

International Meetings

■ *Quick tips for overseas meetings and presentations*



What You Say, WHAT THEY HEAR!

By Merna Skinner

Presenting to international audiences requires not only doing developing content but also learning how people are most comfortable receiving information. Ask yourself these questions before you put your materials together:

- 1 Who are the decision makers?** In Asian cultures, decision makers often don't go to formal presentations. But even if senior people are present, remember to make eye contact with everyone in the room. And don't expect quick decisions! Also: When the British say "yes," it usually means "maybe," and among Asians, if said immediately, "yes" probably means "no."
- 2 How should I deliver the presentation?** This varies tremendously. American audiences, for example, like to interact and ask lots of questions. South Americans usually like a fast clip. Europeans, on the other hand, prefer to hear your presentation all the way through before posing questions. And Asians dislike lots of gestures. When in doubt, take a break to check for comprehension, and then continue.
- 3 What kind of visuals should I use?** In certain cultures, colors carry meanings. In Japan, for example, white symbolizes death. In some Latin countries, yellow carries negative connotations. Safe colors, in general, are green and navy blue, with black for text. As a rule of thumb, observe the standards of native presenters.
- 4 How should I respond to questions?** Make sure you fully understand what's being asked, particularly where language barriers exist. Even if a translator is present, always rephrase the question, which will buy you time to formulate an answer. Be flexible to accommodate cultures that allow more floor time per questioner than others.
- 5 Should I use humor?** The Irish expect a little lightheartedness, but humor rarely translates well from culture to culture. Play it safe by avoiding word plays, puns, or humorous stories with a punch line.

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