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Email Etiquette

Your e-mail is as much a part of your professional image as the clothes you wear and the handshake you offer. If you want to impress on every front and build positive business relationships, pay attention to your e-mail and steer clear of these e-mail mistakes:

1. Omitting the Subject Line

It makes no sense to send a message that reads "no subject" and seems to be about nothing. Given the huge volume of e-mail that each person receives, the subject header is essential if you want your message read any time soon.

2. Not Making Your Subject Line Meaningful

The subject line should be pertinent to your message, not just "Hi" or "Hello." The recipient is going to decide the order in which he/she reads e-mail based on who sent it and what it is about. Your e-mail will have lots of competition.

3. Failing to Change the Header to Correspond with the Subject

For example, if you are writing your web publisher, your subject line may be "Web site content." However, as your site develops and you send more information, label each message for what it is, "contact info," "graphics," or "home page." Don't just hit "reply" every time. Adding more details to the subject line will allow the recipient to find a specific document in his/her message folder without having to search every one you sent. Start a new message if you change the subject all together.

4. Not Personalizing Your Message to the Recipient

E-mail is informal but it still needs a greeting. Begin with "Dear Mr. Broome," "Dear Jim," "Hello Mr. Broome" or just "Mr. Jim Broome." Failure to put in the person's name can make you and your e-mail seem cold. If a job posting asks you to submit a resume via email to an email box that does not disclose the name of the person, use a greeting of "Dear Human Resources" or "Dear Hiring Manager".

5. Not Accounting for Tone

When communicating with another person face to face, 93% of the message is non-verbal. E-mail has no body language. The reader cannot see your face or hear your tone of voice, so choose your words carefully and thoughtfully. Do not capitalize every letter, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING and will come across as too aggressive to the reader.

6. Forgetting to Check for Spelling and Grammar

If you have spelling and grammar mistakes in an email, people will question your attention to detail and the caliber of other work you do. Use proper capitalization and punctuation, and always check your spelling. Remember that your spellchecker will catch misspelled words, but not misused ones. It cannot tell whether you meant to say "from" or "form," "for" or "fro", "he" or "the."

7. Writing the Great American Novel

E-mail is meant to be brief. Keep your message short. Use only a few paragraphs and a few sentences per paragraph. People skim their e-mail, so a long missive is wasted. If you find yourself writing an overly long message, pick up the phone or call a meeting.

8. Forwarding E-Mail without Permission

Most everyone is guilty of this one, but think about it. If the message was sent to you and only you, why would you take responsibility for passing it on? Too often confidential information has gone global because of someone's lack of judgment. Unless you are asked or request permission, do not forward anything that was sent just to you. When choosing to include others in an email exchange, understand what CC and BCC are. CC is Carbon Copy, meaning all parties included in an email can see who the other recipients are. BCC is Blind Carbon Copy, meaning only you are aware of who is included. BCC is commonly used when it is important to protect recipients' privacy, such as when emailing a large group of people who may not know one another.

9. Thinking That No One Else Will Ever See Your E-Mail

Once it has left your mailbox, you have no idea where your e-mail will end up. Don't use the Internet to send anything that you couldn't stand to see on a billboard on your way to work the next day. Use other means to communicate personal or sensitive information.

10. Leaving Off Your Signature

Always close with your name, even though it is included at the top of the e-mail, and add contact information such as your phone, fax and street address. The recipient may want to call to talk further or send you documents that cannot be e-mailed. Creating a formal signature block with all that data is the most professional approach.

11. Expecting an Instant Response

Not everyone is sitting in front of the computer with e-mail turned on. The beauty of Internet communication is that it is convenient. It is not an interruption. People can check their messages when it suits them, not you. If your communication is so important that you need to hear back right away, use the phone.

12. Completing the "To" Line First

The name or address of the person to whom you are writing is actually the last piece of information you should enter. Check everything else over carefully first. Proofread for grammar, punctuation, spelling and clarity. Did you say what needed to be said? How was your tone of voice? If you were the least bit emotional when you wrote the e-mail, did you let it sit for a period of time? Did you include the attachment you wanted to send? If you enter the recipient's name first, a mere slip of the finger can send a message before its ready.

13. Emoticons and Phonetic Spelling

 Do not use emoticons in professional emails. As stated above, be sure to always check spelling to ensure you are spelling words correctly and using the appropriate word for the message you are trying to send. For example, using "ur" for "you are", "you're" or "your" is unprofessional.