

Make Your E-Mail Signature File WORK for You!

By Alexandria K. Brown

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You're probably familiar with e-mail signature (or "sig") files - they're the few lines of contact information that many of us put at the bottom of every e-mail we send. Most e-mail software programs allow you to create and use sig files - even the newer versions of AOL.

I've heard some people who don't use sig files defend their position by saying, "All my clients know my info - I don't need to remind them with every e-mail." Stop! You're missing a perfect opportunity to promote your business, as well as do your clients and prospects a favor.

When you think about how many e-mails you actually send a day, it's probably more than you realized! Some people send over 100 a day. That's a lot of mail - and a lot of chances to slip in your own subtle marketing messages.

****Sig Files Put You at Their Fingertips****

People love it when you make information easy to find. Sure, your clients have your phone number somewhere, but they'll really appreciate it when they can grab your number right from an e-mail they're looking at. In fact, e-mail is such a part of our lives now, that if someone needs your phone number quickly, she may be more likely to grab it off your latest e-mail than to dig up your business card. (Don't underestimate this occurrence - there are many disorganized people in the world!)

Also, if people want to put your info into their contact management software (Outlook, ACT, Palm, etc.), they can simply copy and paste it right from your sig file.

****Good Sig Files Tell Strangers What You Do****

When you e-mail people who aren't familiar with your business, your sig file can act as a subtle sales pitch. As a co-chair for NY Women in Communications Inc. (WICI), I book speakers for our monthly cocktail events. I conduct most of this work via e-mail. Now, these people only know me as a representative of WICI; they have no idea what I do for a living. But one woman, after spotting my sig file, promptly wanted to learn more about my services. This prospect would never have learned what I do unless it was clear in my sig file!

****Sig Files Are Ready to Travel****

E-mails are forwarded all the time. You never know where yours may end up, and one of the recipients may be very interested in your service or product. I learned this when I got a call from a

prospect in Israel. A colleague of his here in the U.S. had forwarded him an interesting issue of my e-newsletter. He learned about my services and got my phone number from the sig file at the bottom.

****Sig Files Are a Great Promotional Tool****

Now, let's move beyond the obvious stuff. Think of your sig file as a little messenger who speaks to everyone you send an e-mail to. What do you want him to say? Do you have great news? A new product or service? A free newsletter or report? Let us know via your sig file!

****Your Sig File Checklist****

Here are several items to consider putting into your sig file. CAUTION: Do not attempt to insert them all! Choose what's most important for you and your business.

- your name and title
- your company name
- your company tagline, or a short phrase that describes what your company does
- your address
- your phone, cell phone, and/or pager numbers
- your fax number
- your e-mail address (sometimes people can't get it directly or quickly from your actual e-mail)
- your Web URL (be sure to include the "http://" prefix to ensure it will translate as a hyperlink on most e-mail programs)

Now, also consider putting promotional info in your sig file, such as:

- an offer for a free report or product you offer
- an offer for a free consultation or trial offer
- a company announcement (new client, new product, award won, etc.)
- a hyperlink to your latest press release, article, or Web site feature
- an invitation to subscribe to your free e-newsletter

In the interest of space and your reader's time, keep your offer or announcement to one or two sentences only. (Tip: Always throw in the word "free" when possible. It's everyone's favorite word!)

Bonus: Most e-mail software programs allow you to create and keep several signatures on file, so you can change them easily and often. This makes it a cinch to switch your messages weekly or even daily, and maintain ones for different businesses.

****Choose What's Important to You****

Of course, it's possible to get carried away and include too much information. We don't need random quotes that have no relation to your business, cute illustrations made up of keyboard characters, or your weekend phone number in the Hamptons.

Try to keep your sig file to a maximum of eight lines. More than that will overwhelm the reader, and it will look silly if your sig files are always longer than your e-mail messages!

Here's a good example:

Jane Smith, President

Smith I.T. Consulting

"Take a Byte Out of Network Headaches"

ph: 800-321-0000 fax: 212-321-0001 jane@smithit.com

*Visit <http://www.smithit.com> and get your FREE report on the top 10 most common computer

network problems and how to solve them!*

Notice that "Jane" opted not to give her mailing address here, in order to use the space for her tagline and an invitation to receive her free report. It's all up to you. If your customers frequently need your mailing address, then you should include it. (I don't include it in mine, since 99% of my work is done via e-mail.) Decide what bits of info are most valuable to keep, and use the rest of the space for a unique message or promotion!

****One Last Thing: Make Sure We "Get" What You Do****

I've seen some seemingly complete sig files that still leave me wondering, "Thanks for all the info, but what do you DO?" We all know what IBM and Kodak do, but the whole world doesn't know what your business does (yet). For now, it's your job to help us all learn. Include a tagline that describes what your company does or a short phrase that helps us understand. If your sig file consistently delivers a clear impression of what you have to offer your prospects, it will reward you numerous times in the future!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexandria Brown's FREE biweekly e-zine gives "how-to" tips on writing compelling copy for Web sites, brochures, and e-zines. Learn how to attract new clients and strengthen your customer relationships! Subscribe today at <http://www.akbwriting.com> or by e-mailing AKBMarCom-On@lists.webvalence.com

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