10 Tips for writing business emails that say the right thing about you

By Lyndsay Swinton

A recent UK study showed that 25% of the workforce spent at least one hour per day managing and writing business emails, of which 34% were irrelevant. That's 2 hours per week you may as well be sitting on the beach sipping cocktails!

Consider this. Every business email you write is like a personal PR agent. What do your emails say about you? "The writer of this email is disorganized / creative / thoughtful / unthinking?"

Here are 10 tips to ensure that when you write business emails you give people the right impression…

Business Email Writing Tips

1. Stop, think then write (or don't!)

Are you emailing to say you'd telephone when the fax goes through? Is a phone call more appropriate? Choosing the right communication medium will increase your chance of being listened to.

2. Prevent premature sending

To avoid sending a badly spelled, half written pile of rubbish, wait until you have written the email before you key in the recipient's names. Hitting send too early is a painful, toe-curling experience.

3. Be professional

You lose control of your email as soon as you hit 'Send' so stick to professional language. Out go all "ist" comments – racist, sexist, ageist, genderist (okay so I

made that last one up but you get my drift). Even your own brand of oh-so-funny humour can cause offence in the wrong hands.

4. If in doubt, spell it out!

How well you know your audience will dictate whether you use short hand, jargon, abbreviations and emoticons. If in doubt, spell it out! Always err on the side of being too polite and respectful, particularly when writing emails to business colleagues where translation may be required.

Use the spell-check and re-read your email before it goes out. To, two and too will all be spelled correctly but which is the correct in context? And to all you text savvy hipsters out there – I h8 ur txt style emails. Leave it to the kids.

5. Be precise, concise and clear

• Keep it brief
• Use the subject header
• Get to the point, quickly
• Use "urgent" flags sparingly
• Use bullets (did you see how I cunningly demonstrated by example?)

6. Tailor emails to your audience

Always open emails with a hello and use the name that they signed off with, even if it's crazyhorse38!

If you must send the same email to loads of people, put their address in the bcc box and use just one email address in the To box . This keeps the person's email address private and makes it look like you've taken the time to write a personal email.

Getting technical, there are mail merge functions that do all the hard work for you. Warning to novice emailers – test before you go emailing the world!

7. Most people can't read minds

Writing an email to a career site requesting "all the stuff you have on getting a job" could at best land you with a load of bandwidth hungry information or at worst be ignored. The more specific you are, the more likely you are to get a response.

If responding to multiple questions embedded in a large email, copy the questions into your email and write your answers next to them.

8. Keep your cool

Your emotional state can slip into an email without notice, with curt sentences, skipped pleasantries and blunt asks. I purposefully let these emails gather dust until the person writes again in a more appropriate tone or picks up the phone. You wouldn't tolerate someone coming to your desk and having a tantrum would you?

TAKE OFF THE CAPS LOCK KEY. It's rude to shout.

9. Need to know basis.

A common business email warfare tactic is to cc in senior managers in the vain thought that this adds weight to the communication. Fight your fights in private so that when you really need someone else to step in, they know you mean it.

10. Be clean and tidy!

Attachments clog up networks and spread viruses. Could the salient points be pasted into the email? If you value your PC, only open attachments if you trust the source. Use spam filters and delete chain emails or other scams and make the web world a better place.

Writing business emails well can make you stand out in the corporate landscape. Writing them badly can do the same, but for very different reasons. These 10 email writing tips will help you get it right.

Oh, and finally always sign off professionally.

Best Regards
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