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Being Heard in the Age of E-mail

By William Arruda

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E-mail has been around for a while. And even though we have augmented e-mail communications with newer technologies, like team rooms, and chat and video teleconferencing, e-mail remains, for most businesses, the primary communications mechanism. It has become such a powerful and pervasive component of our communications toolbox that people who sit so close to us that we can hear them type use it to communicate with us.

And the average knowledge worker receives LOTS of e-mails each day. In fact, most of us receive so many that we feel overwhelmed and almost paralyzed when we look at the screen showing how many new mails we have received. Yet despite e-mail's ubiquity and popularity, users, in general, are not proficient at its use. So here are ten tips to help you make the most out of this critical business tool... without letting it consume you.

1. Get the right fit.

Firstly, you need to determine if e-mail is the right vehicle for your communication. It is – if and only if – if meets at least one of these criteria:

.,h The content of the communication needs to be documented.

.,h The recipient is unavailable (by phone, instant messaging or in person), not co-located or in a different time zone

.,h It is not time-sensitive.

.,h There are multiple recipients who are not co-located or available simultaneously. (Read the caution below in Number 3 about broadcasting e-mails).

.,h The subject does not require a lot of back and forth discussion.

e-mail. Spending a few minutes to summarize a situation before launching into a recommendation or asking recipients to share their opinions helps you build your credibility and make the most of the medium as a way to communicate and build consensus. It may seem obvious, but by simply creating a section in your e-mail that says 'Background' can help save your readers effort thereby aiding your cause in getting everybody "on the same page."

6. Get to the point.

Get to the point in the first few sentences. Have you ever noticed how effective newspapers are at conveying key information in a small amount of space? You can achieve the same results by putting key information up front in catchy wording. Tell them the "who," "what," "when," "why," and "how." The result: you quickly inform your readers about key information and give them the queues to easily determine if it's worth their while to read on. They'll appreciate it.

7. Be brief.

If you've got a lot of information to share; consider writing an executive summary and attach a longer document to the mail or post it somewhere and include a link. Don't expect people to read through a 10 page e-mail to find the pertinent content. The time that people can devote to e-mail is precious, so tell them what they really need to know up front and provide access to further detail should they have need or interest.

8. Be clear.

We need to be extra clear in composing e-mails. Communication is made up of a lot more than just words. When we communicate in person, we use words, facial gestures, body language, and tone together to deliver a complete communication. With the invention of the telephone, we lost the physical component of communication and with e-mail we have added another layer of abstraction – and we are left with just the words. Don't get me wrong, words are very powerful things! In fact, your choice of the words themselves and how you arrange them in prose becomes all the more important when they're not accompanied by those other elements that we experience in face-to-face communication. This makes it critical that we choose our words carefully to ensure that there is only one meaning that can be discerned from each sentence.

If you're authoring an e-mail that is particularly important you may want to consider writing it in word processing software such as Microsoft Word. The added benefit of built in dictionary, thesaurus and grammar checker can give you the piece of mind that your form is top notch so you can focus on the e-mail's content.

And when composing a multiple paragraph e-mail consider including headlines above each paragraph to provide greater clarity and guide the reader through your thought process. For example, the headlines for a mail dealing with a departmental challenge might be: 'Background, The Issue, Potential Solutions, My Recommendation, What I Need From You.'

9. Use power tools.

Another way to ensure that your communication is clear and accurate is the appropriate use of text styles and fonts. But be careful not to create an e-mail that combines too many font types and colors; there's a fine line between using formatting options to aid your reader in negotiating content and creating a document that's more suitable for the wall of your daughter's kindergarten classroom. And remember that if you're sending your mail outside the company, the recipient may not be able to see your creative use of text options. Simple uppercase and punctuation may be your best tools in this case.

10. Make your expectation clear.

Tell the recipient(s) what you want them to do next and when it needs to be done. And give them the info they need to do to do it. Phone numbers, fax, e-mail addresses, snail mail addresses should all be part of your e-mail template. And make your e-mail template reflect your personal Brand. In addition to your writing style, you can use a consistent on-brand template to further communicate your personal brand attributes.

Direct Mailing: Is It Still Effective?

By Gabriel Adams

Direct mail, or marketing by snail mail, is an oft forgotten marketing method - after all, email is quicker, easier, and much less expensive. There are many businesses that now use email exclusively, and do not use snail mail for marketing purposes.

But I believe that these businesses are missing out on a piece of their pie. Actually, they are leaving a piece of their pie for other marketers (ones who use direct mail) to pick up.

DMIS, or the Direct Mail Information Service, reports some important statistics, showing that direct mail is indeed a vital marketing method, even in this digital age. For example, DMIS reports that 67% of direct mail is opened by the recipient, and 45% is both opened and read. Also, 32% of consumers surveyed reported that they had responded to a direct mailing in the past twelve months.

Direct mail is still an effective marketing piece that every business should use, even internet based businesses. Direct mailing has several advantages over email, such as increased delivery rates, higher readership percentages, and the fact that a physical direct mail piece will make a bigger impact than an email.

If you run an internet business, you may not want to use direct mail as an initial marketing piece. Initial contact is probably the strongest point of internet marketing. But follow-up is one of the strong points of direct mail. Use direct mail to follow up with your customers, to let them know about promotions, or to follow up with prospects who have not made a purchase yet.

For all businesses, direct mail allows you to contact precise markets with geographical and demographical targeting. For example, if you sold commercial bakery equipment, you could send your promotional mailing to a list of bakeries.

Direct mail is still an extremely viable marketing method that you don't want to miss out on.

For more Direct Mailing Information, visit



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