

How to manage INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Illustration by **Cristobal Schmal**

Surveyors are increasingly winning and handling assignments with overseas clients. Although face-to-face contact may be more difficult in these situations, there are other ways in which you can manage relationships successfully and ensure clients remain loyal.

BREAK DOWN THE DISTANCE

Create a sense of being close at hand by offering help and providing links to information or business contacts. As one surveyor with many clients in Dubai says, 'Make it seem as though you are just around the virtual corner.' He has created a practical contact planner to ensure he communicates on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Regularity of contact is key to his success, as it ensures he can help clients quickly as and when issues occur.

MAKE ALL CONTACT VALUABLE

The distance barrier is often exacerbated when surveyors don't use a client's favoured means of communication, so it is important to double-check what this is. Even in these days of e-communications, some clients still prefer hard copy; others a phone call. There is little point sending email updates if they won't be read, and they may even end up alienating the client.

A good substitute for face-to-face meetings is a quarterly video or teleconference with a set agenda of information, updates and sector news. Before each session, contact the client to get any special requests for information or focus.

Include the client on any relevant 'webinar' programmes the firm may be running. These do not have to relate to your specific technical offering, but can be of a broad business basis and could be attended by teams on both sides to create a wider sense of support. Ensure all know-how is tailored or personalised in some way to the client, as generic updates only serve to broaden their sense of distance and disassociation.

SHOW YOU CARE

A UK surveyor who manages a number of client relationships in Asia suggests including a couple of 'off the cuff' telephone calls into the client contact plan, just to check how things are going. This has helped him to dispel any sensation that out of sight is out of mind. He also



recommends, when dealing with ex-pats, including in the conversation a bit of trivial home news on subjects of interest to them, as this always goes down well.

MAKE THE MOST OF VISITS

Ask about the client's future movements and take advantage of any visits to your area. Early notice will help you obtain a spot in what is likely to be a busy diary. A surveyor with a number of Eastern European clients always offers to show them around, if their schedule allows. He also tells his clients well in advance if he intends to visit their area, and makes the most of the communication that he generates around the visit. Good 'international' surveyors often become their clients' eyes and ears in their jurisdiction. They think about the information, trends, drivers and people that will be valuable for their clients to be aware of.

Finally, surveyors need to make it easy for overseas clients to contact them. This means providing alternative points of contact during any absence and giving email, mobile, office and home phone details. The more easily contactable a surveyor is, the more likely the client will be to use them as a first port of call for advice or help – a valuable position in a highly competitive international market.

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