EMAIL BEST PRACTICE

E-mail is a key tool of a good evangelist. It is fast, almost free, and ubiquitous. It's also used poorly by most people. Here's how to improve your e-mail effectiveness to make it a powerful evangelism tool:

Optimize your subject line.

If people don't recognize your name on an email message, the next thing they look at is the subject line. Think of it as an executive summary of your message. If it doesn't entice people to read your email then you've failed before you even started. Subject lines that work on me are: "Enjoyed your book," "Enjoyed your speech," and "Referred to you by [someone the I know or heard of]."

Time it for Tuesday.

Stephen Brand, a professor of entrepreneurship at Olin College of Engineering, promotes an interesting concept that Tuesday mornings are the best time to send emails. This is because by Tuesday people have worked through their backlog from the weekend but have not yet received the deluge of the rest of the week.

Resend unanswered emails.

Another Stephen Brand idea is to resend unanswered email to the recipient with a brief note saying, "Did you have a chance to read this?" He believes that when a person receives the same email twice, it jars (or guilts) the recipient into action.

Answer within twenty-four hours.

As I said before, responsiveness is a big factor in cementing a contact. You need to answer while the topic of the e-mail is fresh. Messages that are below the first screen of a person's inbox are often forgotten.

Don't use all caps.

All-caps text is more difficult to read, and it is considered "SHOUTING." If nothing else, it's a sure sign that you're clueless about e-mail, and cluelessness is not conducive to successful schmoozing.

Quote back.

Select the question or section of the e-mail that you're responding to and quote it back in order to refresh the sender's mind. People get dozens of messages per day, so a simple "Yes, I agree," is useless.

Keep it short and simple.

Cut the crap and get to it. The ideal length for e-mail is five sentences. If you can't say what you have to say in five sentences, you don't have much to say.

Use plain text, not HTML.

I assume that HTML e-mails are spam and give them no more than a glance. If you have something significant to say, you don't need bold, outline, shadow, red text, and graphics to say it.

Don't attach files over five megabytes unless you have permission.

Imagine that your recipient is sitting in a hotel room using a slow connection, and you've sent a ten-megabyte PowerPoint file. Do you think you'll get a positive reaction? Also, many people assume attachments from strangers are viruses.

Blind carbon copy (BCC) large groups.

When you send an e-mail to more than two people, it should be a BCC to prevent inadvertent responses to everyone and to prevent revealing e-mail addresses to the other recipients.

Reduce carbon copies (CC).

When I get a CC, I assume that other people are taking care of the issue. Either a person needs to get the e-mail or not. A CC is in a dubious middle ground. The most common purposes of a CC are to cover one's butt ("But you were CCed!") or to implicitly threaten ("I CCed your boss, so you better do what I ask.").

Include a good signature.

A "signature" is the information that your e-mail software includes at the end of every outgoing message. A good signature provides your name, organization, postal address, phone number, e-mail address, and website. This is useful for copying and pasting into a calendar or database. God forbid someone should want to make more contact with you, and they have to hunt down the information.

Wait when you hate.

Although you should answer e-mail in under forty-eight hours, there is one case where you should wait longer: when you're angry, offended, or argumentative. E-mail written when you're in these moods tends only to exacerbate problems.