

Email Etiquette Basics

Below are the key Business Email Etiquette issues that need to be considered with every e-mail sent. These are the issues business owners and their employees need to be aware of in their day-to-day online communications to ensure the best possible results.

- **Be descriptive and helpful with your Out of Office Messages**

Before you leave don't forget to set up your automatic replies (aka Out of Office). You must keep both internal and external contacts informed of your absence. Yet, a lot of us miss the mark when writing our scripted replies.

Here is something to consider adding to yours:

Tell them the time period of your absence. "In California" isn't an acceptable automatic reply. Try "On vacation from Tuesday March 11th till Sunday March 16th. Back in the Office on Monday March 17th."

Let people know how or if they can reach you. Provide details on email availability, phone numbers, etc. Provide alternate contact information.

- **Professional Behaviour on the Job:**

Being aware of how you use your e-mail, company e-mail address and employer's technology is a serious issue.

Visiting Websites that are questionable or not necessary to your job responsibilities will reflect poorly on your ability to be trusted.

Never assume that these activities are not being monitored.

While on company time, do not assume you have any privacy when using company resources and equipment.

- **SUBJECT Field:**

Out of the billions of emails that are sent every day, how can you make sure that yours stands out? The SUBJECT Field is the window into your e-mail and can many times determine if your e-mail will even be opened.

If this is an initial contact with a customer based on their request through your site or otherwise, be sure to have a short SUBJECT: that indicates clearly what the topic of the email is. Get right to the point in about six to eight words.

Do not use filler words like "hello," "nice to meet you," and "thanks," which can easily be included in the email's body.

Typos, all caps or all small case can lend to an unprofessional impression or that you may be spammer.

- **Level of Formality:**

Just like workplace dress codes and the unspoken rules of how to interact with co-workers, there are certain techniques used for how work emails need to be written.

It's also appropriate to remember that verbal and written conversations are very different, and can vary on what is or is not proper. A superior may have a very laid-back and approachable character in person, but have a very official presence in email correspondence.

One should communicate at all times as if your email is on your company letterhead. This means black text and standard fonts too!

No abbreviations — type full words and sentences too! (Not do "u" get it! Do you get it?)

This is your business's image you are branding!

- **Addressing:**

How do you address your new contacts? I would suggest initially that you assume the highest level of courtesy:

Hello, Mr. Anderson, Dear Ms. Jones, Dr. Osborne, etc.

Until your new contact states, "call me Andy" or "you can call me Diane".

If you don't know the gender of the recipient, just use "Dear First Name, Last Name".

Especially, when you operate in a multicultural environment and cannot tell the gender behind every single name. Never assume - that a recipient is male, female, or both 😊

You will also be able pick up clues on when you can address have a more relaxed tone by how contacts approach you as well as how they sign off.

Most business people do not mind being called by their First name, however, in a global economy that can be perceived as taking premature liberties in the relationship if used too soon.

- **TO:, From:, BCc, Cc elds can make or break you:**

In the **TO:** Field make sure you have your contact's name formally typed. John B. Doe – not john b doe or JOHN B DOE. In the FROM: field make sure you have your full name formally typed. Example: Jane A. Jones.

Not: jane a jones or JANE A JONES.

The latter two give the perception of lack of education or limited experience with technology.

By only including your First name or email address you are giving the perception you may have something to hide or do not know the basics of configuring your e-mail program.

BCc: use this field when e-mailing a group of contacts who do not personally know each other. By listing an arm's length list of e-mail addresses in the Cc or TO fields of contacts who do not know each other or who have never met is conducive to publishing their email address to strangers. This is a privacy issue! With those you are forging partnerships with, visibly listing their e-mail address in with a group of strangers will make one wonder what other privacy issues you may not respect or understand.

Cc: Use this field when there are a handful of associates involved in a discussion that requires all be on the same page. These business people know each other or have been introduced and have no problem having their e-mail address exposed to the parties involved. If you are not sure if a business associate would mind their address being made public, ask!

- **Reply to All:**

Use this button with discretion!

You need to carefully think about whether “all” really need to be aware of your reply to conduct business.

Replying all at the wrong time can be rude because the sender may not have wanted all responses to be visible to everyone.

Also it's pretty boring to spend the whole day deleting monosyllabic responses to something that never even applied to you in the first place.

Doing so will just make you look petty while increasing others e-mail volume unnecessarily.

- **Formatting:**

Refrain from using any formatting in your day-to-day business e-mail communications.

Unless you would type something in bold crimson letters on business letterhead, don't do it when e-mailing for commercial gain.

With all the spam filtering going on today; the more formatting or embedded images that higher the chance that your e-mail could be blocked as spammer.

Even something as simple as using a different font makes your e-mail display contingent upon the recipient having that specific font on their system or it defaults to their designated default font.

Keep in mind the recipient may not have their e-mail program configured in such a way as to display your formatting the way it appears on your system – if at all.

- **Attachments:**

How do you think your relationship with a potential new customer/contact is enhanced when you send them that 10MB Power Point presentation they didn't request and you fill up their inbox causing subsequent business correspondence to bounce as undeliverable?

And, if they do not have Power Point, they wouldn't be able open the file anyway!

Never assume your potential customers have the software you do to open any file you may arbitrarily send.

If you need to send a file (or combination of files) over 500,000 in size, business courtesy dictates you ask the recipient first if it is okay to send a large file.

Next, confirm they have the same software and version you do and what is the best time of day to send it to them to ensure they are available to download the large file and keeps their e-mail flowing.

Never send large attachments without warning, on weekends or after business hours when the recipient may not be there to keep their inbox clear.

- **Using Previous E-mail for New Correspondence:**

If you want to give the perception of lazy, find a previous e-mail from the party you want to communicate with, hit reply and start typing about something completely irrelevant to the old e-mail's subject.

Always start a new e-mail and add your contacts to your address book so you can add them to a new e-mail with one click. Do not hesitate to change the subject field to reflect a different topic when an ongoing conversation takes a new direction.

- **Down Edit Your Replies:**

Do not just hit reply and start typing — that's called top posting.

Editing is a skill those you communicate with will appreciate as it lends to reflecting a respect for their time and clarity in your communications.

Removing parts of the previous e-mail that no longer apply to your response including e-mail headers and signature files removes the clutter.

By making the effort to reply point by point keeps the conversation on track with fewer misunderstandings.

- **Common Courtesy:**

Hello, Hi, Good Day, Thank You, Sincerely, Best Regards. All those intros and sign offs that are a staple of professional business communications should also be used in your business e-mail communications. Not doing so could have your messages be misinterpreted as demanding or terse.

Always include a salutation and sign off that includes your name with every e-mail. Here again – think business letterhead.

Courtesy also includes that you make the effort to communicate as an educated adult.

Type in full sentences with proper structure.

Not all caps; not all small case.

Proper capitalization and punctuation are a must!

You are an educated professional and need to communicate as such. All caps or all small case smacks of either lack of education, tech/business savvy — or laziness. None of which is positive for instilling confidence or encouraging others to want to do business with you.

- **Be Sensitive and Accessible**

Always include a signature line that provides alternative ways to contact you.

Keep your signature files to no more than 5-6 lines to avoid being viewed as egocentric. Limit your signature to your name, Website link, company name, and slogan/offer or phone number.

Include a link to your Website where the recipient can get all your contact information from A-Z – that is what your site is for.

Do not forget to include the “http://” when including your Website address within e-mails and your signature file to ensure the URL is recognized as a clickable URL regardless of the user’s software or platform.

- **Send Timely Replies**

Don't make people wait for timely replies to their email.

Respond promptly with a clear, concise message. If you need more time to research an answer or gather more information, tell your email sender when they can expect a reply.

These very important issues will certainly allow your business communications to rise above the majority who do not take the time to understand and master these issues. Thank you