

How To Win With Electronic Mail

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The easiest method of communication today seems to be electronic mail or e-mail, as it is commonly called. It has replaced the memo or business letter of old. So common is this method of communication that the typical businessperson easily sends or receives 75-100 e-mails a day. Many senior level executives send or receive 150-200 e-mails a day. That is a lot of information to manage. Make it easy on the people that read your e-mails by remembering a few simple principles.

First, the subject line is very important and easily overlooked, particularly if you are responding to an e-mail that has been sent to you. Because most people get so many e-mails, they scan the subject lines to see which e-mails require immediate attention. If you write your subject line with the intent of wetting people's appetite, you will increase the likelihood of people reading it. Instead of a generic subject line that says, "Friday's meeting," try this, "Things to remember to ask at Friday's client meeting at ABC Corporation." The more specific the subject line, the more you call attention to what is to follow.

Because e-mail has replaced the face-to-face meeting or even a phone conversation in many instances, make sure any e-mail you send is written at a professional level. This is not the right venue for sensitive information. Your e-mails may be printed and distributed or forwarded to others. Years ago an e-mail the newscaster, Bryant Gumbel, thought was private, was published and distributed, much to his horror. If it can happen to him, it can happen to you. Some people in an attempt to be more casual frequently add what is called emoticons, symbols like a smiley face or numbers or letters to indicate they are upset. Again, it is best to avoid these and be professional.

Being professional also means taking the time to check grammar, punctuation and spelling. If your tool bar offers grammar and spell check, make sure to run it. However, grammar and spell checks do not catch all errors. Be diligent about checking for errors in tense, subject – verb agreement, and sentence structure. People will notice.

Just like with a newspaper article, letter or marketing piece, the first paragraph of your e-mail is critical. It should be clear and concise. E-mails that go on and on often get overlooked. Because of the sheer volume of e-mails received, sometimes the reader doesn't get back to re-reading it. If your e-mail is long, tell the reader why your e-mail is going to be lengthy in your opening remarks.

Whenever anyone reads an e-mail, they wonder what the purpose of the e-mail is. Immediately, tell them in your opening remarks. They also wonder if they are supposed to do anything. If there is an action step you need, make sure you are direct about what it is and what the benefit is for taking the action step you are requesting. Subsequent paragraphs can support your opening premise. If you want recipients to call you after reviewing the proposal, be sure to tell them when you are free. It will help to eliminate "phone tag."

Be aware, that people receive countless e-mails all day long. To insure that yours stands out, use strong nouns and action oriented verbs. When you proof read, eliminate any negative or tentative language. Words like, "maybe," "hopefully," or "might possibly" are weak and should be eliminated if you really want your reader to take action.

As you conclude your email, make it easy for your reader to reach you. Be sure to add your full name, title, e-mail, phone and fax number.

While e-mails are an efficient way to stay in touch with your clients, they can erode the relationship. They are impersonal and obviously, it is impossible for you to read between the lines. They offer limited expression of thoughts and feelings. If there is a disturbing e-mail from a client, do not use e-mail

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to respond. A personal phone call from you will go a long way to calming the person. E-mail should never replace the personal touch. Your clients work with you because they feel comfortable with you.

E-mail says a lot about you and your company. Make sure you put your best foot forward. Take time on the front end to write a well-thought out e-mail. You will make a positive, lasting impression.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.