

## **Multiculturalism on the Phone**

by Sarah Elaine Eaton

In North America anyone who answers or makes calls for a business is going to encounter someone whose first language isn't English. Providing this person speaks enough of the language to understand you, there are three key tactics you can use to set yourself apart from the competition when it comes to dealing with this ever-growing market:

### **Smile while you're on the phone.**

We've heard this one before. The person on the other end of the phone can "hear" your smile and will respond to your positive energy. About 70% of our communication is non-verbal, so a smile conveys a lot, even if the other person can't see it. But did you know that the smile is the only universal facial expression? All others can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the culture. But a sincere smile will always transcend words and cultural difference.

### **Be extra patient.**

Imagine you are the person on the other end of the phone. You would appreciate it if the native speaker did not jump in while you were still talking, finish your sentences for you or jump to the next point without letting you finish. If you allow a non-native speaker to finish saying what they have to say, listen intently and be patient, you will win respect, trust and sales.

### **Speak slower, not louder.**

People whose first language isn't English may need more time to process the language, but their hearing is probably just as good as yours. If you slow down the pace of your speech and leave longer pauses in between sentences, you will allow the other person time to absorb everything that you are saying. Don't exaggerate your pauses or tone, but rather think of speaking slowly, clearly and cheerfully. If you do, the person on the other end will know you are trying to be helpful, not patronizing.

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