

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND YOUR BUSINESS

The Aboriginal market is continually growing and is currently estimated to make up 8% of the Timmins population. It is to a businesses' advantage to successfully service this market. In addition to fellow residents, Aboriginals from northern communities frequently travel to Timmins and provide important support for our local businesses. Here is some information to ensure that your business is doing what it can to provide excellent customer service to this important and growing clientele. Ensure that you are doing your part to attract and retain Aboriginal customers to your business and the City of Timmins.

How many Aboriginal languages are there in Canada?

Aboriginal people come from an oral tradition, meaning word of mouth is the primary means of knowledge sharing and communication. There are over 50 Aboriginal languages in Canada, and many more dialects. Do not make an assumption that everyone speaks and understands the same language. In our region alone, there are more than 5 variations of Cree, along with Oji-Cree and Ojibwe. The Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre (267-7911) offers translation services (fee for service) for anything you may wish to post at your business.

Where can I get contact information for the First Nation Communities in our region?

A listing of the First Nation Chiefs in our region and their contact information is available on the Chamber website at <http://www.timminschamber.on.ca/documents/FirstNationsChiefs2008.pdf>.

What should staff do if there is a language barrier?

As with all situations in which a language barrier exists, avoid using "lingo", slang or jargon. Sometimes we take it for granted that everyone knows what we are talking about. Not knowing these terms does not imply a person isn't smart or capable, but that he/she simply may not know the words or jargon that are commonly used by others.

Never assume your communication with someone with limited English-speaking ability has been understood. Ask for feedback or for demonstration. The most important factor in dealing with all customers with language barriers is to be patient. A thoughtful employee can make all the difference in helping prevent feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment when a person cannot express him or herself clearly or fully.

What are some cultural issues that staff should be aware of?

- No eye contact is a sign of nervousness or lack of confidence. Timmins is very busy and unfamiliar compared to many coastal communities. This can be intimidating to all visitors.
- In some Aboriginal cultures, as in many parts of Europe and Latin America, a limp handshake is more acceptable than a firm grip, which may send a wrong message or intrude upon personal space.
- Non-Aboriginal people may encounter silence when they ask directly for information, but that silence does not necessarily mean that a person has nothing to say and should not be interpreted as ignorance or inferiority.
- Aboriginal people may speak in a low voice and may be shy to ask questions.

What is the proper term to describe an Aboriginal person?

Aboriginal or First Nations person is acceptable.

When is National Aboriginal Day and why should I be aware?

June 21st kick starts the 11 days of “Celebrate Canada” which includes National Aboriginal Day (June 21), Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day (June 24), Multiculturalism Day (June 27) and concluding with Canada Day (July 1).

Ontario has the largest population of Aboriginal people in Canada. National Aboriginal Day presents an opportunity for Ontarians to learn more about the rich culture and history of Aboriginal people in our province and to fully understand how to take advantage of the Aboriginal market available to help grow your business.

Hire an Aboriginal employee today!

- Skills shortage is a widespread concern for numerous industries and many Aboriginals are fully trained, yet their skills are not being utilized. Creating a positive work environment for Aboriginal employees will enhance the attraction and retention of this largely untapped labour force.
- Aboriginal people better understand the demands of this significant and growing market segment.
- Hiring Aboriginal people could lead to exposure to new markets by increasing your business exposure to Aboriginal customers.
- Employing Aboriginal people will increase cultural diversity, resulting in new perspectives and new skills offerings.
- Introducing the Aboriginal workforce to your workplace today will create a positive image of your workplace for tomorrow’s growing, skilled Aboriginal workforce

The Timmins Chamber of Commerce’s Community Outreach Committee produced this information sheet to be shared with our businesses and their front line staff in order to increase awareness and understanding of an important, growing segment of our local consumer market. This sheet serves to answer general questions and is not intended to be legal advice.

Sources include: Government of Canada, Government of Ontario, local Tribal Councils, and The Aboriginal Toolkit by AWPI. Should you have questions or suggestions regarding the information contained on this sheet, please visit www.timminschamber.on.ca or contact the Chamber office at 360-1900.