

DAY TRANSLATIONS PRESENTS

# Doing Business in the Middle East

Congratulations on your new journey!  
Are you ready for what's next?

# The Arab World

**BEING AWARE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES  
WILL BE KEY FOR YOUR BUSINESS  
EFFORTS.**

The Arab region is culturally, religiously, ethnically and geographically diverse. Therefore, it is critical to understand the cultural and economic details of each country in order to find the available business opportunities where your company will fit in.





# Our Middle East Guide

## TOPICS TO BE COVERED

TIMING  
COMMUNICATION  
LANGUAGE  
TRUST  
MEETINGS  
NEGOTIATIONS  
DRESS CODE





# THE 22 ARAB WORLD STATES

SAUDI ARABIA  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
BAHRAIN  
QATAR  
KUWAIT  
IRAQ  
MOROCCO  
TUNISIA  
EGYPT  
OMAN  
JORDAN

SUDAN  
LEBANON  
YEMEN  
SOMALIA  
ALGERIA  
DJIBOUTI  
COMOROS  
MAURITANIA  
SYRIA  
PALESTINE  
LIBYA



# TIMING: Make your calendar culture-friendly.

You have to understand that the workweek in the Middle East is different from the West. With Islam as the dominant religion, Friday is considered as the most holy day.

**On Friday, noontime is congregational prayer time. In many states in the Middle East, the workers' weekend is on Friday and Saturday.** But that is not true for all areas, so here's a quick guide.

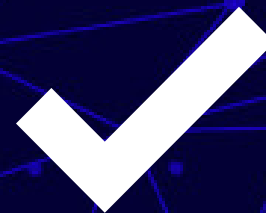
Friday and Saturday weekend schedule is observed in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. In Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, the weekend schedule is on Saturday and Sunday.







# COMMUNICATION: Prioritize face to face meetings.



For people who want to explore the possibilities of doing business in the Arab world, you need to engage in face-to-face communication. Ensure that you avoid engaging in business by phone or email. **For the Arabs, personal contact is vital, because for most of them, there is only a very slight distinction between personal and business relationships, so personal meetings are critical.** See to it that you also schedule personal meetings.

Generally, meetings should be booked at least a week in advance. See to it that you confirm the meeting by phone a few days before.



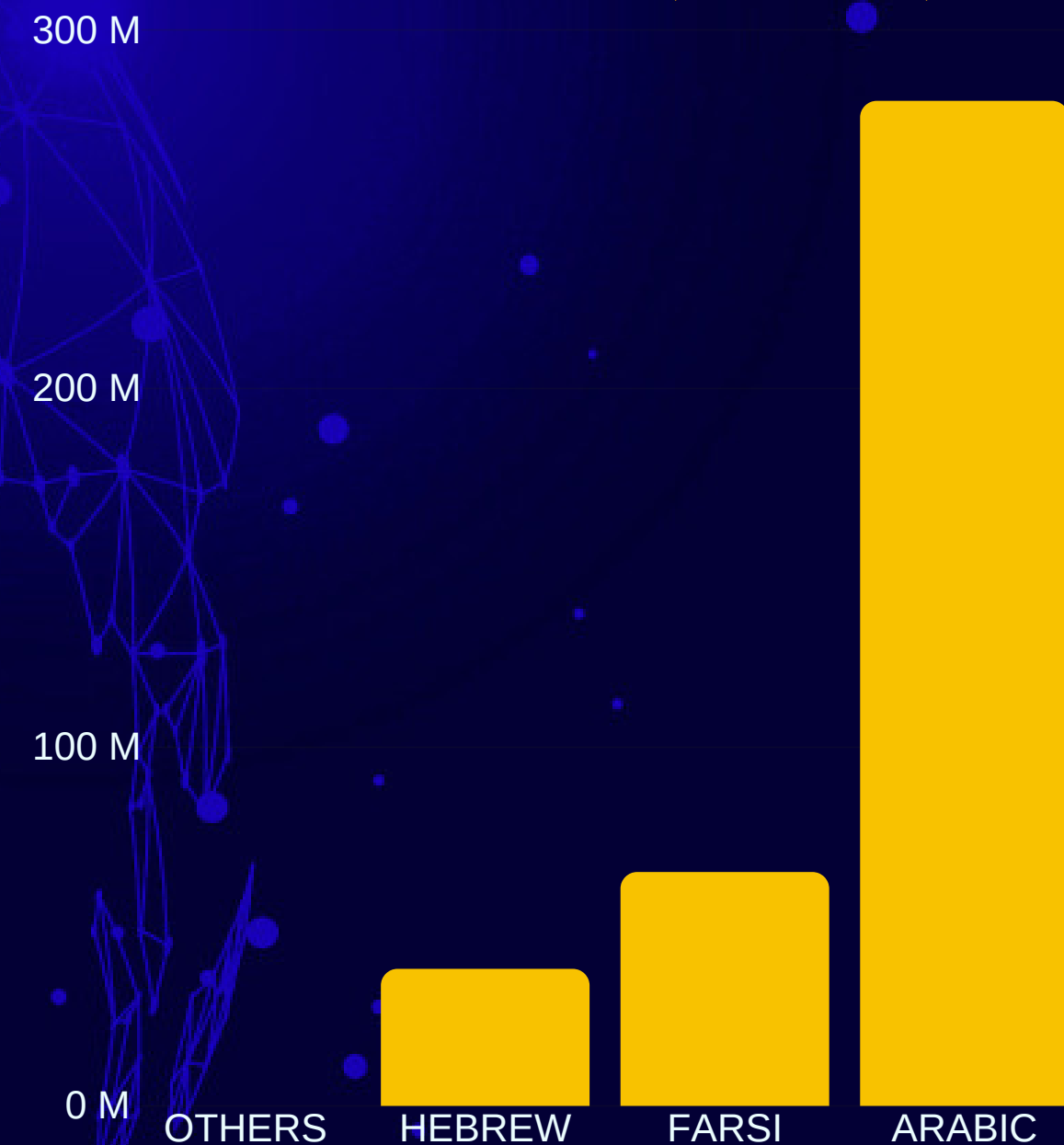
# LANGUAGE: Respect is key.

Modern Standard Arabic is the official language in most Arab states, but Farsi, Hebrew, and Turkish are also widely spoken in some.

**We think it's vital to learn a few Arabic greetings to make a good impression and show your counterparts that you are serious about conducting business with them and that you respect their own language.** You can bring an interpreter with you if your business colleagues prefer to conduct the meeting in Arabic.

During the initial meeting, you can say **As-salaam alaykum** (meaning, Peace be upon you). You'll hear your counterpart respond by saying **Wa alaykum as-salaam** (meaning, And peace be upon you too). Hello in Arabic is Marhaba, while Thank you is Shukran. When you say Keif al-haal? (How are you?), the response you'll receive will be Al-hamdulillah (Thanks be to God)

Number of speakers of the language in the Middle East (in millions)







# TRUST: Friendship in the workplace.

Even with their increasing exposure to business practices outside the Arab world, many Arabs still consider that professional and personal lives are not distinct from one another. It's for this reason why Arabs favor face-to-face meetings. For them, it is important to build rapport through small talks about personal things before you can move on to the main purpose of the meeting. Therefore, before you meet with your Arab clients or potential business partners, you should prepare answers to questions about your family and your health, your travel experiences and your home. You should likewise ask them the same questions, but avoid asking specific questions about their female family members.

**To penetrate an industry in the Arab states, you need to have a senior contact person within an organization or company to introduce you to the person you should meet.**

**This is a prevalent and accepted system in the Middle East, which is called wasta.**

Borrowing and returning favors also exist. If your Arab counterpart requests a favor, it is going to be beneficial for you to have it fulfilled. You should never refuse a request outright. Even if you are not able to fulfil the favor, your efforts will be appreciated and remembered, which will be of benefit to you.



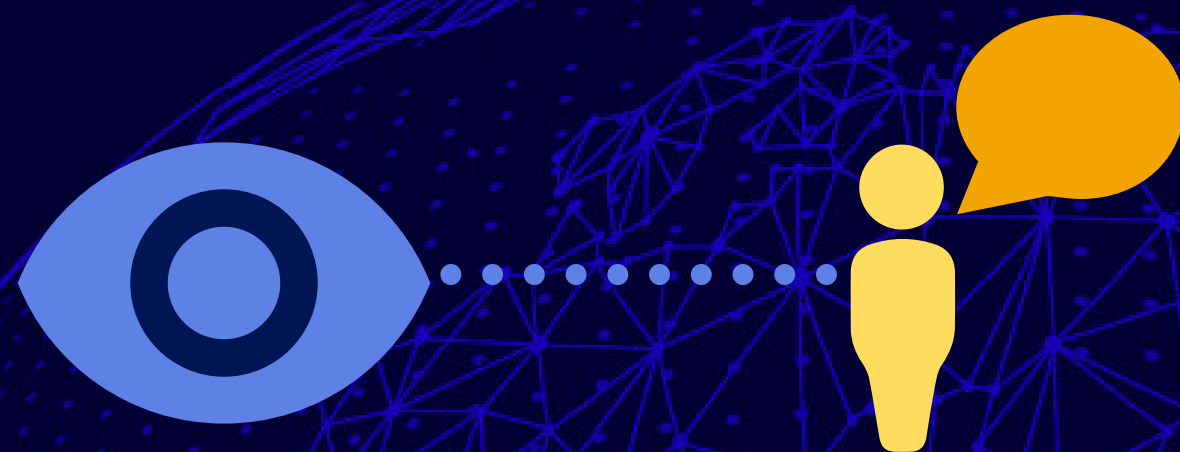
# MEETINGS: A new meaning for punctuality.



In the Arab world, punctuality takes on a different meaning. If you are so used to being punctual, meeting with an Arab counterpart could be a revelation. You have to be quite flexible with your time as your Arab counterparts may show up 30 minutes late for your meeting. It is a normal occurrence. You'd be surprised to know that there were cases where they show up an hour, several hours or a day late. **Rather than getting frustrated, it's advisable that you just go with the flow, but do show respect as their guest and arrive on time for your meeting.**

Agendas are not very important when meeting with Arabs. The structure of the meeting is more circular instead of linear, with the most senior among the Arabs present directing and leading the business discussion. The meeting typically starts with small talk that could last for about five minutes. Even if it is a private meeting, expect interruptions to happen. With the increased use of smartphones, Arabs typically check their phones often and communicate with other people during the course of your meeting. They are not being disrespectful. They are just part of the new technology-based culture.





# NEGOTIATION: Patience, patience, patience.

Arab businessmen are still very traditional and driving a hard bargain is their usual way of concluding business. However, the negotiation process is slower in this part of the world, so you should have plenty of patience. Expect to pass through bureaucratic red tape slowly. The processing of paperwork will take time and if you do not have patience, you'll be defeated. Negotiations and decisions are typically discussed with the entire executive team involved in the business, so be prepared to wait.

Another thing to remember that the concept of **saving face**, whether it's theirs or yours, is very much alive in the Arab world. Avoid disagreeing with your Arab colleagues directly during meetings, and know that your counterparts would not disagree with you directly during your negotiation either. Learn to read body language, which can give you indicators of how the negotiation is going.

**Follow up the meeting with an email or phone call, where your counterparts may be more candid with their thoughts and comments, so you know how to proceed to the next round of negotiations.**



# DRESS CODE: Tradition & Modesty.

Remember that Arabs are still very traditional in many aspects, thus it is important to observe their dress code. Dress in a smart business suit, preferably in dark colors. The practice may vary depending on the nature of the business, the region and the country. Even if you are just traveling around, it is advisable to dress comfortably but sensibly and modestly. **Shorts, T-shirts and short-sleeve polo shirts should be avoided.**

**Businesswomen should wear conservative clothes that cover most of their arms down to the elbows. Skirts should reach their ankles.**

It is best to wear dresses or shirts with rounded necklines to prevent showing the cleavage. See to it that your clothes are of good quality and fit you well.

Arabs will typically wear a **thobe** (long white robe) and a keffiyeh (red and white checkered headdress).





## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



Arabs are very hospitable and you can expect to receive invitations, gifts and refreshments from them. **If you are invited to a meal in a restaurant, be sure to return the invitation later.**

Using the correct titles is very important in the United Arab Emirates (**UAE**).

Remember to use **Sayed** or **Shiek** for male counterparts and **Sayedda** or **Sheikha** for female individuals. **Age normally equates to seniority in the UAE.**



If you are doing business in Jordan, it is customary to greet the first person on your right side. Age is also linked to seniority here. It is also customary for guests to decline the first offer of refreshments. You can accept the offer the third time around.



Egyptians like to indulge in small talk before a meeting – the safest topics are Egypt's cotton industry and their past and modern achievements, so brush up on these subjects. It is also typical not to work from Thursday til Saturday, even if the weekend is Friday and Saturday.



Use French instead of Arabic if you want to do business in Morocco. **Meetings should be scheduled far in advance.**

Confirmation of the meeting is required a few days before it commences.





# We hope you enjoyed our guide.

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