

BUSINESS EMAIL ETIQUETTE RULES

Tips for Communicating One-On-One with Potential Customers

When using email to communicate with potential customers, clients and vendors, our InfoUSA email experts recommend following some basic email etiquette rules.

✔ Be concise

Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Remember that many of your recipients may receive dozens or more emails every day, so their attention span for reading is typically lower while going through their inbox than other kinds of communication.

If you offer particular products or services that require a lot of explanation, consider setting up landing pages for each one – that way your email can remain concise with a simple link for further exploration options. The landing page can also offer them a special report, video or ebook that can explain more fully why your company is the best choice out there. In a nutshell, consider email as the “launchpad” for your entire sales pitch, not the sales pitch itself.

✔ Proofread & edit before sending

Everyone’s tolerance for typos is different. It’s best to assume your recipient is “fussy that way,” until you get to know them. Also if writing isn’t your strength, consider having a trusted employee give your important emails to review before sending them once or twice a day (the drafts folder can help with this). A certain percentage of your potential customers will invariably care about things like run-on sentences, typos and misspellings. Of course if your typical

customer or client is unusually sensitive to precise language, don’t underestimate the importance of proofreading. And if your email program doesn’t include real-time automatic spell checking, upgrade to one that does (Outlook etc). Don’t be the last business in your industry to adopt the powerful convenience of email spell checking.

✔ Do not attach unnecessary files

Sending large attachments will annoy customers, and can even bring down their email system. Only send attachments when they are truly necessary, and it is not feasible to put the attachment on your website. Moreover, if you do send attachments, have a good virus scanner check it before sending – your customers will not be very happy if you send them a virus.

✔ Use an email-friendly layout

Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and layout is very important for email messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, use numbers, dashes or bullets to enhance the email for easy scanning and an organized look.

✔ Use the high-priority option appropriately

If you use the high-priority option without sufficient reason, remember that it will lose its usefulness if you ever really need it. Also ask yourself, “is this only a high priority to me?” You may really need the sale by end of day to meet your month-end numbers, but can the customer wait a few days for your

product? If the answer is yes, consider passing on the “high-priority” button – it may actually backfire on you as the customer wonders whether you have his best interests in mind.

✔ Don't write in ALL-CAPS

IF YOU WRITE IN ALL-CAPS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. There may be times when it's important to shout via email (for example, “YOUR CAR IS BEING TOWED.”) But generally it's a bad idea, and will typically be seen as aggressive or hostile unless there's clearly an urgent purpose behind the choice.

✔ Read the email before you send it

A lot of people don't bother to read an email before they send it out, as can be seen from the many typos contained in emails. But just because it's a common practice, does that mean it's how you want to represent yourself?

Apart from this, reading your email through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings. Remember that the tone of your voice is missing from an email, so giving the email a once over before sending will identify any phrases that could be taken the wrong way. Lastly remember that just because email is an inexpensive form of communication, it doesn't mean your messages should come across that way. If you are known for quality in everything else you do, you can impart that in your messages too.

✔ Take care with abbreviations & emoticons

In business emails, avoid any “new” acronyms like LOL (laughing out loud) and OMG. In business emails these are generally not appropriate unless you are very familiar with the client's particular tastes. Certain acronyms like ASAP and EOD have been used in business long enough to be considered professional, but the jury is still very much out on many “trendy” acronyms. Don't assume that just because your friends and family have adopted

them that your client has too. If your client has a child that uses LOL a hundred times a day, your use of it might not elicit the reaction you're thinking it will.

Emoticons are also to be avoided until you're familiar with a customer or client. While the smiley face certainly has a place in certain industries and customer service situations, it may be a deal breaker in the heavy-equipment industry – weigh the benefits and risks before hitting send. Lastly don't forget that it is certainly possible to be too formal as well – particularly in sales. When in doubt mirror your client's level of formality.

✔ Be careful with formatting

Remember that when you use formatting in your emails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. A handful of fonts like Verdana and Times are part of the system packages on all computers – unless you know what the client has in their system, use a universal system font.

✔ Use delivery & read receipts sparingly

People can elect not to confirm delivery receipt, and some software doesn't support it, so the only surefire way to know is by asking your client to confirm via an email reply. Also remember that it is a mild inconvenience to confirm the receipt, so there should be a good reason for using it. It should not be used routinely.

✔ Use a meaningful subject

Try to use a subject line that is meaningful to the recipient. For instance, when you send an email to a company about one of your products, it's better to mention the actual name of the product. For example write “ACME 4000 XE information” instead of just “product information”. In addition to cutting through the inbox clutter, if the customer wants to search their email box at a later time to follow up on your email, clear and topical subject lines will make your emails easy to find and identify.

✔ Avoid using URGENT & IMPORTANT

It may seem obvious, but only use these words if it is a truly urgent or deadline-sensitive message. Few things are more annoying than a false alarm, or feigning urgency to get your email noticed. It's always best not to worry your associates needlessly.

✔ Avoid long sentences

Try to keep your sentences short. Email is meant to be a quick, easily comprehended medium. Long sentences require a longer attention span. If your client is multi-tasking, which is common these days, the more easily “digested” your message is, the better. Your clients will appreciate the effort on their busiest days.

✔ Cross-Channel Marketing

Utilize your social channels to promote an email marketing campaign. An example would be providing a Twitter and Facebook page leading to the email – for example: “30% Off Sale Ends Tomorrow. Check your email today to receive this exclusive offer.”

✔ Implement “Sharing” Functions

Make it easy for users to share information and offers with their friends and colleagues by inserting a “Share this with a friend” link within the message. If your message is truly compelling, or the offer is highly valuable, a share link can be a key feature to the success of your campaign.

For more information on email marketing, contact one of our experts at 888.297.0899.

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888.297.0899**