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OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- Understand how organizations exchange electronic and paper-based messages.

- Know when to send and how to organize e-mails and memos.

- Describe appropriate formats for e-mails and memos.

- Identify best practices for writing professional e-mails.

- Explain the business applications of instant messaging and texting.

- Discuss social networking sites, assess their advantages and their risks, and appreciate the potential of professional networking sites.

- Recognize the business uses of podcasts, blogs, and wikis; understand the distribution of Web content by real simple syndication (RSS) feeds; and describe the purpose of social bookmarking.

Communication Technology and the Information Flow in Organizations

Although today's workplaces are still far from paperless, increasingly, information is exchanged electronically and on the go. The Web has evolved from mere storage of passively consumed information to Web 2.0—a dynamic, interactive environment. Users are empowered, active participants who create content, review products, and edit and share information.

Ever more data are stored on and accessed from remote networks, not just individual computers. This storing and accessing of data along with software applications in remote network clusters, or "clouds," is called *cloud computing*. Mobile communication and cloud computing are the two prevailing technological trends today. In many businesses, desktop computers are fast becoming obsolete with the advent of ever-smaller laptops, netbooks, smartphones, tablets, and other compact mobile devices. Furthermore, virtual private networks (VPN) offer secure access to company information from any location in the world that provides an Internet connection.

Today's workforce must stay connected at all times. Knowledge and information workers are expected to remain tethered to their jobs wherever they are, even on the weekends or on vacation. The technological revolution of the last 25 years has resulted in amazing productivity gains. However, technological advances have

also made 50-hour workweeks without overtime pay a reality for those "i-workers" lucky enough to snag or keep a promising position in a tough economy. Also, more employees than ever before are telecommuting.

You may already be sharing digitally with your friends and family, but chances are that you need to understand how businesses transmit information electronically and how they use new technology. This chapter explores professional electronic communication, specifically e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and corporate blogs. Moreover, you will learn about business uses of podcasts, wikis, and social networking sites. You will read about best practices in composing e-mails and interacting through other electronic media. Knowing how to prepare an effective message and understanding business technology can save you time, reduce stress, and build your image as a professional.

Organizing E-Mails and Memos

E-mail has replaced paper memos for many messages inside organizations and some letters to external audiences. However, paper-based documents still have their proper functions. Because they are committed to paper, hard-copy messages tend to carry more weight and are taken more seriously in certain situations. They are considered more formal than electronic communication. Moreover, even if e-mail writers have access to sophisticated HTML mail, the recipient may receive only plain-text messages. Poor layout and little eye appeal may result when elaborate formatting disappears on the receiver's end. The e-mail may also be difficult to print. This is why business communicators often deliver electronic copies of memos or letters as attachments accompanied by a brief e-mail cover message. PDF documents in particular guarantee that the reader receives a message that looks exactly as the writer intended it.

> E-mails and memos inform employees, request data, give responses, confirm decisions, and provide directions.

Today it is estimated that on average more than 294 billion e-mails are sent each day worldwide.[1] E-mail growth has slowed recently, and rival services are booming. Twitter and Facebook, for example, offer faster, always-on connectedness. However, e-mail in the workplace is here to stay. Because e-mail is a standard form of communication within organizations, it will likely be your most common business communication channel. E-mails perform critical tasks such as informing employees, giving directions, outlining procedures, requesting data, supplying responses, and confirming decisions.

Knowing When to Send E-Mails and Memos

Before sending any message, you must choose a communication channel, as discussed in Chapter 2. E-mail is appropriate for short, informal messages that request information and respond to inquiries. It is especially effective for messages to multiple receivers and messages that must be archived (saved). An e-mail is also appropriate as a cover document when sending longer attachments.

E-mail, however, is not a substitute for face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, or business letters. Face-to-face conversations or telephone calls are better channel choices if your goal is to convey enthusiasm or warmth, explain a complex situation, present a persuasive argument, or smooth over disagreements. A recent research study revealed that managers and employees were adamant about using face-to-face contact, rather than e-mail, for critical work situations such as human resources annual reviews, discipline, and promotions.[2]

Although e-mail is more often used today, memos are still useful for important internal messages that require a permanent record or formality. For example, organizations use memos to deliver changes in procedures, official instructions, reports, and long internal documents. Whatever channel you choose, be sure it is comfortable to the receiver and appropriate for the organization.

Writing Informational E-Mails and Memos

In today's workplace you will probably write numerous informational e-mails and some hard-copy memos. Both kinds of messages usually carry nonsensitive information that is unlikely to upset readers. Therefore, these messages should be organized directly with the main idea first. The following writing plan will help you create information messages quickly:

Writing Plan for Informational E-Mails and Memos

- **Subject line:** Summarize the main idea in condensed form.
- **Opening:** Reveal the main idea immediately but in expanded form.
- **Body:** Explain and justify the main idea using headings, bulleted lists, and other high-skim techniques when appropriate.
- **Closing:** Include (a) action information, dates, or deadlines; (b) a summary of the message; or (c) a closing thought.

Subject Line. In e-mails and memos, an informative subject line is essential. It summarizes the central idea, thus providing quick identification for reading and for filing. Busy readers glance at a subject line and decide when and whether to read the message. E-mails without subject lines are often automatically deleted.

What does it take to get your message read? For one thing, stay away from meaningless or dangerous words. A sure way to have your message deleted or ignored is to use a one-word heading such as *Issue, Problem, Important,* or *Help.* Including a word such as *Free* is dangerous because it may trigger spam filters. Try to make your subject line "talk" by including a verb. Explain the purpose of the message and how it relates to the reader. Remember that a subject line is usually written in an abbreviated style, often without articles *(a, an, the)*. It need not be a complete sentence, and it does not end with a period. Subject lines should appear as a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters—never in all lowercase letters.

Poor Subject Lines	Improved Subject Lines
Trade Show	Need You to Showcase Two Items at Our Next Trade Show
Staff Meeting	Staff Meeting Rescheduled for May 12
Important!	Please Respond to Job Satisfaction Survey
Parking Permits	New Employee Parking Permits Available From HR

Opening. Because most e-mails and memos cover nonsensitive information, it can be handled in a straightforward manner. Begin by frontloading; that is, reveal the main idea immediately. Even though the purpose of the e-mail or memo is summarized in the subject line, that purpose should be restated—and amplified—in the first sentence. Busy readers want to know immediately why they are reading a message. Notice how the following indirect opening can be improved by frontloading.

Indirect Opening

For the past six months the Human Resources Development Department has been considering changes in our employees' benefit plan.

Direct Opening

Please review the following proposal regarding employees' benefits, and let me know by May 20 if you approve these changes.

Body. The body provides more information about the reason for writing. It explains and discusses the subject logically. Effective e-mails and memos generally

discuss only one topic. Limiting the topic helps the receiver act on the subject and file it appropriately. A writer who, for example, describes a computer printer problem and also requests permission to attend a conference runs a 50 percent failure risk. The reader may respond to the printer problem but delay responding to or forget about the conference request.

The body of e-mails and memos should have high "skim value." This means that information should be easy to read and comprehend. As covered in the section on document design in Chapter 4, many techniques improve readability. You can use white space, bulleted lists, enumerated lists, appropriate typefaces and fonts, and headings. In the revision stage, you will see many ways to improve the readability of the body of your message.

Closing. Generally end an e-mail or a memo with (a) action information, dates, or deadlines; (b) a summary of the message; or (c) a closing thought. Here again, the value of thinking through the message before actually writing it becomes apparent. The closing is where readers look for deadlines and action language. An effective memo or e-mail closing might be, *Please submit your written report to me by June 15 so that we can have your data before our July planning session.*

In more detailed messages, a summary of main points may be an appropriate closing. If no action request is made and a closing summary is unnecessary, you might end with a simple concluding thought *(I'm glad to answer your questions* or *This sounds like a useful project)*. You need not close messages to coworkers with goodwill statements such as those found in letters to customers or clients. However, some closing thought is often necessary to prevent sounding abrupt. Closings can show gratitude or encourage feedback with remarks such as *I sincerely appreciate your help* or *What are your ideas on this proposal?* Other closings look forward to what's next, such as *How would you like to proceed?* Avoid closing with overused expressions such as *Please let me know if I may be of further assistance.* This ending sounds mechanical and insincere.

Applying E-Mail and Memo Formats

E-mails and hard-copy memos are similar in content and development, but their formats are slightly different. In this section you will learn how to format e-mails and memos, and you will learn how e-mails can serve as transmittal documents.
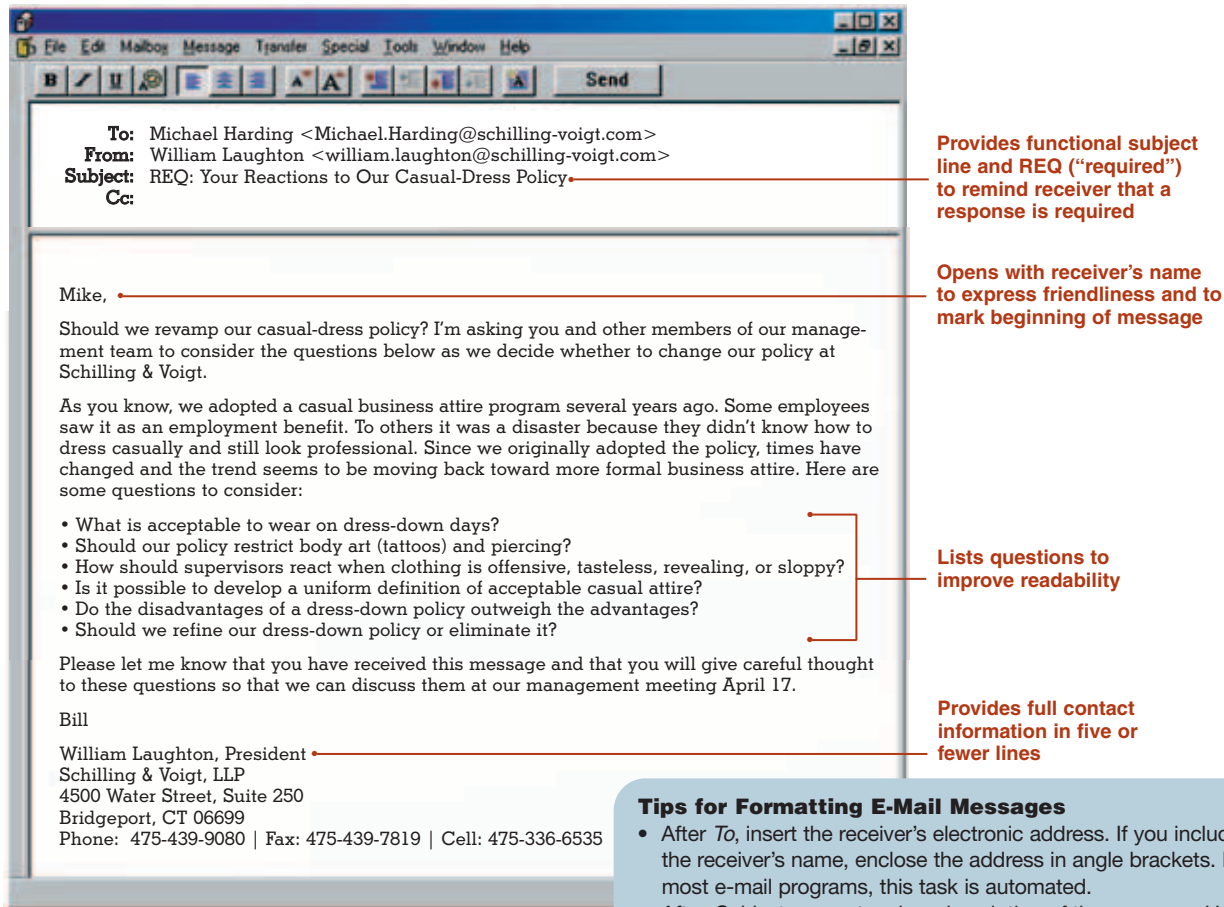
Formatting E-Mail Messages

Because e-mail is now a standard form of business communication, people are beginning to agree on specific formatting and usage conventions. The following suggestions identify current formatting standards. Always check with your organization, however, to observe its practices.

Guide Words. Following the guide word *To*, some writers insert just the recipient's electronic address, such as *michael.harding@schilling-voigt.com*. Other writers prefer to include the receiver's full name plus the electronic address, as shown in Figure 5.1. By including full names in the *To* and *From* slots, both receivers and senders are better able to identify the message. By the way, the order of *Date, To, From*, *Subject*, and other guide words varies depending on your e-mail program and whether you are sending or receiving the message.

Most e-mail programs automatically add the current date after *Date*. On the *Cc* line (which stands for c*arbon copy* or *courtesy copy*), you can type the address of anyone who is to receive a copy of the message. Remember, though, to send copies only to those people directly involved with the message. Most e-mail programs also include a line for *Bcc (blind carbon copy)*. This sends a copy without the addressee's knowledge. Savvy writers today use *Bcc* for the names and

FIGURE 5.1   **Formatting an E-Mail Message**

File Edit Mailbox Message Transfer Special Tools Window Help

Send

To: Michael Harding <Michael.Harding@schilling-voigt.com>
From: William Laughton <william.laughton@schilling-voigt.com>
Subject: REQ: Your Reactions to Our Casual-Dress Policy
Cc:

Provides functional subject line and REQ ("required") to remind receiver that a response is required

Mike,

Opens with receiver's name to express friendliness and to mark beginning of message

Should we revamp our casual-dress policy? I'm asking you and other members of our management team to consider the questions below as we decide whether to change our policy at Schilling & Voigt.

As you know, we adopted a casual business attire program several years ago. Some employees saw it as an employment benefit. To others it was a disaster because they didn't know how to dress casually and still look professional. Since we originally adopted the policy, times have changed and the trend seems to be moving back toward more formal business attire. Here are some questions to consider:

• What is acceptable to wear on dress-down days?
• Should our policy restrict body art (tattoos) and piercing?
• How should supervisors react when clothing is offensive, tasteless, revealing, or sloppy?
• Is it possible to develop a uniform definition of acceptable casual attire?
• Do the disadvantages of a dress-down policy outweigh the advantages?
• Should we refine our dress-down policy or eliminate it?

Lists questions to improve readability

Please let me know that you have received this message and that you will give careful thought to these questions so that we can discuss them at our management meeting April 17.

Bill

William Laughton, President
Schilling & Voigt, LLP
4500 Water Street, Suite 250
Bridgeport, CT 06699
Phone: 475-439-9080 | Fax: 475-439-7819 | Cell: 475-336-6535

Provides full contact information in five or fewer lines

Tips for Formatting E-Mail Messages
• After *To*, insert the receiver's electronic address. If you include the receiver's name, enclose the address in angle brackets. In most e-mail programs, this task is automated.
• After *Subject*, present a clear description of the message. Use uppercase for initial letters of main words.
• Insert the addresses of people receiving courtesy or blind copies.
• Include a greeting such as *Mike; Dear Mike; Hi, Mike* or an honorific and last name (*Dear Mr. Harding*), especially in messages to outsiders.
• Double-space (skip a line) between paragraphs.
• Do not type the message body in all caps or in all lowercase letters.
• Decide whether to include a complimentary close such as *Best wishes*.
• Insert your name and full contact information for most messages.

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addresses of a list of receivers, a technique that avoids revealing the addresses to the entire group. On the subject line, identify the subject of the e-mail. Be sure to include enough information to be clear and compelling.

Greeting. Begin your message with a greeting such as the following:

> An e-mail greeting shows friendliness and indicates the beginning of the message.

Hi, Kevin,	Thank you, Haley,
Greetings, Amy,	Dear Mr. Cotter,
Leslie,	Dear Leslie:

In addition to being friendly, a greeting provides a visual cue marking the beginning of the message. Many messages are transmitted or forwarded with such long headers that finding the beginning of the message can be difficult. A greeting helps, even if it is just the receiver's name, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Body. When preparing the body of an e-mail, use standard caps and lowercase characters—never all uppercase or all lowercase characters. Cover just one topic, and try to keep the total message under three screens in length. Remember to double-space between paragraphs. For longer messages prepare a separate file to be attached. Use the e-mail message only as a cover document.

Closing Lines and Signature Block. Some people sign off their e-mails with a cordial expression such as *Cheers*, *All the best*, or *Warm regards*. Regardless of the closing, be sure to sign your name. Messages without names become very confusing when forwarded or when they are part of a thread (string) of responses. It is also smart to include full contact information as part of your signature block. Some writers prepare a number of "signatures" in their e-mail programs, depending on what information they want to reveal. They can choose a complete signature with all their contact information, or they can use a brief version. See Figure 5.1 for an example of a complete signature.

Formatting Office Memos

In the past interoffice memorandums were the primary communication channel for delivering information within organizations. They are still useful for internal messages that require a permanent record or formality.

Memo Forms and Margins. Memos include the basic elements of *Date, To, From*, and *Subject*. Large organizations may include other identifying headings, such as *File Number*, *Floor*, *Extension*, *Location*, and *Distribution*.

In preparing a memo on plain paper, set 1-inch top and bottom margins and left and right margins of 1.25 inches. Provide a heading that includes the name of the company plus "Memo" or "Memorandum." Begin the guide words a triple space (two blank lines) below the last line of the heading. Insert in bold the guide words: **Date:**, **To:**, **From:**, and **Subject:** at the left margin. The guide words may appear in all caps or with only the initial letter capitalized. Triple-space (set two blank lines) after the last line of the heading. Do not justify the right margins. As discussed in the document design section of Chapter 4, ragged-right margins make printed messages easier to read than right-justified margins do. Single-space the message, and double-space between paragraphs, as shown in Figure 5.2.

OFFICE INSIDER

E-mail is the digital equivalent of DNA evidence, the smoking gun: "E-mail has become the place where everybody loves to look."

—Irwin Schwartz, president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Preparing Memos as E-Mail Attachments. E-mail has become increasingly important for exchanging internal messages. However, it is inappropriate for long documents or for items that require formality or permanence. For such messages, writers may prepare the information in standard memo format and send it as an attachment to a cover e-mail.

In preparing e-mail attachments, be sure to include identifying information. Because the cover e-mail message may become separated from the attachment, the attachment must be fully identified. Preparing the e-mail attachment as a memo provides a handy format that identifies the date, sender, receiver, and subject.

Adopting Best Practices for Professional E-Mails

Wise e-mail business communicators are aware of the importance as well as the dangers of e-mail as a communication channel. They know that their messages can travel, intentionally or unintentionally, long distances. A hasty e-mail may end up in the boss's mailbox or be forwarded to an enemy. Making matters worse, computers—like elephants and spurned lovers—never forget. Even erased messages can remain on multiple servers that are backed up by companies or Internet

FIGURE 5.2   **Formatting a Memo That Responds to a Request**

↓ 1 inch

HOLLYWOOD AUDIENCE SERVICES

↓ 2 blank lines

MEMORANDUM

↓ 2 blank lines

Aligns all heading words with those following *Subject*

Date:	November 11, 201x

↓ 1 blank line

To: Stephanie Sato, President

↓ 1 blank line

From: Sundance Richardson, Special Events Manager *S.R.*

Provides writer's initials after printed name and title

↓ 1 blank line

Subject: Improving Web Site Information

↓ 1 or 2 blank lines

In response to your request for ideas to improve our Web site, I am submitting the following suggestions. Because interest in our audience member, seat-filler, and usher services is growing constantly, we must use our Web site more strategically. Here are three suggestions.

First, our Web site should explain our purpose. We specialize in providing customized and responsive audiences for studio productions and award shows. The Web site should distinguish between audience members and seat fillers. Audience members have a seat for the entire taping of a TV show. Seat fillers sit in the empty seats of celebrity presenters or performers so that the front section does not look empty to the home audience.

Uses ragged line endings—not justified margin

Leaves side margins of 1.25 inches

Second, I suggest that our Web designer include a listing such as the following so that readers recognize the events and services we provide:

Event	Audience Members Provided Last Year	Seat Fillers and Ushers Provided Last Year
Daytime Emmy Awards	53	15
Grammy Awards	34	17
Golden Globe Awards	29	22
Screen Actor's Guild Awards	33	16

Lists data in columns with headings and white space for easy reading

Third, our Web site should provide answers to commonly asked questions such as the following:

- Do audience members or seat fillers have to pay to attend the event?
- How often do seat fillers have to move around?
- Will seat fillers be on television?

Our Web site can be more informative and boost our business if we implement some of these ideas. Are you free to talk about these suggestions at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, November 19?

Omits a closing and signature

Tips for Formatting Memos

- On plain paper, set 1-inch top and bottom margins.
- Set left and right margins of 1.25 inches.
- Include an optional company name and the word *MEMO* or *MEMORANDUM* as a heading. Leave 2 blank lines after this heading.
- Set one tab to align entries evenly after *Subject*.
- Leave 1 or 2 blank lines after the subject line.
- Single-space all but the shortest memos. Double-space between paragraphs.
- For a two-page memo, use a second-page heading with the addressee's name, page number, and date.
- Handwrite your initials after your typed name.
- Place bulleted or numbered lists flush left or indent them 0.5 inches.

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service providers. Increasingly, e-mail has turned into the "smoking gun" uncovered by prosecutors to prove indelicate or even illegal intentions.

In addition, many users complain of poorly written messages and "e-mail ping-pong." Inboxes overflow with unnecessary back-and-forth exchanges seeking to clarify previous messages.[3]

E-Mail Best Practices: Getting Started

Despite its dangers and limitations, e-mail is the No. 1 channel of communication. To make your messages effective and to avoid e-mail ping-pong, take the time to organize your thoughts, compose carefully, and consider the receiver. The following best practices will help you get off to a good start in using e-mail smartly, safely, and professionally.

"Be careful what you write. My wonderful, charming, brilliant boss reads everyone's e-mail."

- **Try composing offline.** Especially for important messages, use your word processing program to write offline. Then upload your message to your e-mail or copy and paste the text into the frame of your e-mail. This prevents "self-destructing" (losing all your writing through some glitch or pressing the wrong key) when working online.
- **Get the address right.** If you omit one character or misread the letter *l* for the number *1,* your message bounces. Solution: Use your electronic address book for people you write to frequently. Double-check every address that you key in manually. Don't accidentally reply to a group of receivers when you intend to answer only one.
- **Avoid misleading subject lines.** Make sure your subject line is relevant and helpful. Generic tags such as *Hi!* and *Important*! may cause your message to be deleted before it is opened.
- **Apply the top-of-screen test.** When readers open your message and look at the first screen, will they see what is most significant? Your subject line and first paragraph should convey your purpose.
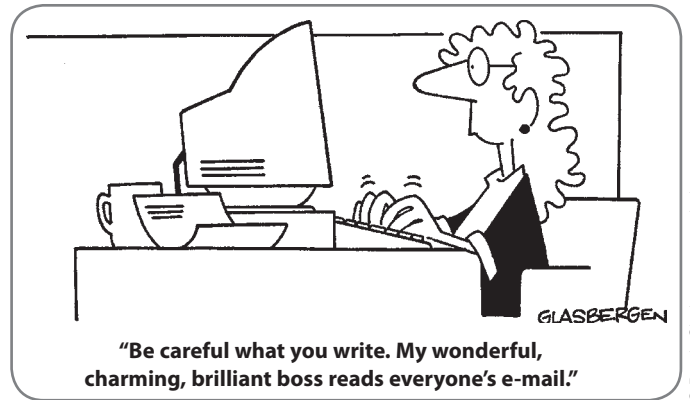
Content, Tone, and Correctness

Although e-mail seems as casual as a telephone call, it definitely is not. Because it produces a permanent record, think carefully about what you say and how you say it.

- **Be concise.** Omit unnecessary information. Remember that monitors are small and typefaces are often difficult to read. Organize your ideas tightly. If you must send a long message, prepare an attachment and use the e-mail as a cover message.
- **Don't send anything you wouldn't want published.** E-mail creates a permanent record that does not go away even when deleted. Every message is a corporate communication that can be used against you or your employer. Don't write anything that you wouldn't want your boss, your family, or a judge to read.
- **Don't use e-mail to avoid contact.** E-mail is inappropriate for breaking bad news or for resolving arguments. For example, it is improper to fire a person by e-mail. It is also a poor channel for clashing with supervisors, subordinates, or others. Before risking hurt feelings, call or pay the person a visit.
- **Care about correctness.** People are still judged by their writing, whether electronic or paper based. Sloppy e-mail messages (with missing apostrophes, haphazard spelling, and jumbled writing) make readers work too hard. They resent not only the information but also the writer.
- **Care about tone.** Your words and writing style affect the reader. Avoid sounding curt, negative, or domineering.
- **Resist humor and sarcasm.** Without the nonverbal cues conveyed by your face and your voice, humor can easily be misunderstood.

Avoid sending sensitive, confidential, inflammatory, or potentially embarrassing messages because e-mail is not private.

OFFICE INSIDER

"E-mail is today's version of a business letter or interoffice memo. Think accordingly. Make it look professional."

—Tennille M. Robinson, Black Enterprise

Netiquette

Although e-mail is a relatively new communication channel, a number of rules of polite online interaction are emerging.

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- **Never send blanket copies and "spam."** Sending unsolicited advertisements ("spam") either by fax or e-mail is illegal in the United States. Address copies only to people who really need to see a message. It is unnecessary to document every business decision with an electronic paper trail.
- **Use capital letters only for emphasis or for titles.** Avoid writing entire messages in all caps, which is like SHOUTING.
- **Don't forward without permission, and beware of long threads.** Obtain approval before forwarding a message. Also beware of forwarding e-mail consisting of a long thread (string) of messages. Some content in bottom screens may be inappropriate for the third receiver. Aside from the issue of clutter, leaving sensitive information in the thread can lead to serious trouble.

Reading and Replying to E-Mail

The following tips can save you time and frustration when reading and answering messages:
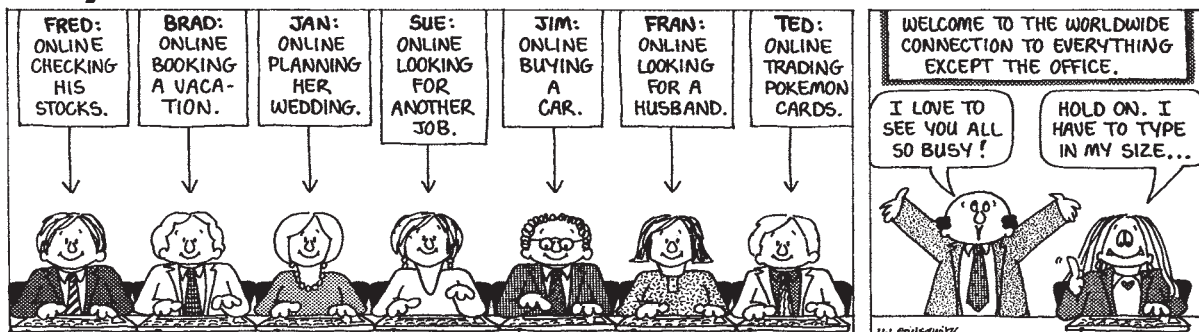
- **Scan all messages in your inbox before replying to each individually.** Because subsequent messages often affect the way you respond, scan all messages first (especially all those from the same individual).
- **Print only when necessary.** Generally, read and answer most messages online without saving or printing. Use folders to archive messages on special topics. Print only those messages that are complex, controversial, or involve significant decisions and follow-up.
- **Acknowledge receipt.** If you can't reply immediately, tell when you can (*Will respond Friday*).
- **Don't automatically return the sender's message.** When replying, cut and paste the relevant parts. Avoid irritating your recipients by returning the entire thread (sequence of messages) on a topic.
- **Revise the subject line if the topic changes.** When replying or continuing an e-mail exchange, revise the subject line as the topic changes.
- **Provide a clear, complete first sentence.** Avoid fuzzy replies such as *That's fine with me* or *Sounds good!* Busy respondents forget what was said in earlier messages, so be sure to fill in the context and your perspective when responding.
- **Never respond when you are angry.** Calm down before shooting off a response to an upsetting message. You will come up with different and better options after thinking about what was said. If possible, iron out differences in person.

Personal Use

Remember that office computers are meant for work-related communication.

- **Don't use company computers for personal matters.** Unless your company specifically allows it, never use your employer's computers for personal messages, personal shopping, or entertainment.

> Scan all messages before responding, paste in relevant sections, revise the subject if the topic changes, provide a clear first sentence, and never respond when angry.

Cathy © Universal Uclick

- **Assume that all e-mail is monitored.** Employers legally have the right to monitor e-mail, and about 75 percent of them do.

Other Smart E-Mail Practices

Depending on your messages and audience, the following tips promote effective electronic communication.

- **Design your messages effectively.** When a message requires several screens, help the reader with headings, bulleted lists, side headings, and perhaps an introductory summary that describes what will follow. Although these techniques lengthen a message, they shorten reading time.
- **Consider cultural differences.** Be clear and precise in your language. Remember that figurative clichés (*pull up stakes, play second fiddle,*) sports references (*hit a home run, play by the rules*), and slang (*cool, stoked*) may confuse nonnative speakers of English.
- **Double-check before hitting the** Send **button.** Avoid the necessity of sending a second message, which makes you look careless. Use your spell-checker, and reread for fluency before sending. Verify important facts and the spelling of names.

Using Instant Messaging and Texting Professionally and Safely

Making their way from teen bedrooms to office boardrooms, instant messaging (IM) and text messaging have become permanent and powerful communication tools. IM enables you to use the Internet to communicate in real time in private chat rooms with one or more individuals. It is like live e-mail or a text telephone call. More and more workers are using it as a speedy communication channel to exchange short messages.

Text messaging, or texting, is another popular means for exchanging brief messages in real time. Usually delivered by smartphone, texting requires a short message service (SMS) supplied by a cell phone service provider.

How Instant Messaging and Texting Work

To send an instant message, you might use a client such as such as Microsoft's Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, and AOL's Instant Messenger, or newer services such as Google Talk, Digsby, and Trillian Astra that integrate social network updates.[4] Once the client is installed, you enter your name and password to log on. The software checks to see if any of the users in your contact list are currently logged in. If the server finds any of your contacts, it sends a message back to your computer. If the person you wish to contact is online, you can click that person's name and a window opens that you can enter text into. You enter a message, such as that shown in Figure 5.3, and click **Send**. Unlike e-mail, IM and texting provide no elaborate page layout options. The text box is small, and pressing the **Enter** key sends the message. Obviously, it is designed for brief but fast text interaction.

New applications allow people to use IM not only on their computers but also on their handheld devices such as the popular iPhone shown in Figure 5.4. Many smartphones work on a 3G or 4G cell phone network where they consume minutes, but they may also allow generally free Wi-Fi access where available.

Texting, on the other hand, usually requires a smartphone or PDA, and users are charged for the service, often by choosing a flat rate for a certain number of text or media messages per month. Lately, voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) providers such as Skype offer texting. For a small fee, Skype subscribers can send text messages to SMS-enabled cell phones in the United States and IM messages both domestically and internationally. Skype and other formerly computer-based applications are simultaneously available on mobile devices and are making communication on the go more convenient than ever before.