

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



BELGIUM

WORKING HOURS

- 8.30 am - 5.30 pm (sometimes 9.00 am - 6.00 pm)

PUNCTUALITY

- Good timekeepers. Punctuality in business is generally regarded as a virtue, although apologies for a late arrival will be accepted good-naturedly.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- Clothing is rather formal, Not extremely high fashion, but elegant in a more traditional sense.

BUSINESS MEALS

- Belgians enjoy business meals as they offer the opportunity to discuss business matters in an agreeable environment.
- Punctuality for social occasions. Generally the most suitable time for business meals is lunch that takes place between 12.30 and 2.30 pm. Dinners are often a more sociable occasion, usually between 8 pm and 11 pm

The general rules of restaurant etiquette are as follows:

- Turn off your mobile phone
- Keep your hands on the table
- If you can, avoid leaving anything on your plate
- When you have finished your starter/main course, place your knife and fork at twenty to four with the points of the fork facing upwards (placing the fork

the other way indicates you are still hungry and want a second helping)

- It is not normal to tip in Belgium. Restaurant bills already include a service charge
- Belgian cuisine is among the finest in Europe: it is difficult to find even a high street café that fails to offer a tempting lunch known as dagsschotel/plat du jour at a very reasonable price. Local specialities, in addition to the famous but misnamed 'French fries', include waterzooi (a delicate chicken or occasionally fish stew), rabbit in beer, salade liègeoise, the tasty local grey shrimps and, in season, mussels from Dutch Zeeland.
- The Belgians are also great coffee drinkers: good quality espresso can be found almost everywhere

- Belgian are also experts in beer and wine. More than 100 different kinds of beer are brewed in Belgium, among them the best in the world. They are also one of the largest consumers of French wine.
- Belgian are also fond of desserts: Belgian chocolate is world famous.



BUSINESS MEETINGS

- It is good practice in Belgium to make an appointment at least a few days in advance: once the timing has been agreed there is no need to check or reconfirm. If you later have a conflict of priorities, explain the situation to your Belgian partner and he or she will certainly understand and make an alternative arrangement.
- Belgian pragmatism and their non-hierarchical culture, affect business meeting planning: this certainly applies in the SME sector, where the younger generation of managers can directly approach for an appointment, taken as good practice, at least a few dates in advance.
- Start by shaking hands, saying something like 'good day – a pleasure to meet you', and presenting your business card to all involved: this may take a few minutes to conclude but is time well invested. You should refrain from too vigorous a handshake or physical contact such as backslapping. Smiling suggests positive intentions but, again, should not be overdone. Hugs and personal contact is not common.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Giving gifts is not normally an aspect of business relations in Belgium.
- If you decide that some sort of gesture is appropriate, for example on closing a deal, make the gift a reasonably modest one and make sure it is logo neutral.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Belgium has a good work-life balance, being above the EU average in all of the three work-life balance (Eurofound)

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- Titles and qualifications, are used sparingly in Belgium.
- With the exception of university professors and lawyers and doctors, it is not normal to address individuals by their professional titles.
- First names should only be used once a relationship has been established.
- In Business setting, a handshake is the usual form of greeting, accompanied by an appropriate phrase like "good day".

CONVERSATION

- Try to avoid issues like language, Belgian politics, or questions about the other party's family time.
- A good starting point can be a comment on the high quality of Belgian food, beer or chocolate. Fall-backs, depending on the interests of the other party, are football, popular music, cartoons (Belgium has the highest ratio of successful professional cartoonists of any country in the world).
- Certain topics and behaviours are best avoided in Belgium. Some examples include pointing or using over-expressive hand gestures, asking personal questions, talking about wages, racial minorities or making a point out of the Flemish-Walloon differences.

VACATION DAYS

- Minimum 20 days or more.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- 10 days

