7 Common Email Mistakes That Kill Your Professionalism… And How to Avoid Them

The average worker spends hours checking and responding to email each day. Unfortunately, that critical business tool can also prove dangerous. Consider the damage of a scathing email sent to the wrong person or sensitive information leaking outside the company. Save your reputation, and maybe even your career, by avoiding these all-too-common email mistakes.

Using Email When Another Method Works Better

Email works great for non-urgent communication, for communicating with groups of people and for maintaining a documentation trail. For instance, email may be just the ticket for communicating follow-up details to team members after a meeting.

On the other hand, a ten-minute phone call or in-person meeting will likely prove more efficient than an hour of back-and-forth emails. Likewise, when you need a response immediately, pick up the phone or send an instant message. And instead of attaching a large document to an email, share the document using OneDrive (or your collaboration tool of choice).

As an indirect communication method, email passes through multiple systems, any one of which could hold up or delay delivery. Direct methods such as telephone and instant messaging are real-time communication. These methods should be relied upon when there is a time constraint or importance that requires immediate, reliable delivery.

Should you need to send information over email with a time constraint, it is wise to follow up with a direct communication to ensure delivery. Even return email receipts are controlled by the recipient, not the system.

Hitting Reply All Without Thinking

Use Reply All only when you know exactly who will receive the message, and you know they need to receive it. The whole team does not need to see your "Got it" reply. And in some cases, you may inadvertently share sensitive information with people who should not see it.

Mis-using CC and BCC

Likewise, be careful how you use the To, CC and BCC fields. Recipients listed in the To field generally need to take action on the email. Include someone as a CC when they simply need to be kept in the loop. In fact, you may be including people in the email who do not need to be included at all. Think carefully about who needs to be involved in the discussion.

Keep in mind that anyone reading the email will be able to see the email addresses in the To and CC fields. If you are sending an email to a large group of people who do not know each other, BCC may be more appropriate.

Finally, as a pro tip, resist the temptation to rely on autofill to enter recipient email addresses. If you have similar names in your contact list, you may accidentally send your email to the wrong person, with potentially damaging consequences.

Writing a Novel Instead of an Email

Avoid long emails in a business setting. No one has time to read them. And consequently, you will not get your point across or get the response you want. Keep your emails concise. Start with a descriptive subject line and a quick summary that indicates any call for action. Then use bullet points where possible. Ideally, word count falls in the 50-to-125-word range.

Presenting a Poor Image with Bad Writing

You may have a phenomenal business idea to present, but if you word it badly, no one will take you seriously. Before you send, proofread for grammar and spelling mistakes. The leading email solutions include at least a spelling checker. Outlook even includes an [Editor function](#) that will highlight biased language and edit for readability in addition to spelling and grammar.

Including Sensitive or Inappropriate Information

Some information has no place in business email. Ever. Never send suggestive content through business email, no matter who you send it to. Likewise, never send passwords, financial data, or other sensitive information through email without encrypting the email.

Keep in mind that anything sent through email lives forever and can be included in the discovery process of a lawsuit. Additionally, your company email policies may prohibit emailing certain types of information such as trade secrets or client descriptions. Know the policies and follow them.

Neglecting Email Security

Finally, know how to email safely and follow [cybersecurity best practices for email](). For instance, use a strong password for your email and consider enabling multi-factor authentication. Never use email on public Wi-Fi or log into your business email on a public computer. And learn how to recognize the signs of a [phishing email]().

Help Employees Avoid Email Mistakes with Security Awareness Training

Everyone makes email mistakes from time to time. But a regular refresher course in email security can help minimize the human factor. The email consultants at Messaging Architects can help you implement a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy that includes effective [security awareness training]() for your employees.