

The Essential Guide to Business Etiquette in Namibia

Establishing Business Relationships

- Business practices are generally western and modern. Business cards can be exchanged before, during or at the end of the first meeting. Ensure that your business cards are translated into English.
- It is advisable to follow up a face-to-face meeting with an e-mail, which captures the main points of the meeting and identifies the next steps forward. If you do not receive a reply within a reasonable time, don't be afraid to call your prospective business partner.
- Business hours are generally from 8am to 5pm. You can schedule meetings at any time during the business day but, generally speaking, mornings are the best. Namibians usually have lunch between 1pm and 2pm, so any meetings in the afternoon should be scheduled accordingly.
- If possible, avoid arranging important business delegations and meetings from the beginning of December until the middle of January as many people go on holiday during this time of the year in Namibia.

Creating Local Business Networks

- While an initial business contact can be established over the phone or through written correspondence, you will have more success if you establish a personal relationship with potential business partners. So, make sure to visit Namibia, prioritise face-to-face contact with potential partners, and take the time to build relationships.
- Although there are ongoing efforts to improve the Namibian bureaucracy, deadlines and timelines can sometimes be affected by red tape. It is therefore advisable to make use of Namibian partners and institutions (e.g. the Namibian Embassy in Germany, the Namibia Investment Centre and the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry) to help you to expedite matters.
- Be flexible, patient and have a long-term business strategy in order to maximise your chances of a successful business venture in Namibia.
- Invest in local partnerships. This will help you to acquire market information, mitigate risk, and identify attractive business opportunities.

Focusing on Local Markets

- Be attentive to local consumer preferences and develop products and services that are tailored to the realities and special demands of the local and regional market.
- When developing your market-entry strategy for Namibia or the region, don't ignore low-income or Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) consumers. They are becoming an increasingly valuable segment of the market.
- View Namibia's smaller domestic market as an advantage: test your products and learn how to operate within an African environment before expanding into the region. Larger markets tend to be more complex, have more competition, and the cost of failure is often higher.



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Namibian Business Culture

- Business people usually greet one another with a firm hand-shake while making eye contact with each other. Some Namibian professionals will engage in a traditional African handshake, in which the hands are clasped in the same way as a handshake in the Western world, but the individuals lock their thumbs and point them upwards before returning to the Western handshake.
- The business dress code in Namibia is formal and western. For certain occasions (e.g. receptions, banquets or parties), women may wear traditional costumes which are considered formal.
- Although much is written about “African Time”, punctuality is valued in Namibia, so don't come late to business meetings. It is polite to greet everybody in the room, preferably with a handshake. It is best to start with the most senior person in the room.
- The corporate structure in Namibia is frequently hierarchical with clearly defined areas of responsibility. Make sure that you are in contact with the right person within each organisation and that this person has the power to make decisions.



Building Trust

- Because Namibians respect authority, seniority and age, it is prudent to pay special attention to the most senior or eldest person present at business and social events.
- Don't rush to business talk during initial meetings. Engage in small talk and some light conversation to establish rapport before business discussions begin.
- Many Namibians enjoy sports and follow European football leagues, especially the English Premier League, the Spanish La Liga, and the German Bundesliga. Talking about football is likely to produce a lively debate and can be used to connect with potential business partners.
- Gifts are not expected in a professional setting but corporate gifts and small gifts such as stationary, culinary specialities or souvenirs from your country, region or home town will be appreciated.
- English is widely spoken in business circles and is also the language of administration in Namibia. However, although business is generally conducted in English, occasionally Afrikaans and German may also be spoken in some companies.

