

Email Netiquette 101

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Given the sheer volume of emails that business users exchange on a daily basis, the odds are that you've probably received enough poorly written emails to suspect that civilization is on the brink of collapse. Maybe it was the fact that a client of yours has recently taken to discarding all punctuation marks in his emails. Maybe it was the fact that you seriously thought about emailing an employee explaining that the word "great" is not, in fact, spelled with the number eight.

Whatever the case may be, the truth is that we've all been guilty of sending a convoluted email or two. But by willfully ignoring email hygiene, we can cause misunderstandings, slow down the workflow, and damage the bottom line.

Sound email writing practices are essential to presenting your business with its best foot forward. Do you have an issue with email 'netiquette' in your organization? No to worry! Here are some valuable tips from our benefit partner HR Downloads.

Keeping it Short

Your employees may believe that the information they are trying to convey requires the same word count as War and Peace. However, online readers tend to have busy professional lives and a short attention span when it comes to email communications. Professionals need emails to get to the point quickly. They want to absorb the information that has been provided and move on to their next task; they don't have time to read an email the length of a Russian novel. Instead, email messages should be short, sweet, and direct. The main purpose of the email should be summed up in a succinct subject line; and emails should be front-loaded, i.e., it should begin with the priority information, preferably in the first paragraph, while relevant details are presented in the subsequent paragraphs. It is also beneficial to have an Internal Communications Policy to establish guidelines in your workplace.

Tricky Tonal Tangles

When it comes to email communication, all that the recipient has are written words – Morgan Freeman will not be doing a voiceover. As such, professionals have to make sure that they choose their words wisely so that the tone of their emails is never misinterpreted.

Consider the following message: "John, place the order ASAP." The writer of the email is making a demand on the recipient **but has dispensed of common courtesy**. Consequently, the tone ends up sounding harsh and unfriendly, and the response to it will usually be begrudging, at best.

In contrast, notice the tone in this email: "Hi John, as you may know, our inventory is running low. Please place the order as soon as you can. Thanks!" Here, the tone is more professional and courteous, and more likely to elicit a positive response. Employees should be aware of the tone an email may convey before it is sent.

Watching for Jargon Jawbreakers

How would you react if the following email graced your inbox one afternoon?

To: All Employees

From: Jacob Blöhardt

Subject: Synergistically incentivizing a marketing plan

Dear team,

Going forward, our team ecosystem needs holistic realignment. We have to strategize synergistically to incentivize a robust, solution-oriented marketing plan. Therefore, we have to dynamically leverage our deliverables so that we can proactively walk the talk.

Sincerely,

Jacob Blöhardt

If this master class in business speak leaves you scratching your head, you are not alone. The true meaning of the email is buried so far beneath industry jargon, mixed metaphors, and clichés that most professionals will either take one quick look at it, decide that it isn't saying anything concrete, and move on to the next task, or will spend wasted time trying to decipher the meaning. While the example provided here might be an exaggeration, the point is that instead of pretending to sound intelligent by spewing buzzwords and jargon, emails should be direct and unambiguous. They are much more effective that way!

Eliminating 'texting' Grammar

Just because emails are exchanged through a digital medium does not mean that basic rules of grammar have ceased to apply. Grammar might not be your organization's forte; maybe everyone had measles when they covered that chapter in English class. Nonetheless, there's no excuse for sending a business associate an email like, "hey, gr8 meeting 2day. Ill send u that info rite now!"

So when writing a business email, it is essential to follow the same grammatical rules that would be applied when writing in any other format. In other words, proper nouns and the first letter at the beginning of a sentence should be capitalized; "text speak" should be avoided and full words and sentences should be used; proper punctuation should be applied; and spellcheck should be used to make sure that emails are free of spelling errors.

Beware of the 'Overshare'

We understand that your account manager may be brimming with post-vacation excitement after his recent trip to the Bahamas. However, he should think twice before forwarding your entire department 34 pictures of him sipping colourful beverages with miniature umbrellas in them. While employees are free to send that email to their friends and family on their own time, they should avoid exchanging non-work related emails while in a business environment. Otherwise, they not only run the risk of violating your company's email usage policy, they may also be wasting valuable company time – download our [Email Appropriate Use Policy](#) for more information.

In addition, professionals should exercise discretion when using the "Reply All" function. It should be used only when all the recipients who are included in the email thread will find the response relevant, or as dictated by company policy. If someone on your team is forwarding a BuzzFeed article about pet owners who look like their pets to the entire company, there's a good chance that they are on the wrong track.

Final Thought

Because it is so easy to exchange emails, it's not surprising that some think of it as no big deal. But the reality is that ineffective communication can not only damage your professional image, it can have a very real impact on a company's bottom line. In fact, a recent study has found that a business with 100 employees suffers from an average downtime of 17 hours per week clarifying communications at an annual cost of over \$500,000. So before employees and co-workers decide to hit the "Send" button, make sure they're minding their email *'netiquette'*!

Resources

<http://www.merkleinc.com/news-and-events/press-releases/2011/merkle-publishes-view-digital-inbox-whitepaper>

<http://360solutions.com/documents/Communication%20White%20Paper.pdf>

<http://vingapp.com/top-communication-tools-business-12-email-statistics/>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacobmorgan/2013/10/15/5-ways-email-makes-your-employees-miserable/>