A Practical Guide to
Email Etiquette
TIPS FOR IMPROVED WORK EMAIL

EMAIL BY THE NUMBERS

1971: Ray Tomlinson sends the very first email to himself, saying: "QWERTYUIOP" (the letters on the top line of a standard keyboard)

1985: Email is commonly used by academics, government workers and military personnel

1996: Microsoft launches Outlook

1997: Yahoo! Mail is released

$400 million: the amount Microsoft paid in 1997 to purchase Hotmail

1998: the word Spam is added to the Oxford Dictionary

2003: RIM releases the original Blackberry smartphone, allowing email to become mobile

2007: Gmail is released

4.1 billion: the number of registered email accounts worldwide in 2014 (expected to grow to 5.2 billion by 2018)

2.4 million: the average number of emails sent per second worldwide in 2015

64%: the daily percentage of emails opened on a mobile device

65%: the overall percentage of emails sent that are spam

108.7 billion: the number of business related emails sent and received each day in 2014

Sources: finance.yahoo.com; mashable.com; internetlivestats.com; pointdrive.com; radicati.com; macworld.com

EMAIL AS EVIDENCE
Business people know that most things they put in writing can be relied on as proof of what happened. Email is often relied on for legal matters, to demonstrate a promise made, or information that was misguided. It's a good idea for all organizations to remind employees and stakeholders:
* to be mindful of what they write, and the clarity of their message;
* how information could be relied on later;
* what the corporate image of the organization is, and key messages;
* how to avoid promises that may be too significant to meet;
* when in doubt, to ask for input before pressing 'Send'.

TALK IN PERSON INSTEAD
Email is great, especially to request or confirm information—however, a conversation is often faster and more easily understood. Conversation can inspire great ideas, it can enhance business relationships and help solve problems quickly. With email, it can become easy to avoid interactions, and may lead to the dreaded send-wait-reply, and send again. When possible, talk in person or pick up the phone to finalize the matter.

MAKE USE OF THE SUBJECT LINE
A subject line is the first impression of an email. Make the most of it by summarizing the key point of your message. Use a reply date or time if the matter is urgent. Eg: "*Response required to Proposal X by noon tomorrow.*"

CHECK THE RECIPIENT'S NAME
Before you click 'Send', double check the name of the person you are sending the email to. As a result of human error, many emails end up going to an unintended recipient. Negative outcomes can include a breach of privacy, embarrassment, legal issues, hurt feelings, and time wasted.

BE CAREFUL USING 'CC'
'CC' used to stand for *carbon copy*, from the days of putting a piece of carbon paper behind a sheet of regular paper so the primary letter would be replicated (as a record of what was written). Today, 'CC' stands for *courtesy copy*, which means you're including someone on an email who needs or wishes to know about the content but is not expected to reply. Most readers view 'CC' as an 'FYI', not as an action item.

BE EXTRA CAREFUL USING 'BCC'
'BCC' is a *blind copy*. It's good to use when you need to email a large group of people, who may not want their email addresses divulge—it respects their privacy. But it can also be perceived negatively, as people want to know who else saw the message. To some, 'BCC' seems sneaky.

CHECK YOUR TONE, TWICE

It's surprising what other people read into meaning. The tone you hear in your head when composing an email isn't always the tone interpreted by the reader. Irony and sarcasm are often misunderstood in email, and humour doesn't translate the same across all cultures, ages, and business sectors. Think of the audience as you review your message.

KEEP CONTENT TO WHAT IS ESSENTIAL

Add an attachment for long-winded explanations. Excessive email content is hard to sift through. Say what is necessary without extras, and use paragraph breaks to separate points.

SPELL CHECK AND PROOFREAD

It's important to remember that these two things aren't the same. Spell check will catch obvious spelling mistakes such as *Sincerly* versus *Sincerely,* but it won't catch common mistakes like *their* versus *there.* Eg: "*Their is a meeting tomorrow at 1pm.*" Take the extra moment to both before sending.

TIME CHECK

Having the date, time and time zone set correctly on your computer ensures that when you receive an email from someone, you can see the actual time the email was sent—even if they are in another time zone. To change your settings in Windows 7, click on the clock in the bottom right corner of your screen and then select '*Change date and time settings.*' Date and time matter because email is relied on for corporate memory, including legal matters. Not having the proper date and time stamps can change the validity and facts of an occurrence.

THINK PROFESSIONAL, NOT FLASHY

Emails containing wallpaper, HTML, colours and multiple font sizes may look nice to the creator, but they may not make it through firewalls and if they do, they may appear distorted. Keep emails plain and simple—this will make them easier to read, and look more business oriented.

ISSUES NOT MEANT FOR THE INBOX

Email is not an ideal method to address a concern or serious problem. It's a great tool to use when following-up, as long as there has been prior communication. For example, H.R. may want to remind an employee of a performance discussion ("*this is to confirm our conversation about…*" but they may not want to use email as means to reprimand for the first time with no understanding of the context. In the same vein, if a disgruntled customer expresses concern via email, it's ideal to call them and address their issues over the phone. Sometimes people have "keyboard courage" (the tendency to vent excessively behind a keyboard) but are much more polite or rational when having a verbal discussion.

CONSIDER CONFIDENTIALITY

If content is private, re-think how it should be delivered. If you choose to send confidential information via email, find out who else may read the message and how it's being stored. An email you may think is confidential may not be to the recipient—it can easily be forwarded.

REQUEST A REPLY

Tell the person you are emailing if you expect a reply. Many messages look like an 'FYI' and it's hard to tell if you should answer or not. If you have an important question, you may want to pick up the phone, or highlight your question in the email. Don't assume a reply is guaranteed.
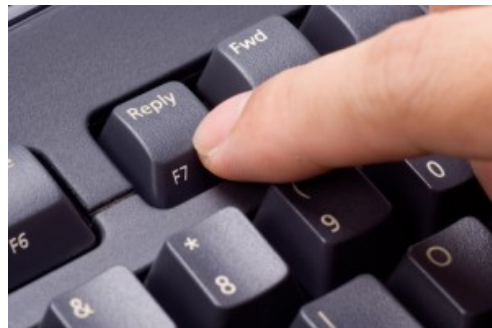
CONFIRM RECEIPT

If you don't receive a response, and your email is urgent, be sure sure it got there. Sometimes emails are sent but NOT received. If it's important, check-in to be sure the recipient has the email.

AVOID ONE WORD RESPONSES

Sending brief responses can appear nonchalant or imply that you're not interested. Eg: "*Sure*" or "*Ok*" may appear flippant. Acknowledge the sender's message in some way when responding.

DELETED BUT NOT GONE

Deleted emails are never really gone forever. They're archived somewhere on a back-up server. This can be both beneficial if you need to retrieve an old email, and detrimental if you think you've gotten rid of a message that may raise future concerns.

BEWARE OF HOAXES

Every day, we get emails about a person who was injured, a computer virus warning, a bank asking you to 'click here', someone overseas asking for money to get home, etc. Most are urban legends, so don't get caught up. For information on hoaxes and viruses, check out: www.virusbtn.com.

RUN ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE

This is important to avoid catching or sharing a virus. Try malware (such as FBI MoneyPak scam), or ransomware (such as CryptoLocker).

IT'S OK TO SAY NO

You don't have to share your email address with every person who asks for it. You can give an old email address that you don't use, or say "*I prefer not to give out my email.*" The goal is to avoid getting spam emails and unwanted ads at work. You can set-up a free, disposable email to help with this—try mailinator.com or 10minutemail.com.

TRAIN THE TEAM

Email is your corporate image so having policies on the topic is just as important as customer service policies. Email training could include: a review of what is proprietary, what is confidential, what is inappropriate content such as racism or harassment (and what the outcome of sending these types of emails could be on their employment), how to communicate with customers, how to handle angry emails, expectations for salutations and punctuation, and how use time efficiently with email. To help with this, we've included a one-page **Practical Guide to Effective Email Practices at Work** that you can post up in the office (see page 4).

EFFECTIVE EMAIL PRACTICES AT WORK

On a professional level, email is an extension of our corporate image. We'd like to share a few good tips for business email.

LEGAL MATTERS: Email leaves a permanent trail that can be used for legal evidence. Be sure that your content does not make commitments that go beyond your role. When in doubt, seek input.

SUBJECT LINES: Every email should start with a clear and concise subject line that summarizes the purpose of the message—express urgency if necessary.

SIGNATURE LINES: Your email signature, which contains your name, job title and contact information, should be included in every email. To set this up automatically in Microsoft Outlook, go to: Tools > Options > Mail Format > and use the Signature Picker to select a default signature.

EMAIL CONTENT: Content should be clear and to the point. Avoid using abbreviations (e.g. AFAIK, instead of saying "*As far as I know*") and emoticons (e.g. happy faces) that may be misunderstood or perceived as unprofessional. Also be aware of your Cap Locks key. Using capital letters implies you're yelling and can make an email seem harsh.

ATTACHMENTS: If you reference an attachment in an email, be sure to attach it before sending.

CC VERSUS BCC: If you are sending a message to multiple recipients, consider using the 'CC' (courtesy copy) feature, instead of 'BCC' (blind copy), as this may be perceived as deceptive.

REPLY ALL: If someone sends a group message, think about your response before sending— is it intended for the whole group or just one person?

FORWARDING EMAILS: If you are forwarding a message to another recipient as a general FYI, there's no need to edit the original message. Even if you notice a small error, leave it as is to maintain the integrity of the message. Be sure you have permission to forward the email before doing so.

EMAIL LISTS: Nowadays we're asked to share our emails with almost everyone. Avoid cluttering your work inbox with unnecessary messages about the latest deals and hoaxes.

PERSONAL, NOT PROFESSIONAL CONTENT: While some relationships at work may be friendships, it's best to keep email at work to business content. Racy jokes, email chain messages, fundraising requests and personal pictures are best sent after hours and from a personal account. Racial and sexual jokes to and from our company email is not acceptable at any time.

Altis PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT