

Modern English Business Communications

现代商业英语书信

阎善明 编著



对外经济贸易大学出版社

MODERN ENGLISH BUSINESS
COMMUNICATIONS

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前 言

商业英语书信由于历史的因素和很强的业务特色,历来有其独特的语汇和写作风格,写信人对这种语汇和写作风格的掌握和正确运用往往被交易对象视为从商经验的表现。

近半个多世纪来,由于商业领域竞争剧烈,商业英语在来往书信中(合同、契约等除外),发生了不少变化。文字逐渐简明,风格趋向营造感染力和亲和作用,以便更有利于发展业务。为此《现代商业英语书信》除了反映英语商函的业务特色外,更侧重于语言的运用技巧,以适应当今外贸业务发展的需要。

本书首先以新旧、简繁等对比手法阐述了商业英语的写作原则以及如何运用语言技巧有效地表达自己的意图,宣传介绍自己的产品或市场。本书的编写方法是按外贸程序的主要环节选用大量实用信例详细论述各类外贸书信的基本要求、特点和写作技巧;与此同时提供丰富的商业词汇、行话和习语。自第四章起配有常用语句以供读者撰写外贸书信时参考使用。凡本书补充读物皆选编自英美等国家商业书信并按外贸环节排列,便于读者进一步扩充商业英语的知识。所有课文中的商业语汇特别是行话都有详细注释,对疑难词汇和片语配有中英文对照的解释和例句。各章皆有大量练习题以巩固所学知识

本书的论述部分均用简明易懂的英语写成,便于直接用外语进行教学。

本书的宗旨在于使学生在提高英语总体水平的同时了解外贸实

务,掌握商业书信的写作技巧,因此不仅适合于大专院校外经贸专业教学之用,亦可作为有关专业人员的自学教材。

本书在写作过程中曾得到美国著名商业英语专家,曾任“全美商务交流学协会”主席、密西根大学 H·W·Hildebrandt 教授的协助,在此特表谢意。

本书虽由编者根据多年教学实践和一些业务经验写成,但限于水平,难免有不当之处,望读者不吝赐教。

编者

1997.12

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE INFLUENCE OF THE PAST ON LETTER WRITING

At one time, business writing style was as formal as the starched collar every businessman wore. The following example is typical:

Yours of the 12th received instant, and in reply beg to state that herewith is forwarded the report under consideration. Please be advised of general concurrence in desire to expedite matters . . .

Writing like this was taken for granted in its day because stock words and expressions such as “yours” and “beg to state” were widely used by business people at that time. Before we criticize them we should remember that their world was different from ours. Business relationships were more formal, and competition was less keen. Businesses concentrated on facts rather than on personal and human contacts in their correspondence, fearing the application of the latter might lead to misunderstandings and possible legal actions against them. Consequently formal, precise legal language dominated company correspondence with outsiders.

Look at the following letter:

Dear Sir:

Your favor of 28th ultimo was received and contents were duly noted. Please be advised that, as per our files, which have been carefully examined, your piano was purchased last June, not last September.

Due to this fact, it is not possible to honor your request for replacement of the defective parts at no charge. It is with exceeding regret that the writer must point out that the failure of your piano occurred after the warranty period had expired. It is hoped, however, that you will see your way clear to return it for repair. After perusing your letter, it is our considered opinion that the failure is not serious, and that it can be repaired at a nominal cost to you.

We earnestly solicit your return of the piano at your earliest convenience. It will be put in first-class condition as soon as our repair shop has an opportunity to repair same.

Please expect to receive in due course charges C. O. D.

Yours faithfully,

The first sentence only functions in wasting the reader's time. The reader knows the letter was received and read; if it were not, the reader would not be holding the reply.

The tone of the above letter is anything but personal and human. "Please be advised" is the voice of the lawyer. It means "If you please,

you are told." Unless you want to be impersonal this expression should be omitted in today's business correspondence. There are many more old-fashioned words and expressions in this letter such as "the writer" and "our considered opinion," which you should not use when writing a business letter.

Unfortunately, this outdated writing style is still used by many Chinese business people. It has been passed down from generation to generation. It seems it will influence future letter writing, as some young people are still taught in schools or by superiors in business to write in this style. There are several reasons why such habits persist: (1) Many letters are still received in the language of a bygone age. (2) Some teaching materials on business communication have basically remained unchanged for years, irrespective of the rapid changes in business language. Take a look at this example of outdated letter writing taken from an earlier teaching material.

Dear Sirs,

We have for acknowledgement your letter of 5th inst., and are appreciative of your information. At the moment, we are interested in tape recorders from your company. Would you please be kind enough to send us photographs and a price list of the same.

Looking forward to hearing from you in the near future, we remain,

Yours faithfully,

Clearly, expressions such as “have for acknowledgement” and “are appreciative of” are not only long but old-fashioned. It is much better to be specific, and say, for example, “Thank you for the information provided in your letter of 5th August, 19 – ” or “We appreciate the information . . . ”. The abbreviation “inst.” is sometimes used by the British but is generally considered by Americans to be a stock abbreviation.

“Looking forward to hearing from you in the near future, we remain” is rather Victorian. Furthermore, participial phrase is weak except when used to summarize or to subordinate an idea. Such phrasing is especially weak at the end of a business letter. Nevertheless, this expression is still used in some present-day business correspondence. Once, the author of this book discussed this issue with an Englishman who had been engaged in foreign trade for several decades. He said: “Older businessmen use it, and younger ones are influenced to use it. That is why you still see this old-fashioned conclusion in today's business correspondence. The modern tendency, however, is towards far more use of ‘we look forward to hearing from you in the near future’ than the outdated style. ”

Contrasting examples:

(1) Dear Mr. Piper:

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the Guangzhou Fair where I saw a sample of your plastic tile flooring. This type of flooring would, I think, be suitable on the ground floors of the houses here. In reply we are venturing to write you for additional infor-

mation concerning said commodity.

We would be pleased to know the colors and designs of the item in stock, the discount you allow, and the special preparations needed for the underflooring.

If the information you supply is favorable to our needs, we shall consider placing an order with you.

Hoping to hear from you by return mail, we are,

Sincerely,

The writer inquires about something he or she wants to buy, and therefore, is in a privileged position. What the writer needs to do is to immediately ask for information. But the above letter begins slowly, giving obvious information. Even if one feels that this information needs to be communicated, it does not deserve the initial position in the letter, especially if that first sentence is intended to arouse the reader's interest. "Are venturing to write" is so outmoded an expression that no good modern business letter writer would "venture" to use it today, as it is cold and rather stilted. The close is friendly, but is old-fashioned. "By return mail" is correct use from the British point of view, but many Americans avoid using this phrase. They argue that the phrase originated in the days when sailing ships shuttled mail across the seas whereas today much mail arrives by air.

The following is an improvement of the above letter:

Dear Mr. Piper:

We are interested in your plastic tile flooring displayed at the Guangzhou Fair. Please tell us whether you can supply the item from stock. Also, please give us the following information:

1. What special preparation would be necessary for the under-flooring?
2. Are the tiles likely to be affected by rising dampness?
3. In what colors and designs can the tiles be supplied? A catalogue would be appreciated.
4. Are discounts given for orders amounting to US \$ 90,000 or more?

We would appreciate your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

(2) Dear Sirs,

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your esteemed inquiry of the 3rd inst., for which we thank you.

We enclose herewith our price list. As you will note on perusing it, our plastic kitchenware is superior to any other on the market and our prices and terms are competitive.

If you wish to ensure delivery in spring it will be necessary for you to place your order at your earliest convenience as the demand is

very heavy.

Hoping to be favored with your early instructions,
We remain, Dear Sirs,

Yours faithfully,

Even a hurried reading will show that this is not a letter to establish a human relationship between the writer and the reader, but a mixture of old-fashioned expressions which make the message sound insincere. For example, "on perusing it" seems to say, "You have to read our letter carefully to be sure you understand what we are saying." Of course, expressions like this cannot gain empathy. This style of writing may win marks for grammar, but none for salesmanship.

Unlike the above letter, the following one stimulates interest by quoting successful sales elsewhere, and gives a reason for placing an immediate order:

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your inquiry of January 3. As requested, we enclose a price list and the details of our terms and conditions of sale.

As you evidently realize, plastic kitchenware is here to stay - it has already replaced the heavy metalware in modern kitchens. Dealers who have made special window displays of our brightly colored plastic kitchenware have reported good sales even during

this season when hardware sales are usually at their lowest.

After studying our prices and our liberal terms, you will understand why we are working to capacity to meet the demand. Would you please let us have your order by the end of this month, especially if you are interested in having a stock of this attractive line in early spring.

We look forward to the opportunity of being of service to you.

Yours faithfully,

The above letter is far better because it is modern and direct in style, and presents the case from the buyer's point of view: included is more "you" than "we". Dale Carnegie, author of "How to Win Friends and Influence People", says that the only way to influence other people is to talk about what they want and to show them how to get it. He also says that if there is any secret for success, it lies in the ability to understand the point of view of others and see things from their perspective as well as from your own.

WORDS & NOTES

starch vt. 给(衣服等)上浆

Yours of the 12th received instant, and in reply beg to state ...

这是省略结构,前半段省去动词,后半段 beg 前省去主语,这种省略很不规范,早已被淘汰。

instant adj. 本月的(源于拉丁语,在英语中属古体用法,如今罕见,