

Japanese Business Cards

The Japanese take business cards very seriously, and a plentiful supply of “meishi” (名刺) is a vital prerequisite for anyone hoping to do business in Japan. This document illustrates two different ways of approaching the translation of an English business card into Japanese.

1. The original business card (TOP)

I'm using my own card as an example. It measures 90 × 55 mm, which is fairly typical for a Japanese business card (90 × 55 and 91 × 55 mm seem to be the two most common sizes in Japan). Business card sizes vary much more widely in the West (especially in the UK), and can cause problems with Japanese card scanning/filing systems. I would certainly advise against using anything shorter or narrower than a credit card (85 × 54 mm).

2. Single-sided Japanese card (MIDDLE)

If you are having cards printed exclusively for use in Japan, then you may opt for a single-sided design. Here, a pronunciation guide has been added to the cardholder's name to show how it should be read. The spelling of the name is also important, so the original English rendering has been left in place. Words like “Fax” and “Email” can be left as they are—most Japanese actually prefer to use these English words on their own business cards instead of the Japanese equivalents.

Obviously the address doesn't need translating, but it is important to show where the line breaks should go. English business cards often show the cardholder's address as a single line of text without any commas. When copying the address onto an envelope, it's easy for us to start new lines in the right places because we know the local geography. But how many Japanese businessmen are likely to know that “Carlisle” and “Cumbria” should be written on separate lines, for example?

You should also indicate the name of your country if it isn't absolutely clear already, and add the international prefix to your phone number.

3. Double-sided bilingual card (BOTTOM)

If you already have business cards of suitable dimensions, you could just print some with a Japanese version on the other side. This example shows a single-colour Japanese layout that might be used for this purpose. Since the spelling of the cardholder's name appears on the other side, there is no need for pronunciation guides. The strange-looking block in the top left corner of the card is a two-dimensional barcode (called a “QR code”) containing the URL of the cardholder's home page in machine-readable form. These are starting to become quite popular in Japan (mainly due to the popularity of mobile phones equipped with the latest gizmos), and are a useful way of exchanging contact details.




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