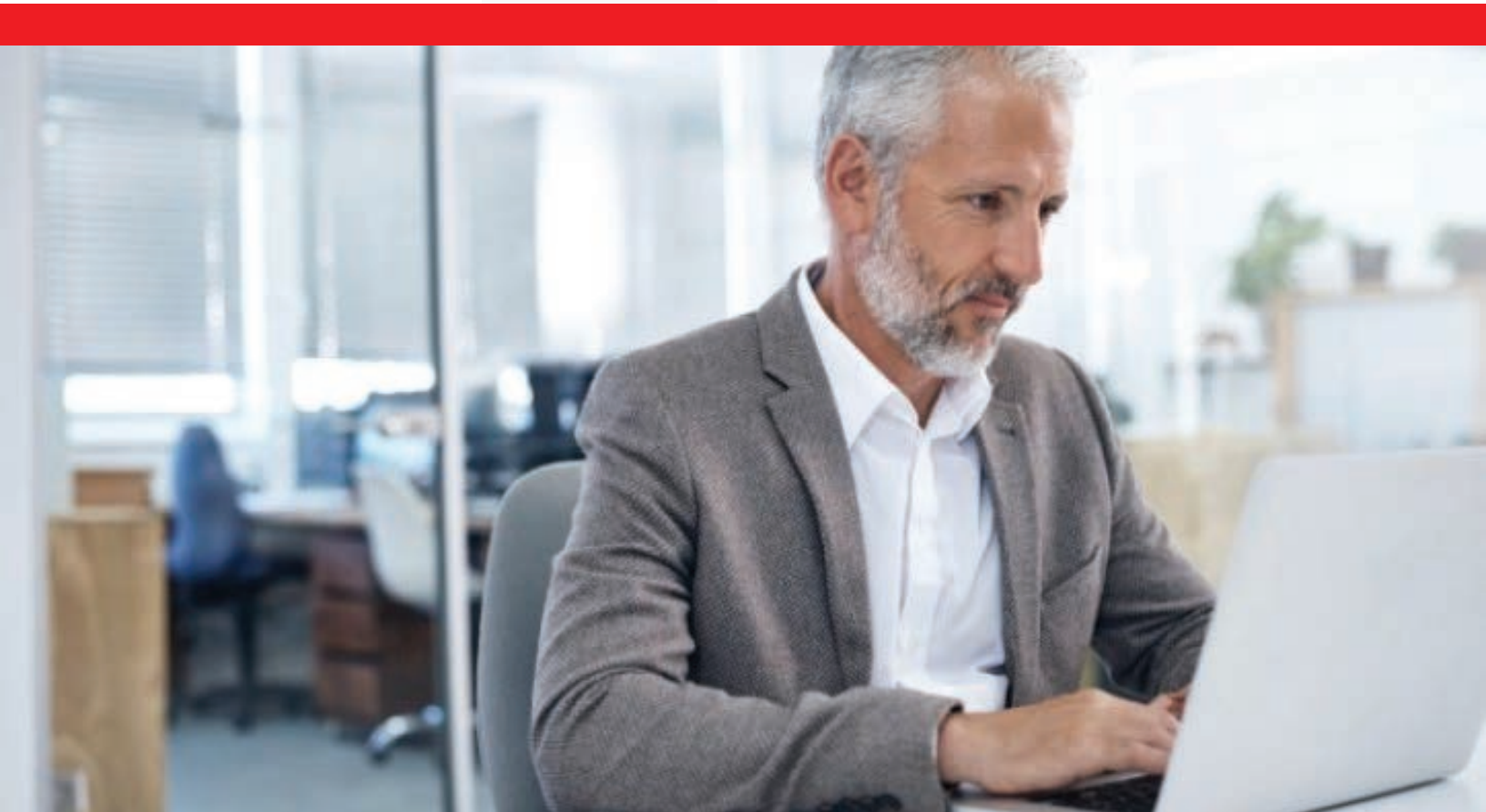


STRATEGY

Think Before You Click Send on Work Email

16 email dos & don'ts to help you appear more professional



by **Preston Ingalls**

Electronic mail, or email, has been around for a long time. The AUTODIN network, first operational in the early 1960s, provided a message service that spanned 1,350 terminals, handling 30 million messages per month, with an average message length of approximately 3,000 characters. Autodin was supported by 18 large computerized switches, and was connected to the United States General Services Administration's (GSA) Advanced Record System.

MIT introduced Compatible Time-Sharing System (CTSS) in the early 1960s as well, so that multiple users were able to log in to a central system from remote dial-up terminals and store and share files on the central disk.

GEnie (General Electric Network for Information Exchange), an online service created by General Electric, ran from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s and was a pioneer for internet communications and email services. So, considering how long email has been around, you would think the general population would have it mastered by now. Right? Yeah, sure. Saving money has been around for a lot longer and the general population has that one mastered just as well.

Although email is a valuable communication tool, its widespread use has presented more than a few challenges. Because it is an evolving form of communication, acceptable protocols or conventions for writing and responding to emails are still being developed. Miscommunication can easily occur when people have different expectations or purposes about the emails that they send or receive. In addition, email is used for many different purposes, including:

- Information requests
- Social contacts with friends
- Inter and intra-business communications
- Marketing outreach
- Employment applications

Depending on your intentions, the email messages you send will differ in their decorum, intended audience and desired outcome. Remember, once you click send, your reputation is clinging to that little digital message zipping through space. Although you more often than not prefer a response to an email, it is technically considered a form of one-way communication, as it is not an instantaneous medium. Many times we overly rely on email as a communication tool. How many times have you said or heard the following?

- "But I sent you an email."
- "Didn't you get the email I sent?"
- "I am sure I covered that in the email."
- "If you had read the last sentence in the email, you would have known."
- "What do you mean you didn't get it?"
- "Look, I was on vacation for a week. I probably didn't notice it."
- "How often do you check your emails? Maybe you should check it more often"

Email is more appropriate for:

- Sharing detailed information and data
- Providing instructions where instant feedback is not required
- Ensuring there is a record of your communication as proof of transmission or something to archive
- Pointing out an online source or link for additional information
- Getting in touch with a person who is hard to reach via telephone
- Sharing information with a large number of people simultaneously or quickly
- Providing brief updates to the email receiver
- Providing important and timely information



16 Email Dos and Don'ts

- 1** *Your email is a reflection of you.* Each email you send either adds to or reduces from your character standing. If your email is beset with misspellings, grammatical errors, poor use of words and scattered words, the recipient will lean toward seeing you as error prone, disorganized and inefficient. You don't want one email to discredit you entirely.
- 2** *Remember the subject.* One of the best ways to flag attention to your email is to embed a condensed main message in the subject line. This should capture attention better than saying, "Hi Dave" or "Thoughts on project." Grab their attention with a few short but interesting words like "3 suggestions on project leadership." You may be competing for read time against many other messages—make yours the one to read.

- 3** *Avoid angry emails.* There is an adage that says, "If you would hesitate to say something to someone's face, do not write it in an email." A tone in an email message could be easily misinterpreted. Before sending an angry email, save it as a draft. Come back an hour or so later and see if you still want to send it as is.
- 4** *Preserve the recipient's privacy.* Before hitting send, take a moment and ask yourself, are there risks of the recipients seeing the names of other recipients? If you are sending a message to a cluster of people and you need to protect the confidentiality of your list, use "Bcc" to conceal the names.
- 5** *Briefly introduce yourself.* If you are unsure of whether the recipient knows you or can recall who you are, provide a brief reminder.
- 6** *Avoid delivering bad or undesirable news.* There are more humane ways to communicate bad news than an email. Ask yourself if email is the best way to communicate this news.
- 7** *Avoid providing complex information.* Emails are a poor medium for detailed or extended information or directions. Since the email process does not have immediate ways to clarify the message, misinterpretation may occur.
- 8** *Minimize use of exclamation points.* If you use more than one exclamation mark, it may appear amateurish or childlike.
- 9** *Avoid sharing confidential information.* The email could fall in the wrong hands, and you would be accountable for that security breach later.
- 10** *Respond expeditiously.* Email doesn't work like a text. Depending on the purpose and time sensitivity of the email and the sender, responding within 1 to 2 days is satisfactory.

- 11** *Click "No reply necessary."* Otherwise you will get simple and useless responses like "Ok" or "Sure," which clutters your incoming email and may appear to solicit some response from them.
- 12** *Avoid jargon.* If you want to look professional, act professional. Inserting silly shortcuts like "omg" or "lol" may be cute in a text between friends, but is not suitable in a business email. You might not impress your colleagues if it looks like you had your teenage daughter craft the message for you.
- 13** *Spell check.* At least take a moment and reread your message before sending. Read it for clarity, grammar and spelling. Your email recipient may not have heard the old saying from Andrew Jackson who said, "I despise a man who can spell a word in only one way."
- 14** *Avoid being mistaken for spam.* Don't use all uppercase or catchy phrases.
- 15** *Warn about large attachments.* You might be bounced from someone's Christmas card list if you clog their inbox with a large attachment. You may want to ask permission before sending.
- 16** *K.I.S.S.* Keep it short and simple. Brevity is more impressive than long lines of prose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Preston Ingalls, president and CEO of TBR Strategies, has led maintenance and reliability improvement efforts across 30 countries for Shell, Occidental Petroleum, Skanska, Bayer, Exxon, Lockheed Martin, Unilever, Monsanto, Pillsbury, Corning and Texas Instruments. He holds two engineering degrees and a master's degree in organizational development. For more information, visit [TBR Strategies](#).