



DOING BUSINESS IN: JORDAN

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What should a U.S. company expect when doing business in this part of the world? In other words, how is it different than doing business here in the U.S.?

General behavior in Jordan follows Arab norms. Be prepared for great politeness and hospitality, and be aware that by accepting gracefully you are showing honor to your host.

Jordanians like to pay compliments so feel free to reciprocate.

Business cards with Arabic translation will impress the business person. Business relationships take time to develop. Do not worry if you haven't nailed something down before you leave Jordan. It might take time to reach a deal. As in all business dealings, it is a good idea to reiterate next steps by each party before leaving. Stay in touch with your contacts, using the medium they prefer. Do not be afraid to make a phone call to their mobile. (Just keep in mind the time difference.)

2. What are some of the main cultural differences U.S. companies should be aware of before visiting or doing business in a country in this region?

You should always aim to be on time for meetings, while being prepared for the fact that your counterpart may be late. It is not advisable to arrive early. Never take offence if meetings are cancelled, postponed, interrupted or include other people. This is normal. Offices in Jordan have open doors, literally and figuratively.

Keep in mind that generally speaking, Jordanians are affectionate and it is a tradition for men to greet each other with kisses and hold hands with good acquaintances.

It is basic good manners in Jordan to shake hands with everyone in the room when entering a meeting or home gathering. (Exception: you don't shake hands with the tea-coffee man.) You work around from one end of the room to the other. The people who are already in the room will stand up and offer their hands and their names. You should do the same – "John Smith, from ABC Electronics, Chicago, USA." An exception to standing up to greet a newly arrived person is if you are sitting and eating at a table – you don't have to rise but some people do, anyway. Usually the new person will beg people NOT to stand up.

At many offices, a cup of "Arabic coffee" with cardamom is offered from a thermos pot to everyone in the room on arrival. You should take the little cup off the top of the stack, have a sip or two and return the cup with a little wiggle (means you do not want more) to





the server when he comes back. If you would like another serving, just hold out the cup and it will be refilled. It is not polite to take more than three servings. Other hosts will offer “Turkish Coffee” which is the thick dark brew in an espresso-sized cup and saucer. REFUSING COFFEE IS REFUSING the host-guest. You do not want to do that!

3. What are some do's and don'ts U.S. business people should be aware of? For instance, this can be about religion, body language, and questions or comments US companies should never bring up in their conversations with their new business partners.

Don't cross your legs in front of the person you are meeting with. Crossing a leg over your knee or sticking your feet straight out in front of you will expose the soles of your shoes to another person, which is a very serious insult in this part of the world. (i.e. don't put the bottom of your shoes facing the person)

Like in most predominantly Muslim countries, visitors should always be respectful of local traditions, prayer times, etc.

In conversations, avoid touchy political subjects (especially local ones) and definitely avoid derogatory humor or sarcasm.

Remember that the U.S. and Jordan are strong commercial and political allies, and this bilateral relationship is crucial for U.S. and Jordanian interests. Close ties, however, should not be taken for granted.

It is best to dress formally and conservatively for business in Jordan, in suit and tie or equivalent. Women should aim to abide by normal Arab standards of modesty, so avoid low necklines or dresses that come above the knees. Do not be led astray by locals who dress less formally. Conservative attire is still respected.

Treat the opposite gender with respect but not familiarity. A man meeting a woman for the first time should wait for her to extend her hand in greeting and vice versa. Just pause a bit before putting out your hand and if the man puts his hand over his heart and bows slightly, this means you won't shake hands but rather, mimic the gesture, and say “Very nice to meet you, sir,” and move on. Sometimes, out of politeness, men wait to see if a woman will offer a hand first but most people know that American business and professional women shake hands with men.

4. Communication is said to be an obstacle when conducting business, however, what communication techniques would you share with a U.S. client to overcome communication barriers?



Jordanians tend to use titles and to be more formal with new acquaintances—you should take your cue from them. Even if you say, “Call me Jack,” it is polite to call your contact “Engineer Adwan” or Dr. Mohammad” until he says otherwise. Even if you have a previous relationship, you should always use the titles of officials when meeting with them in public/around other people – “Your Excellency” is safe for ministers, ambassadors, and other high officials. If you know your contact has a doctorate or medical degree, it’s always good to use “Doktoor” liberally, with or without their name. “Madame” is the accepted general form of address for ladies, whether spouses or professionals, unless you know their professional title.

- 5. What is the best approach to negotiating with companies in this region of the world? At the beginning stages of negotiations, how should a U.S. company enter their negotiations? For instance, how important is building a relationship based on value? Value meaning taking the time to understand and handle their new partner product or service needs or being a reliable and caring supplier.**

Personal relationships are central to doing business.

Business is still conducted on a very personal level in Jordan. Jordanians will try to determine if you are a respectable, honorable person with whom they would like to have a business relationship – not only whether you can meet the technical requirements of the goods or services they need.

- 6. At the beginning stages of negotiations, how important is quality and pricing of products and services?**

Very important. Keep in mind that while the U.S. enjoys a trade surplus with Jordan and bilateral trade is US \$3Billion, Jordan has strong trade ties with neighboring countries and Europe. In some case, Jordanians prefer European products over US-made. Thus, U.S. business people need to be prepared to compete with price and quality. Delivery times are also a concern.

- 7. What about the negotiation process, for instance, is the negotiation a slow process or fast process, and should they expect large groups of people in the meeting?**

The negotiation process is usually slow, especially with government. And you may expect a large group of people in the meeting.

- 8. How soon should the U.S. company begin discussing business with a new partner in this region of the world? In other words, is it rude to begin negotiations immediately or should they wait for their new partner to open negotiations first?**

Like anywhere else, always make an effort to get to know your counterpart socially before getting down to the deal.



9. Does this part of the world seek to build trust through written contractual agreements?

Contracts are used, but written letters are also commonplace.

10. How important is follow-up when conducting business in this region of the world?

It is very important to follow-up when conducting business in this region. Competition is stiff in the relatively small Jordanian market, so be prepared to be tactfully persistent.

11. When is the best time of year to conduct business in this region of the world?

Basically, business can be conducted all year-long, however it may slow down in the summer time and end of the year. Also, below are some of the times that would be best to avoid.

12. When is the worst time of the year to conduct business in this region of the world (e.g. holidays, vacation season)?

During the month of Ramadan there is no lunch break and work hours are only 6 hours. The work day will end at around 2 or 3 pm; this is not a good time to do business nor are the other Muslim holidays: Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet, Prophet's Ascension, Eid al-Adha (variable dates, following the Islamic lunar calendar).

13. Do I need Arabic training to successfully do business in Jordan?

In Jordan, English is widely used. English is the common language for business transactions. Of course, having knowledge of Arabic would be advantageous, but not required.

14. What other important tips would you suggest to a U.S. company before entering a market in this region of the world? Also, what other question(s) should I have asked that you want to share?

Don't judge someone by their appearance. Have patience and avoid references to stereotypes. Most of all, enjoy working in this interesting country.