



# Getting Off on the Right Foot With Your E-mail Communication

By Dana Kader Robb

Ever notice how every development that's supposed to make life easier ends up adding a different level of frustration? Sometimes I wonder if we're meant to have X number of hours of confusion in our lives and we're going to get them one way or another. Today's crazy-making topic is e-mail etiquette, or – cute name alert – “netiquette”.

It's bad enough when your e-mails don't get where they're going but when they do and their intent is misunderstood... watch out! I just read an article that said that e-mail is often the central piece of evidence in commercial litigation and can cost companies huge amounts in financial damages and lost time.

With that in mind, here are some tips from business people who use e-mail a lot in their communication. Learn from their advice before you have to eat your electronic words.

- ☞ Remember that every e-mail you write could be seen by the whole world.
- ☞ Avoid discussing volatile situations or emotions via e-mail. Do not criticize, chastise or reprimand. If you receive a “touchy” e-mail, respond by phone.
- ☞ Make your communication as clear and concise as possible. Spell check and use punctuation.

- ☞ Be appropriate to the relationship. Use the same level of formality as you would when speaking with the recipient. Even better, be a little more formal than you would verbally, since there will be a record of the words you choose.
- ☞ Because the recipient cannot see your face or body language, which normally comprise 93% of our communication, the words you use and the way you use them have much greater impact.
- ☞ When sending a group e-mail (or forwarding one) make sure the entire list of recipients does not appear in the text.
- ☞ Don't write anything in e-mail that you wouldn't say in person.
- ☞ Read and respond to e-mails as quickly as phone calls. If you don't check your e-mail regularly, let people know to expect that.
- ☞ Update your anti-virus software. If you don't have a virus checker, get one immediately. Besides protecting you, it will also help ensure you don't forward viruses to others.
- ☞ Good marketing tip: Take advantage of the signature feature to add phone, fax, tagline, new product info, whatever. Keep it short and sweet.

- ☞ Don't send unimportant e-mail. You want people to pay attention to everything you send them.
- ☞ Only use emoticons (those little punctuation smiley face guys) if you know the recipient well. Not everyone understands these symbols and they are often inappropriate for business-type communication.
- ☞ Let important e-mails “bake” for a little while. Write it, let it sit for an hour or a day, then rethink, reread, make changes or delete altogether.
- ☞ Using all capital letters is like shouting. Don't.
- ☞ When sending an attachment, make sure that the recipient is willing to receive it and will/can open it. Also, make sure that you actually attach it. Most of us have gotten messages that say “attached is” and nothing's there.
- ☞ In this age of electronic communication, nothing leaves an impact like a hand-written message. When appropriate, take the time to grab a pen and paper and jot a note.

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