

Tips for Effectively Communicating Through Email

By Aaron Turpen

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For most everyone in business, whether for themselves or working for someone else, email has become a large percentage of their communications. For most people, the workday begins by logging into their email client and retrieving email. The first few minutes of the day are occupied drinking coffee and responding to emails received.

For some businesses, email is the most critical type of communications – surpassing even the old standby, the phone.

No matter how often you use it, email is probably an important part of your personal and corporate communications. Despite this, many are not trained or do not understand the proper “etiquette” involved in using this powerful tool. After all, you can send and receive emails to and from any part of the world in seconds, but if you aren’t using the medium well, you may not be communicating effectively.

Here are a few tips to enhance your email communications that will save you time, increase your effectiveness, and make you appear much more professional.

1) Make your subject line actually mean something.

I’m amazed at how many people use subject lines like “Cool” or “Good Stuff” to describe their email. These types of messages invariably end up at the bottom of my “to read” list in favor of more descriptive subjects such as “Project Quote Needed” or “CGI Problem.”

2) Keep your message short.

Of all the email rules, this is the one I break most often. I am, after all, a good talker and since I type 80wpm, I can translate this into long emails. This is not usually a good way to communicate. I compromise by making sure the gist of my email is inside the first few sentences and go from there.

3) DON’T TYPE LIKE THIS

That’s considered yelling and is very rude and annoying. Enough said.

4) When you reply, include some sort of “recap” of the prior message.

When responding (replying) to a message, make sure that at least enough of the original message is included that the receiver will remember what was being said. If you’re an AOL user, this is even more important since AOL’s email client does not quote the original email by default.

5) Watch your spelling

Use a spellchecker if you can, but watch your spelling. Common typos and other “hurried” mistakes can really undermine your professionalism. Take the extra few seconds to re-read what you’ve typed at least once before you hit the “send” button.

6) Don’t use HTML email unless it’s REALLY necessary.

I can’t count the number of emails I receive with those nifty “themes” included – graphical backgrounds, sidebars, signatures, etc. Funny thing is, most of them appear as an email with a bunch of graphic file attachments and probably don’t look anything like what the sender expected. I usually make sure to thank the sender for sending me their clipart, even though I really have no use for it.

7) Use the BCC tag to send your jokes, chain letters, etc.

I can’t stand seeing an email that starts off with a huge chain of “To” and “Cc” emails at the top. Not only is this unsightly, it is also an open invitation for the one bad apple in the bunch to gather the emails for his/her SPAM list. Send the email to yourself and include all of those people in the “Bcc” field (Blind Carbon Copy). This way, each recipient sees only his or her email and yours. Much cleaner and much safer.

8) Answer email quickly.

Obviously, this needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Don’t ruin your productivity by jumping every time the email sound is made on your computer. Make sure, however, that you answer email in a timely fashion (within a working day is best). I personally check email first thing in the morning, mid-day, and at the end of the working day. I also periodically check during the day as time permits or as a distraction to freshen my mind.

9) Use a signature file.

Your email signature, which most email clients can insert automatically, is a great way to communicate not only who you are, but also what you do. I keep a list of rotating signatures which include quick (one-line) marketing copy and a link to my website. In this way, no matter who you send email to or when, you are letting them know who you are and even where you are.

10) Don’t believe anything that someone forwards to you.

In my experience, 99.99% of the stuff you receive in your email announcing that some big company is giving money to people who forward the email for a test; announcing that some guy in any country starting with “N” needs you to “store” millions of dollars for him; or that if you send this email to 100 people, you’ll have good luck, love, or whatever else – is B.S. Save the rest of the world (and your friends) from this crap and just delete it when you receive it.

These tips should get you on your way towards more effective communication. Email is a great tool, but is generally not used very well. By streamlining your use of it, you can make your corner of the ‘Net less cluttered and much more useful!

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