Communicating with partners in Nigeria

Quick card · Same official language. Different rules of the conversation.

10 things to do

1. Greet and ask after the person before any business, in person and in writing.
2. Use titles and surnames (Dr., Engr., Barr., Chief, Alhaji) until invited to use first names.
3. Build the relationship first; expect more than one conversation before price.
4. Prefer calls, WhatsApp and visits for warmth; use email for formal documents.
5. Ask open questions: "What would need to change for this to work for you?"
6. Find out early who makes the final decision, and greet senior people first.
7. Confirm meetings the day before and on the morning, with West Africa Time.
8. Send a plain-English written recap after every call and invite corrections.
9. Discuss currency, payment method and timing early; plan for foreign exchange timing.
10. Verify every new partner and share your own details: it is standard on both sides.

10 things to watch

1. "We will see," "no problem" or silence may mean "not yet" or "no," not "yes."
2. Ultimatums and short deadlines can end a relationship; invite discussion instead.
3. Public frustration can cost your partner face; stay calm and ask questions.
4. U.S. idioms and abbreviations (ballpark, circle back, ASAP) may not travel.
5. Write dates with the month in words; 03/04 is read as 3 April in Nigeria.
6. "I'm coming" means "please wait, I will be right back," not "on my way."
7. "Sorry" often expresses sympathy, not an admission of fault.
8. Plan around public holidays, Friday prayers in the north, Ramadan and traffic.
9. Never act on bank detail changes sent only by email; call a number you know.
10. Gifts to government officials raise FCPA risk; follow policy and consult counsel.

Snapshot

Capital	Abuja	**Commercial hub**	Lagos
Official language	English	**Also widely used**	Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo
Time zone	West Africa Time (UTC+1); 5 or 6 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern	**Currency**	Naira (NGN)

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8 phrases that help

Situation	Say it this way
Opening a message	"Good morning, Engr. Okafor. I trust you and your family are well."
Hearing "we will see"	"Which part of the proposal would you like us to look at together?"
Finding the decision maker	"Who else in your team would you like us to include?"
A senior person joins	"Good afternoon, Chief. Thank you for joining us. In short, we have discussed..."
Instead of a discount	"We could adjust the order size or add training. Which would help more?"
After a call	"Here is what we discussed. Please let me know if I have missed anything."
Asking for verification	"We verify all new partners, and we are happy to share our own details."
Declining an improper request	"Our policy and U.S. law only allow us to pay the official fee."

Before your first meeting

- ☐ Confirmed the company on the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) public search.
- ☐ Checked each attendee's title and how they prefer to be addressed.
- ☐ Asked who else should be involved and who makes the final decision.
- ☐ Confirmed the time in West Africa Time and U.S. time (5 or 6 hours apart from Eastern).
- ☐ Checked the date against public holidays, Friday prayers and Ramadan.
- ☐ Prepared a one-page summary your contact can share internally.
- ☐ Planned two or three options instead of a single take-it-or-leave-it price.
- ☐ Reviewed your company's gift and compliance policy.

Go deeper (free)

- Full guide: dealdialect.com/markets/nigeria
- Check a message before you send it: dealdialect.com/tools/message-check
- Templates for first contact, follow-ups and payments: dealdialect.com/tools/templates

> General guidance on common tendencies, not rules about individuals; people and companies vary, so follow your partner's lead. Not legal, tax or compliance advice. Version 1.0, October 2026. Written by Ayomide Adeyeye, founder of DealDialect (adeyeyeayomide97@gmail.com).

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