

Email

Email is used more than ever as the most common form of business communication and so many people seem to get the even the simplest principles incorrect. If we get it right, then the impression we create will be enhanced and we will increase our influence. Ultimately your communication objectives will be met and that will increase our success.

The growth of Email as a communication method in business has been dramatic. It has become the preferred method of communication for large numbers of people and often the preferred way of working with a customer. However, that doesn't mean that email is always used in the right way or is effective.

By its nature email is intended to be a more informal and quick method of written communication. It also means anything we communicate is recorded and can be referenced. This means that the recipient can refer to the information without having to go back to the sender.

The key benefits for using email are that it is quick and provides a history of a communication. It also means we can retrieve information without having to go back to speak to the person again. One of the key fundamentals is that a single message may be sent simultaneously to many recipients. This ensures that a key message can be imparted to a large audience.

If, however we want to build relationships; ensure that there is no ambiguity; build a 2-way communication that helps develop ideas or solve or problems; or something is really urgent then we must use some form of oral communication.

Email is quick and easy to use, but this should not be an opportunity to forget all the basic rules of good business writing. You should not use business emails in the same way as when emailing personal friends. Text speak, abbreviations, such as BFN (bye for now), and emoticons are fine in a personal email but not in what is still a business document. Also be wary of global address books, ensure that you are sending the email to the right recipients and not to the wrong person.

Getting Emails Right

The subject heading should be meaningful and reflect the objective of the email. Ask yourself, what is the emails purpose and function. It should also indicate to the recipient the contents of the message and make it easier for them to handle and categorise the document.

Once you have established your objective ensure that you have gathered all your data and information. In most emails this doesn't have to be a complex process, but think about what you need before you start writing. Once you have your information, think about how you want to structure the email. What is the best way of presenting the information, so that it meets your readers' needs? With an email think of the things you must communicate to achieve your results. If there are other things you feel you should or could communicate to the reader, then use a more formal and longer document to communicate your message.

Start Writing

Always ensure that you keep caps lock off, as this indicates shouting and can look threatening. A font size smaller than you would normally use for a written document is also more effective.

Make sure you use the right greeting and sign off. If you are replying to an email, reflect in your response how the initial email was written. Formality is not appropriate in an email. If you want to use a formal salutation approach like, 'Dear David', just use 'David'. It is more appropriate in emails to be informal 'Hello David' or 'Hi David'. Similarly, 'Yours Sincerely' is not appropriate in emails, use regards, wishes or thanks i.e. 'Best wishes' or 'Kind Regards' or 'Many Thanks'.

Ensure that you check your syntax and use the spelling and grammar checker. It is easy to allow sentences to become very long and verbose. Keep sentences short and simple, around 10 to 20 words. The more pride you take in your message composition, the more successful you will be in being understood and achieving the desired results. Ensure that your sentences make grammatical sense.

Keep paragraphs to around 8 lines and that they are concerned with one topic. If you have several different topics within a heading, ensure that they are covered by different paragraphs. Don't be afraid of using subheadings for your paragraphs if you think it will make your email more understandable.

Always make sure that you keep copies, just as you would keep copies of letters. It is good practice to keep a record of email messages sent and received. Ensure that you keep relevant emails filed together and don't let your inbox build up.

Finally, always make sure you check and review your message. As soon as you hit the 'send' symbol, your message may be received in seconds. There is no going back. So check it carefully and get it right the first time. Whether your email is internal or external to your organisation, you need to ensure you present a professional image.