



**Don Kay,
Chairman,
VHA Global Ltd**

<http://www.vhaglobal.com.au>

VHA Global was established to apply and adapt Victorian health sector expertise internationally.

The company assists with the design, delivery and evaluation of health services, and works in strategic healthcare consulting and hospital commissioning, development and management.

VHA Global has won contracts to commission and operate the Sharjah Teaching Hospital and to manage the Al Qassimi Hospital, also in the emirate of Sharjah, in the UAE.

Don Kay says companies marketing social policy services like health and education need to arrive bearing the endorsement of an Australian government. 'You can't overstate the importance of that,' he says.

'In health and education you need an alignment between industry, academia and government to play major league.

'I recommend companies get close to Austrade and State government bodies, as well as to universities.

'You need to spend time to develop senior relationships. It helps, for example, to be linked to government delegations.

'Healthcare is a growing market for Australian companies in the UAE because governments are committed to supplying better services and have the ability to pay.

'There is respect for Australian expertise. However some people assume the market is not price-sensitive. They assume the market is not competitive. This is not right.

'It's easy to get into a situation of negative cash flow, because of slow payments. And it can be difficult to enforce your legal rights, without personal intervention.

'Personal relationships are the key to doing business in the UAE. You need personal relationships in order to be aware of opportunities early, to secure business, to maintain business, to resolve conflicts and to make sure you get paid.'

'You won't get anywhere if you haven't set up an office in the UAE and you're not prepared to make half a dozen or more trips over there.'

'You need a personal handshake to seal your deal, but there are also stringent contract demands, so legal costs can be high.'

Don sees cultural issues as a problem for some who go to the UAE, but he warns that people should not be intimidated.

'There needs to be a level of respect and a realisation that we are in their country. Don't be arrogant about your own culture. It is important to have contact with and understand the local culture. It is important to realise that the clients aren't other Australians.'

'What's in a handbook about local culture is a bit limited. There's no substitute for experience. It's how to strike a rapport. You can watch others do it. You can seek out a mentor.'

Don Kay's 18 years in the region have taught him one key lesson: 'Arabs are fantastic negotiators,' he says. 'We're babes in the wood.'

He recommends companies spend a lot of time evaluating opportunities.

'At first we got a bit too excited. Now I would put a heavy emphasis on evaluation: evaluating the probability of success, the cost of securing the business, the capacity of the client to pay.'

'At the same time you don't want to be too rigid, either. You have to strike the right balance between flexibility and focus.'