

Business correspondence

E-mail is probably the most commonly used communication tool for business purposes. In business it's even more important to follow certain rules in communication. It is essential for a company to give a good impression of itself. If you fail in this the consequences might be very unlucky. Here are some tips that might help you with your business communications. Remember that these tips are given for company to company e-mails, not (necessarily!) for personal correspondence between business colleagues!

1. Always show consideration for the other party!

This rule applies to all communication. You can test your e-mail message by considering: "How would I feel if I got this e-mail in this situation?"

2. A business e-mail is business

People often feel that e-mail is less formal than a traditional letter or phone call, but it doesn't mean that they should be too informal, either. Business is business even in e-mail correspondence. Remember to be polite and show respect. Do not use informal expressions (like "u", instead of "you").

3. Always put something in the subject field

A message with no subject often gets treated as junk mail. Also, think carefully about the subject: "Hi" or "About the project" are not exactly precise and clear subjects!

4. Mention where you got the e-mail address of the person you are writing to

Many business people have more than one page on the Internet and knowing from where or why you are contacting them is helpful. It might even give you a more meaningful reply. If you have no subject and no indication of source in your message, it is very likely to get treated as junk mail! Also, if the person in question handles several projects, just mentioning "I'm writing to you about your project" isn't very helpful.

5. Be careful with attachments.

Don't send attachments if you are not sure that your correspondent accepts them. It is better to ask first.

6. Create e-mail heads and signatures for formal purposes.

It is good to make it clear that the message is from your company and not from yourself. Keep the signature short enough, preferably not longer than three lines.

7. Names and titles

If your correspondent uses your first name, feel free to use his or hers! But it is better not to be the one to do this first. In many countries it is not considered appropriate to immediately call people by their first names.

- Keep it formal at least in the first message, and use titles Mr or Ms. Never start a business e-mail to a person you don't know with "hi" or "hello", it's "Dear Mr / Ms / Dr XXX".
- If you are not sure which title to use, don't use any title at all.
- When you are replying to a message, use the signature of your correspondent as a guideline. If the message is signed with a single name, you may address your correspondent with this name. If it's signed with both given name and family name, it is safer to keep the reply formal.
- Sometimes business communication becomes very much like personal chat. In this case first names are appropriate. Sometimes communication remains formal, in which case the formal address should be retained.
- Consider age and rank, too. In some countries people in a position of authority and people of mature years expect certain deference from their juniors.

8. Keep your message short enough

It is desirable to keep the message short, but business messages tend to be longer than personal notes. Remember that it is also important to communicate successfully! Don't make the message difficult to read and understand by trying to make it too brief.

9. Make your message look good (and professional)

Leave spaces between paragraphs.

Avoid using CAPITAL LETTERS, emoticons : -) and special formatting.

Check your spelling. In fast communication like e-mail spelling mistakes are very common. However, it might give the reader the impression that you are sloppy.

Don't forget the greeting and the closing!