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Toughen up, folks... it's America

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Self-effacing Kiwi executives are being sent to bootcamp to harden up enough to break into the United States market.

Run by the US-based, not-for-profit organisation Anza Tech, the bootcamps will prepare New Zealand technology businesses for a networking session to be held in Silicon Valley in October.

Anza Tech chief executive David Cannington said many New Zealand and Australian executives were initially uncomfortable about selling themselves aggressively.

"We're pretty humble people. We don't like to sell ourselves."

But self-effacement doesn't wash in the US. "If you come over and you are not well prepared and can't deliver an impassioned 30-second elevator pitch which clearly communicates your value proposition, and why that US executive needs to spend any more than 30 seconds of his time with you - then don't come," he said.

The elevator pitch - where a business message is refined to 30 seconds, so it can be pitched anywhere, anytime, even in a lift - is basic stuff for American executives.

But love in a lift doesn't come naturally for most Australasian executives, who are more likely to try to establish a matey rapport and talk about the goings-on on the football pitch. "We tend to want to talk about the rugby or the football for a couple of hours before we get to business and that is just not the way it is done in the US," Cannington said.

American executives decided first whether a person and their business was of value to them, and then moved on to social chitchat. "They work out what's in it for them first."

Apart from pitching skills, the bootcamp explores other cultural differences in a "10-point survival guide" to doing business in the US.

Cannington said Australasians often did not realise how demanding US customers or business partners could be when it came to service and doing business, nor how litigious the business world was there.

"Really, the cultural differences on the surface don't seem great, but when you scratch below the surface they are quite significant."

But cultural differences work both ways and Cannington said a reverse bootcamp for US executives wanting to break into Australasia was also potentially on the radar.

"I think the exact principles apply in reverse."

Several US businesses were interested in expanding Down Under, not least because Australia and New Zealand represented a gateway into the Asian marketplace.

Anza Tech was originally set up as a networking organisation for Silicon Valley-based Australasian expatriates, but it now also works to foster business interests between New Zealand, Australian and US technology businesses.

- NZPA

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