

Are You Ticking People Off With Your E-mails?

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By Alexandria Brown

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Even now that e-mail has been around for several years, some of us still aren't "getting the message" when it comes to being both effective and polite. While e-mail is a quick, easy, and informal way to exchange information, it still needs some TLC in order to do its job, which is to *communicate*!

One statistic says the average American worker receives approximately 50 e-mails a day -- that's a lot of information to read through. And this number sounds low to me -- I get around 100 a day! Numbers like these mean that your little message is literally competing for your recipient's attention. You'd better make sure your e-mail tells her what you want her to know -- fast!

While I have a mile-long list of e-mail atrocities that I could share, here are the four most common mistakes I see in my inbox every day. By paying attention to these simple points, you can easily ensure your messages come across clearly and professionally ... and that they actually get READ!

Mistake #1: "Dissing" the Subject

Ever receive an e-mail with an empty subject line? That drives me nuts! It's simply a courtesy to tell your reader what info you're delivering. When receiving a list of new e-mails, we all use the subject lines to quickly determine what each one is about and whether we need to open it right away.

The more info you give in the subject line, the better. For example, instead of just titling your e-mail "Meeting," give me the

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details: "Marketing Meeting Set for Nov. 9." This way I know instantly that you're talking about the Marketing Department, *and* that I have a meeting to go to on Nov. 9.

Also keep in mind that many e-mail systems cut-off long subject lines, so shoot for *six words or less.*

Mistake #2: Rambling On and On and On and...

Because we're all receiving way too much information every day, it's important to make your point FAST and CLEARLY. Have you ever gotten an e-mail that's so long you put off reading it, and later discovered

it had some important information at the end? An associate of mine used to do this — she'd send a drawn-out missive about her enlightening trip to Bali, and at the very end of her message she'd sneak in something urgent like, "Oh and the client will be here today at 2 p.m. instead of 4." Yikes!

Fire your "biggest gun" first. If you have something important to tell me, or if you want me to take any sort of action, be sure to make your point in the first few sentences. Otherwise I may not read it.

Try to keep your entire e-mail shorter than *two computer screens* — one screen is best. For long, detailed messages, provide a brief list or summary at the top, and break up the copy below with subheads.

Or, better yet, split up your points into a few different e-mails. For example, if you need to tell me something important about my taxes, ask if I'm available for a conference call tomorrow, and fill me in about your hot date from last weekend, make each subject a separate e-mail. Not only will you ensure that I'll read each point, but if I need to get back to you on something, I can just save that particular message.

Mistake #3: Funky Formatting

Your e-mail program may let you underline, italicize, boldface, and color your words, but when your recipients read your messages, these features may not carry through. Text formatting rarely translates between e-mail systems, and your reader may instead get a garbled mess of abstract characters (like this: "##@ @!!&&&>>") that muddle your message.

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A safe way to emphasize a word is to place an *asterisk* before and after the word, as I do here often in my e-zine text. Typing words in all-caps is another option. But while caps make an impact when used occasionally, they're extremely hard to read.

THE TOPS AND BOTTOMS OF CAPITAL LETTERS ARE COMPLETELY ALIGNED, MAKING IT HARDER TO QUICKLY DIFFERENTIATE WORDS. NEVER TYPE YOUR WHOLE MESSAGE IN ALL CAPS UNLESS YOU WANT TO IRRITATE SOMEONE, BECAUSE IT COMES ACROSS AS "SCREAMING."
ARE YOUR EYES HURTING YET?
OK, SORRY!

Typing in all caps also labels you as an Internet newbie — many computer first-timers are inexplicably attracted to that caps lock key. (Someone should start an intervention group for that.)

Mistake #4: Operating Undercover

Ever get an e-mail from someone and you just can't figure out who it is? I've had to explain many times to associates that e-mail addresses like "fuzzybear4u@wackomail.net" don't quite let your recipients know whom is calling. Many people may even delete your e-mail, mistaking your message for spam. (And goofy screen names don't do much good for your professional image either.)

Even if your identity is obvious based on your e-mail address, it's still a courtesy to sign your e-mail. And even better, include your *signature file.* You know what a signature (or "sig") file is, right? It's that little blurb with contact info that you can automatically insert at the end of every e-mail you send.

Most e-mail programs now allow you to use sig files — even AOL 6.0. At the least, just list your name, title, company, phone, e-mail address, and Web site URL. And don't think that including a sig file in every e-mail is overkill — I find it wonderfully handy to grab a client's phone number off of her last e-mail to me.

Copywriter and consultant Alexandria Brown's FREE biweekly e-zine, "AKB MarCom Tips," gives how-to tips on writing compelling copy for Web sites, brochures, and e-zines. Learn easy ways to "write to sell" and attract new customers today! Subscribe now at <http://www.akbwriting.com> or via <mailto:AKBMarCom-On@lists.webvalence.com>

Block Spam with An Easy Behavioral Change

By Catherine Franz

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E-mails now have a connection back to their servers. I will leave the technical aspects out of this article. Instead, I will walk you through how information from your computer is getting back to them.

You have probably experienced this already, an e-mail lands in your box with many symbols in the subject line created with the Shift Key plus a Number Key. This is the most common one. For example, it may look like this:
&*)(*&^%\$! Except the length of the symbols are longer.

When you click on it to delete it, any further action, including the deletion of the e-mail seems to go into la-la land. In other words, you can do anything else. This may last up to a minute or two depending on your computer speed. You have just been pinged and information is going back to their server saying there is a live connection.

In addition, because the symbols change all the time, it's difficult to block them unless you use a program like Spam Arrest.

Here is an easy way and excellent way to protect from this and all you have to do is change the way you dial in and out.

If you have a DSL line or any other type Internet connection that is open all the time. Control how frequently you allow e-mails to upload into your system. If you use Outlook, you go into Tools, Options, select the Mail Delivery tab and change "check messages every" 30, 60 or 90 minutes. This also helps on time management if e-mails are eating up too much of your time.

Next, after all your e-mails are uploaded into your software, whether you set the time management feature above, close off the Internet connection. It will not stop the lost 30 or 60 seconds these e-mail lock up your computer but you have cut off any possible pinging.

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After you close the Internet connection, read, review and delete the e-mails. After completing this, you can go ahead and reopen the Internet connection, and send your responses.

If you have a dial-up connection, you can do this same method, except you will ignore the Mail Delivery option mentioned earlier.

This actually isn't just happening on e-mails with these symbols. There are other programmed e-mails dumping cookies on your computer. I will not address how to remove cookies in this article. To find out how your software can remove your cookies use F1 (help) on your keypad in your e-mail software to find the answer before. WindowsXP also has additional information for removing cookies under: Start, Help and Support.

Catherine Franz, a eight-year Certified Professional Coach, Graduate of Coach University, Mastery University, editor of three ezines, columnist, author of thousands of articles website:
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