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I Am Not A Number! Are You?

By Mike Banks Valentine

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How often do you give your email address to clients and business prospects? Is it memorable? Is it meaningful? Does it say something about you or your business? Does it suggest your role in the company? Does it project meaninglessness or generic emptiness? Is it playful, respectful, descriptive or bland beyond words? You may believe it is none of these, but you are wrong if you think nobody cares. Your email address speaks volumes.

In 1979, CompuServe became the first service to offer electronic mail capabilities to personal computer users. Most early adopter types were computer geeks already and were not offended by the odd numeric email addresses, nor did they mind being represented digitally by a string of digits. Hence, odd looking email ID's such as cs10457882.32@compuserve.com were common for years.

Now that email is becoming an expected and necessary element of business communications, be aware how often it is seen and used by clients and customers and the impression it makes on them each time they see that address showing up in their in-box. Few of the old CompuServe members with numbers for email addresses remain. Numbers were assigned to those early members to identify compuserve accounts and served to efficiently turn those people into bits of data for the old, slow computer systems of just a few years ago.

Unfortunately, we seem to be headed back in that direction as more users than available names exist at service provider email accounts. If you attempt to sign up with an email account at America Online, Hotmail, Yahoo or other national internet

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service providers, you are likely to find that the name you choose is not available. They'll offer you odd variations with strings of numbers attached to differentiate you from hundreds of others who've chosen that name. So JohnDoe654298475@aol.com might be offered instead when a John Doe gets a new AOL screen name today. The same is true of Yahoo and Hotmail addresses.

Most of us operating businesses online are aware that it is possible to have almost any name we can dream up attached to our own domain name and that we can have nearly any email address we like, but few use that ability to choose an online identity creatively or with much business sense. So it is quite

common to see bland generic names such as info@yourcompany.com or even some web-based email accounts at generic hosts such as Hotmail or Yahoo just because the small business owner is not aware that they can now have an email address that reflects their own domain name to further brand their business.

It's not unusual that small businesses use YourCompany@Yahoo.com or even something as strange and unacceptable for business as HotMamma@YooHoo.com for their professional communications when they could have a more appropriate CEO@YourCompany.com or even the more common First.Last@YourCompany.com to identify them. This is the bland end of the spectrum but serves as a bare minimum of business email identity for your professional email communications. If you don't know how to set up your email account at your domain name, FIND OUT! It is inappropriate to conduct business with free email accounts or even AOL names.

Contact your web host and simply ask, then follow directions. Most often it involves very straightforward, simple set-up steps and can be done while on the support line with your host.

I've seen small business owners change the name of the company and then stick with their old domain name and email addresses because they don't want to bother with the simple set-up of a new email address through their host or service provider. This is completely unacceptable for business uses. Get an email address that matches your company domain name without fail.

If you don't have a domain name for your business, SHAME ON YOU! It was still being actively debated a year or two ago whether using a generic host and email address was necessary and/or desirable, but is no longer even discussed. It's mandatory to

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have the domain name, and email capability comes with that domain name at every host across the internet. Get branded!

Email addresses speak volumes about their owners, and while it is more common for personal emails to identify their owners by creative and interesting monikers like RastaDreadlock or even lots_of_laughs – imagination seems to falter or fail completely when it comes to business email identities. Since establishing my first educational domain a few years ago, I've used the email address of learn@website101.com to help clarify what the site is all about.

It's easy to tell that the site is educational and clearly emphasizes the main activity visitors can expect when seeing only my email address. Does your email address tell something about you and your business role? Do you want to be known to your clients and contacts as webmaster@mycompany.com or would

it serve you better to be seen in communications online with a more descriptive title like DigitalAlchemist@MyCompany.com?

Do you communicate with conservative and stuffy people, digital geeks or real humans? Clearly, it's best not to alienate your customers in your first email because they expect a serious title for your serious business. But give some thought to being something ever so slightly more interesting than info@blah.com! Make it more descriptive than admin@DullBusiness.com and more truthful than Support@BadCompany.com

You can also have multiple addresses to reflect your varied roles in the company. While it may be expected at corporations to be M.Smith@Giantco.com, try to break out of the corporate mold when establishing email addresses for your less stuffy role as an online entrepreneur with Mary@LittleLamb.com! How about adding to that a descriptive WoolGatherer@LittleLamb.com and even Wolf@LittleLamb.com for the accounts payable role?

Clients and customers will make assessments of your company based on things as simple as email addresses and while not always conscious, that customer appraisal says much about your business, your attitude and your priorities. Don't waste your email address as a branding tool that brands you as unimaginative or ignorant when it is possible to use that simple resource to add polish and sparkle to your image.

Mike Valentine does Search Engine Placement for the SmallBusiness
http://website101.com/Search_Engine_Positioning.html WebSite101 "Reading List" Weekly
Netrepreneur Tip Sheet Weekly Ezine emphasizing small business on the
Internet <http://website101.com/arch/>

What To Do With Your Automobile VIN Number History

By Rishi Chawla

Did you know that the VIN number to your automobile is more than just a series of numbers used for identification? In fact, the VIN number of your car can actually reveal to you the history of your vehicle. How can this be so? With a VIN number, you can find out who owned your car in the past, whether or not the vehicle has been in any accidents and more. In fact, the VIN number is often used from car dealers that travel from home to automobile auctions to determine whether or not a vehicle is worth bidding on before they travel to the auction and place their bids.

Much like a strand of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the VIN number of your vehicle is an identification number like no other—the VIN number of your vehicle relates solely to the vehicle you have purchased or you plan on purchasing and no other vehicle in the world has the same VIN number as the one your car possesses. In fact, there is even a decoding process when it comes to VIN numbers—a VIN number can be decoded by breaking down the various combinations of letters and numbers—all which have a significant meaning. For example, one number will denote the country that the car was built in, another number will denote the manufacturer, and certain numbers even denote the car's features.

Conversely, the VIN number can also provide you with information about odometer readings; whether or not the car has ever been stolen; if the car has experienced flood damage; and whether or not there have been recalls on parts associated with the vehicle. You can also find out if there is or ever was a lien on the car's title, if it had ever been repossessed, and if it suffered major damage in the past. So, what does all this information mean to you? Basically, consider it fuel for a positive purchase when you are buying a car—the more you know about the vehicle, the better decision you will be able to make when buying it. Conversely, if you already own the vehicle, knowing the car's history is vital in giving the car the proper maintenance it needs. Also, you may be able to foresee problems in the future that originate from past issues with the vehicle.

In the end, you should visit a website that allows you to check on the VIN number of any vehicle. In fact, some sites let you run a free VIN number check so that you can test out their services. Using your preferred search engine, you can easily locate a VIN Number checking website. You will find such services well worth the visit.

Rishi Chawla has an informative site on lemon law for owners of defective cars.

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