

The Do's and Don'ts of E-mail

As an online business owner or as a netizen or even as a part of your normal job, it's a verity that e-mail has taken precedence over any other form of communication. In fact e-mail has emerged as a vital line of communication with your clients, associates, acquaintances, friends and family. Your approach to e-mail communication could make the difference between your business' or websites' success and failure. Every e-mail you send should be considered as a learning exercise in marketing.

In today's fast paced global economy, e-mail offers the much needed convenience of quickly delivering your message across to your clients or colleagues at any given hour of the day or night. No doubt e-mail has emerged as the primary source of communication for business and work related aspects. As your business/website grows, be prepared for the influx of e-mail. It will take up major part of your time, but the benefits of dealing with enquiries courteously and efficiently could be immense.

Implementing and following e-mail etiquette (also known as netiquette) not only makes for effective professional communication, but also helps build a good brand image with the clients and within the organization. However, one needs to adopt a soft approach to avoid being accused of spamming (sending mass unsolicited e-mails, which could have negative repercussions).

Addressed here are some of the "Netiquette" issues that often crop up with e-mail communication. The following tips, when implemented could help you in fine-tuning your e-mail 'Netiquette' skills:

- In the present day e-mail are infested with viruses and by spammers, so assuming that every e-mail message is valid would be a losing proposition. Viruses generally spread through e-mail attachments. Before opening or viewing any attachment make sure to scan them
- Make it a point to remember that whatever e-mail you send to others, has the potential to be public, hence use the e-mails judiciously
- Make sure that any material you reproduce follows the copyright act. Indicate sources, references and quotes wherever necessary. Plagiarism applies to e-mail messages as much as other documents
- Giving access of your e-mail ID to others could result in misuse, landing you in trouble
- When forwarding any message that you have received, remember not to change the wordings. While replying just quote or send the relevant parts of the original message, instead of sending the whole message
- E-mail being a non-verbal media of communication lacks the advantages that a face-to-face communication carries. Care should be taken not to project a wrong message through sarcasm or slapstick humor
- Good manners cost you nothing, but reflect your persona. If you know the person's first name, make sure that you use it. Getting straight into the subject-line is considered as being

arrogant. It's also rude to start the message without any salutation like "Hi, Hello or Dear." Being polite and courteous matters as well as pays

- Avoid being hasty. When responding to mails remember that any e-mail sent cannot be recalled. Take care while sending "flame" mails (in the heat of the moment). When you are angry, place your e-mail in the drafts folder and act on it later
- Keep specific subject-lines in your e-mails. Sending e-mails with blank subject-lines could be annoying to people who receive large quantity of e-mails and prioritize them based on the subject lines
- Putting a 'Tag' of 'High-Importance' (a feature available in some e-mails), should be done only when its really needed
- In your e-mails, if you wish to include signatures keep it short (4-5 lines). Always, include your name in the mail, people have a right to know who they are communicating with (its also required under the Anti-Spam Policy). As a basic courtesy gesture, make sure that atleast you include your first name in the e-mail
- When sending multiple e-mails, make sure that the distribution list is responsibly used, wherein the message goes only to the intended recipients. Sending unnecessary, big-sized attachments, could have issues with the Mail Servers
- When there is a need to address various e-mail IDs, but wherein the recipients aren't familiar with each other, their privacy should be respected by putting the list of names under 'Bcc' (Blind Carbon Copy) category. This would ensure that the recipients will only see their names displayed and not the complete list
- Be prompt. Read and reply to the e-mails you regularly receive. The communication tends to loose its relevance if the e-mail stays for a longer period in your inbox
- Periodically keep your inbox updated. Delete junk/unwanted e-mails from your inbox on a daily basis. This will help you keep track of the communication made till date and any important e-mails/information that needs to be saved
- Its of vital importance to save your important messages (both business and personal) into a folder of your choice, to keep a record for future reference (technically – e-mails are legal documents)
- Making use of customized and specialized stationeries in your e-mails could look attractive at your end, but at the recipients end it could be a mess, with images not opening up, taking greater time to download on the screen, and other technical compatibility issues. The best response could be elicited by keeping your e-mails plain, generic, readable and meaningful
- In cases, when you receive messages that might seem arrogant or rude, you shouldn't be caught off-guard. Retaliating in the same tone won't help – it just may be a case where the person is not familiar with the English language or has problems with communication or is just having a bad day. Try and maintain a professional approach – a friendly note back could change the entire attitude and scenario

Last but not the least it would help a great deal to remember and understand that human communication is such a fragile thing; 'one word' carries the potential to make the difference between getting your message across effectively or causing a rift.

For as Pythagoras said, "Do not say a little in many words but a great deal in a few."

In today's global economy, to stay competitive, businesses need to be one up with their communication giving predominance to e-mails with greater focus on e-mail etiquette and implementation. Before getting started, note here the three basic reasons on why should a company or organization adopt and follow e-mail etiquette rules:

1. **Professional Approach:** Ensuring the right communication tone and language will project your company's image, values, principles and above all professionalism
2. **Focus on Efficiency:** E-mails that are well-written, are brief and precise, tend to elicit better and quicker responses. Such e-mails prove to be efficient when compared to ill-timed and poorly written e-mails
3. **Be aware of Liability issues:** Keeping abreast with the liability laws, rules and issues will protect your company's interests and keep it away from any potential lawsuits

Presented here are 32 etiquette-tips that could further help you master your e-mailing skills

Make the Best of these "32 E-mail Etiquette Tips":

1. **Communicate to the point. Be concise:** It's a busy world out there, and people have little time on hand. Keep your messages short, simple and precise. Note that reading an e-mail on a computer screen is strenuous than reading printed communications. A long e-mail is better avoided
2. **Make a point to answer questions, also any further related questions:** An e-mail reply must answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions – If you do not answer all the questions in the original e-mail, you will receive further e-mails regarding the unanswered questions, which will not only waste your time and your customer's time but also cause considerable frustration. Moreover, if you are able to pre-empt relevant questions, your customer will be grateful and impressed with your efficient and thoughtful customer service
3. **Eliminate spelling-mistakes, apply proper grammar and punctuation:** This is not only important because spelling mistakes, improper grammar and punctuation give a bad impression of your company. Its imperative to convey the message precisely, properly and meaningfully. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text. And, if your program has a spell checking option, make good use of it
4. **Keep it personal:** Not only should the e-mail be personally addressed, it should also include personal i.e. customized content
5. **Use templates for frequently used responses:** Some questions you get over and over again, such as directions to your office or how to subscribe to your newsletter. Save these texts as response templates and paste these into your message when you need them. You can save your templates in a Word document, or use pre-formatted e-mails
6. **Answer swiftly:** Customers send an e-mail because they wish to receive quick responses. If they did not want a quick response they would send a letter or a fax. Therefore, each e-mail should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. If the e-mail is complicated, just send an e-mail back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them. This will put the customer's mind at rest and thereby they would tend to be very patient
7. **Don't attach unnecessary files:** By sending large attachments you could annoy customers and jam-up their e-mail system. Wherever possible try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive

8. **Use proper structure and layout:** Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and layout is very important for e-mail messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview
9. **Do not overuse the high priority option:** If you are habituated to overuse the high priority option, it will lose its function when you really need it. Moreover, even if a mail has high priority, your message will come across as slightly aggressive if you flag it as 'high priority'
10. **Do not write in CAPITAL letters:** Using UPPER-CASE letters in your e-mails is considered equivalent to "SHOUTING". This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame mail. Make use of the upper case letters only when there's a need to emphasize
11. **Keep the messages connected:** When you reply to an e-mail, you must include the original e-mail in your reply, in other words click 'Reply' instead of 'New Mail'. If you receive many e-mails you obviously cannot remember each individual e-mail. This means that a 'threadless e-mail' will not provide enough information and you will have to spend a frustratingly long time to find out the context of the e-mail in order to deal with it
12. **Add disclaimers to your e-mails:** It is important to add disclaimers to your internal and external mails, since this can help protect your company from liability issues
13. **Read the e-mail before it's sent:** A lot of people don't bother to read an e-mail before they send it out, as can be seen from the many spelling and grammar mistakes contained in e-mails. Apart from this, reading your e-mail through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings and inappropriate comments
14. **Don't overuse 'Reply to All':** Use 'Reply to All' feature only if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message
15. **Mailings > use the Bcc: field or do a mail merge:** When sending an e-mail mailing, some people place all the e-mail addresses in the To: field. There are two drawbacks to this practice: (1) the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients, and (2) you are publicizing someone else's e-mail address without their permission. It helps, if you have Microsoft Outlook and Word, you can do a mail merge and create one message for each recipient. A mail merge also allows you to use fields in the message so that you can for instance address each recipient personally
16. **Be careful with abbreviations and emoticons:** In business e-mails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations and in business e-mails these are generally not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it
17. **Be alert with formatting:** Remember that when you use formatting in your e-mails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. When using colors, use a color that is easy to read on the background
18. **Take care with rich text and HTML messages:** Be aware that when you send an e-mail in rich text or HTML format, the sender might only be able to receive plain text e-mails. If this is the case, the recipient will receive your message as a .txt attachment. Most e-mail clients however, including Microsoft Outlook, are able to receive HTML and rich text messages

19. **Do not forward chain letters:** Do not forward chain letters. We can safely say that all of them are hoaxes. Just delete the letters as soon as you receive them
20. **Do not request delivery and read receipts:** This will almost always annoy your recipient before he or she has even read your message. Besides, it usually does not work anyway since the recipient could have blocked that function, or his/her software might not support it, so what is the use of using it? If you want to know whether an e-mail was received it is better to ask the recipient to let you know if it was received
21. **Do not ask to recall a message:** Biggest chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. A recall request would look very silly in that case. It is better just to send an e-mail to say that you have made a mistake. This will look much more honest than trying to recall a message
22. **Do not copy a message or attachment without prior permission:** Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws and issues
23. **Do not use e-mail to discuss confidential information:** Sending an e-mail is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your e-mail to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Moreover, never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in e-mails, even if they are meant to be a joke
24. **Use a meaningful subject:** Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. For instance, when you send an e-mail to a company requesting information about a product, it is better to mention the actual name of the product, e.g. 'Product A information' than to just say 'product information' or the company's name in the subject
25. **Use active instead of passive voice:** Try to use the active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, 'We will process your order today', sounds better than 'Your order will be processed today'. The first sounds more personal, whereas the latter, especially when used frequently, sounds unnecessarily formal
26. **Avoid using words like 'URGENT' and 'IMPORTANT':** Even more so than the high-priority option, you must at all times try to avoid these types of words in an e-mail or subject line. Use it sparingly and use it only when it is really urgent or important message
27. **Don't use long sentences:** Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. E-mail is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters. Also take care not to send e-mails that are too long. If a person receives an e-mail that looks like a dissertation, chances are that they will not even attempt to read it!
28. **Don't send or forward e-mails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks:** By sending or even just forwarding one libelous, or offensive remark in an e-mail, you and your company can face court cases resulting in multi-million dollar penalties
29. **Don't forward virus hoaxes and chain letters:** If you receive an e-mail message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. Hoaxes and chain letters tend to use up valuable bandwidth. Since it is impossible to find out whether these mails and letters are real or not, the best thing to do is send them to 'Trash'
30. **Adopt a neutral language gender:** In this day and age, avoid using sexist language such as: 'The user should add a signature by configuring his e-mail program'. Apart from using

he/she, you can also use the neutral gender: "The user should add a signature by configuring the e-mail program"

- 31. Don't reply to spam:** By replying to spam or by unsubscribing, you are confirming that your e-mail address is 'live'. Confirming this will only generate even more spam. Therefore, just hit the delete button or use e-mail software to remove spam automatically
- 32. Sparingly use the 'CC' field:** Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message. Using the cc: field can be confusing since the recipients might not know who is supposed to act on the message. In general, do not include the person in the cc: field unless you have a particular reason for wanting this person to see your response. Again, make sure that this person will know why they are receiving a copy

Conclusion: Too often, people tend to forget that they are 'anonymous' when it comes to their presence on the Internet. Your friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues may know you as a 'friend indeed' or a 'loving human being' or a 'helping hand' or as a 'tireless worker', but out on the Internet people don't know that. To the 'Netizens' (online audiences), you're just another font in an e-mail or in an online forum (where your messages are posted). If you allow access to your website, your image is projected from the website the way it is created and by what the site communicates. But, by and large, you are noted as being 'anonymous' on the Internet. So when there is a need at your end to establish an online presence or carry out your business dealings through the Internet, make it a point to project a well-branded and professional image via your e-mails.

Though e-mails are less intrusive than a phone call and faster than a letter, first impressions are as important here as any other business communiqué. It would be worth its pie to remember that an e-mail may be your introduction to someone you never met before, for example: a prospective client or colleague or your new boss or even a prospective employer. For remember, next time, when you are on your PC and ready to communicate through the e-mail, take your time for putting together a well-written message....'coz *once you hit the send button you don't get another chance to reverse it.*

Source / Reference URLs:

www.emailreplies.com

www.ezinearticles.com

www.heatherswebdesign.com