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Creating User-friendly e-mail

By Myrtis Smith

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Word Count: 870 (60 characters per line)

Summary: 10 tips to ensure your e-mail messages get read.

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Creating User-Friendly Email

For some people email is a blessing. It is now easier than ever to communicate with counterparts all over the world at the speed of light. You can collaborate on projects, review memos, and send updates all in the stroke of a few keys. For other people email is a horrible curse. As if the paper tiger on your desk wasn't bad enough, many people are drowning in hundreds of emails a day, all urgent, all needing your immediate action. Here are 10 tips to make sure the emails you send don't add to your recipient's list of headaches

1. Greet the recipient in the beginning of your message and thank them at the end. This will set the tone of your

message. If you were to walk over to someone's cube, the first thing out of your mouth would not be "Is the report ready?" More than likely, you would say something like "Hi Bill. Do you have that report ready?" Show the same courtesy when you're sending a message.

2. Make the subject line of your message meaningful. The average manager receives dozens of emails everyday. Make the subject of your email as meaningful as possible so the recipient will know if they need to open right away or if it can wait until after lunch.

3. Mark your message urgent only if it is urgent. We live in such a fast paced society; it feels like everything is urgent. But if every email in your box was marked as urgent how would you know what was really urgent? The last thing you want is to be labeled as a person who marks all of their messages as urgent (ever heard of the little boy who cried wolf:). There are 2 things you can do if you are concerned about your message being read in a timely basis.

a. If your email service has this capability, place a return receipt on your message. This way you will be notified when your letter is open.

b. Write in the subject when you need a response by. This will help set expectations with your recipient.
Example: West Lake Report: Please Review by 1/27

4. If you have an attachment included in your email, mention it during the message. This will ensure that your recipient knows there is an attachment and they should contact you if they didn't get it.

5. State the purpose of your email in the first couple of sentences. When people open email, there is only one thought going through their minds "Do I have to read this now?" Answer that question for your recipient as early in the message as possible.

6. Use bullets or numbering in your messages to make them easier to read. Reading from a computer screen can be difficult on the eyes. Make this task easier for your recipient by making ample use of white space. Avoid long, dense paragraphs.

7. Be wary of the formatting features you use (like bolds,

colors, and underlines), especially if you are sending the message to someone outside of your company. Many email systems strip messages down to

plain text. If you've sent a message with a lot of fancy formatting in it, your recipient may end up with gibberish.

8. Highlight the specific action you want the recipient to take at the end of your message. Few things are more frustrating than reading a long email message only to get to the end and not be clear on what the sender wants from you.

9. Read your message out loud before you hit the send button. Keep the tone of your message professional while at the same time adding bits and pieces of your personality.

Given that deleted emails are never really deleted, never put something in an email message that you would not want to see on the Local News. Also, never say anything in an email message that you would not say to the recipient's face. You should not hide behind an email to deliver a difficult message. Pick up the phone.

10. When all else fails, pick up the phone. If you find yourself exchanging email with a person 3 or 4 times in order to clear up a single issue, the time had come to pick up the phone. Email is supposed to make communicating easier, not more frustrating. It is amazing how a 10-minute call can clear up the confusion that a 3-page email created.

Bonus Tip

If you have a short message to send, put it in the subject line, this will completely eliminate the need for the recipient to open the email.

Example 1: Reminder: Status reports due by 5:00 pm (EOM)
Here EOM means End of Message. Be sure you communicate that abbreviation to your team before you start using it. This format is ideal for quick reminders.

Example 2:

MARY // Thanks for the report. It was perfect! // SUE
In this example, the subject line contains the greeting, the message, and the closing. It is self-contained and its

obvious to the receiver that your total message is in the subject. This format is great for sending people a quick Thank You note.

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A New Twist To The Signature File Idea

By Terence Tan

After the incredible success of Hotmail.com, the use of signature files on all outgoing e-mail accounts has been a common method of web promotion.

The limitation that most people face is that there is a limit to how much "legitimate" e-mail they can send everyday.

A key but often overlooked characteristic of the Hotmail campaign that made it wildly successful is that every user of Hotmail was actually part of its campaign. Rather than sending signature file ads from only one e-mail account, Hotmail had a virtual army of people promoting their service.

One way we can boost the number of mails carrying our signature files is to offer free e-mail accounts to people and attach OUR signature files to their outgoing email. While it is now harder to give out free e-mail accounts than when Hotmail first started out, even a small handful of active users of your free service can dramatically increase the number of your signature files being displayed.

Everyone.net offers a cheap Group Mail account that lets us offer free e-mail accounts to 100 people, at \$9.99 a month.

For less than 10 cents each, you'll get an large group of people pushing your advertisement every time they send out an e-mail message.

There are probably other companies offering to let you provide free e-mail to others (the key point being they must allow you to attach YOUR signature file to each outgoing e-mail), but Everyone.net

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does seem to be very user friendly, easy to set-up(no setup cost), and cheapest.

They also offer to give you a free domain name of your choice when you sign up.

If you already own XYZ.com, you could take advantage of their offer by also getting XYZ.net for free.

For sites with large and dedicated North American audiences, there is even a Sponsored Mail solution where they essentially offer their service for FREE!

This is certainly a proven, low cost strategy to use, especially if you are looking for some "free stuff" to offer your web site visitors, gaining their goodwill and turning them into your "evangelists" at the same time.

Terence Tan is the founder of

, a website dedicated towards the development of

Multi Level Affiliate Programs as an alternative system of business. Visit

to

learn how MLAPs can multiply your affiliate referral commissions.

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A New Twist To The Signature File Idea

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