



DealDialect

Communicating with Partners in Nigeria

A 90-minute workshop for U.S. exporters

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Welcome



Restrooms

Ask the host



Phones on silent

Thank you



Wi-Fi

Details posted in the room



Questions

Ask any time

One short survey at the end helps us improve this workshop.



Today in 90 minutes



You will leave with one message you can send this week.



The quote that went quiet

An illustrative example

Day 1

An Iowa farm equipment maker sends a quote to a distributor in Kano.



Days 2 to 14

Silence.



Day 15

"Please confirm by Friday or we will offer the territory to others."

What do you think the distributor heard?



Quick poll



Has a message to an overseas partner ever gone unanswered, and you did not know why?

Who sells to, or plans to sell to, Nigeria or West Africa?

Raise your hand, or use the poll.



What a misread message can cost



Lost replies

Messages that never get an answer



Stalled quotes

Deals that wait and quietly fade



Damaged trust

A partner who feels pushed or disrespected



Lost to competitors

Partners who choose someone easier to work with

Why Nigeria, why now

\$6.8B

U.S. goods exports to Nigeria in 2025, up 56.3% from 2024

Source: USTR

97.1%

of identified U.S. exporters in 2024 were small or medium-sized businesses

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 preliminary profile

Small firms are the least likely to have in-house help with cross-cultural communication.



Same language, different rules

Same official language.

Different rules of the conversation.

English is Nigeria's official language. Norms for greeting, refusing and deciding often differ from U.S. habits.



Saying it or implying it

Low-context

High-context



The words carry most of the meaning

Relationship, tone and setting carry more of it

Much U.S. business

Many Nigerian business settings

Neither end is better. These are tendencies, not rules about any person.



Guess the meaning

"I'm coming"

"Flash me"

**"Next
tomorrow"**

"Sorry"



Your table has 60 seconds to agree on what each one means in Nigerian English.

Nigerian English: answer key

"I'm coming"

Please wait, I will be right back

"Well done"

A greeting to someone at work

"Flash me"

Give me a missed call

"Next tomorrow"

The day after tomorrow

"How far?"

How are you? What is the status?
(informal)

"Sorry"

Sympathy, not an admission of fault

"Go-slow"

Traffic jam

"Dash"

A gift or tip

Nigerian English is a full variety of English, like British or American English.

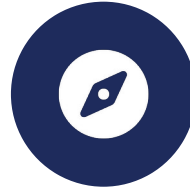


Tendencies, not rules



500+ languages

Nigeria is home to more than 500 languages, including Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.



North and south differ

Language, religion and business style vary by region; Lagos has its own fast pace.



Every person is an individual

Many business people have studied or worked abroad and adapt their style.

Use what you learn as a starting point. Then watch, ask and adjust to the person in front of you.



Greet before business

BEFORE

"Please send the signed contract today."

AFTER

"Good morning, Mr. Bello. I hope you are well. When convenient, could you send the signed contract?"

In many Nigerian business settings, opening with business can read as cold or rushed. A greeting and a courtesy line signal respect.



Titles and surnames

Dr.

Doctor

Engr.

Engineer

Barr.

Barrister

Arc.

Architect

Chief

Traditional title

Alhaji

Man who has made the Hajj

Alhaja

Woman who has made the Hajj

Use until invited to use first
names

Titles often reflect real achievement and are used in everyday business. Age and seniority also shape who speaks first.



Relationship before transaction



Call or video first

A voice or face carries weight that email alone does not.



Several conversations

Trust is often personal and built over time.



Then price and terms

Business follows the relationship, not the other way round.

Accept hospitality where you can. It is part of building the relationship.



The cold email

Subject: Pumps!!

Hi Chinedu,

I'm Sarah, VP of export sales at Prairie Flow Pumps. We make best-in-class irrigation pumps and want to hit the ground running in Nigeria ASAP.

Ballpark pricing is attached. Let me know by Friday if you're in. Otherwise we'll circle back with other distributors in Lagos.

Can you do a call 03/04 at 10am?

Thanks, Sarah

Fictional example

Sarah Miller, export manager at a Kansas pump maker, is writing for the first time to Engr. Chinedu Okafor, managing director of a Lagos distributor.

How would this land with a senior distributor in Lagos?



Your turn: rewrite it

1

Read it aloud. Each of you names one thing that might land badly, and why.

2

Rewrite it together. Use the "Introduction to a new distributor" template as a guide.

3

Check: greeting, title and surname, relationship before price, no idioms or ultimatums, a clear date and time zone.

4

Finished early? Write a three-line WhatsApp version.

10

minutes, in pairs



One way to write it

Subject: Introduction from Prairie Flow Pumps, Kansas, USA

Good morning, Engr. Okafor,
I hope this message finds you and your family well.

My name is Sarah Miller, Export Manager at Prairie Flow Pumps, a family-owned maker of irrigation pumps in Kansas. We are looking for a long-term distribution partner in Nigeria, and I would value the opportunity to learn about your business.

Would you be open to a short introductory call? Please suggest a day and time, in West Africa Time, that suits you. We can share pricing once we understand your needs.

Warm regards, Sarah Miller

- ✓ Greeting, title and surname
- ✓ Personal reason for writing
- ✓ No idioms or abbreviations
- ✓ No ultimatum
- ✓ Price after relationship
- ✓ He chooses the time, in his time zone



When yes means maybe

"We will look into it."

"No problem, we will see."

...

Silence

A flat "no" can feel harsh, especially to a guest or new partner. So reluctance is often signaled gently. **This is not dishonest. It protects the relationship. The risk is hearing agreement where none was given.**



Questions that get honest answers



"What would need to change for this to work for you?"



"Which part of the proposal would you like us to revisit?"



"Who else should we include as you consider this?"

Instead of

"So we have a deal?"

A yes-or-no question invites a polite yes.

Then confirm what you agreed in writing.



Scenario S1: The quiet distributor

You sent a quote to a Lagos distributor two weeks ago. No reply. What do you do?

A

Email: "Following up again. Please confirm by Friday or we will offer the territory to others."

0 points

An ultimatum risks ending the relationship.

B

Call or send a WhatsApp message, ask after them, then ask whether any part of the quote needs discussion.

3 points

A personal channel and an open question make an honest answer easy.

C

Wait another month.

1 point

Patience is good, but total silence can read as lost interest.



Scenario S2: "We will see about the price"

On a video call, the managing director says, "No problem, we will see about the price." What do you say?

A

"Great, so we have a deal?"

0 points

This pushes for a yes that was not given.

B

"Thank you. Which part of the pricing would you like us to look at together?"

3 points

It invites the real concern.

C

Offer an immediate 10% discount.

1 point

It may solve the wrong problem and sets a pattern.



What the scenarios teach



Use a personal channel

When writing goes quiet, call or send a WhatsApp message.



Ask open questions

Make an honest answer easy to give.



Avoid ultimatums

Deadlines from a new partner can end the conversation.



Do not discount too early

Find the real concern before you change the price.

Back to the quote that went quiet: which of these would have saved it?



Verification is standard practice

"Most businesses are legitimate. Both sides verify."



Fraud happens in every market

Business email compromise targets U.S. firms every day.



Your partners verify you too

Many Nigerian businesses guard carefully against fraud.



Same routine for everyone

Verify every new partner the same way, and say so.

The digital trust checklist



Verify the company in the official registry (Nigeria: Corporate Affairs Commission public search)



Meet on video before the first transaction



Check email domains for look-alike spellings



Never act on bank detail changes sent only by email



Use letters of credit, escrow or staged payments for first deals



Keep records of all agreements and payment instructions



Report suspected internet fraud at ic3.gov



Explain your checks as standard practice

Tick what your firm already does on the handout. Circle one to add.



Bank details changed? Pick up the phone.



Never act on a change of bank details sent only by email. Call a number you already have, not one in the message.

1

An email asks you to pay a new account



2

Call your contact on a number already on file



3

Confirm the change before any payment

Say it this way

Dear Mr. Bello,

Thank you for confirming the order. As with all new partners, for our first transaction we use a confirmed letter of credit. This protects both of our companies and is standard practice for us. Once we have completed a first order together, we will be glad to discuss more flexible payment terms.

I am happy to walk through the steps on a call.

From the Template Library: "Explaining secure payment for a first deal." Not legal or financial advice; talk to your bank, a trade finance advisor or qualified counsel about payment structures.



Your next step

"This week I will _____ with _____ by _____."

Greet and use titles

Ask open questions, then
confirm in writing

Verify every new partner the
same way



Keep going: free tools



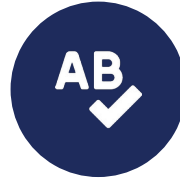
**Readiness
Assessment**

5 minutes



**Nigeria guide and
quick card**

12 chapters



Message Check

Review a message



Template Library

40 templates



**Negotiation
simulator**

3 scenarios

All free at **dealdialect.com** • Questions: adeyeyeayomide97@gmail.com





Thank you

Please take 3 minutes for the survey before you leave.



Or go to: dealdialect.com/feedback

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