

Build Credibility with Every E-mail You Write

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E-mails can either build or erode credibility. For e-mails to differentiate you in a positive light, take the time to write them clearly and concisely. Make sure to focus them on the recipients and their needs. Lastly, plainly define any follow-up actions.

When e-mails erode one's image, they contain unnecessary details, endless amounts of background or multiple digressions. Because today's business professionals often receive 50–250 e-mails a day, most readers only skim them for pertinent details. If readers can't discern relevance or clarity at a glance, they will begrudgingly read your text or skip to the next e-mail. If your e-mails fall into the pattern of being unclear or drawn out, people will loathe receiving any messages from you.

Mechanics and punctuation can also jeopardize credibility. Incorrect tense, agreement errors, comma splices, fragments or run-on sentences will be noticed and remembered. These errors will make the writer look careless or lazy. Additionally, the person's manager may want to review important e-mails before they are disseminated.

Finally, a lot of people are needlessly copied on e-mails. Unnecessary e-mails clog people's in-box. Consequently, recipients either delete the message or save it to a folder. Either way, they rarely read it. If they frequently get unnecessary e-mails from you, they will find it annoying.

Successful e-mail writers remember to do the following:

- Consider their audience first and foremost. If a method other than e-mail is better or preferred, they take the time to do what is appropriate. They are also very sure about who goes in the To, CC or BCC fields. They send their message to the minimum number of people.
- Use priority symbols only when appropriate.

- Create a headline for the subject line that answers the question, "What is this all about?" Their subject line generates reader interest.
- Keep their message brief out of respect for their readers. The message typically fits on the screen and is rarely more than one page. There is a lot of white space so that visually people see points quickly.
- Make ideas jump off the page by putting key points in a headline format and bold print.
- Use bullets so that readers easily find the specifics.
- Answer the questions people have in an opening paragraph—what's this all about; what am I suppose to do; what are the benefits for me.
- Proofread for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Are warm and friendly. Comments can be misinterpreted so they are mindful of tone.
- Avoid acronyms when possible.
- State any required actions directly.
- End their message as if writing a letter.

Since e-mail has become our primary means of communication, it is important to take the time to plan and edit your message. If your messages are applauded by others as clear and action-oriented, you will build your credibility.

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. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.