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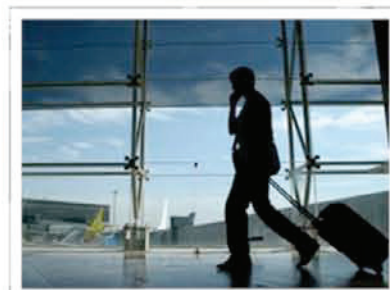
What do you see as the most significant barrier to growing your small business beyond U.S. borders?

Financing	40%
Finding customers	35%
Logistics	16%
We do not plan to expand in 2010	9%

Know Before You Go: 12 Tips for Doing Business Abroad

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Dec 06, 2010 -

If a Chinese person tells you that you look fat, don't be offended -- it's a compliment. This is just one of the important things to know if doing business overseas is on your list of New Year's resolutions.

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"It's important to be aware that most Chinese people are very direct," said Syndi Seid, an expert on international customs and founder of *AdvancedEtiquette.com* in San Francisco. "They will often ask you personal questions about your salary or family."

Being prepared to deal with the complexities of other cultures before going global is critical to your success. The good news is that there are tremendous resources available to help you get started, and here's why:

"Seventy percent of the world's purchasing power and ninety percent of the population is located outside of the U.S.," said Karen Zens, deputy assistant secretary for international trade at the International Trade Administration.

Here are 12 things to consider before booking a flight:

1. Similar to the U.S., every country has different regions. Language, customs and cuisine vary, so become acquainted with the particular region you plan to visit. In addition to reading books and magazines about the country, try to meet as many people as you can from that country before you go. One great way to learn about life abroad is to host visitors from that country. Ask friends and business contacts to make introductions or contact your local chamber of commerce.

2. Read current books, magazines and online information about your target country. Follow news reports to up to date on social and political issues. Set Google Alerts to monitor what's going on. You don't want to be traveling overseas during unstable times.

3. Contact the *U.S. Department of Commerce*. The department has commercial experts based in 126 countries. Their job is to provide business owners information and make introductions. Best of all, most of their services are free.

4. Learn how to pronounce names correctly and memorize a few key phrases in the native language. Making an effort to learn the local language makes a positive impression. Hire an interpreter for business meetings. Brief them about your business and products before the meeting. Explain what you hope to accomplish so they can prepare for the meeting.

5. If you don't have an international mobile phone, rent a local phone. (You can rent a mobile phone at most major airports). It's much easier to set up meetings if you have a local number. Texting is usually cheaper than making calls abroad. Use Skype to keep in touch with friends and family back home.

6. Be willing to try the local cuisine. As long as you are not allergic or the food completely violates a religious or dietary restriction, try it. Not eating meat

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evening dress or dressy pants suit. Dress conservatively and professionally for business meetings: a suit or jacket and tie for men and business attire for women.

9. Be careful to address someone by their proper title. It's best to use Mr. or Ms. "The global trend is to honor a person's gender, but not focus on a woman's marital status," said Seid.

10. During a toast, look directly at the person making the toast and take a sip. If the toast is in your honor, don't sip. Just smile and say "thank you." Immediately following the toast to you, make a toast to your host and everyone else. Always wait for your host to start eating before digging in.

11. Keep both hands on top of the table at all times during a meeting or meal. "It means you are not hiding weapons under the table or holding hands with the host's sweetheart," said Seid.

Other quick notes: pack extra prescription medicine and keep it in the original containers. Bring along a small medical kit, including plastic bandages for cuts and scrapes, medicine for treating diarrhea and indigestion, cold remedies and cough drops.

Jane Applegate is president of The Applegate Group Inc., which provides strategic marketing and video production services to big and small companies. She's the author of four books on entrepreneurship, including 201 Great Ideas for Your Small Business, published by John Wiley & Sons. For more information, visit: www.theapplegategroup.com. Contact Jane: jane@theapplegategroup.com or on Twitter, @janewapplegate.

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