

Commonsense in E-mailing

by Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC



Nearly 110 million people now use e-mail, collectively receiving seven trillion messages annually, according to the Electronic Messaging Association. Depending on which study you read, the typical executive today receives between 150 and 190 e-mails a day. Even after accounting for spam, you're still looking at 80 to 120 e-mails per executive, per day. Any way you cut it, that's an awful lot of communication coming at you at high speed.

The advantages of using e-mail are abundantly clear. It's fast; it's transmitted nearly instantaneously after you push the "Send" button. (Only the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) on your end and on the recipient's end have any real say as to when the e-mail actually shows up in the other person's mailbox, but in most cases it's less than two minutes.)

50 Million Users in Record Time

Radio gains 50 million users - 40 years

Television gains 50 million users - 13 years

World Wide Web gains 50 million users - 4 years

Source: Time Magazine

E-mail is relatively inexpensive. In most locales you pay one flat monthly fee to have e-mail service. Of course, within your organization, e-mail is included as a communication tool at your disposal, much like the telephone on your desk is.

If you don't send a subject, on many systems, the recipient receives an e-mail from you that says in the subject line, "No subject." That alone will make your e-mail stand out unlike most of the rest the recipient receives that day. Consider listing no subject messages when possible and relax.

If you can't live without listing a subject, wait till (that's short for until, "till" means to cultivate soil!) you have first composed your message. Then look at what you've said, and extract two or three words (usually together), hence making a phrase you can throw into the subject line. Voila! You've got it. That's one small step for you, one microscopic step for humankind.

Subject Lines When Writing to Friends

If your e-mail is non-work related, then you've got it made in the shade. All you have to do in the subject line is put something like "hi," "greetings," "it's me again," "hey," "good day," "long time," or something

equally harmless. A friend is a friend and is probably glad to hear from you. What does he or she care if you say "hi" in your subject line? It probably suits your message well, anyway.

Watch Out for Banned Words

If you use the same type of words in your subject heading that spammers use, chances are your e-mail might get discarded before it's even read. Hence, you've lost the time you spent composing the e-mail, and will waste yet more time trying to get a reply from a party who never read your message to begin with. What are the banished words? You already know most of these:

- sex
- free
- naked
- money
- exclusive
- incredible
- first time
- adults only
- make money now
- a one-time offer

Stop Psoriasis Now, An Urgent Message, Make Money at Home, ANNOUNCING..., Your Dream Vacation is Waiting, Get into the College of Your Choice, Don't Ignore This, Retire Now, Secrets Now Revealed, Instant Web Site, We Believe You Would Be Interested... and Lowest Air Fares Ever.

Check Once, Check Twice and Be Gone

Unless you're waiting for some critical response via e-mail, it's best to check your mail about twice a day, and perhaps a third time, if you're feeling particularly ahead of the game.

Some people get obsessed with checking their e-mail at every spare moment. These are people who are usually not doing a great job anyway, sending off epistles to loved ones, trying to pick up new acquaintances in chat rooms, and sending and receiving the latest jokes to and from the usual gang.

I do not advocate checking your e-mail first thing in the morning unless your job requirements specifically call for such procedure. The most com-

elling reason is you need to do many other things in and around your desk, and in the non-cyber world in general, before logging on.

Off-Line Preparation Yields On-Line Efficiency

The "administrivia" that you tend to first thing in the morning often enhances your productivity in both sending and receiving e-mail.

- Perhaps you need to prepare files on your hard drive
- Perhaps you have addresses to correct
- Perhaps you received phone and fax messages that will fuel your e-mail responses.

From the time I check in at 7 a.m., it's usually between 60 and 90 minutes before I log on to e-mail. Once I do, I allow anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes to handle the 15 to 25 messages I'll have waiting for me. Overall, if I'm free and clear of the morning administrivia, and e-mailing, before say 9:00 or 9:30 I consider that to be a great start, and if before 10:00, normal.

- limited time only

...and anything with stars, plus signs, equal signs or other attempts at using typographical figures as art work. The most efficient use of your time, when compiling e-mail messages that you intend to be read, is to offer a vibrant subject line, or short of that, at least a passable one, so the other party will indeed open up your mail.

Also, don't use any of these words or phrases in the subject line of your e-mail, if you intend for any non-Enquirer subscribers to read your e-mail: Free Guide, Cyber Sex, You Were Carefully Chosen, Hot Nymphs, Consolidate Your Loans Now, Make \$50,000 in Just Three Days, How to Stop Belching, More Web Hits Instantly, You Can't Ignore This, Pay Zero Taxes... Legally, A Friend Gave Us Your Name, Make More Money Than You Know What to Do With, With Over Ten Million E-mail Addresses, You Can't Ignore This Offer, Amazing Pet Training System, Grand Cayman Tax Shelters, Fly for Free, Limited Edition,

Okay, Check at Lunch If You Must

I confess to checking in a little after lunch to see if anybody sent me anything but then I log off rather quickly. I certainly check in at around 4:30 each day, to catch the closing e-mails that might be arriving from East Coast correspondents, and from those on the West Coast who know to get their messages in before 2:45 Pacific Coast Time.

I think it's only fair if you do likewise.

*Jeff Davidson offers simple advice that makes profound differences in people's lives. Special offer for readers of this magazine! Order autographed copies of his three books, [titles in italics] *The Joy of Simple Living* (Rodale), *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time* (Macmillan), and *Breathing Space* (MasterMedia) for \$39.95 (combined, post-paid) and get his cassette "Relaxing at High Speed" free. Fax your order, using VISA or Mastercard, toll free to 888-932-2003, or send your check to: *Breathing Space*, 2417 Honeysuckle Road, Chapel Hill NC 27514. Be sure to mention this special offer. For additional product information visit <http://www.BreathingSpace.com>. **OW***