

# Writing business emails

**Do you know how colleagues and employees are communicating with customers, the media and each other? Are you aware of how much damage sloppy communications can do to your brand, sales and credibility?**

**Kava's "Email for businesses" is a half day course aimed at laying the foundations for best practice in email communication.**

**Here are a few very basic guidelines that offer an insight into the challenges facing companies in an email dominated world**

## **Top 10 rules for business emails**

### **1. NEVER mistake informality for a license to be careless**

Yes, the internet and email is an 'informal' medium. Yes, emails are shorter, quicker, and less wordy than old-fashioned letters. Yes, a lot of people's emails are littered with mistakes. No, it's not acceptable. There's no excuse for being any less professional about a communication sent by email than you would be for a printed document. Whatever people say, and whatever their own example, they'll judge you badly for a poorly written, mis-spelt or haphazardly punctuated email. Besides, it's so 20th Century to think sloppy text is cool (or even ok).

### **2. BREVITY is the art of email**

This one's harder than it sounds. We all lead busy lives and we all get a lot of email. Keep yours as short as possible and your recipient will feel more inclined to reply quickly. Give him a ten page scroller and he's likely to close it, put it aside (promising himself a 'proper' read of it later) and look for something more bite-size. It's an annoying truth that a short email often takes longer than a long one to write (because a short one's usually just a long one with the superfluous stuff taken out).

### **3. ALWAYS read through your email before you hit 'send'**

Sounds obvious, but you'd be amazed at how many people bash out a few lines in reply to an email and then hit 'send' without a second thought. You must take the time to read through every email before you send – whether it's a one liner or a three page document. If it's important, read it out loud (it's easier to pick up mistakes that way). If it's really important, send it to yourself first to see what impact it would have if you received it. Ask yourself: is it free from mistakes and is its message instantly clear? Only when you're satisfied, hit the magic 'send' button.

### **4. GRAB your reader with your subject line...**

However much we like to think people are dying to hear from us, more often than not we have to compete for attention in someone's heavingly-full email inbox. However well you know the person, or whatever your relationship with them is ('they work for me – they live for my daily instructions...') make your subject line stand out. You have a nano second's grace to get your demand/plea/important information into their consciousness – and it has to be compelling enough for them to open the email and read on...

### **5. ... THEN grab them again with your first line or paragraph**

Just because someone's opened your email, doesn't mean they're 'committed' to it; they can just as easily close it again. If you want them to do something – you'd better state that request straight away (you can quickly follow up with the context). If you're giving them information you need them to know, you'd better tell them why what follows is important to them. Neglect to tell them why they should read the rest of your email and, chances are, their fingers will be twitching to see how important their next email is.

### **6. STRUCTURE your email to be scanned (not 'read')**

Nowadays people rarely read emails, they 'scan' them. They'll take a quick read of the first sentence or paragraph and then skip through the rest of the text to glean the information nuggets. To give your text a chance of being fully read, make it easy for the reader. Keep paragraphs short, with spaces in between. Use bullet points where you can. Put important phrases or requests in bold to draw their attention. It's a fine balance, but adding visual pace to your text will help to get it read.

### **7. COPY appropriately (and wisely)**

Another obvious one that people continually seem to ignore. Only copy people on an email if they really need the information. In case we haven't mentioned it, we're all busy, and filling people's email box with issues that don't concern them isn't going to endear you to them. Resist the temptation to play politics; eg copying in the bosses to show someone up, or just to prove how great you are (there are better ways of doing the latter). Those kind of tactics usually backfire – especially if it turns out you're in the wrong – by which time the CEO and all their family are party to the news.

### **8. USE an email signature**

It's important to set up an 'email signature' with your contact details, so that this information is sent out with every email you send. It gives people the chance to contact you on the phone, for example, if that works better for the situation.

*continues*

### **9. DO use email for quick updates**

The internet is a speedy medium and, as we've already said, short is good. Emails are perfect for quick updates on projects, for example. You can contact a large group of people in one go to let them know about information updates, deadline changes and people to contact etc. If you keep the emails brief and frequent people will feel comfortable and confident that they're been kept up to date with progress (so hopefully they'll leave you alone to get on with the job). But...

### **10. DON'T use email in isolation**

Just because you've sent someone an email it doesn't mean you're off the hook. It's no longer a defence if a job doesn't get done simply because you put a request, in writing, over email. You still have to use common sense (sorry) and take responsibility for what needs to be done. If you don't get the response you need from sending an email there's still that old fashioned device called the telephone (or even, gasp, walking over to someone and talking to them). Email's great, but like all addictions, it should be used in moderation.

AND one more (important one) for luck...

### **NEVER EVER send an email in anger**

We've all done it and we've all regretted it. And if you haven't done it, welcome to email little infant. No matter how annoying or maddening an email is, ALWAYS resist the temptation of firing off an angry (usually self-righteous) reply. Write one by all means, but be careful to remove the 'send' addressee in case the email fires off by mistake. Then vent, then breathe, then walk around the block, then read it again. And then start again sensibly. It's simply not worth the aggro that will surely follow to rise to someone else's angry argument. And of course you get much better self-righteous points if you show yourself to be the 'better (wo)man'.

**Kava's 'Writing Business Emails' course is a half day session. Our trainers can present one-to-one or to groups and teams.**

**For more information, call Richard Kennedy or Caroline Chapple on 0845 644 5823 or email [courseinfo@kavamedia.com](mailto:courseinfo@kavamedia.com)**