The Web Page

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Practice proper e-etiquette

Electronic mail, usually abbreviated as e-mail, is the fastest-growing communication medium in the world. It is the second-most-popular communication tool next to the telephone. In 2000, more than 7 trillion e-mail messages traveled the wires in the United States alone, up from a mere 4 trillion in 1999. Additionally, the most recent findings report that the average businessperson sends and receives about 90 e-mail messages daily. And if you think your e-mail box is full now, just wait until 2005, when e-mail usage is expected to exceed 5 billion messages per day.

In order to use e-mail effectively and to be sure that others read and understand your messages, it is important to follow some simple e-mail communication guidelines. By utilizing proper e-etiquette, you can turn e-mail correspondences into effective communication tools.

The KISS principle

The KISS (Keep It Super Simple) principle should be the first rule of all e-mail communication. Whenever possible, keep your message short and to the point. Think of it as a telephone conversation, except you are typing instead of speaking. An appropriate maximum length of an e-mail message is one to two screens.

Check it often

Check your e-mail daily, and stay within the disk space you are allocated. Delete unwanted messages immediately, as they use up valuable storage space.

Scan your system for viruses

This is especially important when receiving or downloading files from other systems. For more information about viruses see the "Web Page" column in the April 2001 *Angus Journal.*

Plain text is best

When composing messages use plain text. There are several e-mail formats that cannot handle messages with a lot of formatting. Plain-text messages are also smaller in size and faster to open and read. The other option is composing e-mail in HTML. This allows you to change fonts, colors and sizes and to add graphics. If you choose to send messages in HTML format, expect some recipients to request plain text because their computers can't render the message.

Use BCCs

When sending an e-mail to multiple recipients, address it using the "blind carbon copies (BCC)" field. Just as it is not polite to give out a person's telephone number without his or her knowledge, it is not polite to give out someone's e-mail address. For example, when you send an e-mail message to 30 people and use the "To" or "carbon copy (CC)" fields to address the message, all 30 people see all 30 e-mail addresses. By using BCC, each recipient sees only two addresses — theirs and yours.

Meaningful subject line

Many people receive dozens of e-mail messages a day — business, personal and junk. In most cases recipients quickly scan their Inbox and if the subject line doesn't sound important they immediately click the "delete" button. To get your message read, give it a subject line that tells the recipient why they should read it. Properly titled messages also help people organize and prioritize their e-mail as they file it.

Check your spelling

To make sure your message isn't misunderstood due to misspelled words or bad grammar, use the spell checker and proofread it before sending.

Response time

In today's fast-paced society, people regard e-mail as instant communication. It is not designed for immediacy (that's why you have a telephone). It's designed for convenience. Depending on your recipient's workload, logon habits and time constraints, receiving a response to your message may take several days.

The general rule is to allow at least three days for an e-mail response. If you don't receive a reply, re-send the original message and insert "#2" into the subject line. If your original message subject line reads, "Sale information you requested," the re-sent subject line would read, "Sale information you requested — #2." If your second attempt doesn't get a response, consider calling your recipient and alerting them to your message.

Some e-mail programs have a feature that sends you an e-mail receipt when a person has received your e-mail. It does not mean the recipient actually read the message, but it does detect if the message was opened.

When should you reply?

One challenge with e-mail is that everyone wants to have the last word. As a result, an e-mail trail can continue on for days, with each additional message not adding anything to the subject's importance. This wastes time and takes up bandwidth space on the server.

On the other hand, if someone e-mails you a document to review, don't make them wait for a response. Send them confirmation that you received the document and will review it at your earliest convenience. This is similar to the order acknowledgments you receive from online retailers.

When you do reply to a message, use the correct "reply" button. All e-mail programs have a "Reply" and a "Reply to All" option. Clicking the Reply button sends your message to the original sender only. The Reply to All button sends your message to the original sender and to all the other
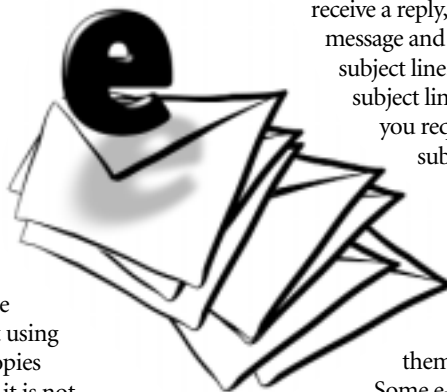
addresses listed in the original message's To, CC and BCC fields.

It is also important to set up your e-mail reply preferences so it is easy for you and your recipient to understand. Be sure your new message is the first block of text above the original message. Inserting your reply message below the original message can cause confusion.

Use the asterisk *

If you receive a message asking you to do something or give a one-word response, be polite and acknowledge you received the message. For example reply with "done," "OK," "yes," "no." To be even more helpful, instead of putting "Thanks" in the body of your reply, type "*Thanks" in the subject field of your reply. Then, as long as the recipient knows the meaning of the asterisk, they won't have to waste time opening the message. The asterisk means there's no need to open this message; I'm saying everything I need to right here in the subject line. Your recipient can simply glance at the Inbox, read the subject line and then delete the message.

Proper salutations

There is no rule on how to start an e-mail. You should make a decision based on each situation. In general I would use the following as a guide: If you normally address a person as Miss/Mrs./Ms./Mr. Smith, then that's the way you should initially address them in an e-mail. If you normally call them by their first name, then you should either omit the salutation or just type their name.

Include signatures

As a courtesy, include your name and contact information at the bottom of your message. Even though your e-mail address is included in the header of your message, it is nice to provide all of your contact information in one spot. Most e-mail programs have a "Signature" option, which allows you to set up a standard signature paragraph with your name, title and/or ranch name and contact information (address, phone, e-mail) that will load each time you start a new message.

Clean up your forwards

If you're going to forward a message to someone else, strip all the extraneous information and characters from it before clicking "send." This will cut down on the size of the message and makes it easier to

Table 1: Abbreviations

This	Means This
ASAP	as soon as possible
BTW	by the way
FWIW	for what it's worth
FYI	for your information
IAC	in any case
IMHO	in my humble opinion
IMNSHO	in my not-so-humble opinion
LOL	laughing out loud
ROTFL	rolling on the floor laughing
TTFN	ta ta for now (Tigger made this popular in the Winnie-the-Pooh stories)
TTYL	talk to you later
WTG	way to go

Table 2: Emoticons/Smiles

This	Means This
:-)	Smiley face (happy or laughing)
:-D	Really big grin
;-)	Wink (light sarcasm)
:-|	Indifference
:->	Devilish grin (heavy sarcasm)
:-/	Perplexed
:-(	Frown (anger or displeasure)
:-X	My lips are sealed
:-O	Yell
8-O	Surprise

read. This is just another form of common e-courtesy that too many people have forgotten (or don't think about).

Consider abbreviations

Abbreviation usage is quite common with e-mail. In the quest to save keystrokes, users have created their own "shorthand." Some of the more common abbreviations are listed in Table 1.

Emoticons/smiles

Some experienced e-mail users use emoticons, also known as smiles, to show feelings or intent in their messages. The icons look like faces turned on their sides. For example, if you run across a :-) in a message, it means the person who sent you the message is happy or the previous statement is meant as a joke. Use these sparingly. See Table 2 for a list of some of the more common emoticons.

Things not to do

Along with the things to do there are several things not to do when sending e-mail messages.

Do not forward a virus warning without verifying it. To verify a virus warning or to learn about the latest threats, go to *www.faqs.org* or *http://dir.yahoo.com/ Computers_and_Internet/Security_and_ Encryption/Viruses/*.

Try not to send e-mail messages using all uppercase letters. Typing a message in all capital letters looks like you are shouting and can be hard to read. Only use uppercase letters when trying to make a point or for section headings and titles.

Verify the accuracy of a message that says, "please forward" or "pass this along" before sending. For example, Disney is not giving away free trips; Microsoft doesn't have money for everyone who forwards their message, etc. To check whether a message is a hoax you can go to *www.urbanlegends.about.com*.

Don't send spam, chain letters or jokes to people who have no interest in them. To most people it's annoying to have to sort through unwanted e-mail.

Avoid lengthy attachments. A large document can "choke" the recipient's e-mail, especially if a dial-up connection is being used on the road. For more information about e-mail attachments see the April 2002 "Web Page" column in the *Angus Journal.*

Don't send flames. A flame is a searing e-mail message in which the sender attacks the recipient in overly harsh, and often personal, terms. Unlike telephone and personal conversations that fade with time, impulsive e-mail responses can sit around in Inboxes, be printed out, circulated and acquire a level of importance that was never intended.

A good rule to follow is don't write anything you wouldn't say in public. To avoid doing this, try reading your e-mail message out loud before sending. This will allow you to catch any phrases or words that could be taken the wrong way.

Following these suggestions can help you as you communicate with current and potential customers. But remember, never use e-mail as a replacement for face-to-face conversation. It is a message service and should never replace personal contact.

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