

Holidays Around the World

by Jiri Stejskal, CETRA, Inc.

***I* t is the time of the year to mail out “Season’s Greetings” cards - businesses in the United States are becoming “politically correct” and culturally sensitive to the fact that “Merry Christmas” will not do it in the religiously inter-mingled global environment.**



Even a Happy New Year wish is a bit tricky, because it is based on the Gregorian (Christian) calendar. While the Gregorian calendar is a *de facto* international standard and businesses around the world use it (imagine the confusion if each country used a different calendar!), it is important to know that other calendars exist as well and are widely used in non-business environments.

In the Bengali calendar, New Year’s Day is on or around April 15, the date we usually associate with filing tax returns rather than celebrating. Like many other holidays based on the position of the sun or the moon (think Easter), this one does not have a fixed date. The Bengali calendar might seem like a silly example, until you realize that there are more than 200 million speakers of Bengali – about the number of speakers of French and German combined.

In the Chinese calendar – and there are twice as many speakers of Chinese than there are of English – New Year’s Day (also known as the Lunar New Year or the Spring Festival) falls on the first day of the first lunar month. In 2007, it will be on February 18 in the Gregorian calendar.

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Add the Buddhist, Jewish, Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, Julian and other calendars, and you will be able to celebrate New Year's Day with amazing frequency.

Political correctness aside, international businesses must be aware of the calendars and holiday schedules of individual countries around the world. In addition, even regular working days and weekends cannot be taken for granted: with the notoriously tight deadlines in the marketing research industry, you'd better know that in the Middle East the work week does not coincide with the work week in the US.

For example, in Saudi Arabia, the legal work week runs from Saturday through Wednesday, whereas in Iran it runs from Saturday through Thursday, and in Egypt and Israel from Sunday through Thursday.

In non-religious China, holidays are observed religiously.

There are three week-long holidays, presenting a major obstacle to doing any kind of business. These are Spring Festival (the aforementioned Chinese New Year), Labour Day, and National Day. To make things more interesting, these so-called Gold Weeks have different dates each year, as the Chinese authorities manipulate the surrounding



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weekends. Closer to home, Easter is another example of a moveable feast. While Easter goes largely unnoticed by the businesses in the US, in other parts of the world it is a legal holiday and most businesses are closed on Easter Monday. Wikipedia lists more than 100 countries, including almost all of Europe, Canada, and Australia – see the map below which indicates in yellow which countries are closed for business on Easter Monday:

Countries Celebrating Easter Monday



So how do we navigate the complicated global environment and figure out which country is open for business when? Is there a simple source – a global calendar – which would tell us who is celebrating what and when, and, more importantly, which countries are closed for business on particular dates? Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, because many holidays – like Easter – depend on astrological events which do not follow the Gregorian calendar schedule we are accustomed to. In addition, we need to distinguish between religious, public, legal, bank, and other holidays, as some holidays do not affect business (Halloween), some affect business to some degree (Columbus Day – banks are closed, but most businesses are open), and some prevent doing business altogether (Thanksgiving).

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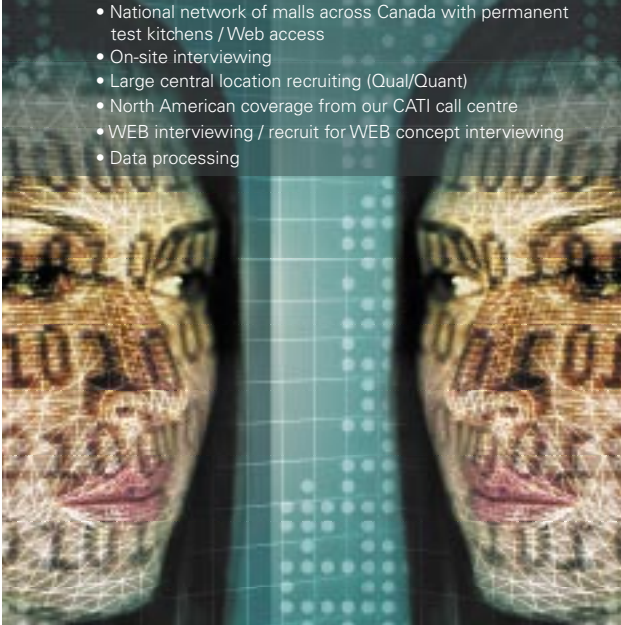
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The following links will help you figure out who is open for business when:

- **Wikipedia** offers a list of holidays by country with links to a wealth of further information (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_holidays_by_country).
- **Earth Calendar** lists holidays by date, by country, and by religion (<http://www.earthcalendar.net>). It also unwittingly provides a fine example of how *not* to translate “Merry Christmas” into a myriad of languages, as it fails to include diacriticals and use appropriate script for most of the languages listed (http://www.earthcalendar.net/_php_MerryChristmas.php).
- **Bank Holidays Around the World** is a business-oriented site. It is maintained by a French translation company which offers information on the current quarter for free, and requires payment for information on past and future dates (<http://www.bank-holidays.com/>).
- **International Planner** is a printed version of an international calendar, available for purchase at <http://www.aglobalworld.com/pd.html>.
- **Holidays on the Net** is a rather eclectic site with focus on US holidays (<http://www.holidays.net/>).
- **Q++ Holidays Portal** claims to be the “official source of public holidays, national holidays, legal holidays, religious holidays, for the world’s major diary and calendar companies,” and offers search by country, month, and religion (<http://www.qppstudio.net/worldholidays.htm>).
- **World Calendar** offers search by country, religion (limited to Christian, Islamic, and Jewish), and by calendar (Chinese, Hebrew, Islamic, and Japanese). By clicking on the name of a country, you can see the country’s calendar with holidays (<http://www.world-calendar.com/>).
- **Financial Calendar** is a paid service which lists bank holidays around the world, and is specific to financial institutions. It claims to be the international standard for bank holiday data (<http://www.financialcalendar.com/>).
- **World Holiday Calendar** is also paid service that provides online access or calendar application for download (<http://www.lightdev.com/holcal/index.jsp>). □

Jiri Stejskal, PhD, is the president of CETRA, Inc. He can be reached at 215-635-7090 or at jiri@cetra.com

The Myth about *Cinco de Mayo*

By Michele Bantz, CETRA

When *Cinco de Mayo* appears noted on the 5th day of our May calendars, most of us think *fiesta*, we think *mariachis*, *margaritas*, we think...about a Mexican-style St. Patrick’s Day. The images evoked in the average American’s mind of this festive holiday confound most Mexicans who have come across the date essentially because this holiday, surprisingly enough, is practically non-existent in Mexico and certainly doesn’t receive the attention it receives here. So what then is being celebrated?

Contrary to popular belief, *Cinco de Mayo* doesn’t commemorate Mexico’s birth as an independent nation, which is in fact September 16th. The date of May 5, 1862, actually marks the end of French occupation in Mexico when a Mexican force of 4,500 men defeated the well-trained occupying French Army in the legendary four-hour Battle of Puebla in Puebla, Mexico. While the state of Puebla itself still holds festivities commemorating the historic event, by no means is *Cinco de Mayo* a customary holiday celebrated throughout Mexico or even well known outside of the United States. Within the US, *Cinco de Mayo* events are likely most popular in larger cities along the border and high school Spanish classrooms. If traveling to Mexico to celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* with the locals, you may want to reconsider. Many simply won’t understand what all the fuss is about.

Michele Bantz is a Spanish and Portuguese translator/editor at CETRA, Inc. She can be reached at 215-635-7090 or at michele@cetra.com