International Correspondences

Researching your audience is important, and in the case of an international correspondence, knowing your audiences’ culture, customs, politics, religion, and economic beliefs will make your communication much more effective. In order to be successful in the globalized market, you should consider the following:

1. Cultural Differences: Become aware of the recipient’s customs inside and outside of business, paying special attention to the customs that affect communication.
   - Direct versus indirect introductions.
   - General to specific versus specific to general.
   - First or last name usage.

2. Language Differences: If you are not using a translator, make certain that you are writing as clearly as possible.
   - Avoid American idioms, clichés, metaphors, slang, or colloquialisms because figurative language’s meaning doesn’t translate. Instead, the literal meaning will be translated and your reader will be confused.
   - Avoid humor, irony, and sarcasm because your audience members may not understand and may become offended. Sarcasm is especially misunderstood outside its cultural reference.
   - Avoid contractions because if your audience member is reading the letter he or she may not understand the use of the contractions, and if the correspondence is being translated, the translator may not translate the complete contraction so don’t becomes do.
   - Avoid long sentences that may have multiple clauses between the subject and verb. Try bulleting the clauses for readability.
   - Write specifically to avoid confusion.

3. Learn the country’s means for writing dates, times, and measurements.
4. Learn the customary titles of respect and use them in your correspondences.
5. Use active voice whenever possible because active voice is easier to understand for non-native English speakers.
6. If you are using graphics, make sure that the graphics are not culturally specific.
7. Define abbreviations and acronyms or better yet, avoid them.

Where do you begin?

1. Talk to people in your company who may have already worked with people from the particular culture.
2. Do research in basic guidelines for communicating with people from other cultures. (Reputable websites can provide you with reliable information.)

The world is a global market place. If there is any doubt about your potential role in the globalized market place, consider the following information. In 2006, the United States exported more than $1.4 trillion worth of goods and services (U.S. Census, 2007, p. 786). In addition, in 2006, direct investment abroad by U.S. companies totaled more than $2.6 trillion (U.S. Census, 2007, p. 739). Within the borders of the United States, it is just as important to understand all the people to whom you will either provide products or services to or to whom you will work with or you will need to persuade to use your products or services. Consider that every year, the United States admits more than a million immigrants (U.S. Census 2007, p. 8). So, if you are writing a letter, an email, an advertisement, or a press release, you must consider the readability of your documents by all the various audiences who will either read the information themselves or who will have this information translated.