

Email Etiquette

Solution As the owner of an ecommerce web site, you'll find much of your time is taken up with email communications. While your web site is your face to the world, email provides people with a more intimate insight as to who you are - your procedures, approach and ethics.

In many instances, people will already know what they wish to purchase - it's simply a matter of deciding whom to purchase the item from. Email is one of the strategies that they use in deciding.

Many of your partnerships with merchants will also be made or broken based on the quality of your email communications. Electronic Mail is a very powerful tool and like using any other tool, you can be a master or an accident waiting to happen.

We offer these following points to bear in mind to assist you with your email communications

- Remember that whatever you send can be sent on to other people and become public knowledge. It's wise to add a disclaimer and confidentiality statement to each communication:

Disclaimer - This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and contain privileged or copyright information. You must not present this message to another party without gaining permission from the sender. If you are not the intended recipient you must not copy, distribute or use this email or the information contained in it for any purpose other than to notify us. If you have received this message in error, please notify the sender immediately, and delete this email from your system. We do not guarantee that this material is free from viruses or any other defects although due care has been taken to minimize the risk.

- It is quite simple to forge e-mail. You should not assume that a message is from the "sender" - especially if it appears to be from a service provider requesting a password or financial information. Study the note carefully before responding with sensitive data.
- Be careful with viewing attachments, even from people you know, as attachments are often a source of computer viruses. It's imperative that you have virus scanner installed and operating at all times. In most cases if you have a virus scanner, right clicking on the attachment should display a menu option to scan the item. If this option does not exist, save the attachment to the hard drive and scan it from within the anti-virus program before opening it.

To further protect your system, if you are using Outlook or Outlook Express, your preview window should be disabled - worm viruses can execute via a preview window.

NOTE: Sending an infected email to another person or company could result in legal action by the affected party, so it's crucial to have a reliable virus scanner installed and operating at all times. Remember to check for updates regularly or better still, have the system check automatically.

- Respect the copyright on material that you reproduce. List all references, quotes and sources. Copyright law applies to e-mail messages as with any other document - both physical and electronic.
- Don't give anyone access to your e-mail account - you may be held responsible for any actions they carry out.

- If you are forwarding a message, don't change the wording. If you are replying try to only quote the relevant parts of the original message
- E-mail lacks body language and vocal intonation, which are vital aspects of "normal" communications. Be careful with sarcasm and humor as the person you are writing to may misconstrue what you are stating.
- Remember that once a message is sent, it cannot be recalled, so take care with knee jerk reactions. If you are angry when composing an email, put it in your drafts folder and review it the next day - you'll be surprised how often you will find your perceptions have changed.
- Use proper sentence case when composing email. USING ALL UPPER CASE LETTERS IS CONSIDERED "SHOUTING" and rude. If you wish to emphasize something try *this*.
- Mail messages should have a subject heading which reflects the contents of the note.
- If you wish to use a signature paragraph - keep it short - no longer than 4 lines.
- Use your name in all communications, not just your company name - people will want to know exactly who they are communicating with - "Customer Care" "Client Support" are not names, they are titles - attempts at anonymity in an online business environment can often be misinterpreted as being dishonest and having something to hide.
- When sending attached files such as spreadsheets or word processed documents, use a version which is likely to be supported by the recipient.
- It is considered good manners to ask a recipient of their willingness to accept an attachment before sending it to them.
- When sending emails to multiple names, ensure that distribution lists are used carefully. To preserve privacy, unless you specifically want all list members to know who the email was sent to, you should put list members in the Bcc: line (Blind Carbon Copy).
- Read your e-mail regularly. The immediacy of e-mail is lost if it sits unnoticed in your mailbox for long periods. People expect responses within 24 hours of sending their note to you. One extra hour can mean the difference between keeping or losing a client.
- Delete unwanted messages on a daily basis from your mailbox as this helps prevent important emails being deleted accidentally.
- Save your important messages to a special folder to keep a record - emails are legal documents and can assist with dispute resolution.
- Unfortunately, email has become so widely abused that wading through your inbox these days can be like running through a war zone. But if you set a good example for email communications, others will follow - and you will also stand out from the rest in a positive way.

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