
Doing business in China – starting or expanding

Considering starting a business in China or expanding into their market? Brian Goff gives us his tips on how to be successful in China.

I have travelled to China three or four times a year since 2015 and have been doing business there since 2016 with my company [Emerald Green Baby Ltd.](#) of which I'm a director and co-founder. Here are some of my tips for anyone looking to set up their business in China.

Visit China

If you are still reading this then I'll assume you have an interest in what is the second largest consumer market in the world and the largest e-commerce market. To get an understanding of China one must take the time to visit and while this may sound obvious it's the first thing on my to-do list.

Worst case you won't end up doing business there, but you will witness first-hand what the future looks like in terms of high tech, payments and the economic miracle of modern China.

If you plan on visiting, I'll assume you have something to sell and please before you go, protect your trademark, patents and IP. Despite what you might assume, China does offer protection if you have registered but operates a 'first to register' rule so spend time to file before you go or risk someone filing ahead of you.

Good deals take time

The Chinese like to take time to get to know who they may be doing business with so don't try to squeeze too many meetings into one day as not only will it be considered impolite, but as we like to say that any deal done on a first meeting ends up being a bad deal. It may take several 'get to know you' meetings and long dinners before any real business is transacted.

Speaking of long dinners, the Chinese have the same relationship with food as the Irish are reputed to have with drink so prepare to be wowed by both the quality and volume of food assembled at formal dinners, and while you may come across some exotic foods (donkey and hairy crabs come to mind) in the main Chinese food is delicious.

Do take the time to get your business cards printed in both English and Mandarin and when exchanging use the thumb and forefinger of both hands to present and receive. Take time to read the card carefully and don't stick them in your pocket or worse leave them behind when you leave.

Do enjoy the local firewater, Moutai, which is very strong. Do bear this in mind as everyone at the table will want to toast you so go easy!

WeChat

If you really want to impress your potential clients or customers, then download and get proficient on WeChat. It's the Chinese super app that has 1.1 billion active users, the majority of which are in China. It's how everyone communicates and trying to do business in China without it, is akin to trying to do business in Europe without e-mail. If we send a Chinese contact an e-mail we generally alert them by WeChat to let them know, it's a fantastic combination of WhatsApp, Facebook, Gmail, Instagram and Revolut, all in the one app and incidentally, all the aforementioned are blocked in China by the great firewall.

Do be prepared for some frank non-PC exchanges from your Chinese hosts. One of my friends who does business there, and is by his own admission slightly overweight, remarked after his first day of meetings "how many more Chinese are going to tell me that I'm fat".

The contacts that you meet are very important as the Chinese put great store in their Guanxi, which loosely translates as your network or contacts. Do cultivate and keep up to date with your Guanxi and better still connect with them on WeChat as they can become your business allies in China. Follow their activities on WeChat moments and keep them up to speed on your business activities as well.

The Chinese are very proud of their country, its' economic achievements and their political systems. Business and politics are closely intertwined so don't be tempted to criticise its' socialism with Chinese characteristics which is basically capitalism with a one party system, unless

you want your first meeting to be your last!

China is a fascinating country with friendly people open to doing business, but bear in mind that the Chinese consumer is very demanding and is being courted by brands from all over the world. It may take you several visits to achieve your goals but do enjoy the journey.

Written by Brian Goff, co-founder of Emerald Green Baby

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