- 2. Use the notes you collected throughout the sales process to show how buying from you satisfies these needs.**
- 3. Highlight the extra benefits your customer is going to receive with your company's product or service.**

If you need a refresher on cross-cultural sales presentations, see Chapter 11.

Your customer has no good reason to change

If you're trying to persuade someone to use a different product or service or buy it from a different supplier, you have to account for *inertia* — a body's natural resistance to change position. Inertia is commonly expressed in the following objections:

“But we’ve been using X (product or service) for years.”

“But we’ve been customers of X (company) for years.”

“I don’t see why we should switch.”

In short, you haven’t given your customer enough reason to put down the remote control, get off the couch, and do something different.



Answer the question, “What’s in it for them if they change?” Customers choose a different product, service, or supplier for either of these reasons:

- ✓ They’re unhappy with their current product or service. Dissatisfaction is a much more powerful motivator than desire.
- ✓ They need what the new product or service can do for them.

Mastering the trial close

After you’ve addressed your customer’s objections, you’re ready to ask for the order . . . yes, again. As you ask for the order time and again, change the wording so you don’t sound like a parrot. Here are some trial closes:

- ✓ “Do you want to pay cash or charge it?”
- ✓ “Would you like to take it home or have it delivered?”
- ✓ “Do you want to purchase the accessories now or would you prefer to buy them later?”

Notice that you don’t care what the answer is to these questions as long as the answer isn’t “No, I don’t want to buy.” Each question is carefully worded to evoke one of two answers, neither of which is “No.” By choosing either of the two options contained in the question, the prospect gives you the order — you merely need to work out the details.



After you deliver the trial close, remain absolutely silent. The customer must be the next one to speak because the pressure is now on them. Anticipate an uncomfortable pause while the prospect thinks about the final decision. If you interrupt that pause, you greatly diminish your probability of receiving the order. Keep in mind that selling is more about listening than it is about talking. If you’re constantly flapping your lips, you may be too busy to notice the signs that indicate your customer is ready to buy.



Use the assumptive close in moderation, if at all. Multicultural customers may find it insulting because it’s so obvious. Used in moderation, this closing technique can help your prospects narrow their choices when their choices are plentiful. Just don’t go overboard.

If the customer says, “Whoa, I’m not sure I want this at all,” then you know you need to back up and find out what his real objection is. After you uncover it and deal with it, you can try closing again.

Putting a Multicultural Twist on Road-Tested Closing Techniques

You can find plenty of books and other resources on the market to help you hone your closing technique. One of the best is *Sales Closing For Dummies* by the legendary Tom Hopkins (Wiley). Not all of the standard closing techniques, however, are as effective with multicultural customers. Some are downright counterproductive. In the following sections, we reveal some closing techniques that are more likely to work with prospects from other cultures.



If you’ve done a thorough job at closing your customer, she should be clear about what she needs, including all the accessories desired. It’s time to ask for the order again. When dealing with longtime Americans, it’s usually just a matter of writing up the order. When selling to multicultural customers, however, it’s more than likely that after they’re clear on what they’re buying, you’ll encounter the most feared part of the sales process — negotiating. When you reach this point, you’re ready for Chapter 13.

The balance sheet close

When you encounter *bean counters* — detail-oriented customers, especially those with engineering, accounting, or mathematical backgrounds — be prepared to slice and dice with the *balance sheet close*. Here’s how you do it:

1. **Draw a line down the center of a blank sheet of paper.**
2. **Label the left column “Pros” and the right column “Cons.”**
3. **Ask the customer to list all of the reasons why she should go ahead with the purchase under the Pros heading until she’s run out of ideas.**
4. **Ask her to list all of the reasons why she shouldn’t buy now under the Cons heading.**



This tactic empowers the customer and enables her to clearly see which side has more weight. The key to making this work is to assist customers with the Pros list and remain perfectly silent when it comes to the Cons. After you’ve completed a thorough wants and needs analysis (see Chapter 10), you can say things like, “Remember you wanted to buy this computer to help your kids with their homework, in addition to sending e-mail?”

If you do the closing technique properly, the Pros side always wins out by a mile. All you have to do now is take the order.

The been-there-done-that close

In Chapter 11, we recommend telling a story during your sales presentation to more effectively illustrate the benefits of your product, your service, or your company. Stories are an effective closing tool in cross-cultural sales, as well, because you can present scenarios that prospective buyers can envision happening to them.

For example, you could tell the story of a customer who delayed her purchase this way: “I had a client last month who wanted to think about her decision for one day. Unfortunately, when she returned, the one she wanted was sold, and we never got another one in. I would hate to see that happen to you.”

The bracket close



If your buyer is having trouble deciding whether to buy the midline model that you know is right for her needs and budget, show her a similar but much more expensive model and then one that is much less expensive (if available). The *bracket close* quickly convinces your prospect that she doesn't need all the bells, whistles, and expense of the costlier product, while the cheaper one doesn't meet her needs.

The calendar close



Multicultural customers often have to return several times before they have enough trust to make a major purchase, so the *calendar close* can be very effective. Here's how it works: If you've tried several times to close the customer and it's clear she's not ready to buy, the best you can hope for is to make an appointment for her to return in the future. Be sure to set a specific date and time as well as determine any information she would like you to prepare for the meeting. This keeps you in the game and gives the customer a deadline to work toward for making a purchase decision. It also gives you another warm call to make sometime in the future.

The companion close

As discussed in Chapter 10, people from collectivist cultures rely on the opinions of others they trust. If the primary purchaser seems to be having difficulty making up his mind and others are accompanying him, pick

someone who seems to be positive about the purchase and sell her. It could be a spouse, friend, grandparent, or even child who can tip the scales in your favor. This technique is called the *companion close*.



Get the companion involved in the purchase by letting her try the product or read the brochure. Because this person isn't the ultimate buyer, she has no financial or emotional commitment and is more likely to agree with you.

The concession close

The *concession close* (also referred to as the *trade-off close*) is sort of like *nibbling* (asking for just one more thing to be thrown in), but in this case, you're doing the nibbling. It works like this: You offer the prospect something, such as a free accessory or service, and ask something in return or strongly imply that you expect something in return — usually the sale. (We cover nibbling in more detail in Chapter 13.)

This close is particularly effective for customers who are teetering on the fence and need just one more perk to get them past any reservations they may have. However, by asking for something in return, you're letting them know very subtly that this is the best deal you're going to offer.



Always save something for the end of the deal in case the customer tries to nibble on you. See Chapter 13 for details.

The demonstration close

As we explain in Chapter 11, some multicultural buyers tend to be more *kinesthetic* (or hands-on) than others, so letting them try your product or service often gets them to sell themselves. You can say something like, "You won't believe how fast this cleans. Try it for yourself." The *demonstration close* provides tangible evidence that the customer can't argue with.

The economic close

Many new immigrants are very money conscious. They may wonder out loud if they can afford to buy what you're selling, so show them the real economic cost of *not buying*. For instance, you can say something like, "This model is so energy efficient that within a year it will pay for itself, and after that, the savings go right into your pocket."

The emotional close

The *emotional close* gets the customer to emotionally own your product or service. Determine whether they're more motivated by fear of loss or satisfaction of gain. You can usually get a sense of what motivates your customers during the questioning stage of your sales presentation, as discussed in Chapter 10. If it's fear of loss, you can say something like, "How would you feel if someone else bought this tonight while you were thinking about it?" If they're more motivated by satisfaction of gain, say something like, "If you owned this right now, how would you feel?"

The feel-felt-found close

Some buyers, especially new immigrants, want to know that you empathize with their situation. They may state an objection about a particular feature of the product or service, or they may mention their inability to make the payments, for example. In this case, you can draw from your own experience and use the *feel-felt-found close*. Simply say, "I know how you feel, because when I bought my first one I felt I couldn't afford it either. What I found is that you get used to making the payments, and now I hardly notice them."

The guarantee close

Many people are afraid to make a mistake, and this is particularly true for those who are less familiar with your product or service or may not be completely fluent in English. This is a good time to go over any guarantees or warranties you offer. For information on explaining the terms of guarantees and warranties, check out Chapter 11.

The never-the-best-time close

It's natural for anyone to put off a decision if they can. The *never-the-best-time close* shows your customer that delaying will do her no good or may even hurt her. Talk about what your customer stands to miss out on by not having it. You can say, "If you wait until next month, that's 30 days less that you'll have to enjoy it," or "The best time to buy is when you need it, which seems to be now, wouldn't you agree?"

The puppy dog close

The *puppy dog close* is a powerful closing technique, because hardly anyone can take a cute puppy home, play with it, and then want to take it back the next day. If you can, let the customer try your product or service for a day with no strings attached. If it's as good as you probably say it is, the prospect is highly unlikely to get cold feet after they've experienced it.



People from some cultures are highly kinesthetic; after they get a chance to try your wares for a while, they'll find it hard to let them go. See Chapter 11 for more about kinesthetic and other learning styles.

The quality close

The quality close emphasizes quality over other factors, especially price. Many cultures are thousands of years old, and they highly value longevity. If you know your client is value conscious, you can say, "You can see by the quality of the construction that this is really built to last. Although it's priced a bit higher than its less-expensive competitors, you should save money through lower maintenance and operating costs."

The standing-room-only close

Buyers, especially those from collectivist cultures, can be greatly influenced by peer pressure. If you're selling a popular item, you can use the *standing-room-only close* to hint that your customer may be left behind or seem out of touch by not buying your product. This scenario would sound something like, "You can see from our inventory sheet that we had 20 of these yesterday, and today we only have 3 left. I would hate to think that you might come back tomorrow and we'd be out of these state-of-the-art phones."

The summary close

Summarize the list of benefits that the customer stands to gain. This not only reminds her of the value she's getting but that you've been paying attention to her. A real estate agent may say, "Remember that this house is only five short minutes' drive to your work, two minutes from your daughter's school, and ten minutes from that shopping center you like so much."

The testimonial close

Buyers from collectivist cultures rely on the opinions of those they trust. Use other people's words to convince your customers that you have a great product or service. After you gather testimonials from customers, here's what you can say: "I've received many letters from buyers explaining how happy they are with their car and our service department. Here are just a few."

The treat close

Many new immigrants work very long hours and may feel guilty about spending their hard-earned money on something they consider to be a luxury. In this case, you can point out that they should treat themselves by saying something like, "I can see that you like this model, but it might be a bit more than you want to spend. You work really hard, and it seems to me that you deserve to reward yourself, don't you think?"

Avoiding High-Pressure Sales Maneuvers

Back in days of Willy Loman (the tired main character in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*), the hard sell worked. Nowadays, consumers are more sophisticated. High-pressure tactics are much more effective at driving prospects away than closing deals. This is true of your longtime U.S. residents and is even more true of your new-immigrant clientele. High-pressure tactics undermine trust — the very thing you need to establish most to sell to customers from other cultures.

Ditch the hard sell

People from high-context cultures don't like high-pressure sales, so if you normally subscribe to the ABC's of selling (Always Be Closing), you may need to change strategies. Offering special incentives only if the customer signs a contract or places an order today may be counterproductive. Customers from high-context cultures feel that friends don't have to pressure friends to buy. Building trust rather than offering special deals is usually a more effective approach, as we discuss in Chapter 9.

Avoid the “one-sit close”

One of the groups I (Michael) regularly speak to consists of remodeling contractors throughout the United States. This industry is famous for using what is called a *one-sit close*. The salesperson sits down with the customer for the first time, determines his needs, calculates an estimate for the job, and leaves with the business — or not. To go back again takes more time and reduces your income per hour,

so in this industry it’s either buy now or forget it. Although this may work with some Americans, it’s ineffective with high-context people who want to establish a relationship before they buy (see Chapter 3 for more about high-context cultures). They want to take the time to get to know and trust you before they spend \$50,000 or more of their hard-earned money on remodeling their home or any other major purchase.



Steer clear of techniques such as *the ultimatum* (“Buy today or forget it”) and *take-it-or-leave-it* (“Take this deal or else”). High-pressure closings such as these drive customers out the door never to return. High-pressure tactics are a sign that you’re desperate and have run out of ideas.

If you get only one shot . . .

In some sales situations, you have only one opportunity to sell a customer, such as timeshare sales that cater to distant visitors or artisans whose main trade are tourists. These potential buyers aren’t likely to return for a second visit, so how do you encourage them to buy today without seeming pushy?



If you offer a “buy today” incentive, put it into the form of a choice rather than a high-pressure sales tactic. In other words, a timeshare salesperson might let the customer know that if he buys today, the price is \$12,000 for a premium week and after that it will be \$15,000. Remind the customer that it’s like a department store that offers a one-week sale, and after the time has passed, it would be false advertising to keep offering the discounted price. It’s the buyer’s choice to purchase now, but to save face with other customers who do buy on their first visit, you must be consistent in enforcing the policy.

Chapter 13

Negotiating with Natural-Born Hagglers

In This Chapter

- ▶ Identifying no-haggle and haggle cultures
 - ▶ Tuning in to the negotiating mind-set
 - ▶ Successfully countering low-ball offers and requests for discounts
 - ▶ Knowing when customers start nibbling and how to shut it down
 - ▶ Practicing your bargaining tactics
-

If you grew up in the United States, you're probably unaccustomed to haggling over what you pay for a product or service. You may dicker about the price when buying a car or a house, but to get a good deal on other products and services, you don't haggle — you *shop*. You skim through the sales inserts in the Sunday newspaper or search for the product online at a comparison shopping site, such as Shopzilla. Or you head to eBay or Priceline.com to name the price you're willing to pay.

When you're selling to customers from cultures where people are born to haggle, you may be completely blindsided at the very moment when you feel the deal has been sealed. You were certain that your customers were finally clear and in agreement about the purchase and all the terms related to it, so you proceeded to close by asking for the order. Now they want to quibble over your price?! What gives? What could they possibly be thinking?!

The fact is that this approach is the rule rather than the exception for people from haggle-friendly cultures. In this chapter, we level the playing field by showing you what to expect and revealing some negotiating strategies that can give you the upper hand.



If you have a no-haggle policy, you probably aren't going to be very successful selling anything to people from haggle-friendly cultures. Accept the fact that the sticker price is always negotiable when you're selling to people from these cultures and that you need to develop some negotiating skills of your own. This

chapter instructs you on the basics, but you may want to consult additional resources, including my (Michael's) book *Black Belt Negotiating* (AMACOM) and *Negotiating For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Michael C. Donaldson (Wiley).

Separating Buyers from Bargainers

Travel the world, and you can pretty much put every culture into one of two camps — buyers and bargainers or, to put it another way, non-hagglers and hagglers. In most cases, the hagglers come from countries that are time-rich and money-poor — places where haggling is a survival skill. In time-poor, money-rich countries, haggling is much less prevalent. People have precious little time to waste negotiating with a salesperson to save a few bucks.

In any event, when you're dealing with immigrants, you're often dealing with hagglers. Many of these folks left their country for precisely the same reason they became hagglers — they were time-rich and cash-poor, so they came to the United States. In the following sections, we tell you which cultures simply shop and which cultures consider negotiating to be a way of life.

The buyers: Non-hagglng countries

Ever notice the similarities between the words *haggle* and *hassle*? In the United States, most customers find the words nearly synonymous — haggling is just one big hassle. In non-hagglng countries, customers can usually muster up the courage to bargain for a better deal on big-ticket items, but they rarely enjoy it, nor are they very skilled at it. Consumers in the States hate haggling so much that one major car manufacturer used it as a marketing tool, advertising a no-haggle policy, and customers snapped up the vehicles.



Non-hagglng countries are usually those countries where people tend to be relatively cash-rich and time-poor, including the following:

- ✓ Canada
- ✓ France
- ✓ Germany
- ✓ Great Britain
- ✓ United States

Dealing with your haggling disability

If you're the product of a no-haggle culture, you're handicapped when it comes to negotiating. With no training in the art of negotiating, you're stepping into the ring with some real prizefighters. Customers born in the United States or other non-haggling countries often feel helpless and rather powerless in most common bargaining situations, including buying a car or a house. We don't dare walk into a major department store and ask for a discount on some very nice but overpriced outfit we desperately desire.

If negotiating makes you feel like little David going up against the behemoth Goliath armed

only with a slingshot and a bad aim, you may want to enroll in a course on negotiating. While this chapter and other training materials may bring you up to speed on the basics, practicing your skills in a classroom setting can give you a more realistic experience. Think of it as the difference between looking at dance steps drawn on a piece of paper and actually taking dance lessons. Classroom experience can increase your confidence in situations when you must negotiate to make the sale. Ultimately, however, you must practice your skills in the real world.

The bargainers: Haggling countries

In 2007, the average monthly income of people employed in Russia was \$550. People in mainland China earned just \$155 per month. Workers in India received only \$44 per month — the equivalent of 28 cents an hour if they worked a 40-hour week.

When you earn such a paltry salary, every penny counts, and you tend to be highly motivated to make your money last. In these countries, customers rarely pay the sticker price. In fact, they haggle over everything, even the price of meat and vegetables. Saving even a few dollars can make the difference between a family eating well and possibly going hungry.

For many, negotiating prowess is a survival skill that is honed on a daily basis. When they come to the United States, they may become more affluent but still may be unable to leave the haggling habit behind.



Countries where haggling is a way of life include the following:

- ✓ Most countries in Africa
- ✓ Most countries in Asia
- ✓ The Caribbean Islands
- ✓ Greece

- ✓ Most countries in Latin America
- ✓ India and Pakistan
- ✓ Countries that comprise the Middle East
- ✓ The former Soviet Union
- ✓ Turkey
- ✓ Most other countries that are less industrialized

To people from haggle-friendly cultures, haggling isn't just about price and terms; haggling is about building relationships. It doesn't matter whether customers are buying a throw-away plastic watch or a Rolex — through the process of haggling, they get to know you, your company, and your products and services more intimately.

Knowing What to Expect

Salespeople often become frustrated selling to born-and-bred hagglers for two reasons:

- ✓ First, these customers tend to want to negotiate everything.
- ✓ Second, the negotiating process can seem to go on forever — before, during, and even after the sale . . . sometimes even after the customer signs the contract! For people who were raised in a primarily non-haggling culture, this can be maddening.

If you're serious about selling to people from haggling cultures, however, you need to adjust your mind-set and be prepared to negotiate. In the following sections, we show you what to expect.

Everything is negotiable

In countries where people haggle, customers don't simply haggle over price. They haggle over *everything* — price, terms, delivery fees, the cost of extended warranties, and just about anything else that's related to the transaction. That's how they save money and remain in tip-top condition for future negotiations.

When building a new home, for example, these folks will dicker over not only the price of the house, but also the upgrades, lot location, landscaping, financing, closing costs, service contract, and more. When negotiating the purchase of a new car, these same customers will bring up issues such as the dealer invoice, extended warranties, financing, floor mats, how much gas is in the tank, maintenance plans, top dollar for their trade-in, and more.



When selling to these skilled hagglers, be prepared for them to ask about special discounts or freebies, including the following (and much more!):

- ✓ Free delivery or shipping
- ✓ Free gift wrapping
- ✓ Extended warranty
- ✓ Free or discounted accessories
- ✓ Free upgrades
- ✓ Price discount if more than one is purchased
- ✓ Free or discounted financing
- ✓ Free sessions (for service providers)
- ✓ Free training



Every department in your company — not just sales — can be affected by some people’s propensity to negotiate. If you have a separate department that provides the upgrades or accessories, the customer may request that you include these up-sell items in the deal at little or no cost. On large purchases, customers may expect free financing, a lower interest rate, or reduced fees. After the sale, customers may expect customer service to maintain or repair items that were never covered under warranty or fix things that went out of warranty years earlier. If you sell pianos, for example, customers may ask for discounts to have their pianos tuned regularly. If you sell cars and have a service department, customers may request discounts on everything from tuneups or oil changes to major repairs.



Provide the manager of every department in your company with training in negotiations so you can effectively serve this market without having your profit margin assaulted. Have your department managers read this chapter; better yet, have them read the entire book.

What about death and taxes?

When I (Michael) say in my seminars that nearly everything in the world is negotiable, many of the attendees point out that death and taxes are nonnegotiable. Although that may be true to some extent, the truth is that the cost of healthcare and how much you pay in taxes are negotiable. I get a “good patient discount” from my doctor, for example, because I never

miss an appointment and always pay my bills on time. This saves my doctor a great deal of time and paperwork, so he passes the savings on to me.

If you owe several years’ worth of income tax to the federal government, you can often negotiate a lower lump-sum payment through its Offers in Compromise program.

Negotiating never stops

Most people, including salespeople, have little exposure to cultures in which negotiating is a way of life. Because of this, salespeople often become frustrated with customers from these cultures. Many sales professionals complain that some groups seem to haggle before, during, and even after the sale. What's even more maddening is when the salesperson is absolutely sure that the patron can easily afford the purchase; why do they spend so much time being difficult when they can pay the sticker price?



The penchant for negotiating everything is just a cultural difference. As many people in the business world like to say, "It is what it is." Accept it and plan for it — know exactly what you're willing to negotiate upfront.

Fielding Low-Ball Offers and Requests for Discounts

Salespeople who are unaware of the nuances of selling to customers from haggling cultures often lose customers by misinterpreting low-ball offers and rejecting them outright. What would you do if you had a lot full of \$40,000 cars and a customer came up to you and said something like, "I know this car is \$40,000, but you have so many. How about letting this one go for \$20,000?" Most uninitiated salespeople are likely to laugh and tell the customer to come back when he's serious.

With multicultural customers, this can be a huge mistake. That shockingly low offer is actually a buying signal. If the customer simply looked at the price tag and walked off the lot without saying a word, you'd know she wasn't interested, but you wouldn't know why. The customer who pitches a low-ball offer is interested and ready to negotiate the purchase.

In the following sections, we reveal the do's and don'ts of fielding low offers and requests for discounts, and we offer strategies that can boost your sales.



When customers from haggling cultures make a laughably low offer, don't take it personally or feel insulted — this is the ultimate sign that they're willing to buy from you. Be elated knowing that you have serious prospects and are about to make a sale!

Don't take the bait

If you're new to dealing with people from bargaining cultures, you're likely to think that they expect you to accept their initial offer, regardless of how low

it is. Nothing could be further from reality. Perhaps the worst move you can make when a customer offers a ridiculously low price is to accept it. Perhaps you set the price ridiculously high, the product is overstocked, or you have some other reason to accept the offer. Whatever your motivation, don't accept that initial offer, because it can backfire.



If, for whatever reason, you're motivated to accept a ridiculous offer, it may immediately raise the customer's suspicions. Why would you sell such a valuable product or service for such a low price? What's wrong with it? These questions can cause the customer to try to back out of the deal as quickly as possible, no matter how good the deal may seem.

Do express shock and dismay



When a customer makes an unacceptably low offer, you're likely to feel shocked and perhaps insulted. Many salespeople try to hide these emotions behind a stoic and cool demeanor. This can send the wrong signal. Your lack of negative response may lead your customers to believe that you're considering their offer and set them up to be disappointed. When you later try to write up the purchase at full price, it may make you appear dishonest.

It may not seem intuitive, but one of the most effective ways to get lowballers to raise their offer is to demonstrate the pain it has caused you. Flinch. Grimace. Let your face and body express what you're thinking.

If you work in a jewelry store and are showing a \$2,000 ring, for example, and the customer asks, "Would you take \$1,200?" repeat the price back in a horrified tone, "\$1,200!" Then be absolutely silent and give the customer a chance to absorb the fact that their offer is unacceptable. What they'll likely do next is respond, "What about \$1,400?" Your flinch just bought a \$200 price increase for nothing.

If the offer is in the ballpark, you may want to consider raising the ante one more time to create the illusion of precision. (See "Do use the 'illusion of precision'," later in this chapter for details.) If the offer is still too low, express your disappointment in some other way so they won't think you're just acting. You can slowly shake your head and frown without saying another word. Your silence puts the pressure on them to raise their offer.



Develop an entire repertoire of nonverbal expressions of disappointment. You need to mix it up so the customer will be less able to tell that you're putting on an act. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Laugh and say nothing.
- ✓ Put your hand to your mouth as if you don't want to say what you're thinking.

- ✔ Put your hand to your head as if the low offer has given you a headache.
- ✔ Look the customer in the eye and shake your head from side to side.
- ✔ Act as if you just grabbed a live electric wire and recoil.

You can also vary your expressions of disappointment by adding verbal “flinches,” such as the following:

- ✔ Laugh and say, “Seriously, what are you really thinking?”
- ✔ Repeat the customer’s offer back in an incredulous voice.
- ✔ Act horrified and say, “You’ve got to be joking!”
- ✔ Pretend to be confused and respond, “You must be thinking about the one without the options, right?”

Keep up this process until the customer appears as though he’s going to leave. At this point, you know you’re getting close to his bottom line. (By the way, any time someone says, “This is my bottom line,” it’s almost guaranteed that it isn’t.)



Now keep quiet! For any flinch to have maximum impact, remain absolutely silent after you deliver it. This silence shifts the pressure to respond back to the customer. When the customer made the silly offer, it put pressure on you to respond. Your flinch followed by silence puts the ball back into his court.

Get comfortable with uncomfortable silences so you can use the discomfort to your advantage. The first person to speak loses.

Do help customers save face

Asians, Hispanics, and Middle Easterners are particularly sensitive to the need to save face. Saving face is important to them, and they believe it’s important to you, too.

When customers present an unacceptably low offer, one way to respond is to tell them something like, “Because we’ve sold all of these to our other customers at this price, *to save face with them* we must sell it to you for the same price.” This often shuts down the haggling immediately, because many people from collectivist cultures will accept this explanation without any additional need for discussion. (For more about collectivist cultures, visit Chapters 6 and 11.)



Be sure to use the phrase “save face,” because it really resonates with people from collectivist cultures. If they cause you to lose face with your other customers, they, in turn, lose face. Couching your inability to discount the price in terms of not wanting to lose respect with other customers expresses your motivation in a way that customers from these cultures clearly understand.

After all, who would want to find out that their friend or relative paid less for the very same item? This is especially effective when selling big-ticket items, when people are more likely to compare the price they paid.



This countering technique doesn't work in all circumstances, and even when it does, there's no guarantee it will curtail all future negotiations on other aspects of the transaction. It's just one weapon you can keep in your arsenal when bargaining with experienced hagglers.

Do use the “illusion of precision”

Whenever you're presenting a counteroffer to a customer, never make your response an even number. For instance, if the customer is considering a \$1,000 diamond watch and offers you \$800, resist the temptation to respond with “\$900.” It sounds like you just pulled this number out of thin air and you could be willing to go lower.



Instead, use your flinch-and-grimace tactics (see the “Do express shock and dismay” section earlier in the chapter) to get them to come up as high as possible from their low starting number. If you must quote a figure, hesitate for a moment and then make it precise, such as \$947. This implies that you have calculated your profit margin, carrying costs, rent, and alimony payments to come up with as low a figure as possible. It also sends a clear message that this is truly your bottom line.

Don't offer to “split the difference”

One negotiating strategy that spans all cultures consists of splitting the difference, and it's always a bad idea. Splitting the difference disappoints both the seller and the buyer.

Reexamine the previous section's example in which the seller wants \$1,000 for the watch while the buyer only wants to pay \$800. The *logical* compromise is to split the difference — the seller drops the price \$100, and the buyer agrees to pay \$100 more for a sales price of \$900. Unfortunately, this leaves both parties feeling none too happy. The buyer thinks, “Why should I pay \$100 more just because the seller set an unreasonable markup?” The seller thinks, “Just to make this deal, I'm going to have to give up \$100 right out of my profit margin?!”

A more effective way to approach situations such as these is to counter with an illusion of precision, as discussed in the preceding section. Say something like, “Look, I'd like to split the difference with you, but I can't because our profit margins are too small on this item. Let me tell you what I can do, though. I'll knock \$53 off if you'll come up to \$947.” The illusion of precision

now makes it almost impossible to split the difference between \$947 and \$1,000 (\$26.50 if you try to split the difference of \$53). This offer allows the buyer to feel good about getting a \$53 discount, while making you feel good about adding another \$47 to your bottom line. Everybody's happy.



If a customer wants a discount on your product or service, ask him how much of a discount he wants. Your customer may ask for less than you had in mind, giving you a clearer idea of where the starting point really is.

Do set deadlines



The more time you give your customers to make a final decision, the more time they have to dicker over price and terms and back out of the deal. To encourage customers to make a final decision, set deadlines:

- ✓ Announce special sales, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, President's Day, or owner's birthday sale. When the day ends, so does the sale.
- ✓ If you have a limited supply, let the customer know you could run out. (Don't just pretend you have a limited supply, because if the customer finds out later that you lied, you'll lose repeat business and referral opportunities.)
- ✓ Schedule several appointments with customers interested in the same product or service close to each other so your customers feel they could lose the deal to another buyer.

Don't focus solely on money

Competing solely on price is a loser's game. The more you drop your price, the lower the profit margin goes for both yourself and your competitor. You need to find some other way to remain competitive without destroying your bottom line.

The same is true when you're negotiating with customers. Many novice negotiators make the mistake of focusing solely on the sales price. When a customer asks for a discount, they start dropping the price. This sends the wrong message, confirming the buyer's suspicion that your markup was unrealistic.



When your customers ask for a discount, consider finding other ways to sweeten the pot. One option is to simply provide more information about the value of your products and services. Customers negotiate because they want to feel as though they're getting more for less. Instead of dropping the price, give them more information that convinces them they're getting a great deal.

You can also look for nonmonetary ways to put together a deal that's valuable to the customer but inexpensive for you. Including a warranty or accessories may be one way to offer value without giving away the store. For example, say you sell musical instruments, and a customer wants a 10 percent discount on a guitar that lists for \$700 — a discount of \$70. Instead of squabbling about the price, consider throwing in a carrying case that lists for \$70 but costs you only \$25. By not caving in on your price, you added \$45 to your profit margin.



Always counter. Even if a customer's offer seems reasonable, counter their offer without tipping your hand by saying something like, "You'll have to do better than that." Giving in too early in the process can trigger doubts that may encourage the customer to back out of the deal. They believe that there's got to be something wrong if you jump at their first offer.

Recognizing and Shutting Down Nibbling

When you're selling to customers from haggling cultures, be prepared for any attempts by customers to *nibble* you out of your profits — asking for concessions after they've signed the contract. In the United States, a signed contract signals the end of negotiations. In other countries, signing the contract is only the beginning. In negotiating cultures, the ability to get a really good deal is a badge of honor. In these places, customers like to be able to brag that they not only got a good price, but also persuaded the other party to throw in something extra.

Savvy negotiators know that Americans don't particularly like bargaining. After the contract is signed, people from non-haggling cultures are so relieved that we may let down our guards and become vulnerable to nibbling. I (Michael) have seen multicultural home buyers ask for new carpets, painting, copper piping, and even a rusty old lawnmower to be thrown into the deal after everyone signed the contract. To hold the deal together, a seller may give in to the customer's demands in an attempt to put an end to additional requests. Unfortunately, acquiescing to these requests only whets the appetite. She got something for nothing, so why not ask for more?

As soon as you start making concessions, nibblers ask for more, so you need to spot nibbling as soon as it begins and put an end to it immediately. We reveal how in the following sections.

Spotting nibbling as soon as it begins

The nibbling process can begin very subtly, so tread carefully. For example, a customer buying a plasma TV may ask you to throw in the matching base, or a career coaching client could ask you to evaluate her résumé for free.



When a customer starts asking for more than what you already agreed on, the person is nibbling.

Nipping nibbling in the bud

As soon as you give in to one concession, you embolden your customers to ask for even more, so you really need to nip nibbling in the bud. In the following sections, we describe four strategies for shutting down nibblers.

Get a concession before you give a concession

The best way to stop nibbling is to always get a concession before you give one. Nibblers will stop nibbling as soon as they realize that every time they ask for more, you'll ask for something in exchange. Here are some examples:

- ✓ If a plasma TV purchaser asks you to throw in the matching base, you can ask her to also purchase the extended warranty.
- ✓ If a career coaching client asks you to evaluate her résumé for free, you can ask her to commit to a six-month contract.
- ✓ If a jewelry customer wants a more expensive chain for a pendant after you've agreed on a price, ask the customer to pay cash instead of charging the purchase.
- ✓ If the nibbler asks for additional accessories, offer to sell them at a reduced price but above your cost.

Practice the art of "takeaways"

Another way to stop nibbling is to take away value. In the previous section's jewelry example, if the buyer wants a thicker gold chain for free, offer a less expensive pendant with the more expensive chain for the same price. When you start taking away value, nibblers usually back off from their demands.

Always save something for the end

Savvy bargainers know that they have the most leverage just before they take delivery of their purchase, because the seller has often already spent the proceeds in her mind (or maybe in reality) and doesn't want to lose the sale.

So if you always throw in a freebie to sweeten the deal — a free sample, gift wrapping, or something else — don't mention it until the customer starts to nibble. Then say something like, "I have a special gift for my best customers, but the negotiating must end." Every time they try to nibble, remind them of the gift they could forfeit.

Be willing to walk away

Ultimately, the strongest position in negotiating is just to walk away from a deal. If you don't like how it's going or you're going to lose money due to nibbling, you can simply say, "No, thank you." If your customer wants it badly enough, she'll raise her offer or come back later with a different deal.



Walking away tells the customer that you believe that your product or service has the value you're asking for. It also sends a message that you've truly reached your bottom line.

Short-Circuiting Buyer's Remorse

To put an official end to the negotiating process, congratulate the customer on making a wise purchase decision or "investment." Review the benefits of the product or service to reinforce the notion that the buyers have purchased the right products or services.

Congratulating your customers can often head off any *buyer's remorse* they may feel — the sick feeling purchasers often get in their stomachs when they begin to think that they made a mistake.



We're sure that you can come up with your own list of benefits to point out to customers, but one of the biggest benefits you should always mention is the fact that the buyer can now stop shopping and start enjoying the product or service he has purchased.

Practicing Your Skills

Becoming a skilled negotiator requires real-world practice. Reading about it isn't enough. In the following sections, we give you some calisthenics to keep you in tiptop shape so you can do battle with some of the best negotiators in the world — your customers from haggling cultures. We also point out some other opportunities you can explore to hone your negotiating skills.

Doing your negotiating calisthenics



Whenever you're buying a product or service for yourself, you have a golden opportunity to flex your negotiating muscle. This weekend, head out to a few garage sales in your neighborhood and practice haggling with the proprietors. For \$20, you can haggle all day with very little risk, because the sellers are usually not very sophisticated negotiators. Try the following tactics:

- ✔ Start by trying to get the seller to quote you a price lower than sticker by saying something like, “What’ll you take to get rid of this right now?”
- ✔ Pitch a ridiculously low offer.
- ✔ Flinch when the owner counters your offer.
- ✔ Respond with a counter to his counter, using the illusion of precision.
- ✔ Try nibbling to see how the seller responds.
- ✔ Try walking away and coming back toward the end of the day.
- ✔ Congratulate the seller on what a great deal he got.
- ✔ Remind the seller that he doesn’t have to donate the items you bought to charity or haul them to the dump.

After you’ve mastered garage sales, visit flea markets in your area. Here again you have little to lose, but the sellers are generally more experienced at bargaining. After you’ve improved your skills, visit antique or collectible shops where negotiating is common, but the proprietors are even more highly skilled negotiators.

Finally, move up to negotiating the purchase of furniture, major appliances, cars, and houses as these opportunities present themselves. This kind of disciplined practice is what it takes to become a black-belt negotiator.

Pursuing daily opportunities to hone your skills

Every time you sit down with a salesperson or you pull out your wallet to make a purchase, ask yourself, “Is this an opportunity to practice my negotiating skills?” If it is, seize the opportunity.



To remind yourself to pursue negotiating opportunities, put a yellow sticky note inside your wallet with one word on it: “Negotiate?”

Set a goal to negotiate at least one purchase every day. Think about what items you purchase on a regular basis that you should be getting a discount on. If you eat at the same restaurant a couple of times a month, your consistent business should be rewarded with a discount or at least a free salad or dessert. If you go to the same sandwich shop nearly every day for lunch, you should certainly get a free sandwich after purchasing ten.

By practicing every day you’ll become a master negotiator with anyone, regardless of culture.

Part IV

Taking Your Game to the Next Level

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"This concept was a big hit in Nome. I wonder why it failed here in New Delhi."

In this part . . .

You got game. You can meet, greet, and pitch your products to the multicultural marketplace and build strong relationships with your customers. But how effective is your postgame (postsale) follow-through?

In this part, you take your game to the next level by keeping your customers happy so they'll come back for more and recommend you to their friends, family, and neighbors.

To assist you in achieving this goal, we focus on sharpening your customer-service skills, generating word-of-mouth advertising, and building a diverse sales team that's better equipped to serve your multicultural clientele.

Chapter 14

Tweaking Your Customer-Service Skills

In This Chapter

- ▶ Recognizing the warning signs of poor customer service
 - ▶ Providing top-notch customer service
 - ▶ Responding effectively to multicultural customer complaints
 - ▶ Gathering feedback from your multicultural clientele
-

Achieving cross-cultural selling success is like perfecting your golf swing — you need to work on your back swing, forward swing, and your follow-through. The back swing is all the marketing and advertising you've done, along with the effort you invested in giving your business a multicultural makeover. Your forward swing is your sales presentation and any post-sale negotiations required to close the deal. With an effective back swing and forward swing, you can establish contact with your customer and make a sale. It takes a great follow-through, however, to win a customer for life and all the referral business that comes with achieving that goal.

Cross-cultural sales and marketing isn't just about making your products and services appealing to people of different cultures. For long-term success, you have to adjust the way you treat people after the sale. As a salesperson or business owner, you're well aware of the value of superior customer service in retaining customers and building a strong referral base, but you may be unaware of exactly how to provide quality customer service to your multicultural clientele. This chapter brings you up to speed.

Spotting the Signs of Poor Customer Service

As a seasoned salesperson or business owner, you can probably tell the difference between stores and offices where the employees and management

pride themselves on customer service and those where the staff just doesn't seem to care. In fact, you can usually tell just by watching the customers. Here are the most common signs that you have customer-service issues:

- ✓ Long delays at checkout lines.
- ✓ Long waits in the lobby or reception area.
- ✓ Frequent returns of the same product.
- ✓ Frequent cancellations of your appointments.
- ✓ Poor signage so customers must constantly ask for help or wander the aisles aimlessly.
- ✓ Salespeople who never seem to be around when needed.
- ✓ Employees lack knowledge . . . when they're around.
- ✓ A significant proportion of customers leave without buying anything.
- ✓ Prospective clients walk out of your office before meeting with a sales rep.
- ✓ Repeated complaints about the same issues.
- ✓ Personnel frequently say, "That's our policy."
- ✓ Personnel often say, "That's not my job."
- ✓ Slow response to customer complaints.
- ✓ Patrons frequently become angry or frustrated.

Ramping Up Your Customer-Service Efforts



Stellar customer service begins with the Global Rule — treat others the way they want to be treated. You already know what good customer service is all about. The only difference is that now you must take into account cultural influences and differences.

After every interaction with you or one of your staff, a client has one of the following three reactions:

- ✓ **Disappointment:** They got less than what they expected and will tell others to avoid you.
- ✓ **Satisfaction:** They got what they expected.
- ✓ **Delight:** They got more than they expected and will tell others to do business with you.

You want as many customers as possible to feel so delighted that they sing your praises to all of their friends, relatives, and acquaintances. In the following sections, we offer suggestions on how to reduce the number of customers who feel disappointed and increase the number who are delighted.



The most important step in making sure your customers have a positive experience is to meet and greet them in a way that makes them comfortable. Flip to Chapter 8 for guidance on how to master the multicultural meet-and-greet, and make sure all staff who deal directly with customers have mastered these skills, as well. This is a great start to showing prospects that you care about them and their culture.

Hiring and training customer-service-minded staff



If you're a business owner, hire people who have customer-friendly attitudes to continuously meet the ever-changing needs of your customers and constantly improve customer service. Hire for attitude first, and then for aptitude, because changing a person's attitude is much more difficult than providing them with the training they need to competently perform their job. Recruit people who love to solve problems and truly care about people. (See Chapter 16 for full details on building your staff.)

Train your staff on the ABC's of customer service: Always Be Courteous. And this means being knowledgeable and helpful, too. One national grocery chain has spent a fortune to make sure that their employees greet every customer who gets within 20 feet. Although this seems to go a bit overboard, it sends the message that they're dedicated to being helpful.

Train your staff yourself or hire someone to train them for you. (In Chapter 6, we list the components of a crash course on cross-cultural training and provide a short list of companies that can provide the training for you.) Explain what good customer service is (and isn't) regularly. Most important, give every member of your staff enough information and power to make those small customer-pleasing decisions so she never has to say, "I don't know, but the manager will be back later."



Major manufacturers are often happy to provide free seminars about how to use and maintain their products. Send your frontline staff to these seminars. Sure, this requires an investment on your part, but it benefits you in three ways:

- ✓ Demonstrates your commitment to quality customer service
- ✓ Shows that you value your staff enough to invest in their education
- ✓ Improves employee retention rates so you have a more experienced staff

Educate your staff about the lifetime value of a client. Remember that multicultural customers in particular can be extremely loyal. If your staff focuses not only on one sale, but future purchases as well, your customers will patronize you for a lifetime and refer friends and family. For more about increasing your referral business, check out Chapter 15.

Focusing on relationships — not sales

Whenever a customer enters your business, pretend that the person is a close friend or favorite relative you want to help. This places your focus on serving your customer's needs rather than your own (making a sale). Most people are willing to spend a little more money if you make them feel special.

This is a good approach to take with all of your customers, but it earns you additional benefits when you're working with customers from collectivist cultures, where relationships are valued even more highly.

Educating your customers

The source of most consumer complaints is the fact that a product or service didn't live up to the promise. In other words, the customer's expectations were out of whack. They thought they were getting something great, and it turned out to be something less than outstanding. Of course, this applies to all of your customers, but especially to customers from other cultures who may not have previous experience with the type of products and services sold in the U.S. To avoid complaints that arise from inflated expectations, educate your customers from the get-go:

- ✔ **Educate customers about how to use the product or service.** If they're confused about how to use a product's features, they may simply assume that the product can't do what you said it could.
- ✔ **Show customers how to get the most out of the product or service.** If the product has optional accessories that make it more useful or enjoyable, make sure the customer knows about them upfront. Manufacturers make accessories and service providers offer additional services for a reason — because these add-ons increase the benefit of their product or service to the customer.

See Chapter 11 for more information on showing your customers how to use your product or service. We explain how to field customer complaints in more detail later in this chapter.

Treating your customers with respect

Of course, you should treat all customers with respect, but this is even more important when dealing with multicultural clients, because they may be a little more sensitive than your traditional clientele. They may be more likely to jump to the conclusion, for example, that discrimination is the reason you didn't return their call or answer their question by e-mail.



Return calls and e-mails promptly and answer questions as soon as you can find the answers. If you're unavailable, let customers know whom they can contact in your absence. Check out Chapter 4 for the basics of treating multicultural customers with respect.

Being helpful — even if there's no immediate reward

One day I (Michael) popped into a local watch shop because the small piece that clipped my watchband together had broken. When I explained the problem, the proprietor said he thought he might have one lying around. He found it, attached it to my watchband, and charged me *nothing!* Where do you think I'll go when I need a new watchband or even a new watch? And how many people do you think I've told this story to?

If someone walks into your store and asks you to help them find something, don't just say, "It's in Aisle 3." Lead the customer to the item. Better yet, wait a moment and see if she has questions about it or any further needs. Remember, customers from other cultures may feel even more "lost" than your usual new customer, so they may need more orientation. Whatever the extra step may be, if you want to provide good customer service, take that extra step. Doing a little extra may not seem like much to you, but people notice when you make an extra effort and will tell others.

Showing patience



Patience is crucial. New immigrants especially may have difficulty expressing why they're unhappy or dissatisfied. Just listening can have a calming and comforting effect. Dealing with multicultural customers typically takes a bit more time and effort than working with folks who speak English fluently and are familiar with your product or service. Understanding this is often enough to make you more patient. (In Chapter 11, we explain in more detail the importance of listening to your customers.)

Saving your customers precious time

In the United States, everything is fast — we have drive-through restaurants, minute rice, the 10-minute oil change, and even instant messaging. We're an on-demand society that wants it all and wants it now.



You may think that customers from other countries would take a more relaxed approach to doing business, but the opposite is often true. Because many new immigrants work long hours, they value their time off even more. They'd much rather spend time with their friends and family than with a salesperson they barely know, so look for ways to save your customers time. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- ✓ **Streamline transactions.** Keep checkout lines moving smoothly, simplify your paperwork, or use a team-based approach to processing complex transactions.
- ✓ **Offer one-stop solutions.** If you sell guitars, for example, make sure you have everything a budding musician needs, including a case, strap, stand, amplifier, cables, strings, special effects pedals, and lessons. If the customer needs to shop around to different stores, they're wasting valuable time, and you're missing additional sales.



Don't forget that your complete solution for a customer can include warranties, service plans, financing, insurance, and other options. Any of these can not only increase your income but also help reduce hassle, frustration, and cost for the customer in the future.

Preventing misunderstandings over warranties and service policies

Your multicultural clientele are much more likely than your traditional customers to expect that you stand behind what you sell for the entire time they own your product or pay for your services, whether or not it comes with a warranty or service policy. If you offer a warranty or service policy, many of these folks won't completely understand how these contracts work or their limitations. It's natural for anyone, especially new immigrants, to assume that everything is covered forever.

The best time to deal with potential issues or confusion is before any issues or misunderstandings arise:

- ✓ Explain any warranties or service contracts upfront. Make sure your customer thoroughly understands any limitations or expiration dates by having them circle, initial, and date the critical information on your copy.



- ✔ Enforce warranty and service policies consistently for all customers and across all departments in your company. If the word gets out that one customer persuaded a manager to approve replacing an entire driveway because he found a crack, you can expect a lot of people to ask for the same thing. This leaves you with few options unless you want to face discrimination complaints.
- ✔ If customers try to renegotiate the warranty or service after the sale, stall for time and quickly review Chapter 13 on haggling.

Throwing in something extra

Whether it's a coupon for a future discount, additional information on how to use the product, or a genuine smile, people love to get more than expected. And don't think that a gesture has to be large to be effective. The local art framer that my (Michael's) family uses attaches a package of picture hangers to every picture he frames. It's a small thing, but customers really appreciate it.

Practicing what we preach

As discussed in Chapter 13, consumers in the United States tend to be relatively money-rich and time-poor, so salespeople are wise to do everything in their power to save their clients time. Each of us (the authors) does this in our own unique ways:

- ✔ **Michael:** In my multicultural sales training business, I offer clients a full array of services, including the option to customize their program, pre-interview key audience members, provide assessments, develop workbooks, offer interactive games and surveys, and more. I may spend a day or two observing salespeople on-the-job and even *mystery shop* them — posing as a customer and rating the salesperson on the quality of his interaction. These activities can help me diagnose and solve several problems for clients at one time.
- ✔ **Ralph:** With my team-based approach to selling homes, as soon as a home buyer decides to make an offer, I can call back to the office to have my transactions coordinator start the paperwork. In addition, I try to provide my clients with everything they need, including financing. If a seller needs an electrician to do some repairs before placing his home on the market, you can bet that I'll have the name of a high-quality electrician who can do the work.
- ✔ **Joe:** I generally have two clients — my coauthors and the publisher to whom we deliver the manuscript. I streamline the process at both ends with the goal of making the process easy and hassle free for all parties (including myself). Every book starts with a very detailed outline, which functions almost like a fill-in-the-blanks form. After that's in place, the writing proceeds much more smoothly.



Hold off on revealing your bonus item until the very end of the transaction, as noted in Chapter 13, to discourage buyers from nibbling — a common practice in countries where customers often haggle for better deals.

Keeping your promises

Few things annoy customers more than broken promises, because they totally destroy customers' faith in you. Only make promises you'll keep — not just plan to keep, but *will* keep. Train your staff to be conservative in their estimates of costs, delivery dates, and other details. Underpromise and overdeliver.

Reliability is the key to building trust, especially when you're trying to attract customers from other cultures. If you say, "Your new bedroom furniture will be delivered on Tuesday," make sure it's delivered on Tuesday. Otherwise, don't say it. The same rule applies to client appointments; if you're not sure you can keep the appointment, don't make it.



Pad your deadlines. If you think you can deliver the goods on Tuesday, but you're sure you can get them there by Friday, say Friday. If you find out later that you can absolutely make it by Tuesday, call your customers and let them know. They'll be delighted to hear the good news!

Remaining accessible 24/7



Customers want to be able to reach a human being in your company when they have a problem after purchasing a product or service. This is especially true for those who may not be completely familiar with how to use products or services that aren't common in their country of origin. Offer support by phone, e-mail, or online chat, or hire a service that can provide 24/7 support for you. Make sure the support you offer is available when your multicultural clientele needs it; remember, they may have different schedules than your traditional customers.

Fielding Multicultural Customer Complaints

Pleasing existing customers should be your number-one priority for several reasons:

- ✓ According to some estimates, finding a new customer costs two to three times more than keeping an existing one.

- ✔ Existing clients are likely to buy more products and services from you because they already know you and trust you.
- ✔ You get more referral business from existing satisfied customers than from new customers who don't even know you yet.

Don't simply chalk up a complaint to "You can't please all people all the time." Perhaps you can't, but if you address the complaint, you may be able to please this one person this one time and position your business to reap the benefits of good customer service. Multicultural customers tend to become very loyal and make lots of referrals when they're satisfied. In the following sections, we offer some guidance on how to change the way you feel about complaints and how to address them more effectively.

Treating complaints as good news

In business, what you don't know really can hurt you, especially if you're unaware that your customers are unhappy. Studies show that for every person who complains to management or staff, two more won't say anything but will never come back. To keep more customers coming back, be ready to hear the complaints, identify the cause, and solve the problem.



Complainers give you an opportunity to re-earn their business, so encourage people who are dissatisfied to let you know they're unhappy. Give every customer a postage-paid survey card that they can complete at home and drop in the mail. To increase your response rates, you can offer to put their name in a drawing for an attractive gift like an MP3 player or gift certificate. If the results show that they're satisfied and happy, so much the better! (We discuss surveying customers in more detail later in this chapter.)



Studies show that satisfying unhappy customers makes them more loyal than those who never complained at all. This is why it's worth investing time and money to develop an effective customer-service program.

Considering the source

Some cultures are more apt to complain than others. Most longtime Americans, for example, rarely express their dissatisfaction to the salesperson or customer-service rep. People have just gotten used to poor service in this country. While multicultural customers may be even more hesitant to make waves, overall, Hispanics are the least likely to complain, although they're more likely to tell their friends and family not to do business with the offending vendor.

You may need to work a little harder to obtain feedback from dissatisfied customers who belong to certain groups. This is especially true for those who are reluctant to complain. With cultures that are less likely to complain,

focus on becoming more sensitive to the signs that customers aren't satisfied and then be more proactive in asking them what you can do to help or to correct a problem. Instead of waiting for customers to come to you, you may need to approach them.

When a multicultural customer does complain, you have to take it very seriously because it means they're really unhappy. It usually takes a lot for someone from a collectivist culture to openly express dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, some Greeks, Middle Easterners, Israelis, and others use complaints as a way to increase their negotiating leverage. Always examine the reasons for a customer's dissatisfaction to see how much attention the complaint deserves.

Responding to a complaint in eight easy steps

Your business should have a complaint policy that includes standard operating procedures for responding to complaints. We recommend the following eight-step process:

1. Acknowledge the complaint.
2. Listen.
3. Diffuse the anger by asking your customer to unload all the issues.
4. Accept the blame.
5. Ask your customer to suggest a solution.
6. Suggest your own solution if necessary.
7. Implement the agreed-upon solution.
8. Follow up to ensure satisfaction.

Step 1: Acknowledge the complaint

Ignoring a complaint is not an option. Unhappy customers may go away, but they go away angry and then blow off steam by telling everyone they know what a rotten person they think you are. In addition, multicultural customers are likely to assume that your lack of empathy is a form of discrimination. This isn't exactly going to make them more receptive when you finally get around to dealing with their problems.

When your customer expresses dissatisfaction, demonstrate the fact that you care by listening carefully and taking the complaint seriously. You may even want to repeat the complaint back to the person to show that you've heard and understand the reasons they're unhappy.



Step 2: Listen

When a customer starts complaining, it's easy to go on the defensive and plug your ears. Some salespeople even proceed to argue with the customer, which is about the worst thing you can do, especially with multicultural customers; arguing may cause them to lose face, which is unacceptable (see Chapter 4). Instead, simply listen to the complaint and note any significant details that may help you resolve the problem.

Step 3: Diffuse the anger by asking your customer to unload all the issues

What really irritates customers is when they feel that nobody's listening. They have a problem that they believe you or your company, product, or service has caused, and they haven't had a chance to complain about it yet. They call or come in with all of this anger bottled up inside them. Your customer may actually be experiencing physical pain from trying to control his emotions.

So what's the best response? Let the customer unload on you and then ask for more. We know this sounds crazy, but all you have to do is listen, and when the customer stops, simply say something like, "Is there anything else you're unhappy about?" Sometimes he says no, and you can start exploring resolutions to his complaint, but more often than not, he'll come up with additional issues. When he finishes, ask again, "So what else are you dissatisfied with?" Keep asking until he runs out of things to complain about. Until you hit this point, don't even think about discussing solutions.



Angry people, no matter the culture, often don't want solutions — they just want to be heard. Only when they feel they've been heard will they be ready to listen to you.

Step 4: Accept the blame

Regardless of what or who caused the problem, accept the blame. The first thing customers want to hear is an apology. You can simply say, "I'm sorry." If you really can't bring yourself to take the blame, at least say something like, "I'm sorry this happened."

What you do next depends on the customer's cultural context (see Chapter 3 for an introduction to this topic):

- ✓ If you make a mistake with a customer from a low-context culture, a simple "I'm sorry" is usually sufficient. A complaint from someone with this background is viewed simply as an error in the transaction.
- ✓ If you screw up with someone from a high-context culture, prepare to make a very elaborate and flowery apology. A complaint from someone from a high-context culture signals that a trusting relationship has been damaged and must now be repaired.

Step 5: Ask your customer to suggest a solution

When you're addressing an issue raised by a multicultural customer, realize that you're likely to be involved in a negotiation in every sense of the word. As we explain in Chapter 13, one of the first rules of negotiating is this: Never make the first offer.

After the customer has calmed down, ask, "So what do you suggest as a solution?" or "What can I do to make this right?" It's possible that the customer may offer something quite reasonable, easy to implement, and less than you're willing to offer. Sometimes all he wants is a working replacement of a defective item, but sometimes he wants that plus a million dollars as compensation for pain and suffering. By asking for the customer's opinion, at least you know what he's thinking.

Step 6: Suggest your own solution if necessary

If the customer's solution is reasonable, skip to Step 7. If it's not, then propose your own remedy. Be creative. People from haggling countries may use a mistake or defect as a negotiating tool to get a rebate or other concessions. In other words, they may know full well that they're asking for too much. Make a reasonable counteroffer.



If you're a business owner, empower all frontline staff to resolve customer complaints. Consider giving each person a set budget for resolving complaints without having to consult with a manager so your staff can build strong relationships on their own.

As always, when explaining policies or what you're willing to do for an upset new-immigrant customer, speak slowly without raising your voice. You don't want to add frustration to their anger.

Step 7: Implement the agreed-upon solution

After you've agreed with the customer on a mutually satisfactory solution, you can implement it. You may want to make a written note about how you plan to deal with the customer's issue so you have something concrete to refer back to. Let the customer know every step of the way what the progress is toward the problem's resolution. If you have to order a replacement part or entirely new unit, inform them when it's expected to arrive. Remember to underpromise and overdeliver, as we explain in the earlier section "Keeping your promises." A missed deadline here could be the kiss of death for your relationship.



If a unit needs repairs, let the customer know what the technician tells you about the status of the job. Call even if it's only to inform him that the problem hasn't yet been isolated and you're still working on it.

Step 8: Follow up to ensure satisfaction

After the solution has been fully implemented, call or e-mail the customer (use whatever mode of communication he prefers) to see whether things are still satisfactory. You're likely to find that people from high-context cultures tend to prefer personal contact.

On those rare occasions when the customer is still unhappy, you can go back to Step 5 or just write him off. We don't hold the belief that "the customer is always right." You may decide that this customer is just too much trouble, but at least you tried.

Surveying Multicultural Customers to Understand Their Satisfaction Level

Many retail outlets, service providers, and even some individual salespeople conduct customer satisfaction surveys. Some of my (Michael's) clients even submit their surveys to organizations like J.D. Power and Associates so they can benchmark themselves against others in their industry.

After you've done everything possible to improve customer service, survey all of your customers to determine what they think of the level of customer service you provide. To obtain accurate ratings, be aware of the following do's and don'ts.



If you don't adjust your survey for multicultural customers, the results will be of dubious value and could even be misleading. Like anyone else, these customers appreciate exceptional service and want, more than average, to let people know.

Do set the stage properly

As early in your relationship as possible, let customers know that they'll be receiving a survey and it's very important for you that they complete and return it. Tell them that your performance is graded by the scores and that you'll lose face with your peers and your boss if you don't get the score you deserve. Finally, ask them to let you know at any time if there's anything you can do to improve, because you really want to receive a top rating. Let them know that you won't be embarrassed by getting a high score. For additional details and tips on conducting effective surveys, check out Chapter 2.

Do design your survey to be “culture friendly”

At the top of the survey, state that your company strives to meet the needs of all of its customers and one of the ways to measure this is through a survey. Avoid phrases like “We strive to be the best,” because collectivist cultures may interpret this as arrogant and putting down your competition, which causes you to lose face.

Do use short and simple statements

We suggest that you keep your survey short and simple by using check boxes. You can develop specific questions for your customers by consulting a survey designer. List five to ten customer-service areas, and ask customers to rank each area on a scale of “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

Retail customer-service areas can include the following:

- ✓ **Atmosphere:** For example, “As soon as I entered the store, I felt welcome.”
- ✓ **Staff:** For example, “A staff member greeted me soon after I entered the store.” “A clerk assisted me in finding what I was looking for.”
- ✓ **Store layout/shelving/signage:** For example, “I was able to find what I was looking for easily.” “I had no trouble finding the products/services I was shopping for.”
- ✓ **Sales:** For example, “The salesperson I spoke with answered all of my questions.” “The salesperson helped me in selecting the right product/service.” “I felt comfortable talking with this salesperson.”
- ✓ **Post-sale:** For example, “The products/services I ordered were delivered on time or ahead of schedule.” “Questions I had about the warranty were answered to my satisfaction.” “The sales staff was helpful in teaching me how to use the product.”
- ✓ **Returns/exchanges:** For example, “I had no trouble returning/exchanging the products I had purchased.”

Service providers can examine such areas as:

- ✓ **Atmosphere:** For example, “As soon as I entered the office, I felt welcome.”
- ✓ **Education:** For example, “I fully understood the services to be provided and their costs.”

- ✔ **Personal responsibility:** For example, “I understand that to obtain a satisfactory result I am responsible for fully participating in this service.”
- ✔ **Post-visit:** For example, “I am satisfied with the services I received.”
- ✔ **Overall satisfaction:** Example, “I am likely to recommend this service provider to others.”

Figure 14-1 shows a sample survey that can fit on the back of a small mail-in card.



At the end of your survey, include a comments section that gives customers an opportunity to provide feedback on issues that your survey didn't cover. We discuss customer comments in more detail later in this chapter.

Don't use a numeric scale



If you use a numeric scale, you're likely to find that the surveys completed by multicultural clientele, especially those from collectivist cultures, contain highly positive comments combined with mediocre ratings (5 or 6 out of a possible 10). Why is there such a disconnect? In collectivist cultures, being outstanding isn't necessarily a good thing. If the person were to rate you highly, you'd stand out and lose face. The person who completed the survey doesn't want to give you a 10 and embarrass you in front of your peers.



If you must have a numeric total for each question, you can convert it back after receiving the qualitative answers. Talk to your survey designer about how to do this so it accurately reflects the results of the instrument; for example, if you use a scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, you may consider assigning a 10 to Strongly Agree and a 0 (zero) to Strongly Disagree.

Do define your scores

Refrain from using the terms “best” or “outstanding” in a qualitative survey because people from collectivist cultures may have trouble relating to these concepts. Instead, use words like “Agree” and “Disagree.”

If you choose to use a numeric scale, let your customers know that a 5 or lower indicates that the service was lacking in several ways and that they should provide details about poor service in the comments section. A 7 or 8 means that the service was very good but not great. You can see how a qualitative scale avoids this problem entirely.

At XYZ, Inc., we work hard to meet the needs of our customers. Please help us achieve our goals by completing the following survey and including any additional comments on how we can serve you better.

Please rank the following items from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
As soon as I entered the store, I felt welcome.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soon after I entered, someone offered to assist me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was able to find what I was looking for easily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My questions were answered to my satisfaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt comfortable with my salesperson.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would recommend this salesperson to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments (feel free to offer additional opinions or suggestions below):					

Figure 14-1:
Survey your
customers
to obtain
feedback
on your
customer
service.

Do be consistent



Whatever scale you choose to use, make sure all surveys and sections of surveys use this same scale. Also, be consistent with terminology. We read a survey in which the person being evaluated was variously called “personnel,” “individual,” and “employee.” Inconsistencies confuse the person completing the survey and can reduce response rates, especially with people for whom English is not their native language.

Don't use advanced terms, colloquialisms, acronyms, and abbreviations

Don't assume that everyone knows the meaning of terms used in your surveys. Surveys with terminology (such as “rationale” and “sufficient”) that only people with an advanced college degree could understand are unappealing to most consumers, particularly people who may use English as a second language. Target your language to a fifth-grade level, which is pretty standard for business communications.

Some of your customers, including those from other cultures, may not be familiar with *colloquialisms* (informal expressions) if you use them in your survey. For example, not everyone will understand what you mean when you ask whether a staff person went “above and beyond” to meet their needs. Write more literally than figuratively; for example, you may ask whether a certain employee did more than the customer expected to meet her needs.

Abbreviations and acronyms may also trip up your customers. New immigrants are highly unlikely to know what “N/A” means. Some surveys explain, “N/A means that it does not apply.” The average person would then ask if it should be “DNA” instead, causing even more confusion and frustration. Spell everything out.

Do consider written comments

Although using comments or remarks to establish a ranking may be difficult, you can use comments to adjust scores that don't seem to reflect how the customer really feels. For example, if the person being surveyed gives you mediocre scores and a glowing review in the comments section, you can bump up the numerical score, perhaps from a 6 to an 8.

Don't give too much weight to negative comments and low scores



Studies show that people who are disgruntled tend to vent by giving extremely low marks and negative comments, whereas those who are satisfied don't usually feel any reason to be overly complimentary on scores or comments. In short, this means that you shouldn't beat yourself up too much over low scores or the lack of positive reviews, but you still need to take those low scores and comments seriously and use them to identify areas that need improvement. Pay particular attention to those categories that consistently receive low scores.

Chapter 15

Generating Word-of-Mouth Referrals

In This Chapter

- ▶ Reminding yourself of how valuable referrals really are
 - ▶ Putting a system in place to generate referrals
 - ▶ Generating referrals through gift giving
 - ▶ Staying in touch with customers for repeat and referral business
-

Everyone knows that word-of-mouth advertising is the best way to find eager new customers, including multicultural customers. In fact, 70 to 80 percent of an experienced and successful salesperson's business is usually built on referrals from satisfied customers or clients. Getting referrals, however, can be tough. Clients of all cultures naturally know how to complain, but when it comes to rewarding quality service by giving referrals, they're often clueless. They don't think of it on their own, so you have to ask. The challenge is in finding the right time to ask — when the conditions are just right and when your customer has a sense of gratitude for the service you provided.

The key to earning referrals from multicultural customers is to provide top-notch customer service (see Chapter 14). This helps you win your customers' trust and sets the stage for them to entrust you with their acquaintances. After earning referrals, you're likely to feel more comfortable asking for referrals, and your customers are going to feel more comfortable giving them.

In this chapter, we point out the benefits of referrals, encourage you to implement a plan for generating referrals, and show you the importance of staying in touch and giving incentives to gain even more referrals.

Grasping the Benefits of Referrals

Like most salespeople, you're probably already well aware of the many benefits of referral business, but just in case you've forgotten or you simply disregard them as a source of business you can't rely on, the following list reminds you of their value:

- ✓ **Increased trust:** In Chapter 9, we explain the importance of building rapport with your multicultural clientele, because trust sells. When a customer refers a prospect to you, the new prospect already trusts you more than she has faith in a complete stranger.
- ✓ **Lower resistance to buying:** When dealing with prospective customers, you need to overcome their natural resistance to buying whatever you're selling. With referrals, this resistance is lower for two reasons:
 - The prospect already “knows” you through his acquaintance.
 - The prospect's acquaintance already made a purchase, giving the prospect “permission” to buy something.

According to world-renowned sales trainer Tom Hopkins, author of *Sales Prospecting For Dummies* (Wiley), the closing ratio for non-referred leads is 10 percent versus a 60 percent close ratio with referred leads.

- ✓ **Reduced marketing and advertising costs:** With referrals, you invest no money or resources in marketing or advertising and no time or effort searching for prospects or making cold calls. Your existing customers do all the work for you. In addition, selling to referral customers requires less hand holding and trust building.
- ✓ **Increased purchases:** Studies show that referral customers tend to buy more products and services than customers you find through your own marketing and advertising efforts.
- ✓ **Even more referrals:** Referral customers are more likely than non-referral customers to recommend you. They want to turn others on to something good.



Referrals are even more important in the multicultural marketplace, where prospects may not trust “outsiders.” The referral grants you immediate status as an insider, or at least opens the door so you can prove yourself.

Good news travels fast . . . in multicultural circles

Getting referrals from multicultural customers is usually easier than getting them from your traditional customers because many cultures, especially those in less-developed countries, rely less on advertising and far more on word-of-mouth recommendations. As a result, people from these cultures are conditioned to making referrals. In Saudi Arabia, for example, people have for centuries relied on the recommendations of friends for survival. Trust in personal contacts has seen them through periods of drought in their desert homeland since the dawn of time.

In the United States, multicultural customers often feel ignored. Even if they find products and services they need through advertisements, they often don't know where to look for businesses that know how to meet their unique needs and are willing to treat them with

sensitivity to their culture. When they find one of these rare entities, word spreads fast.

As an example of the power of viral marketing, take a look at Daly City, California, just south of San Francisco. Thirty years ago, about 95 percent of the homes in Daly City were owned by Caucasian families. As home prices started shooting up in San Francisco, many new immigrant Filipinos were priced out of the market and started looking for more affordable areas.

One Filipino family settled in Daly City because of its close proximity to San Francisco and because the price was right. These early settlers told their friends and family, and as of this writing, Filipinos are now the largest group in Daly City, comprising nearly one third of the population. This is the power of personal endorsements.

Implementing a Systematic Referral Strategy

Referrals don't just happen. You have to make them happen. Develop a systematic strategy for generating referrals and then put your plan into action. The following sections describe an eight-step plan of attack.

1. Set a target

As with any business plan, you must set goals and measure your results to improve performance. Set a clear goal with a timeline for referrals, such as a 10 percent increase in referral business over the next eight weeks. This will remind you to ask for referrals whenever the opportunity presents itself.



In Chapter 5, we talk about the importance of setting a target prior to launching any marketing or advertising campaign and then tracking your results. The same applies to tracking the results of your referrals. You need to know what works and what doesn't so you can do more of what works and less of what doesn't. You can track your results by surveying new customers to find out how they heard about you or by having your frontline staff ask customers and tally the results, or both. Most retailers use a point-of-sale computerized tracking system that can be adapted to track referrals.

2. *Set the stage*



One of the best ways to overcome the feeling that asking for a referral puts your customer “on the spot” is to let your customer know from the beginning that you’re going to ask for referrals:

- ✓ Tell clients that you intend to satisfy them so well that they’ll want to refer three new clients to you after working with you. This makes it clear that you’re planning on taking very good care of them and that, in return, you expect referrals.
- ✓ Tell your customers that you measure your success by the number of referrals you get from satisfied customers.
- ✓ When you hand your business card to customers, give them two — one so they’ll remember you and a second for their friends and family who may need your product or service. Be sure to explain that this is the reason you’re giving them two cards. (Flip to Chapter 8 for the basics of exchanging business cards with multicultural customers.)

These tactics set up the expectation that you’re going to ask for referrals and get customers thinking, from the very start of your relationship, who else could use your product or service.

3. *Earn your referrals with the best service possible*

Referrals don’t come from the generosity of your customers — you have to earn them, or at least earn the right to ask for them. Give your clients extra-special service and follow-up support to earn the right to ask for referrals. When they see how much effort you’re investing in helping them, they’ll feel obligated to return the favor. This is especially true of clients from other cultures who not only want you to tell them how valuable they are, but also to show them. (For details on how to go the extra mile to serve your customers, see Chapter 14.)

4. Ask and ye shall receive

Most companies just wait for customers to refer them, thinking that if they provide stellar customer service, this will happen automatically. Frankly, many people are too busy or simply forget to talk up your great product or service, so you must remind them to be alert to opportunities to refer you. By asking for a referral, you often do your multicultural customers a favor:

- ✔ It's an ego boost for them to know more than their friends do about a product or service.
- ✔ They can help others with a referral. In collectivist cultures (which we introduce in Chapter 3), assisting others is considered an honorable duty.
- ✔ A referral gives your customer the opportunity to pay you back for the service you provided them.



Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Mexican customers are extremely loyal and may automatically refer friends and family, assuming you provide great products and service. Gratitude also carries value as evidence of good quality and worthy purpose, so be sure to acknowledge the favor of a good referral in an appropriate manner. Later in this chapter we show you how.



After you've gotten into the habit of asking for and getting referrals, it can become addictive, but asking too often can be the kiss of death. It can make you seem pushy and over-aggressive.

Try to get a feel for how much is too much. It's like a kid who persists in asking her father to buy her an ice-cream cone on a hot day. After a while she starts to see impatience growing on his face, so she backs off. Later she asks again when the mood is right and she is much more likely to obtain the object of her desire.

5. Assist customers in identifying referrals

When customers buy stuff, they're usually not thinking about other people who would benefit from the same products or services, so when you ask for a referral, they're likely to say that they can't think of anybody right now who could use what you're selling. Usually, the customers aren't lying. You asked if they can think of "anyone," and the word is simply too nebulous to conjure up any names or faces of specific friends or family members.



To clear this hurdle, stimulate the customer's imagination:

- ✔ Ask about people at work, at church, or whatever place you now know they frequent on a regular basis. After you have built relationships (as we explain in Chapter 9), you should know what kind of work they do, what they do for fun, and whatever else they do that brings them into contact with other people.

- ✔ Let your customers know the types of clients you can help. What needs do they have in common? This helps them identify specific people they can refer to you.
- ✔ Ask customers to look through their address books to jog their memories.

6. *Work on your timing*

In referrals as in sales, timing is everything. If your request is too early or too late, it's likely to make you feel awkward and your customers uncomfortable. The right timing varies depending on the type of sale and customer. In the following sections, we describe the right timing for retail sales, service clients, and business-to-business transactions.

Hitting up retail customers for referrals

If you're a retailer, you have four distinct opportunities to ask for referrals. Which one is best depends on timing and circumstances:

- ✔ **When the customer says he doesn't want to buy from you:** This may seem like an odd time to ask for a referral, but it's really the best time. Most salespeople are so busy being angry or disappointed that they fail to turn a lost sale into a future business opportunity. The prospect is vulnerable, probably feeling guilty for wasting your time. This is particularly true when you've provided valuable information or had to go out of your way — such as getting the product out of the storeroom rather than just pulling it off the shelf. Every time you do something for the customer, his psychic debt increases.

When he says he's not interested in buying, simply say something like, "I've really enjoyed working with you and would like to help others like you. Do you know anyone else who may want this kind of product or service who I can begin building a relationship with?" Watch just how powerful guilt can be.
- ✔ **When you've earned the customer's appreciation:** You've earned the right to ask for a referral anytime a customer says, "Thank you." This means you've done something to put them into your debt, and now they owe you a referral. All you need to do is simply say, "You're very welcome! By the way, is there anyone you can think of who might also like to know this information?"
- ✔ **When you've just closed the sale:** Everything leading up to the purchase decision usually generates a lot of tension and misgiving, but after your customers make a decision, they should feel relaxed and relieved. They're happy with their decision and are often in the mood to refer friends and family members. As you're ringing up the purchase, running their credit card, or going through the contract, you have a golden opportunity to ask whether they know anyone else who also needs your product or service.

- ✔ **When you delivered the product as promised:** Some products can be brought right out of the storeroom or off the shelf pretty quickly after closing the transaction, making your request for an introduction simultaneous with delivery.

However, if some time passes between purchase and delivery, such as with cars, houses, boats, and custom items like high-end tennis racquets, musical instruments, and other items, make delivery a special occasion with much fanfare and celebration. In addition to making this a special moment and confirming that the customer made the right decision, this is an excellent opportunity to ask for referrals.

Obtaining referrals from service clients

If you provide services to your clients (for example, as an attorney, financial planner, real estate agent, dentist, or doctor), you establish a more personal relationship with your clients. This slightly changes the right time to ask for a referral, but you still have four opportunities:

- ✔ **When the client says he doesn't need or want your services:** In this case, the client isn't simply saying no to a toaster or whatever you sell, but he's saying no to you. Remaining in the right frame of mind to request a referral in the face of this kind of rejection is very difficult, indeed, but again, this is one of the best times to ask for a referral. Why? Because the person is likely to feel guilty for having wasted your time.

When the client says he's not interested in using your services, you can simply say something like, "I've really enjoyed getting to know you and would like to help others like you. Do you know anyone else who may need this kind of service?" Again, guilt is a great motivator.

- ✔ **When the client says "thank you":** Clients often say "thank you" when they can think of no other way to show their appreciation. Give them a better way to show their appreciation by asking for a referral.
- ✔ **When the client signs a contract:** When a client finally agrees to a relationship, they almost always feel a sense of relief and commitment. This is a great time to ask whether they know anyone else who would appreciate knowing about the same service.
- ✔ **When the relationship ends:** Service relationships always come to an end eventually because the client no longer needs the service or other factors. At this point, they should feel a bit sad about the "breakup" and be in the mood to give a referral.

Gathering referrals from related businesses

One often-overlooked source of referrals is other businesses that your customers are likely to patronize. Start by making a list of people or businesses that sell complementary products and services. If you sell athletic shoes, for

example, you can develop relationships with health clubs, running clubs, basketball teams, or foot doctors. Try to think of any type of business with which you share clients.



To remind your business associates to send referrals your way, design special coupons or cards that they can give to their customers. To keep tabs on who's sending you the most referrals, add the name of the referring party or business to your coupons or cards. As an added incentive, you may agree to pay your associates a flat fee for referrals or a percentage of the initial sale. You can also refer customers back to them, which is often more than enough compensation for their referrals.

7. Offer incentives

We strongly recommend that you offer an incentive to both the *referrer* (the person giving the referral) and the *refer-ee* (the person being referred). Such an incentive encourages your customer to give the referral in the first place and encourages the prospect to follow up by calling you or visiting your business. Consider the following:

- ✓ Offer a discount to your customers for sending referrals your way. Perhaps you can offer a 10 percent discount off their next purchase or a flat fee for referrals.
- ✓ Offer a free trial or sample to the referred party to encourage the person to actually visit your store or try your product or service.

One dentist that I (Michael) saw many years ago would give anyone you referred a free teeth cleaning. This was nice, but there was no incentive for the referring party to make the referral. A dental patient can easily represent tens of thousands of dollars' worth of business over a lifetime. Would it have hurt the dentist to give the referring party \$50 credit for the referral?



To increase the response rate, add an expiration date to your special offer. If you give them forever to come in, they'll just keep putting it off until they lose the card or coupon.

8. Contact referrals with care

How you approach prospects whom customers refer to you is crucial both in preserving your relationship with the referring customers and turning new prospects into customers. This is especially true when you're dealing with customers from other cultures. Take the following approach:

1. Ask for a referral, as we describe earlier in this chapter.

2. Ask for an introduction.

Ideally, your customer calls the person he's referring to let her know you'll be contacting her. In collectivist cultures, this kind of "introduction" is essential.

3. Promise your customer that you're going to contact the referred party.

This promise is key, as you see in the next step.

4. Contact the referred party and introduce yourself.

Say something like, "This is John Smith from the ABC Company. I promised your (friend, relative, co-worker, whoever) Sam Jones that I would call you." This starts your relationship by fulfilling a promise, which tells this potential customer that she's important.



Asians feel so strongly about referrals that they often offer to personally introduce their friends and family to a salesperson. Hispanics treat a trusted businessperson as a member of the family. You'll never have a deeper business relationship than one in which you've both educated a customer and been educated by them about their culture.

Bestowing Closing Gifts That Keep on Giving . . . to You, That Is

Giving customers a gift as they walk out the door with their purchase not only presents you with an opportunity to ask for referrals, but also provides your customers with a constant reminder of how well you've served them.

When I (Michael) worked for a guitar store, we gave customers a plastic guitar pick with the name of our store printed on it. It was a small gesture, but customers appreciated these inexpensive picks, which also reminded them where to shop every time they played their guitar. If you sell more expensive items, such as furniture, cars, or houses, give customers a gift when their furniture is delivered, they drive off in their car, or they receive the keys to their new home.



Over the course of our combined 70 years in sales, we've given every conceivable closing gift imaginable, including books, CDs, refrigerator magnets, door knockers, cook sets, and portable barbecues. The best gifts, however, are those that regularly remind customers that you're their salesperson for life and will work hard to earn their repeat business and any referrals they can send your way. A gift that doesn't satisfy this paramount requirement

is a waste of money. Consumables, like wine, for example, often fail the test because after the wine is gone and the bottle is pitched in the trash, memories of you fade along with it.

Closing gifts don't have to be expensive. For example, an athletic shoe store could provide a small laminated card with tips on how to care for shoes along with the company's name and phone number or Web site. For larger purchases, the best closing gifts come with personalized plaques and are appropriate to the item purchased. For example, if a customer purchased an expensive kitchen remodeling job, a nice utensil set could be appropriate.

When shopping for closing gifts, be aware of certain cultural sensitivities. The following guidelines can be useful in choosing the right gifts and avoiding the wrong ones for customers from certain cultures:

- ✔ **Chinese:** Avoid giving watches or clocks, which remind them of the winding down of life or of funerals. Green plants are a sign of health and longevity.
- ✔ **Chinese and Japanese:** Avoid giving knives, scissors, or other cutlery, because these items could symbolize the severing of the relationship. Sets of cooking utensils (no knives) are a much more appropriate gift.
- ✔ **Asians:** Avoid giving anything that comes in a four-pack to customers from most Asian cultures, because the number 4 is often considered bad luck. Packaging products in eights would be especially auspicious. Note that the 2008 Olympics in China officially began on August 8 at 8 p.m.
- ✔ **Filipinos:** Avoid giving anything that comes in a three-pack. Three is an unlucky number for people from the Philippines. In this culture, the number 7 tends to be lucky.
- ✔ **Hispanics:** Avoid giving Hispanics gifts that are cheap imitations of Latin art or culture. An appropriate inexpensive thank-you gift would be a laminated bilingual card with information related to your product or service. Hispanics love cooking, so items for the kitchen are always a thoughtful gift, such as a set of kitchen tools up to a top-end cookware set. Try to find a way to personalize the container or holder. Also, books about Hispanic culture are usually very much appreciated. Contact a local Hispanic gift store for more ideas.
- ✔ **African Americans:** A notepad or magnet with Black images or religious sayings along with your company information would be a thoughtful reminder of their experience with you. Closing gifts for larger purchases could include African figurines, art, and tapestries that you can find at many African and African American gift stores. In addition, books about African and African American culture are usually valued gifts. Avoid giving Blacks anything that would allude to slavery, such as Civil War or Confederacy memorabilia.

- ✔ **Middle Easterners:** Small pieces of jewelry with Roman glass are highly valued, and fabric bookmarks are thoughtful gifts. Avoid gifts made out of wood because Middle Easterners don't think it has much value. Also, don't give liquor to Muslims because it violates their religion.
- ✔ **Native Americans:** Coffee mugs with Native American blessings and woven computer mouse pads with Native American images can be given. Avoid gifts that portray Native Americans as savages or uncivilized.
- ✔ **Western Europeans:** Books and crystal dishes and vases can make good gifts if they're appropriate to your customers. Those that celebrate their heritage are especially appreciated. Inexpensive gifts may include American-made candy and other confections. Avoid anything cheaply made or imitations of quality European goods.



The best gifts are the most thoughtful. As you meet with customers and discover more about them and their families, an idea for the perfect gift is likely to appear almost magically. This gift carries more meaning because it shows you cared enough to listen and get to know them as individuals.



Never go overboard with your gift giving. Giving an obviously expensive gift for a relatively small purchase can make the customer suspicious and may even cause her to rethink her purchase. An extravagant gift for a large purchase may cause a buyer to wonder just how much you made on the transaction. It's always better to be thoughtful than to be flashy with closing gifts.

Staying in Touch with Your Customers

The best resource you have for expanding your business and boosting sales is your current customers. They represent two sources of business — return buyers and referrals. Yet, after the first sale, many salespeople completely ignore the golden opportunities that their customers and clients represent.



We strongly encourage you to keep in touch with past customers. This doesn't mean you constantly harass them with sales calls or requests for referrals. It simply means you let them know you're thinking about them. In the process, you gently remind them that you still exist. You always want to be on the top of their minds whenever they or someone they know needs what you provide. Keep in touch but make sure everything is soft sell, if you choose to sell at all. Following are some ideas on how to keep in touch with your customers:

- ✔ **Call them.** I (Ralph) have created what I like to call my Hour of Power. I devote one solid hour per day (five to six days a week) placing calls to 100 people I know, most of whom are clients. I follow two rules: (1) No distractions and (2) No selling.

If you have information about the people you're calling (birthdays, kids' birthdays, anniversaries, and so on), you can mention those. If you're in real estate, you can call and remind customers to perform certain maintenance tasks (in season), such as checking the filters on their furnaces. You can even call around the holidays to give them a special greeting (see the appendix for a list of holidays in other cultures).

- ✔ **Write them.** Send a card or note letting your customers know you're thinking about them. If you have their birthdays, anniversaries, and other special dates recorded in your database, your job is much easier.
- ✔ **Send them a token of your appreciation.** Send your best customers a token of your appreciation — an inspirational book, flowers, candy, cookies, whatever you think they would enjoy. For more about gift giving, see the earlier section “Bestowing Closing Gifts That Keep on Giving . . . to You, That Is.”
- ✔ **Send a newsletter.** You can do this via e-mail or snail mail. Make sure it provides valuable, relevant information. If you sell running shoes, for example, you can provide information on the latest development in footwear, nutrition for runners, upcoming races, and more. For more information on keeping in touch via newsletters, check out *Advanced Selling For Dummies* (Wiley).
- ✔ **Distribute an announcement.** If you have information about products or services that your customers may find useful, let them know about it via your newsletter or a special announcement. Your announcement could relate to any of the following:
 - Changes that affect your product or service, including recalls
 - New accessories, services, or upgrades
 - Related products or services
 - Upcoming sales, discounts, or rebates
 - Any information that would make their use of your product or service more enjoyable or efficient



Always have a valid reason to contact your customers. It really doesn't matter if you have good news or bad, as long as you're providing a valuable service. Although it's obviously better if you have good news, even giving bad news earns the right to a referral. For instance, if you call to let them know that their product has been recalled, it's still a valuable service for which they should be appreciative. Go ahead and ask for a referral.



If a multicultural customer invites you to his home for dinner, drop everything and go. This is one of the highest honors you can receive from a multicultural customer and really says that he trusts you. Establishing a personal relationship with customers is one of the best ways to earn referrals.

Chapter 16

Building, Managing, and Retaining a Diverse Sales Team

In This Chapter

- ▶ Identifying the many benefits of diversifying your staff
 - ▶ Finding, screening, and interviewing cross-cultural candidates
 - ▶ Keeping your multicultural staff happy and highly motivated
 - ▶ Making your business more attractive to workers from other cultures
-

Most salespeople and business owners find that a team-based approach enables them to accomplish more in less time, and that the increase in sales and profits more than covers the expense of managing a team. Working as a team enables you to focus on what you do best and love most, while your fellow team members specialize in their own areas of expertise.

If a team-based approach appeals to you, consider making your team culturally diverse to really ramp up your sales. In addition to looking for people who have the requisite skills and experience to fill certain positions, look for people whose cultural backgrounds can improve your company's ability to serve your multicultural marketplace.

In this chapter, we reveal the challenges and benefits of building and maintaining a multicultural sales team and show you how to do it.



Hiring salespeople from diverse cultures isn't an absolute necessity because minorities don't necessarily want to be served by one of their own. Having a culturally diverse staff, however, can bring language and cultural skills into the company as well as show that your company welcomes differences. Just seeing people of color on your sales staff assures minorities that your establishment is probably going to understand their needs.

Deciding Whether a Cross-Cultural Sales Team Is Right for You

The promise of being able to do more and earn more while investing less time and effort is certainly an attractive proposition, but it's not the right move for every organization. If you're already having trouble drumming up enough business to make ends meet or you're unable to relinquish some control over how you run your business, trying to build and manage a sales team may be catastrophic.

To assist you in determining whether a cross-cultural sales team is right for you, in the following sections, we define *multicultural sales team*, list the many benefits you can reap from creating a diverse sales force, and describe conditions in which a team-based approach could lead to disaster.

Defining “multicultural sales team”

When most people hear the term *multicultural*, they immediately think *minority*, but a *multicultural sales team* is composed of staff with diverse backgrounds. To have the greatest power, it must represent a cross-section of all cultures, including Caucasians.



The challenges that Whites have selling to multicultural customers can be the same as for multicultural salespeople selling to Whites. Working together, the members of a multicultural sales team can help each other increase sales to customers from all cultures.

Grasping the benefits of team diversity

Hiring minorities, as you find out in the following sections, not only demonstrates your commitment to the multicultural marketplace, but can also assist you in building a fundamentally sound business entity that's much more capable of remaining competitive in the ever-evolving global market.

Projecting a diversity-friendly image

In Chapter 7, we encourage you to build a diversity-friendly business from the ground up so everything about your business — from your product line to your signage to your office décor — reinforces the message that you're committed to serving your multicultural clientele. Part of that includes creating a staff that reflects your multicultural demographic.



Everyone has heard the old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words. When you hire minorities, you're painting a portrait of your business that conveys a very subtle, yet powerful message that you welcome customers of all races and cultural backgrounds.

Adding new ways of thinking

People from other cultures naturally have a different perspective, and you can harness that difference to fuel creative sparks. Creativity experts often recommend expanding your mind by placing yourself in a totally new environment. You've probably noticed that when you hold sales meetings off-site, everyone suddenly becomes much more creative. The new atmosphere challenges your old habits and ways of thinking.

One way to place yourself in a totally new environment is to create it yourself by hiring multicultural personnel, including sales and support staff. In addition to creating a new environment, this also puts you in a position to be more open to different ideas.

Adding unique skills and talents

People from other countries and cultures have different skills, talents, and knowledge that can help everyone in your company become more knowledgeable and productive. They know which products and services appeal to people from their culture and how to market those products and services most effectively.

Making your business more flexible

The rate of change is constantly accelerating. How successful your business is at adapting to and capitalizing on changes in your marketplace often hinges on your staff's diversity. By increasing diversity, you improve your chances of surviving and even thriving whenever market conditions change. If, for example, sales of some products to your traditional clientele begin to fall, staff members from other cultures may offer suggestions on how to make up the lost revenue by increasing sales in certain ethnic markets.



We often encourage salespeople to develop and implement systems to make their businesses run more efficiently and improve customer service. A system, however, can easily turn into a rut that prevents you from changing course when external factors demand a change. By hiring minorities and listening to what they have to say, you can often spot changes and opportunities earlier and shift direction more quickly.

Making your business more global

In today's global economy, your organization must be able to speak other languages and understand the mind-set of people who live and work outside the

U.S. By hiring people with different cultural backgrounds, you increase your pool of international resources so you're better prepared to take advantage of worldwide opportunities, not just those in your own backyard.

Many businesses are unaware of global opportunities until they have staff members who have the skills and experience to capitalize on those opportunities. You may be surprised at the unique prospects, such as partnership opportunities with overseas businesses, that appear seemingly out of thin air when you begin diversifying your staff.

Knowing when to say no to a team-based approach



A team-based approach to selling isn't appropriate for everyone. In some cases, it can be downright disastrous. If you're not very good at delegating tasks and trusting team members to accomplish them, for example, you're likely to see high turnover. Also, if you don't have enough business to keep everyone busy (and paid), you could run into financial trouble.

Before you start building your team, make sure conditions are right:

- ✓ You have more business and opportunities than you have the time and resources to pursue.
- ✓ Systems and step-by-step instructions are in place that make it easier to train new team members.
- ✓ You have a system in place to welcome and integrate workers from other cultures into your team. See the later section, "Making Multicultural Employees Feel at Home," for more information.
- ✓ You are able to delegate instead of acting like a control freak.
- ✓ You have enough cash in reserve to compensate new team members for at least two months so they have time to generate sufficient revenue to cover their costs.

By having all of these conditions in place, you significantly improve your chances of success.

Staffing Your Cross-Cultural Sales Team

If you thought that finding qualified applicants from your own culture was a challenge, you probably think it's nearly impossible to find qualified candidates from other cultures. You may have no idea of how to begin your search, where to look for qualified candidates, or how to evaluate them.

Can't find a willing salesperson?

Perhaps the biggest challenge you face when you decide to diversify your sales team is finding people of other cultures who are eager to go into sales. Many new immigrants, like many people who grew up in America, have the American dream of securing a steady job with a large company. They want a steady income they can rely on for themselves and their families.

As a salesperson, you know that a sales career can be feast or famine. Your income can be unpredictable, but the entrepreneurial drive to score big sales and huge commissions keeps

you going. You know that your income from sales can be much higher than what you can expect from a job that offers a guaranteed salary. Many immigrants, however, would much rather have a steady income they can count on when they first arrive here.

As new immigrants become more acculturated, they're more likely to consider sales positions. Certainly their children and their children's children are just as likely as anyone else to go into sales as a career.

Fortunately, we've got you covered. In the following sections, we show you how to advertise openings, screen for qualified candidates, and then interview the best of the best.

Advertising positions on your team

Perhaps the greatest challenge you're likely to face is getting qualified candidates from other cultures to apply for openings. If you're shaking the usual bushes, you're going to get the usual job seekers. To find people from different backgrounds, you need to change where and how you advertise openings. In the following sections, we offer some guidance to improve your chances of attracting the right people.



Avoid advertising in the native language of applicants you're trying to attract unless you have personnel in management or human resources who speak the language. Otherwise, you're likely to attract applicants who falsely assume that you speak their language. By advertising in English and specifying that you're looking for bilingual candidates, you attract candidates you can talk to.

Spreading the word

The easiest, least expensive, and most effective way to let people know about job openings within your company is through word-of-mouth advertising:

- ✔ **Post a notice in your office or store.** If your multicultural clientele and current employees like and trust you, they'll want their friends and family members working for you, too.

- ✔ **Let community and church leaders know about any openings.** They have a vested interest in helping find employment for people within their circle of influence and are usually the unofficial centers of influence and information in most multicultural communities. (See Chapter 5 for details on becoming involved with your multicultural clientele's community.)



Transform your multicultural customers and employees into headhunters by offering them an incentive — perhaps a finder's fee, points to redeem for prizes, free trips, or other perks. Consider tying these bonuses to the date on which a referral is hired. You also can offer a retention bonus to be paid after your new team member has been employed for six months or a year or both.

Reaching out to the multicultural workforce

In the U.S., many organizations help workers from other cultures find gainful employment. Use their efforts to your advantage by doing the following:

- ✔ **Sponsor or participate in career fairs geared toward different ethnic groups.** To find career fairs in your area, contact your local chamber of commerce or the local unemployment office.
- ✔ **Develop internship programs that solicit applicants with different cultural backgrounds.** Get started by identifying possible positions for interns and developing training materials for bringing them on board. Then contact local colleges, universities, and even high schools to find out if they have internship programs.

Choosing effective media



In Chapter 5, we point out that new immigrants may not read the same newspapers, watch the same TV shows, or tune in to the same radio stations as longtime U.S. citizens. To reach this audience, you need to advertise openings in the media these job seekers read, watch, and listen to:

- ✔ Community newsletters.
- ✔ Church bulletins.
- ✔ Newspapers and other media that specifically serve the new-immigrant populations. (Asians seem to prefer to read newspapers for information, as opposed to listening to the radio or watching television.)
- ✔ Community-based cable television channels. (Many Hispanics watch Spanish-language television and listen to Spanish-language radio stations. Although they may speak English, many prefer Spanish-language media depending on their level of acculturation.)
- ✔ On your Web site, on the Web sites of media channels geared toward the minorities you're trying to attract, and on job search engines including CareerBuilder.com, Monster.com, and Craigslist.com. (This approach is particularly effective if you're seeking tech-savvy applicants.)

Choosing the right words, images, and features

When designing your ad or notice, follow the same principles you practiced when broadening your marketing campaign for the multicultural marketplace (see Chapter 5). In particular, keep the following guidelines in mind:



- ✔ If your ad contains photos of people, make sure to include people from the culture you're trying to attract.
- ✔ Avoid making emotional pitches such as "You'll love this job!" when trying to attract Asian applicants, who typically consider it poor taste to display emotions in public and tend not to respond well to emotional pitches. Any attempt to use an "American" viewpoint about work for Asians is likely to fall on deaf ears and may well be counterproductive.
- ✔ To appeal to Asians, consider emphasizing the longevity, reputation, quality, and reliability of your company, if applicable. Boldly stating that your work environment is "the latest" and "cutting edge" won't attract people from a 5,000-year-old culture. Some may even find it humorous.
- ✔ To appeal to Hispanics, think about stressing your company's family atmosphere. Foster a collaborative environment where people work together for the good of all the employees, and then advertise the fact.
- ✔ To appeal to African Americans, accentuate the uniqueness of your products and services and even your compensation plan, if appropriate. Don't use the word "traditional" or similar words because they may imply adherence to past discriminatory policies.
- ✔ To appeal to Asian Indians, consider using Indian models in ads showing families. They also appreciate name brands and well-known companies.
- ✔ To attract Native Americans, stress how environmentally sensitive your organization is and any green building initiatives you have in place.
- ✔ When advertising an opening, include the location. Many applicants from other cultures prefer to work locally, and they often seek companies that are close to their homes so they can spend more time with their families.



- ✔ If you have a liberal vacation or holiday package, highlighting such features can win you the loyalty of most immigrant groups. Many regularly work 14 to 16 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week. Time is at a premium for these folks, and they often feel guilty about not being able to spend more time with their families, especially the children.



- ✔ Avoid using words that may be considered discriminatory. Verify with your advertising representative that seemingly innocent words don't violate antidiscrimination laws. You can't use words that imply discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, sexual preference, or physical handicap. For example, an ad should not say "salesman," but rather use "sales clerk" or "salesperson." Obviously anything like "Hispanics preferred" or "Asians preferred" should also be avoided.



A little personal research with members of the ethnic communities you hope to reach can go a long way toward developing effective marketing plans to reach potential employees from diverse cultures. In Chapter 2, we recommend assembling a multicultural advisory board for your business.

Adding incentives for language skills

Many companies offer a bonus for workers with language skills, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. This can not only entice bilingual people to apply for work with you, but also may encourage current workers to improve their ability to speak your customers' language. Consult an employment law specialist about how to establish such a program. Consider starting your search through the American Bar Association (www.abanet.org/lawyerlocator/searchlawyer.html).



If you're looking for salespeople with language skills, make sure they speak the right kind of language. Some may be able to speak "street Spanish" or "common Chinese," but these may be inappropriate for business.

Screening and interviewing potential candidates

You probably have a system in place for screening out unqualified applicants and then interviewing the best of the bunch. However, the system and criteria you're using may be less effective in selecting multicultural candidates. In the following sections, we highlight some of the most important differences in the screening and interviewing processes and offer some guidance on how to more effectively screen and interview multicultural candidates.

Accounting for resume deflation

In the United States, padding your résumé is almost a national pastime. Someone who spent ten years at the local one-hour photo lab is likely to present herself as having a decade's worth of experience in the "film industry." A janitor may claim to have five years' experience as a "sanitary engineer." A secretary applying for a management position may claim to have worked as the "office manager."



While inflating one's résumé in the U.S. is part of the game, many minorities don't play by the same rules. In fact, Asians, in particular, are more likely to understate their skills and experience, because humility is expected in their culture. As a result, you can often make the mistake of dismissing superior candidates simply because they choose not to toot their own horns.

If the résumé or application looks professional and meets the education, skills, and experience required but doesn't exactly dazzle you, consider setting up an interview to find out more about the person.

Assessing candidates fairly

In the U.S., many employers rely on the phone interview to screen out the worst of the applicants who appear to qualify on paper. The phone interview is quick and easy and allows you to reject people without having to look them in the eye. However, this method can often and unfairly screen out highly qualified multicultural applicants.

In Chapter 11 and the appendix, we highlight the fact that different cultures prefer different communication styles. Unless you're hiring telemarketers, judging them solely on how well they communicate over the phone can be a mistake.



To obtain a fair assessment of a candidate's skills and abilities during the interview, give him several opportunities to demonstrate what he knows and can do for you. Some applicants are likely to shine on paper (résumé or application). Others are going to sound better over the phone. Some can be much more convincing in person. Here are some culture-specific differences that can influence your assessment:

- ✔ African Americans tend to be more comfortable with verbal communications and generally have an advantage in phone interviews.
- ✔ Hispanics often prefer to demonstrate their skills. To give them a fair chance, set up situations in which you can test their ability to perform specific tasks that the position requires.
- ✔ Asians are often less verbal and more comfortable showing on paper what they've accomplished and can do. Give applicants a chance to show you samples of their work or pictures of projects they've completed.

Nepotism . . . you gotta love it!

Hiring family and friends (*nepotism*) is a time-honored tradition in many collectivist cultures (see Chapter 6 for a definition of *collectivist*). However, this practice is frowned on in the United States because we like to be considered on our individual merits, not for who we know.

Obviously you must comply with equal opportunity employment laws, but companies that follow legal guidelines to hire the family and friends of current workers find that this practice

can increase retention. After all, why leave a company when it literally is like family?

Hiring relatives of minority workers can also increase performance through peer pressure. Honor plays a major role in many cultures. If a person works for the same company that employs his aunt and three of his cousins, he's much more likely to show up on time, put in a good day's effort, and perhaps even work a little harder thanks to friendly competition.

Managing and Retaining Multicultural Employees

Employees from other cultures often have needs and expectations that differ from those of the traditional American workforce. They may value time more than money, be a little less direct in communicating their needs, and rely much more on their relationships with supervisors for more than job approval. In the following sections, we highlight some of the most common areas in which supervisors encounter the greatest challenges and offer some suggestions about how to proactively overcome any hurdles.

Accommodating a different work ethic

New immigrants are used to working long hours and even weekends just to survive in their home country. This work ethic becomes so ingrained that when they come to the United States, they have trouble adjusting to a 40-hour work week with weekends and holidays off. This can cause friction with longtime residents of the U.S. who may feel that their cross-cultural co-workers are trying to make them look like slackers.

You can't do much, nor would you probably want to, to discourage team members from working hard. You and other members of your team may just need to deal with an extended transition period in which you all catch the new work ethic while your team members from other cultures become accustomed to Americans' more leisurely lifestyle.

Treating all employees equal, but different

Treating all team members fairly is important, both legally and ethically, but fairly doesn't mean treating them the same. Just as you need to accommodate differences among customers, you need to make adjustments for differences among staff members. Some may not be completely fluent in English. Others may not be comfortable with American culture. By making the effort to accommodate differences, you express your appreciation in tangible ways, which can often increase job satisfaction and retention rates. What kinds of differences are we talking about? Here are a couple of examples:

- ✔ People from some cultures often expect to have a more personal relationship with their supervisor or manager. They may invite her to their house for dinner, parties, or even special occasions like weddings. Accepting these invitations and extending your own invitations can significantly improve loyalty to your company or business.

- ✓ Hispanics often want to be personally greeted every morning and bade goodbye every evening as a sign of friendship and respect. Like Asians, they may invite co-workers and supervisors to family events.



Observe how team members from the same culture interact with one another and how they try to interact with you. If they invite you to a special occasion, chances are pretty good that they'd like you to accept the invitation and return the favor. If you still can't figure out how they want to be treated, ask.

Dealing with different communication styles

You can often observe different communication styles at work in close male-female relationships. Almost without exception, one of the individuals involved in the relationship is going to get frustrated to the point of saying something like, "I'm not a mind reader! You need to tell me what you want!"

Differences in communication styles among people of different cultures can stir up similar conflicts. The following sections introduce these differences and provide suggestions on how to minimize the negative effects that often result from them. (See the appendix for details on the specific communication styles of a wide variety of cultures.)

Direct communication

In America we're fond of saying what we think and "telling it like it is." Sure, we gossip. We talk behind one another's backs. Some may even try to sabotage another colleague's career. As a culture, however, we tend to discourage these underhanded tactics and promote direct communication. When you have a conflict with a co-worker, you're expected to confront the person and resolve the issue immediately. When people don't speak their minds, we think they're sneaky and underhanded. We may not believe we can trust them because we don't know what they're thinking.

Some African Americans may be even more direct than Anglo Americans. As a result, they may be perceived as blunt. The reality, however, is that they're just at a different point on the direct communication continuum. They have a different culturally influenced communication style. Accept it as a difference, keeping in mind that people who have a very direct communication style may be just as uncomfortable around people who are less direct.



Direct communicators will generally say "I don't know" only when they really don't know the answer.

Confucius confusion

The Chinese philosopher and teacher Confucius lived over two millennia ago, but his teachings continue to influence many Asian cultures. Much of what he taught promoted honor, integrity, hard work, harmony, and respect for authority. Students were expected to collaborate with others to achieve whatever was in the best interest of the group and Chinese society as a whole.

Due to the influence of his teachings, Asians have gained a reputation (and somewhat of a stereotype) of being highly educated hard workers. Although this is often the case, it's certainly not true of all Asians, so be careful about those stereotypes — even the positive ones.

Indirect communication

In many cultures, including the Asian and Hispanic, people generally prefer to avoid conflict. They smile and bide their time, assuming that any issues will fade over time. Instead of confronting others, they may just send subtle signals that they're upset and unhappy, expecting the offending party to take the hint and apologize.



Indirect communicators will usually say “I don't know” when they don't want to offend another person or if they can't fulfill a request. They may even make up an answer to avoid disappointing a questioning co-worker.

Handling the two communication styles in one conversation

When direct and indirect communicators meet, sparks can really start to fly. The indirect communicator gets upset and won't say what's upsetting her, while the direct communicator thinks the person is secretive or even somewhat lacking in communication skills. If the direct communicator initiates a confrontation, the indirect communicator simply concludes that the person is rude and withdraws.



Overcoming these differences in communication styles requires a mutual understanding of the differences.

- ✓ Direct communicators need to realize that the indirect style uses innuendo and implication to avoid hurting others' feelings.
- ✓ Indirect communicators need to realize that confrontation is simply an attempt to clear the air.

Neither style is superior — they're just culturally influenced communication styles.

Retooling your reward system

Your reward system is only as good as its ability to reward individuals with what they value most. Giving someone a big fat bonus for working overtime when they really treasure family time much more is hardly a motivator. We recommend that you get to know your employees on a personal level to gain insight into what each team member prizes most.



A great way to find out what each person values most is to have everyone create a reward collage. You can even use this as a team-building opportunity. Have everyone cut out pictures that represent what they're working for and provide pieces of poster board and glue or tape for creating the collage. Some team members may dream of owning a new home or car. For others, photos of friends and family members will populate their collage.

Following are some suggestions for rewarding team members from other cultures:

- ✓ Say thank you. Simply saying "Thank you" makes people feel appreciated.
- ✓ Get to know them as people. Spend time talking about things other than work.
- ✓ Ask them directly how they want to be rewarded.
- ✓ Be accessible. Knowing you're available when they need help can make them more comfortable.
- ✓ Celebrate success as a team instead of highlighting individual accomplishments. For example, you can take everyone on the team out for lunch, host a picnic or cookout for employees and their families, or schedule a team outing when the team meets its goals.
- ✓ Assess team member satisfaction levels on a regular basis. Don't assume that just because employees don't complain that they're happy. Meet with team members individually on a regular basis and encourage them to provide feedback. You may even want to implement a system in which you survey team members regularly and allow them to provide anonymous feedback.
- ✓ Personalize team members' gifts, instead of doling out generic awards, to show that you've been listening to your staff.
- ✓ Teach new skills or provide opportunities for continuing education and training.
- ✓ Share the reward with their family.
- ✓ Send them to conferences. Remember how much they value education.
- ✓ Let the team determine its own reward.
- ✓ Give team members time off to spend with their families. They may feel guilty about spending so much time at work.

- ✔ Let them attend meetings you can't attend. This is generally viewed as a high honor.
- ✔ Consider donating to a charity that the employee feels strongly about.
- ✔ Use your best workers (rather than models) in printed and videotaped advertisements.
- ✔ Give them business cards with an appropriate title.
- ✔ Offer scholarships for attending job-related classes.
- ✔ Recognize them by showing up at their child's soccer game, school play, or other event. How you treat your workers' children says a lot about how you feel about your workers.
- ✔ Let them shadow a manager or co-worker they respect for a day.
- ✔ Invite their friends and family to see where they work and what they do. You can also get referrals to more staff members this way.



Be careful about distributing individual rewards, and be particularly careful about making a public spectacle of it. Although longtime residents of the U.S. tend to value having their individual accomplishments acknowledged in front of their peers, this often has the opposite effect on people from collectivist cultures. (For details about the differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures, see Chapter 6.) If you have one or more team members from a collectivist culture, consider providing group awards rather than individual rewards. Singling out collectivist workers for praise may cause them to lose face, sometimes to such a degree that they quit.

Retaining multicultural employees

Keeping your best employees means keeping them happy, and for most people in the United States, this means five things: money, time off, benefits, recognition, and rewarding work. For employees from other cultures, those five things are still important, but a couple of other factors carry some significant weight:

- ✔ **Employer/employee relationship:** The most common reason multicultural workers quit is because of the people they work for, not the job they're doing. If you want to increase retention rates for multicultural employees, get to know them and work on building strong relationships. Treat them like family: Visit them outside of work; offer to help them move; if they have a problem, find out what you can do to help.
- ✔ **Family:** Many employees from other cultures work mainly to support their families, and when they're not working, they're enjoying time off with them. Learn the names of each employee's spouse and children. Take the time to find out about challenges they're having both on and off the job. Work is often an extension of family for these workers.



Effective communication is also very important for retention. For example, studies indicate that the turnover rate for African Americans is 40 percent higher than for Whites. Being able to relate better to all workers can increase retention. Communication is two parts listening and one part talking — listen to what team members have to say and identify their needs.

Making Multicultural Employees Feel at Home

You've probably heard the line, "News travels fast." Bad news travels even faster. This is particularly true in multicultural circles. If your company develops a reputation for being unfair or unfriendly to workers from a certain group, everyone in the community is going to know about it and do whatever they can to work somewhere else. To attract the best and the brightest, demonstrate your commitment to your greatest resources — human resources.

The first and most important step is to get everyone in the company on board and educate them so everyone has a base level of cultural competency. We show you how to do this in Chapter 6. In addition to making your entire company culturally competent and diversity friendly, you need to pay special attention to creating a workplace that accommodates your multicultural staff and makes them feel at home. We provide some guidance for how to do this in the following sections.



According to U.S. Department of Labor estimates, 85 percent of all new workers entering the workforce are women or minorities. To tap the full potential of this talent pool, make your team and your company a more attractive place for them to work. Any company that demonstrates it values workers of all cultures and treats people fairly regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity will attract more culturally diverse workers.

Developing mentoring programs and support groups

Hiring team members from other cultures doesn't guarantee that everyone on your team is going to mingle or that existing team members will welcome them with open arms. Have a system in place that encourages team members to interact, learn from one another, and provide mutual support:

- ✔ **Mentoring programs:** Assign a mentor to each new hire to help him become comfortable in his new environment. A mentor can provide the initial orientation and basic training and assist the new employee in advancing his career. In the process of mentoring a multicultural team member, the mentor naturally develops multicultural competency and skills of her own as well as takes on more of a leadership role.
- ✔ **Support groups:** Support groups can assist new hires with the transition into their new country and culture, offering everything from relocation resources to information on where and how to obtain additional assistance.



Do everything you can to fully integrate culturally diverse workers into your business. Merely bringing them on board without a system in place to blend them into your team can often lead to divisiveness and chaos. If you sense that your team is becoming cliquish, whatever system you have in place isn't working. Call a team meeting and reinforce the importance of working together as a team to more effectively serve your customers.

Taking inventory

If you've done everything you believe possible to attract qualified multicultural applicants and still find that they're not exactly flocking to your business to seek out opportunities, take inventory of what you're doing and start asking yourself some tough questions:

- ✔ "Are we advertising openings in a way that reaches the multicultural communities?"
- ✔ "What are we doing or not doing to make multicultural people feel comfortable?"
- ✔ "Does our corporate culture demonstrate a commitment to integrating workers from other cultures into the business?"
- ✔ "How does our culture fit or not fit with what workers from various ethnic groups are looking for?"
- ✔ "Do we have a system in place to integrate multicultural workers into the business?"
- ✔ "What kind of professional track do we have for advancement?"
- ✔ "Is our compensation in line with the other opportunities for multicultural employees at the same skill level?"
- ✔ "Do we offer cultural sensitivity training that creates a welcoming atmosphere for diverse workers?"

When you have some honest answers to these questions, you have a pretty good idea of which areas you need to work on. Prioritize the list of improvements you need to make, and get to it!

Part V

The Part of Tens

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Is there an herbal remedy for culture shock?"

In this part . . .

Every *For Dummies* title comes complete with a Part of Tens — several chapters that each contain ten strategies, tips, tricks, or other important items to keep in mind.

In *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies*, the Part of Tens busts ten myths about multicultural customers and reveals ten common stereotypes that people from other cultures often have about Americans.

Chapter 17

Ten Myths about Customers from Other Cultures

In This Chapter

- ▶ Busting the myth that customers prefer to buy from their own people
 - ▶ Getting over the false assumption that catering to multicultural clientele costs too much
 - ▶ Knowing why treating everyone “the same” doesn’t work
 - ▶ Understanding why some people continue to negotiate after the deal’s done
-

Some myths, such as the ancient Greek myths, are teaching tools that reveal important truths about the world and the times in which people live. Other myths, however, can seriously limit people’s perspectives and even blind them to truth. Such is the case with myths about customers and clients from other cultures. If you buy into these myths, you may miss out on some tremendous opportunities.

In this chapter, we bust the ten most common and thought-limiting myths related to people of other cultures.

Other Cultures Hold Beliefs That Are Completely Incomprehensible

This myth actually holds some truth, because in essence, all beliefs are incomprehensible — that’s why they’re beliefs. When you examine a belief in the light of truth and logic, you usually walk away completely baffled.

What’s important to remember is that all cultures have beliefs that sometimes transcend logic. Many people in the United States, for example, believe that Friday the 13th is an unlucky day. If you have a bit of Irish in you, you may think that four-leaf clovers bring good luck. Does it make any sense at all that a rabbit’s foot is a common good luck charm — especially for the rabbit?!



Beliefs don't have to make sense. Accept the fact that some beliefs may be illogical, and you should have no trouble coexisting with those who hold beliefs that are different from yours. Find out your customers' beliefs and make the necessary adjustments, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Other Cultures Are Paranoid about Money

Ask a recent immigrant a seemingly innocent question about finances, such as “How much do you have for a down payment?” and he's likely to break out in a cold sweat — or at least do everything to avoid giving you an honest answer. Because of this, many salespeople falsely assume that other cultures are overly secretive about money matters, perhaps to the point of being paranoid.

Paranoia, however, is an irrational fear. People from other cultures often have good reason to be afraid of disclosing information about their personal finances. Many don't trust banks and are afraid that the word will get out about how much money they have stuffed in their mattress (or wherever they choose to hide it).

Asians, Hispanics, and other groups often become the targets of home-invasion robberies for this very reason. With this crime, robbers break into a house and physically threaten the occupants until they reveal the whereabouts of the valuables — usually the cash.



Remind customers from other cultures that they always have the option of paying cash, even for those big-ticket items. The money just might be burning a hole in their mattress.

People Don't Want to Talk about Their Culture

In an attempt to avoid drawing undue attention to the fact that your customer is different, you may be tempted to completely ignore the fact. As a result, you now have a 600-pound gorilla sitting between you and your customer that neither of you has the courage to mention. This creates a cultural static that stands as a barrier to building true rapport.

As soon as you express a sincere interest in your customers' cultural backgrounds, they're usually more than happy to tell you about their language, food, and even beliefs. You can ask customers how to say "hello" or even your name in their native tongue. You may be slightly embarrassed as you struggle with their language, but they'll love you for it because then you'll know how they feel trying to speak English.



Use what you discover to determine whether you should adjust your sales presentation (see Chapter 11) or products (see Chapter 7) based on your customers' culture and familiarity with your product or service.

People Prefer to Buy from Someone of Their Own Culture

Many salespeople don't even try to cater to the multicultural marketplace, because they falsely assume that consumers from other cultures are committed to buying from people of a similar background. Unless consumers encounter a major language barrier, nothing could be further from the truth, as we explain in Chapter 2. Even then, if immigrant customers see that you're sensitive to their culture, they'll find a way to overcome this challenge — for example, by having a relative or friend act as an interpreter.

In fact, many cultural groups prefer to work with salespeople from outside their own culture for two reasons:

- ✓ **Privacy:** Someone from outside their culture is less likely to share their financial and personal information with others in their community.
- ✓ **Acculturation:** Many first- and second-generation immigrants seize any opportunity to practice their English and communication skills. One of the best ways for them to do this is by purchasing from longtime residents of the U.S.

If you're not attracting multicultural customers or they shop without buying anything, you're probably falling short in terms of supplying what they're looking for, making them feel comfortable, or making your products and services appealing and easy to find. Don't assume that they're not buying because you happen to look a little different.



Assume that every customer wants to buy from you unless you get strong signals to the contrary.

People Should Do As Americans Do When They're in the United States

A good host accommodates his guests and never coerces them into following the house rules. If the guest uses her hands to eat fried chicken, for instance, the host may follow suit to make the guest feel more at home.

Most people know that this is the proper etiquette to follow, but when people from other countries become guests in the U.S., Americans often expect them to morph overnight into fully acculturated Americans who speak fluent English. The truth is that even though most of us have been born in this country, we're the children of immigrants, and first-generation immigrants often require years or even decades of living here to learn the language and adjust to the customs of their new homeland.



Adjust your perspective and expectations. Imagine yourself moving to Egypt or China and having to learn an entirely new language, navigate a new landscape, eat new foods, and deal with people who have completely different beliefs and customs. You'd probably take quite a while to get up to speed. Be patient while the new arrivals make the necessary adjustments. Believe us, they're trying. Night schools are packed with people from every corner of the world trying to learn English and to become citizens of this country.

People from Other Cultures Are Just Too Much Trouble to Bother With



We hear this statement far too often from retailers, service providers, and salespeople all around the country. Too bad for them, because if they knew how to meet the special needs of multicultural customers, most could significantly increase their market share, sales, and profits. In addition, multicultural customers come with some added perks:

- ✓ They're loyal.
- ✓ They're more likely to refer friends and family to you if they're satisfied.
- ✓ They expose you to different cultures, so you can gain the knowledge of a world traveler without getting seasick or losing one piece of luggage!

It doesn't take much effort to adjust your practices to make multicultural customers comfortable. Just follow some of the tips and techniques in this book and you'll be well on your way.

I Can't Afford to Customize Products or Services for Multicultural Customers

Actually, making your business attractive to people from other cultures is fairly easy (see Part II for details):

- ✔ **Start with your brochures.** Print them in the major languages of the customers who frequent your store or office. Be sure to get professional assistance with the translation, because many concepts and words in English don't convert easily to other languages.
- ✔ **Make sure your marketing, advertising, and informational materials are printed in the correct language.** While Chinese, Korean, and Japanese writing may appear similar to the untrained eye, they're very different. Hire an expert who's familiar with the language of your major group of multicultural customers as well as your specific industry.
- ✔ **Hire a consultant to examine your store or office layout, packaging, signage, and other elements to ensure that your business accommodates the customers you're trying to attract.** An expert can often show you simple and inexpensive techniques for adjusting to your expanded market.



Instead of wondering whether you can afford to accommodate multicultural customers, you should be asking, "Can I afford to ignore a large and growing number of potential customers?" Do the math. If a third of the people in your service area are of cultures different from your own and you're unable to attract their dollars, you lose this business. And your loss is a potential wind-fall for any competitors who put some effort into catering to these markets.

The Best Approach Is to Treat Everyone the Same, Regardless of Their Culture

Treating all customers equally requires more than simply treating them the same. Handing a menu to a customer with impaired vision certainly treats the person the same as you treat others, but it doesn't provide that patron with equal access to the menu items. In the same way, greeting all customers the same way can be offensive to customers who've grown up in other cultures.

The best approach is to follow the Global Rule: Treat others as they would like to be treated. In Chapter 8, we provide some guidelines to follow that include following your customer's lead and asking people about their culture and their preferences.



To avoid any appearance of discrimination, ask *everyone* who comes into your place of business about their cultural background. One of the best ways to do this is to subtly mention your own roots first.

People from Outside the United States Are Unreasonable When Negotiating

There are two types of countries in the world — negotiating and nonnegotiating. The United States is a nonnegotiating country where we generally pay the price asked by vendors without question. In most other countries around the world, people haggle on everything from groceries to clothing to homes. To expect someone from one of these places not to bargain is tantamount to asking her not to breathe.

The best way to deal with born-and-bred hagglers is to hone your own negotiating skills. We offer several strategies and tips in Chapter 13.

Renegotiating After Signing a Contract Is Unethical

Contracts mean different things to different people. For most longtime residents of the U.S., the contract signals the end of negotiations. After the ink dries on the contract (and, in some cases, several days pass), all parties become legally bound by whatever's in print.

However, for many people from high-context cultures (those that rely more on shared understandings to communicate; see Chapter 3), the contract often signals the beginning of a relationship that can evolve over time. As a result, the parties are obligated to help each other continually “adjust” the contract to their needs until it's completed.



When dealing with customers from high-context cultures, let go of the notion that the contract is a legally binding document. We're not telling you to give away the store. You can use any of the strategies we outline in Chapter 13 to curb the “nibbling” and make sure your needs are satisfied, as well.

Chapter 18

Ten Common Stereotypes of Americans

In This Chapter

- ▶ Confronting the concept that all Americans tend to be provincial
 - ▶ Toning down the idea that all Americans are loud and bombastic
 - ▶ Busting the myth that all Americans are focused solely on short-term gains
 - ▶ Dispelling the notion that all Americans are brusque in business
 - ▶ Dealing with the assumption that because you're an American, you're rich
-

Americans often have misinformed ideas about other cultures, but we're not the only ones guilty of stereotyping. People of other cultures, especially the people who don't get to meet many U.S. citizens, have a distorted view of Americans as well. By becoming aware of how people from other countries and cultures may perceive you, you have a better chance of breaking through those misconceptions to develop stronger and more meaningful relationships with your clients. In this chapter, we reveal the common stereotypes that other cultures often have about Americans and suggest ways that you can break those molds.



Before you can embrace people from diverse cultures, you must understand your own American culture and recognize that it impacts how others around the world view you. If one or more of the stereotypes in this chapter describes the way you do business, admit it, and then work toward overcoming that tendency.

Americans Are Ethnocentric

In the U.S., most of us are raised to believe that America is the best country on the planet, everybody in the U.S. should speak English, and Christianity is the one true religion. Although many U.S. citizens have sufficient experiences in other countries to support their beliefs that the U.S. is the best, many have never even crossed the border to Canada or Mexico. As a result, U.S. citizens, for the most part, tend to be a bit *ethnocentric*.



Patriotism is certainly understandable and even admirable, but cultural elitism is counterproductive in building relationships and making sales. Strive toward becoming more open-minded and genuinely curious about the rest of the world. People from other cultures are always very appreciative when you ask questions regarding their culture or language. You may be surprised at just how much you can discover without leaving the country. Flip to Chapter 4 for tips on developing your cross-cultural competency.

Americans Are Clueless about Other Countries and Cultures

Even Americans recognize that they're poorly informed not only about other countries, but also about their own. Every month or so, a reporter heads out to the streets of Any Town, USA, to ask passersby basic questions about national and international history or geography, only to receive blank stares and inconceivably wrong answers. People from other countries see this and believe that everybody in the U.S. is completely clueless about what's going on in the world.

To dispel this myth, demonstrate a genuine interest in your customers' land of origin, language, and beliefs. This approach accomplishes three important goals:

- ✓ It shows that you're interested in discovering more about other cultures.
- ✓ It shows that you care enough about your customers to take the time to find out more, specifically about them and their culture.
- ✓ The knowledge you acquire improves your ability to adapt to the multicultural marketplace.

Americans Are Too Casual

Baby boomers ushered in a more casual lifestyle, this is true, but what constitutes *too casual* is a cultural preference, and many people outside the U.S. believe Americans have crossed the line. We call each other by our first names, have casual dress days at work, and assume postures that slouch or lean.



To make your less casual customers and clients feel more comfortable, consider making the following adjustments to the way you meet and greet customers (see Chapter 8 for additional guidance):

- ✓ Assume a more formal posture when meeting with multicultural prospects and clientele — sit or stand upright with both feet firmly planted on the ground.
- ✓ Address people by their preferred title followed by their last name, unless they instruct you to do otherwise.
- ✓ Dress a bit more formally than your customers. Don't forget that it wasn't so long ago in this country that men would attend a baseball game wearing suits and ties, while women would wear dresses, hats, and gloves.
- ✓ If you're having a meeting in which people are going to dress more casually, let your foreign customers know in advance about the dress code.



Posture can mean different things to different cultures. In Japan, for example, people who don't sit upright with both feet flat on the floor may be perceived to have an unbalanced or untrustworthy character.

Americans Are Loud and Boisterous

WE ARE NOT! Ahhhh, denial is the first sign of guilt. Actually, people in the U.S. range from extremely reserved — sitting silently through a baseball game with legs crossed daintily at the ankles — to highly bombastic — shouting crude remarks while sporting brightly painted faces and chests during a hockey game. Overall, however, compared to Asians and people from more demure cultures, Americans tend to be way over the top.



The key to appealing to people from other cultures is to err on the side of being more reserved — at least until you have a chance to observe the level of exuberance your customers exhibit. You can always scale up. Toning it down is tougher.

Americans Focus Only on Short-Term Gains

In countries that have been in existence for thousands of years, people often develop business and personal relationships that last for generations. These same folks often think that Americans tend to be rather shortsighted, looking to score a quick transaction and move on to the next deal.



When working with clients from other cultures, look at time spent socializing as time well spent. Whether you're chatting about their country, sampling their cuisine, or visiting their family, you're building relationships that can last for your lifetime and generations to come. In the process, your clients are trying to size you up to determine whether you and your company and your associates are the kind of people they want to do business with now and in the future. Although the initial process may take longer than you're used to, keep in mind that this could save time and boost sales in the long run — when your clients and the people they refer begin the next transaction by trusting you. Check out Chapter 9 for the full scoop on building rapport with people of all cultures.

Americans Are Somewhat Brusque in Business Dealings

Americans tend to want to “Get 'er done,” “Get down to brass tacks,” and deal with the bottom line. Not that there's anything wrong with that. It's just a cultural thing. However, this approach to business, and to life in general, often leads people from other cultures to think of us as brusque in our business dealings. Outside the United States, salespeople and clients usually engage in a lot more small talk and relationship building before they get down to business.



When you're dealing with customers from cultures that have been around for thousands of years, constantly remind yourself of this fact. Japan, for example, has a 5,000-year-old culture, making a few hours or even days seem insignificant. Chill out.

Americans Are Overly Materialistic

The U.S. media do an outstanding job of stereotyping Americans as celebrity-hungry material girls (and guys) with TV shows like *Cribs*, magazines like *People* and *GQ*, and music videos that glorify all the trappings of financial success. It's no wonder that people from other countries view people from the United States as materialistic when we half-jokingly claim that “He who dies with the most toys wins.”



Whenever you're dealing with people from other cultures and you focus attention on the bling, you're unintentionally reinforcing this stereotype. One way to dilute it is to discuss other topics beyond satisfying their egos. Ask fewer questions about a person's job, the car they drive, and the house they live in and more questions about the person's family, interests, and activities. By introducing topics that focus on your customers as people, you're likely to find that you're building rapport much more quickly.

All Americans Are Rich



Thanks to television shows and movies shown around the world, many people have the mistaken impression that all Americans live in ten-bedroom mansions with solid gold water bowls for their dogs. As a result, you're likely to encounter the following:

- ✔ Customers may assume during the negotiating phase that you can afford to present them with a much better offer. After all, because Americans are so filthy rich, surely you can afford to share a little of that wealth with your less affluent customers from other cultures.
- ✔ Prospective clients may expect you to pick up the tab. Whether you're playing host in your own country or heading out to foreign lands, you're likely to find yourself paying some pretty hefty bar bills.



The only way to dispel this common myth is to answer questions about your possessions honestly. People from other cultures frequently ask endless questions about how many houses you own or what kind of Mercedes you drive. Don't try to impress them with your leased car or highly leveraged home — it can cost you dearly.

Americans Are Extravagant and Wasteful

Statistics alone have done a sufficient job of condemning the U.S. as a country of extravagance and waste. Although the U.S. accounts for less than 5 percent of the global population, for example, it uses about a quarter of the world's fossil fuels, burning up nearly 25 percent of the coal, 26 percent of the oil, and 27 percent of the world's natural gas.

Of course, these statistics fail to account for the fact that the U.S. produces between a fifth and a third of the world's food supply and has developed many of the technologies that other countries rely on to develop and maintain their own industries. Be that as it may, U.S. citizens probably could do a little more to improve their image in this category. Perhaps the growing green movement, a weakening dollar, and higher oil prices will make Americans less wasteful and work toward dispelling this myth.



Consider spearheading green policies for your company. Starting a recycling program, reducing your paper use, and cutting fuel consumption demonstrates your commitment to being a responsible citizen of the world.

Americans Believe That Time Is Money

People in the United States have a cultural tendency to highly value time and even commonly say, “Time is money.” Outside of our borders, people believe that Americans are always in a hurry because of this value. People of other cultures may view time differently and may believe instead that time is for building relationships.



If you really believe that time is money, you may rush business transactions without even realizing that you’re doing it. This can work against you when you’re doing business with customers from other cultures:

- ✔ Your customers may feel that you don’t care about them or about spending time to develop a relationship with them. As a result, they’ll simply look elsewhere to have their needs met.
- ✔ Customers may use your rush to quickly close a deal against you when negotiations begin.



When you’re dealing with customers who need to establish a relationship with you before making a purchase, take a more relaxed approach and allow your customer to set the pace. When she’s ready to talk business, she’ll introduce the topic.

When I (Michael) went to Japan to negotiate some business contracts, my colleagues and I stayed in a hotel with rooms so tiny that we could barely walk between the bed and the dresser. In spite of its small size, each room had a large price tag, so we were anxious to conclude our transaction as quickly as possible and fly home. However, we knew enough not to bring up the subject of business until our hosts did. Unfortunately for the first week of our stay, all we did was tour the countryside, eat sushi, drink sake, and sing karaoke (very badly!). It wasn’t until we were just about to leave that our hosts got down to business. Whether this was a demonstration of the difference in how the Japanese view time or was a negotiating ploy to put pressure on us, we’ll never know; but by appearing to be relaxed even when we weren’t, we put ourselves in a better position to seal the deal on our terms.

See Chapter 13 for general information on negotiating with people of all cultures.

Appendix

Culture-Specific Insiders Information

If you need a quick reference guide for interacting with customers from specific cultures, you've arrived at the right place. Here we provide guidelines for meeting, greeting, and selling to customers who form the most prominent cultural groups in the United States. We also include a calendar of multicultural events and special occasions to assist you in planning your marketing and sales calendar.



In this book, we divide cultures into groups based on the size of their population according to the latest information available from the U.S. Census Bureau. Immigrants from Europe vary widely in greetings, communication styles, negotiation tactics, and more, so if you want to serve one or several European immigrant groups in your service area, conduct a survey as we explain in Chapter 2 to find out their wants and needs, and flip to Chapter 4 for tips on becoming involved in their community events.

A Quick Reference for Cross-Cultural Etiquette

Follow the Global Rule: Treat others as they would like to be treated. In the following sections, we provide a quick reference guide for meeting, greeting, and establishing rapport with people from various cultures. We list these groups in order of population size in the United States.



These are only guidelines. How any individual wants to be treated depends on the level of *acculturation* (how adapted to American culture a person is, as explained in Chapter 9) and his personal preferences. The degree to which ethnic culture influences thinking and behavior depends upon how long the person has been in the U.S. (which generation), the type of community he comes from, his socioeconomic status, his ties to his ethnic culture via family, and so on. As always, assume nothing and let the customer take the lead.

Hispanics

In 2003, the Census Bureau announced that the U.S. Hispanic population had reached 39 million people. This marked the first time Hispanics had overtaken Blacks to become the largest minority group in the country. In 2006, they numbered more than 44 million people, or around 15 percent of the nation's total population.

Hispanics are a very diverse group hailing from many parts of the world, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. In this section, we outline some of the cultural tendencies of the larger groups. Unfortunately, due to page limitations, we've had to omit some of the smaller groups, including populations from most of Central America (7.6 percent of the total U.S. Hispanic population in 2006) and South America (total 5.5 percent of the U.S. Hispanic population in 2006). However, if you want the details, many books and Web sites focus on specific Latin American countries and cultures. My (Michael's) Web site at www.EthnoConnect.com includes a list of resources.

Mexicans

According to the 2006 U.S. census, Mexicans are by far the largest group of all Hispanics in the United States at 64 percent, or more than 28 million people.

Common greeting: Shaking hands or giving a slight bow. Only shake hands with a Mexican woman if she extends her hand first. Men may greet other men with the *abrazo* (a hug with a few pats on the back).

Personal space: Generally closer than most Americans are comfortable with, at 1 to 1.5 feet.

Eye contact: Direct.

Approach to time: Relaxed; up to 30 minutes late is considered punctual. Mexicans may also cancel or fail to show up for meetings, so be persistent. You're not expected to arrive on time for appointments or social events.

Language: Spanish is the official language, so you may want to pick up a few Spanish words like *hola* (hello), *adiós* (goodbye), *por favor* (please), and *gracias* (thank you). However, keep in mind that for many of your customers, their English may be better than your Spanish.

Communication: Mexicans are more likely to prefer doing business in person rather than over the phone or Internet. They also tend to be indirect communicators, so avoid direct confrontation.

Topics for building rapport: Family and children are always welcome subjects. Never ask a Hispanic man, "What does your wife do for a living?" because this can imply that he doesn't earn enough to support his family.

Negotiations: Negotiations can move at a snail's pace, so be patient. Quick decisions are considered rash.

Actions to avoid: Standing with your hands on your hips connotes anger. Standing with your hands in your pockets is rude.

Tips for saleswomen: Men may not be used to seeing women in positions of power, so proceed slowly.

Puerto Ricans

According to the 2006 U.S. census, Puerto Ricans are the second largest group of Hispanics in the U.S. at 9 percent of the U.S. Hispanic population, or nearly 4 million people.

Common greeting: Shaking hands is common for both men and women. Men and women who are friends may kiss each other on the cheek. Older people are respected and usually introduced first. Be formal at first and don't use customers' first names unless invited to do so.

Personal space: Puerto Ricans tend to stand close when conversing, at about 1 to 1.5 feet. They often touch other people when talking, such as patting them on the back.

Eye contact: Direct.

Approach to time: May be 15 to 30 minutes late or more.

Language: Although Spanish is the national language, English is the language of business, so Puerto Ricans are usually quite comfortable speaking it.

Communication: Puerto Ricans are a friendly people who often smile while talking. They like to be very direct about issues and feelings and may be a bit more emphatic while doing it. Be aware that Puerto Ricans consider their country to be part of the U.S., so if you were to say something like "We Americans . . ." (as if they're not Americans), your listener would likely be insulted.

Topics for building rapport: Sports and travel.

Negotiations: Usually begin with small talk and can end with a hard sell, so be prepared. Don't offer your best deal upfront, or you'll have few options when the real bargaining begins.

Actions to avoid: Sitting or standing with arms crossed or putting your hands on your hips, because these are considered challenging or aggressive postures. Don't inquire about families or marital status; the rate of divorce and single-parent families is pretty high among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. Don't talk about Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory because this is a sensitive and controversial topic.

Tips for saleswomen: Although Puerto Ricans value equality, the spirit of machismo is still alive and well. Puerto Rican men are used to seeing women in positions of power and authority, so be yourself, but remain aware that some men from this culture may prefer to work with salesmen.

Cubans

According to the 2006 U.S. census, Cubans are the third largest separate group of Hispanics in the U.S. at 3.4 percent, or 1.5 million people.

Common greeting: Shaking hands is common for both men and women. Men and women who are friends may kiss on the cheek. Be formal at first and don't use customers' first names unless invited to do so.

Personal space: A bit closer than in the U.S. at 1 to 1.5 feet, and touching is common among friends. However, Cubans aren't used to being touched by strangers, including seemingly friendly pats on the back.

Eye contact: Direct.

Approach to time: It's not unusual for Cubans to keep people waiting for an hour or more for a meeting.

Language: Spanish is the official language, although English is widely spoken.

Communication: Fairly direct; not much different from your U.S. customers, but they may be a bit louder than Americans are used to.

Topics for building rapport: Travel and family.

Negotiations: Cubans tend to try to tire you out with slow and protracted bargaining.

Actions to avoid: Discussions about politics, which can be a minefield.

Tips for saleswomen: Cuba is a very macho country where women aren't commonly seen in positions of power and authority. Proceed slowly and present yourself as representing your company rather than yourself. If necessary, be prepared to graciously allow a male counterpart to step in if you sense a great deal of uneasiness on the customer's part.

Salvadorans

According to the 2006 U.S. census estimates, people from El Salvador are now the fourth largest separate group of Hispanics in the U.S. at just over 3.0 percent, or almost 1.4 million people.

Common greeting: Handshakes that are a bit soft and held longer than Americans may be comfortable with. A Salvadoran woman may not shake hands, so wait for her to extend hers first. Friends of either gender may add a light pat on the back or a hug. Be formal at first and use customers' titles, such as "doctor" or "professor," if you know them.

Personal space: Salvadorans generally stand and sit closer than Americans are accustomed to at 1 to 1.5 feet.

Eye contact: Direct.

Approach to time: Relaxed; may be an hour or more late for appointments. For instance, city buses run regularly, but there's no schedule.

Language: Spanish is the official language.

Communication: Very indirect. Salvadorans generally don't say what they feel. They appreciate receiving information in English as well as Spanish.

Topics for building rapport: Foods and culture of El Salvador, as well as history, geography, and families.

Negotiations: Decisions can take a long time over several meetings. Salvadorans don't like high-pressure tactics. They tend to be skilled and tough bargainers.

Actions to avoid: Common American gestures that may have little or erroneous meanings in the Salvadoran culture. For instance, don't point your fingers at anyone. Avoid loud or overly boisterous conversations.

Tips for saleswomen: Women in positions of power in business are rare in El Salvador. It helps to tell customers from this country that you're representing your company and not speaking for yourself personally.

Dominicans

According to the 2006 U.S. census, people from the Dominican Republic are the fifth largest separate group of Hispanics in the U.S. at 2.8 percent, or more than 1.2 million people.

Common greeting: Handshakes, which may be combined with slight touches on the arm and elbow. Just return the gesture. Women commonly shake hands with men and other women. Friends may share a light kiss on the cheek.

Personal space: Dominicans tend to stand and sit a bit closer than Americans are accustomed to, at 1 to 1.5 feet.

Eye contact: Direct eye contact is very important in this culture.

Approach to time: Relaxed; may be an hour or more late for appointments.

Language: Spanish is the official language, but it's quite a bit different than the Spanish spoken in Mexico or Spain. Most Dominicans grow up speaking their own form of Spanish, commonly referred to as "Dominicanese."

Communication: Very direct and open. Dominicans generally say what they feel. They appreciate receiving information in English as well as Spanish. They may talk a bit louder than you're used to. Humor is greatly appreciated by these rather upbeat people.

Topics for building rapport: Foods and culture of the Dominican Republic and baseball. Many Dominicans are proud of the fact that their country sends so many fine players to the major leagues in the U.S.

Negotiations: Decisions can take a long time. Dominicans don't like high-pressure tactics. They tend to be skilled and tough bargainers.

Actions to avoid: Common American gestures that may have little or erroneous meanings in the Dominican culture.

Tips for saleswomen: Machismo is practiced as a high art in the Dominican Republic, so when you're dealing with male customers, present yourself as a representative of your company and tread carefully so as to not insult the male ego. If necessary, be prepared to graciously allow a male counterpart to step in if you sense a great deal of uneasiness on the customer's part.

Blacks or African Americans

In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the Black population to be 36.6 million people. For the first time, this made African Americans the second largest ethnic group in the country, and in 2006, they comprised 12.8 percent of the nation's total population, or more than 38 million people. The Census Bureau defines "Black or African American" as "A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa." African Americans are obviously very different from people who have recently emigrated from Africa.

African Americans

Recognize that African American consumers are not all the same. One way to differentiate them is by economic status such as working class, middle class, and upper class. Each group is unique in terms of buying habits and preferred products.



Common greeting: Shaking hands for both men and women is commonly practiced. Be formal at the beginning and never call an African American by his or her first name unless the person invites you to do so, because this could be extremely insulting. Show respect by saying something like, "It's really good to meet you."

Personal space: Closer and less formal than Anglo Americans may be used to at 1 to 1.5 feet, but you must establish trust before assuming familiarity or closeness.

Eye contact: Can be very direct, especially when speaking. May be somewhat indirect when listening.

Approach to time: Punctual.

Language: English.

Communication: African Americans tend to prefer very direct communications and "telling it like it is." Gestures can be more enthusiastic than most Anglo salespeople are used to. Nonverbal communication is very important and can convey more meaning than in almost any other culture. Men may not always be comfortable talking about themselves. The African American culture has a long history of storytelling, so tell stories instead of lecturing.

Topics for building rapport: Anything you would normally talk to any other long-established American about, such as entertainment, sports, or education.

Negotiations: Older African Americans may not negotiate much, whereas the younger generation seems more adept at the art of haggling.

Actions to avoid: Anything that can be interpreted as questioning the customer's ability to afford an item. Calling African American females "Miss," which can be demeaning. Don't ask a Black woman about her husband unless she brings up the subject first, because many African American households are headed by single women.

Tips for saleswomen: Women salespeople are generally treated with a great deal of respect by African American men. Black women can be very independent and may prefer to deal with a man.

Africans

Africans in the United States include people from Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Egypt, Somalia, South Africa, Angola, and elsewhere. Although they can represent a significant customer base in certain cities like the District of Columbia, New York, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Boston, Houston, Chicago, Dallas, and Philadelphia, in total just over a million people of African descent were living in the U.S. in 2006.



The diversity of people living in different countries across the African continent (especially the diversity in South Africa alone) is too great to provide any accurate general tendencies. If you have a large number of people from Africa in your service area, conduct a survey of their needs as described in Chapter 2.

Asians

In 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the Asian population in the U.S. to be nearly 15 million people. This made them the third largest ethnic group in the country at around 5 percent of the nation's total population. Among U.S. Asians, Chinese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians comprise more than half of the population. Although the Census Bureau's definition of Asians is much broader, in the following sections we just cover the main groups you're likely to encounter.



Indians and Pakistanis are South Asians, so we include them in the following sections. Bear in mind that Indians and Pakistanis are very different in culture, religion, and many other ways. For instance, Indians primarily speak Hindi and are Hindus who don't eat beef. Pakistanis primarily speak Urdu and are largely Muslims who don't believe in eating pork or drinking alcohol.

Chinese

Chinese are currently the largest Asian group in America (at more than 3.5 million people in 2006). They started coming to California in the late 1840s to mine for gold and have always looked on the United States as the land of opportunity.

Common greeting: For Chinese men, shaking hands is common and often accompanied by a bow. A woman may be uncomfortable with handshakes, so wait to see what she does first. Chinese generally don't like being touched by strangers. Business cards are exchanged with formality with both hands with the wording facing the customer (see Chapter 8). They may put last names first, so be sure to ask "Which is your family name?"

Personal space: A bit closer than in the U.S., at 1.5 to 2 feet. It's common for friends of the same sex to hold hands while walking.

Eye contact: Indirect.

Approach to time: Punctual. However, people and relationships are more important than deadlines.

Language: Mandarin Chinese is primarily spoken in mainland China and Taiwan, while Cantonese is primarily spoken in Hong Kong.

Communication: Periods of silence during a sales presentation or negotiations are used for contemplation; don't interrupt with idle chit chat. As very indirect communicators, Chinese find "no" difficult to say. They may say "maybe" or "we'll see" to save face. Forcing a Chinese customer to say "no" is a good way to quickly end a relationship, because they don't like to be disagreeable. They also don't express themselves very physically.

Don't be insulted if the Chinese ask personal questions such as "How much money do you make?" "How many children do you have?" or "Are you married?" They ask these questions to show interest. Just change the subject if you don't want to answer. Feel free to ask personal questions in return, especially about family. Show respect for older people.

Topics for building rapport: Personal interests, hobbies, children, Chinese food, and culture.

Negotiations: Very formal and slow. If a customer seems surprised at a proposal, attempt to change your request, allowing the customer to save face. Signing a contract begins negotiations. A contract is usually considered only a draft and is subject to change at any time.

Actions to avoid: Never use your index finger to beckon or point. Use the entire hand. Don't wrap gifts in white paper, which is the symbol of death. Don't touch Chinese people, even casually, unless they touch you first.

Tips for saleswomen: China is a male-dominated society. However, many women are in business in China, and some occupy high-ranking positions and important managerial jobs. One of the principles of the Chinese communist system is to work toward sexual equality. By establishing a more indirect communication style, you should be able to avoid any problems.

Filipinos

According to the 2006 U.S. census, just over 2 million people of Filipino descent reside in the U.S.

Common greeting: Men and women shake hands with everyone present at a business meeting or social occasion and when saying goodbye. Handshakes should be friendly and informal, but soft. Men should wait for women to extend their hand. Friends may greet each other by raising their eyebrows.

Personal space: Just a bit farther than in the United States at 2.5 to 3 feet. Friends will stand much closer in casual conversation.

Eye contact: Direct during the greeting and indirect after that. Strong eye contact between men can be interpreted as aggressive.

Approach to time: Filipinos are very relaxed about time. Meetings and appointments usually begin about 30 minutes to an hour late.

Language: Filipino and English are the official languages of the Philippines. Because English is widely used for educational, governmental, and commercial purposes, Filipinos are generally very comfortable speaking English.

Communication: Filipinos are casual, fun-loving, sensitive, and hospitable people. Laughter may convey pleasure or embarrassment; it's commonly used to relieve tension. Communication is indirect, truth is diplomatically presented, and Filipinos find it difficult to say "no," disagree, reject, or be confrontational. As a result, they may give an ambiguous or indirect answer — not to be deceptive, but rather to avoid confrontation. Filipinos may point by puckering their lips in the direction they are referring to.

Topics for building rapport: Filipino food, customs, and language.

Negotiations: Casual conversation may precede business discussions during meetings. Negotiations and business deals move slowly. Don't allow meetings to go too long, because Filipinos love to eat, and their enthusiasm wanes when they're hungry. They often have a "take it or leave it" attitude when it comes to price. They also may place less stress on the absolute selling price and more emphasis on percentages, unit cost, or rounded figures.

Actions to avoid: Standing with your hands on your hips means you're angry. Pointing at a Filipino with your finger is disrespectful.

Tips for saleswomen: Women are generally treated similar to men in the Philippines and have been rulers of the country, so as long as you make the other adjustments described in this section, you should be safe.

Asian Indians

According to the Census Bureau, the Asian Indian population in the U.S. grew from around 1,678,000 in 2000 to 2,662,000 in 2006. This was a growth rate of 59 percent, which was the highest for any Asian American group.

Common greeting: Shaking hands is common, but so is the traditional *namaste* (placing both hands prayerfully to the chest with a slight bow). Men generally don't touch women when greeting them. Traditional Indian

women may shake hands with American women but not usually with men. Men may pat other men on the back as a sign of friendship. Always present your business card when introduced. Use the right hand to present your card, and accept the other person's card with the same hand.

Personal space: A bit farther than in the U.S. at 2.5 to 3 feet.

Eye contact: Indirect, especially when speaking with people they consider to be superior.

Approach to time: Arriving 15 to 30 minutes late is considered punctual. They may not show up for appointments and expect you to reschedule.

Language: Although Hindi is the national language, most Indians are comfortable speaking English. It's the most important language for national, political, and business communications in that country.

Communication: Indians can be very direct. When an Indian smiles and jerks his head backward or moves his head around in a figure eight, this usually means yes. It's considered rude to discuss business before engaging in small talk about the customer's family and interests. "I will try" likely means "no."

Topics for building rapport: Food, personal interests, and hobbies. Ask them to teach you a few words in Hindi.

Negotiations: Indians rarely make an immediate decision and typically demand lots of data to back up any claims you make. They often view bargaining as win-lose, so you must build trust before you begin or you're likely to lose.

Actions to avoid: Using your left hand for eating, because it's considered unclean. Don't touch an Indian on the head, because the head is considered sacred. Pointing the sole of your foot at a customer is considered extremely rude, so keep both feet on the floor when seated. Don't point with the index finger — use the entire hand, instead.

Tips for saleswomen: You shouldn't shake hands with a man unless he extends his hand first. Men may not be used to seeing women in positions of authority, so saleswomen should present themselves as representatives of their company. Indian men may not invite their spouses to business meetings or social functions.

South Koreans

Because the North Korean government doesn't allow its citizens to leave the country, few North Koreans live in the United States. Therefore, the Census Bureau doesn't draw a distinction between North and South Koreans. According to the 2006 census, about 1.5 million Koreans (primarily South Koreans) were living in the U.S.

Common greeting: Bowing is common in Korea, but in America many men will shake hands. However, to show respect when shaking hands, the right forearm is supported by the left hand. Korean women generally

don't shake hands but rather just nod slightly, so follow their lead. Don't use first names unless invited to do so. They may put last names first, so be sure to ask "Which is your family name?" Don't touch Koreans, even casually, unless they touch you first.

Personal space: A littler farther apart than Americans are probably accustomed to at 2.5 to 3 feet.

Eye contact: Very indirect after the initial greeting.

Time: Very punctual.

Language: New immigrant Koreans usually speak Hangul (Korean) and tend to be uncomfortable with English, so speak a *little more* slowly. Younger people are often brought on shopping trips to act as interpreters.

Communication: Koreans tend to be very indirect, and yet they are considered the most emotional of all Asian people. As opposed to the rather stoic Japanese and Chinese, the Koreans are more likely to wear their emotions on their sleeves. Because they are indirect, they tend to avoid saying the word "no," so don't ask questions to which the answer could be no. Instead of saying, "Can we deliver the refrigerator tomorrow?" phrase it as, "When do you want us to deliver the refrigerator?"

Topics for building rapport: Korean history, food, or culture.

Negotiations: Very formal and data driven. Koreans generally start with an unreasonable position and, if you're firm, will compromise. They may continue to negotiate after a contract is signed.

Actions to avoid: Talking about politics or North Korea. Don't say "thank you" when a Korean compliments you, because it's considered a sign that you lack humility. Instead say, "Oh no, I was just lucky" or something that implies you're not worthy of the compliment.

Tips for saleswomen: Korean men tend to be uncomfortable negotiating with women. To ease this discomfort, present yourself as a representative of your company and spend time establishing a relationship before starting your sales presentation.

Vietnamese

According to the 2006 U.S. census, the Vietnamese have a fairly large population in the U.S., accounting for more than 1.6 million people.

Common greeting: Business cards are usually exchanged first, although the ritual isn't as elaborate as with the Japanese (see the following section). Vietnamese men generally shake hands when greeting as well as when saying goodbye. Shake with both hands and bow your head slightly to show respect. Bow to the elderly who don't extend their hands. Vietnamese women are more inclined to bow their heads slightly rather than to shake hands. Family names usually come first, followed by middle name and then given name.

Personal space: A bit farther apart than in the U.S. at 2.5 to 3 feet.

Eye contact: Very indirect after the initial greeting.

Approach to time: Punctual, but value people and relationships more than deadlines.

Language: Speak Vietnamese and many don't speak English well. An interpreter is usually necessary, although children who were born and educated in the United States are usually brought on shopping trips to serve this function.

Communication: While generally indirect, Vietnamese can be very direct, almost confrontational at times. However, the Vietnamese try to avoid unpleasantness by not saying the word "no," which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. Yes may not mean they agree. When the Vietnamese say "No problem," you can take it to mean "Yes, there is a problem." In this case, double- and even triple-check all commitments. As with most Asians, silence during conversation is valued.

Topics for building rapport: Vietnamese food and culture.

Negotiations: Can be very slow, and decisions are often made as a group.

Actions to avoid: Gesturing with your hands or touching. Always pass an object by using both hands.

Tips for saleswomen: Women in Vietnam are considered caregivers and are highly respected. However they aren't usually seen in positions of authority, so expect customers to be a little surprised when meeting a woman in sales. Take time to establish a relationship, and most of your male customers will readily accept buying from a woman.

Japanese

Given the influence that Japanese culture has had on the United States, you'd probably think that the U.S. has a considerable number of immigrants from Japan. Yet, according to the 2006 census, just over 1.2 million Japanese were living in the U.S. That's still a sizeable population, but not quite as large as most people believe.

Common greeting: Japanese customers may exchange business cards even before they shake hands or bow because business cards are very important. They present their cards with great ceremony by using both hands, with the lettering facing the customer. You should accept their card with your right hand and treat it with respect. You should be familiar with many other aspects of the business card exchange before doing business with Japanese people. (See Chapter 8 for more details.)

Some Japanese bow and then shake hands. The bow is a highly regarded greeting to show respect and is appreciated by the Japanese. A slight bow to show courtesy is acceptable. A handshake is appropriate upon meeting. The Japanese handshake is soft and accompanied by little or no eye contact. Women generally don't shake hands with men. Wait to see what kind of greeting your customer offers you, and then do likewise.

First names are almost never used in Japan. Instead, they use the honorific term *san* (pronounced *sahn*) following the last name which is the equivalent to the English “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” “Ms.,” or “Miss.”

Personal space: Much farther than in the United States at about 3 to 3.5 feet.

Eye contact: Very indirect except when first meeting.

Approach to time: Punctual.

Language: Japanese is the national language. The Japanese tend to speak English slowly and deliberately, but most value an opportunity to further develop their mastery of English. In most cases, you can get by without a translator, but be sure to speak slowly and literally (avoid common expressions, such as “getting down to brass tacks”).

Communication: Very indirect and formal with very little body language or gesturing. Expect silence when the person is in thought. Nodding is very important. When listening to Japanese speak, you should nod to show you’re listening and understanding the speaker. Silence is a natural and expected form of nonverbal communication. Don’t feel a need to fill it with idle chatter. Japanese people rarely say no, but this doesn’t mean they agree with you. They don’t like being disagreeable and may say such things as “This is difficult” to mean “no.” Sucking air in quickly and loudly through lips and teeth expresses distress or surprise at a proposal and also means “no.”

Topics for building rapport: Japanese food and culture. They are also very interested in talking about education, especially well-known American universities, and of course, baseball.

Negotiations: Extremely slow and deliberate. The Japanese typically take their time getting to know you because they’re trying to determine whether you’re an honorable person with whom to do business.

Several meetings are usually required to close a sale. When the time comes, be content to close a deal with a handshake. Leave the signing of the written contract to later meetings.

Actions to avoid: Touching of any kind.

Tips for saleswomen: Japanese men may not be accustomed to seeing women in positions of power or authority, although this is slowly changing. Dress conservatively around Japanese people. You must establish credibility and a position of authority immediately.

Pakistanis

Pakistanis comprise a much smaller portion of the population than Asian Indians. According to the 2004 census, only about 200,000 Pakistanis were living in the U.S.

Common greeting: *Salaam* (a Muslim greeting), which involves a soft handshake with the right hand followed by touching your hand to your forehead and then your heart. (Notice that the salaam greeting is very different from the Indian namaste.) A handshake is common for non-Muslims. Muslim women generally don't touch men or women to whom they're not related by marriage or blood.

Personal space: A little closer than Americans may be comfortable with at 1.5 to 2 feet.

Eye contact: Direct when speaking to people of your own age or younger, and indirect with people who are your senior.

Approach to time: Punctual but not insistent upon it.

Language: Although Urdu is the official language, most Pakistanis, especially those who are businesspeople, speak English.

Communication: When speaking to a Pakistani older than yourself, the preferred style is indirect. When speaking to people of your own age or younger, you can be more direct.

Topics for building rapport: Pakistani culture and foods.

Negotiations: Pakistanis love to bargain as a way to get to know you. Build connection and trust before starting any negotiation. Written contracts are important.

Actions to avoid: Any reference to "God" as in "Oh my God" or "good God." Don't cross your legs so the bottom of your foot points at the customer.

Tips for saleswomen: Men may not be used to seeing women in positions of power or authority and may prefer to negotiate with a male counterpart. If that's not an option, present yourself as a representative of your company and take some time establishing a relationship before beginning your sales presentation.

American Indians and Alaska Natives

As of July 1, 2006, 4.5 million people in the United States identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Natives. Given the fact that Native Americans were here first, it's surprising that many people in the U.S. have so many misconceptions about them. The majority of American Indians, for example, do *not* live on reservations.

American Indians

Approximately 116 nations represent the various populations of American Indians. Although great diversity exists among the different nations, here are some general tendencies you may notice:

Common greeting: A very gentle handshake.

Personal space: Greater than for Whites at 2.5 to 3 feet. Native Americans greatly value their personal space.

Eye contact: Very little.

Approach to time: Less punctual. American Indians tend to see time as an endless circle where the past, present, and future are all continuous. Arriving for appointments 15 to 30 minutes late isn't unusual.

Language: English. Hundreds of nation-specific languages are also spoken.

Communication: Native American communication style is greatly affected by their values of humility, respect for elders, and harmony. As indirect communicators, Native Americans often exchange information and convey beliefs through storytelling. The most effective method of selling is to tell stories.

Topics for building rapport: Anything you would normally talk to any other long-established American about, such as entertainment, sports, nature, or education.

Negotiations: More collaborative and less confrontational than Caucasians. They want to bring about agreement through good feelings.

Actions to avoid: The words “squaw,” “redskin,” “tribe,” or “chief.” American Indians tend not to display much emotion, especially facial emotions.

Tips for saleswomen: Many of the Indian nations have a matriarchal structure where women are considered powerful figures, so you shouldn't face any extra challenges when selling to male clientele.

Alaska Natives



Alaska's indigenous people are divided into 11 distinct cultures with 20 different languages in addition to English. Again, great diversity exists among its peoples; therefore, it's impossible to begin to even generalize cultural tendencies. If you find you have a large number of people who are Alaska Natives in your service area, conduct a survey of their needs as recommended in Chapter 2.

Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders

Another group of people that the U.S. Census Bureau regularly tracks are Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. In 2006, this group consisted of more than 1 million people from Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, and other Pacific Islands. Remember that Hawaii is part of the United States, and people from the islands refer to the contiguous 48 states as “The Mainland.”



People who are categorized as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders are very diverse. Therefore trying to describe cultural tendencies among this diverse population is nearly impossible. Taking a survey, as suggested in Chapter 2, is the best way to gather information about the prospective customers in your area.

Middle Easterners

Another group that has a significant impact on retailers and service providers in different parts of the United States are people from the Middle East — primarily Arabs. In the 2000 U.S. census, more than 1 million people identified themselves as of Arabian ancestry. People of Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian backgrounds accounted for 60 percent of the Arabian population. Another 20 percent described themselves as Arabians. Although part of the Middle East, Iran is not considered an Arabian country because the majority of its inhabitants speak Farsi (Persian).

The Arabian states are composed of some 22 countries. Although great diversity stands between Middle Eastern cultures, here are some general tendencies you may notice:

Common greeting: *Salaam* for Muslims — shake hands with your right hand and then touch your forehead and your heart with the same hand. Shaking hands is common for non-Muslims. Men often hug other male friends and kiss them on both cheeks. Women usually don't touch men who aren't their spouse or family member. They may immediately call you by your first name, which gives you permission to do the same.

Personal space: Much closer than most Americans are used to at 0.5 to 1 foot. Probably the closest of any group of people on the planet, depending on which country in the Middle East your customers hail from.

Eye contact: Tends to be very direct. A saying in the Middle East is that “The eyes are the windows to the soul.” Customers may stare deeply into your eyes to try and see if you're an honorable and trustworthy person. Try not to flinch!

Approach to time: Usually not very punctual and may be 30 minutes to 3 hours late or more depending on their specific country of origin.

Language: Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, and others are spoken depending specifically on what country they or their ancestors are from. Those who emigrate to the United States are usually fairly conversant in English.

Communication: Silence is highly valued. Although Middle Eastern people tend to be extremely indirect, they can also be very demonstrative and emotive. They may be very emotional during negotiations, but it's mostly for show.

Topics for building rapport: Family, education, and Middle Eastern culture. Although most of us have been taught to be humble, in the Middle East bragging is often elevated to a high art. When dealing with folks from this culture, you can toot your own horn whenever the customer does so first.

Negotiations: Middle Eastern people can be very confrontational negotiators with lots of emotion. They may even walk out, but if you've built a relationship, they'll likely come back. A person's word is more highly valued than a written contract.

Actions to avoid: Asking about a man's wife because this is considered impolite unless he mentions her first. Using the left hand for gesturing or eating, because it's considered unclean. Remember that Muslims are forbidden to drink alcohol or eat pork.

Tips for saleswomen: Although it can vary from country to country, men may not be comfortable doing business with women. If you sense this, you may want to defer to a male counterpart to do the talking while you put the deal together behind the scenes.

On the other hand, while Middle Eastern men may not treat American women with the kind of respect women are used to in the U.S., they are likely to trust women more than men. This is because in their home countries men cheat each other just for fun and then brag about it, but women don't cheat.

Anglo Americans or Caucasians

Anglo Americans?! What could we possibly be thinking by including a section on Anglo Americans? Actually, we do have a purpose for our madness — three purposes, in fact:

- ✔ To acknowledge that everyone, including Caucasians, has cultural quirks.
- ✔ To give Anglo American salespeople a clearer understanding of the differences between “us” and “them.”
- ✔ To provide new immigrant salespeople who are reading this book with advice and insight on how to sell effectively to their Caucasian customers.

Hey, it's only fair. After all, more Anglo Americans are living in the U.S. than the populations of all the other groups combined — more than 200 million Americans, according to the most recent U.S. census estimates.

Common greeting: Firm handshakes for men and women. Anglo Americans are very casual people who are quick to call others by their first (given) name.

Personal space: Anglo Americans generally stand about 2 to 2.5 feet apart when doing business. They may slap or pat you on the back or shoulder as a sign of friendliness.

Eye contact: Anglo Americans consider direct eye contact to be a sign of respect and that you're paying attention as they're speaking.

Approach to time: Punctual. If you're going to be more than ten minutes late, you'd better call and let the customer know.

Language: English (not the King's English) with a great deal of slang thrown in.

Communication: Very direct. Most Americans generally say what they feel. They're generally not comfortable with silence and usually try to fill any gaps in conversation with idle chitchat, such as commenting on the weather.

Topics for building rapport: Sports, entertainment, and food, usually in that order for men; and family, entertainment, and food for women.

Negotiations: Very quick and bottom-line oriented. Anglo Americans want to get the negotiation process over with as quickly as possible. If they sign a contract, it generally signals the end of all further negotiations.

Actions to avoid: Being overly formal because most Americans consider this to be "stuffy" and standoffish. Don't give an expensive gift because it may be seen as a bribe, which is illegal. Don't use or chew on a toothpick in public. Don't smoke in public or in any place that isn't specifically marked as a smoking area.

Tips for saleswomen: Women commonly hold positions of power in business. Men expect you to be direct and have the authority to negotiate on behalf of your company.

A Handy Cross-Cultural Holiday Calendar

Following is a list of some of the more common cultural holidays for cultural minorities in America:

January 1:	U.S. African American Independence Day New Year's Day — U.S., Japan, elsewhere
January 3:	Independence Day — Burma
January 21:	Martin Luther King Jr. Day — U.S.
January 26:	Duarte Day — Dominican Republic Republic Day — India
February 5:	Constitution Day — Mexico
February 11:	National Foundation Day — Japan

February 12:	Tet — Vietnam lunar New Year; occurs around this date Shul — Korean lunar New Year; occurs around this date
February 15:	Mahaparinirvana — Buddhist
February 17:	Vasanta Panchami — Hindu/Sikh lunar Spring Festival occurs around this date
February 22:	Abu Simbel Festival — Egypt Eid Al-Adha — Islamic; occurs around this date
February 25:	National Day — Kuwait People Power Day — Philippines
February 26:	Lunar Lantern Festival — China/Taiwan; occurs around this date
February 27:	Independence Day — Dominican Republic
March 1:	Independence Day — South Korea
March 6:	Independence Day — Ghana
March 17:	St. Patrick's Day — Ireland
March 19:	St. Joseph's Day — Poland
March 21:	Boun Pimay — Laos New Year
March 22:	Emancipation Day — Puerto Rico
April 5:	Qing Ming Festival — China/Taiwan
April 6:	Chakri Day — Thailand
April 8:	Buddha's Birthday — Buddhists celebrate on nearest Saturday
April 13:	Buddhist New Year — Buddhist Songkran — Thailand Vaisakhi — Hindu, Jain, Sikh; celebrated around this date Varushapirapu — Sri Lanka
April 14:	Pan-American Day — Latin America
April 22:	Discovery of Brazil Day — Brazil
April 26:	Gathering of Nations Pow Wow — Native American
April 27:	Freedom Day — South Africa
April 29:	Golden Week — Japan

May 1:	Flores de Mayo — Philippines Lei Day — Hawaii
May 3:	Memorial Day — Japan
May 5:	Children's Day — South Korea Cinco de Mayo — Mexico Boy's Day — Japan
May 6:	Sham al-Nassin — Egypt; celebrated around this date
May 10:	Golden Spike Day — Asian American
May 14:	Independence Day — Paraguay
May 20:	Independence Day — Cuba National Day — Cameroon
May 23:	Labour Day — Jamaica
May 25:	African Liberation Day — Africa Independence Day — Jordan May Revolution — Argentina
May 26:	Independence Day — Guyana
June 1:	Children's Day — China Gawai Dayak — Malaysia Navajo Treaty Day — Native American
June 6:	Memorial Day — South Korea
June 7:	Red Earth Native American Cultural Festival — Native American
June 11:	King Kamehameha Day — Hawaii
June 12:	Independence Day — Philippines
June 15:	Dragon Boat Festival — China; occurs around this date
June 19:	Juneteenth — African American
June 24:	San Juan Day — Puerto Rico
July 1:	Abolition of Slavery Day — Suriname
July 4:	Fil-American Friendship Day — Philippines
July 5:	Independence Day — Venezuela
July 9:	Independence Day — Argentina
July 10:	Independence Day — Bahamas

July 13:	O-Bon Festival — Japan; occurs around this date
July 17:	Constitution Day — South Korea Munoz-Rivera Day — Puerto Rico
July 20:	Independence Day — Colombia
July 23:	Revolution Day — Egypt
July 25:	Constitution Day — Puerto Rico
July 26:	National Day — Cuba
July 28:	Independence Day — Peru
August 1:	Emancipation Day — Trinidad & Tobago
August 6:	Independence Day — Bolivia & Jamaica
August 9:	National Day — Singapore
August 10:	Independence Day — Ecuador
August 13:	Independence Day — Central African Republic
August 14:	Independence Day — Pakistan
August 15:	Independence Day — Congo & India Korean Liberation Day — Korea
August 16:	Restoration of the Republic Day — Dominican Republic
August 17:	Independence Day — Indonesia
August 25:	Independence Day — Uruguay
August 31:	Independence Day — Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago
September 2:	Independence Day — Vietnam
September 7:	Independence Day — Brazil
September 15:	Hispanic Heritage Month begins in the U.S. Independence Day — El Salvador
September 16:	Independence Day — Mexico
September 18:	Independence Day — Chile
September 21:	Ch'usok — Korea; occurs around this date
September–October:	Rosh Hashanah — Jewish; occurs around this time
September–October:	Yom Kippur — Jewish; occurs around this time
October 1:	Independence Day — Nigeria National Day — China

October 10:	Double Ten Day — Taiwan
November 1:	Día de los Muertos — Mexico & Latin America
November 3:	Independence Day — Panama
November 6:	Constitution Day — Dominican Republic Ramadan for Muslims begins with the new moon around this date
November 9:	Independence Day — Cambodia
November 14:	Children's Day — India
November 15:	Proclamation of the Republic Day — Brazil
November 19:	Discovery Day — Puerto Rico
November 28:	Hmong New Year — Laos
December 1:	Rosa Parks Day — African American
December 4:	Eid Al-Fitr — Muslim; at the end of Ramadan around this date
December 8:	Bodhi Day — Buddhist
December 10:	Constitution Day — Thailand
December 12:	Guadalupe Day — Mexico Independence Day — Kenya
December 15:	Navidades — Puerto Rico
December 16:	Independence Day — Bangladesh
December 23:	Tenno Tanjobi — Japan
December 24:	Independence Day — Libya
December 26:	Kwanzaa — African American
December 30:	Rizal Day — Philippines
December 31:	New Year's Eve — international celebration

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