

5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the role of text messaging in business communication.
2. Write effective emails for both internal and external communication.
3. Demonstrate the appropriate use of netiquette.

Text messages and emails are part of our communication landscape, and skilled business communicators consider them a valuable tool to connect. Netiquette refers to etiquette, or protocols and norms for online communication.

Texting

Whatever digital device you use, written communication in the form of brief messages, or texting, has become a common way to connect. It is useful for short exchanges and is a convenient way to stay connected with others when talking on the phone would be cumbersome. Texting is not useful for long or complicated messages and careful consideration should be given to the audience.

It is often said that you can tell how old someone is by how he or she inputs a phone number on a cell phone. If the person uses his or her thumb while holding the digital device, that person may have been raised on video games and be adept at one-handed interfaces. If they hold the digital device with one hand and input the number with the other, they may be over thirty or may be less comfortable with some technological devices. Of course, there is no actual correlation between input and age, but it is a useful example to use when considering who your audience is when writing a text message. If the person texts with one-hand and knows all the abbreviations common to texting, you may be able to use similar codes to communicate effectively. If the person texts with two-hands, you are better off using fewer words and spelling them out. Texting can be a great tool for connecting while on the go, but consider your audience and your company, and choose words, terms, or abbreviations that will deliver your message.

Tips for Effective Business Texting

- Know your recipient. “? % dsct” may be an understandable way to ask a close associate what the proper discount is to offer a certain customer, but if you are writing a text to your boss, it might be wiser to write, “what % discount does Murray get on \$1K order?”
- Anticipate unintentional misinterpretation. Texting often uses symbols and codes to represent thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Given the complexity of communication, and the useful but limited tool of texting, be aware of its limitations and prevent misinterpretation with brief messages.
- Contacting someone too frequently can border on harassment. Texting is a tool. Use it when appropriate but don’t abuse it.

Email

Electronic mail, usually called email, is quite familiar to most students and workers. In business, it has largely replaced print hard copy letters for external (outside the company) correspondence, as well as taking the place of memos for internal (within the company) communication (Guffey, 2008). Email can be very useful for messages that have slightly more content than a text message, but it is still best used for fairly brief messages.

Many businesses use automated emails to acknowledge communications from the public or to remind associates that periodic reports or payments are due. You may also be assigned to “populate” a form email in which standard paragraphs are used but you choose from a menu of sentences to make the wording suitable for a particular transaction.

Emails may be informal in personal contexts, but business communication requires attention to detail, an awareness that your email reflects you and your company, and a professional tone so that it may be forwarded to any third party if needed. Email often serves to exchange information within organizations. Although email may have an informal feel, remember that when used for business, it needs to convey professionalism and respect. Never write or send anything that you wouldn’t want read in public or in front of your company president.

Tips for Effective Business Emails

- Proper salutations should demonstrate respect and avoid mix-ups in case a message is accidentally sent to the wrong recipient. For example, use a salutation like “Dear Ms. X” (external) or “Hi Barry” (internal).
- Subject lines should be clear, brief, and specific. This helps the recipient understand the essence of the message. For example, “Proposal attached” or “Holiday Schedule.”

- Close with a signature. Identify yourself by creating a signature block that automatically contains your name and business contact information.
- Avoid abbreviations. An email is not a text message and the audience may not understand your abbreviations.
- Be brief. Omit unnecessary words.
- Use a good format. Include line breaks between sentences or divide your message into brief paragraphs for ease of reading. A good email should get to the point and conclude in three small paragraphs or less.
- Reread, revise, and review. Catch and correct spelling and grammar mistakes before you press “send.” It will take more time and effort to undo the problems caused by a hasty, poorly written email than to get it right the first time.
- Avoid using all caps. Capital letters are used on the Internet to communicate emphatic emotion or yelling and are considered rude.
- Test links. If you include a link, test it to make sure it works.
- Reply promptly. Watch out for an emotional response—never reply in anger—but make a habit of replying to all emails within twenty-four hours, even if only to say that you will provide the requested information in forty-eight or seventy-two hours.
- Use “Reply All” sparingly. Do not send your reply to everyone who received the initial email unless your message absolutely needs to be read by the entire group.

Let’s look at an example of a business email.

Netiquette

We create personal pages, post messages, and interact via mediated technologies as a normal part of our careers, but how we conduct ourselves can leave a lasting image, literally. The photograph you posted on social media may have been seen by your potential employer, or that nasty remark in a post may come back to haunt you later. When the internet was new, Virginia Shea wrote out a series of ground rules for communication online that continue to serve us today.

Virginia Shea’s Rules of Netiquette

- Remember the human on the other side of the electronic communication.
- Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.
- Know where you are in cyberspace.
- Respect other people’s time and bandwidth.
- Make yourself look good online.
- Share expert knowledge.
- Keep flame wars under control.
- Respect other people’s privacy.
- Don’t abuse your power.
- Be forgiving of other people’s mistakes (Shea, 1994).

Agenda for March 12 meeting on budget cuts

divisionmanagers@ourcompany

Agenda for March 12 meeting on budget cuts

Dear Division Managers:

All division managers are required to attend a March 12 meeting to decide how to cut the third and fourth quarter budgets. Please refer to the CEO’s memo of February 1 for guidelines on cuts (see attached memo) and determine how to cut 15% of your division budget.

Each division manager must bring to the meeting eight copies of your proposed 15% budget cut for your division per the CEO’s 2/1 memo.

The meeting will be held on March 12 from 8:00 a.m. - 11 a.m. in the Third Floor Conference room. Please clear your calendar of any conflicting appointments as this is a mandatory meeting.

Meeting Agenda

1. Budget presentation and discussion
2. Revision of Procedures to meet OSHA requirements on oxygen tanks (see attachment)
3. Cost overrun problems with maintenance contractors.

Please review all attachments prior to the meeting.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Debbie Char
Administrative Assistant, Office of the CEO
(808) 555-1234

Figure 5.1.1: Example of a business email.

Her rules speak for themselves and remind us that the golden rule (treat others as you would like to be treated) is relevant wherever there is human interaction.

Key Takeaways

- A text message is a brief written message sent and received using a digital device. It is useful for informal, brief, time-sensitive communication.
- Email is useful for both internal and external business communications. The content and formatting of an email message should reflect professionalism and follow the rules of netiquette.
- Social customs that exist in traditional, live, human interaction also influence the rules and customs by which we interact with each other in the online environment.

Exercises

1. Find an example of an email that you wish you had never sent or received. Rewrite it to eliminate the characteristics that you find problematic. Share it with your classmates.
2. Choose at least three emails you have sent or received that are good examples of business communication. What makes them good examples? Could they be improved in any way? Share your suggestions with classmates.
3. When is email inappropriate? Why?
4. In your experience, how do people behave when they interact online? Share your observations with your classmates.

References

- Guffey, M. (2008). *Essentials of business communication* (7th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Shea, V. (1994). *Netiquette*. San Francisco, CA: Albion Books.

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