7 email etiquette strategies that will win you clients for life

Business, Marketing

Most of us are so comfortable communicating via email that we don't give it much thought. We dash off messages while eating lunch with the other hand, riding the subway or sprinting to a meeting. But each time we mindlessly send an email, we're missing out on meaningful business opportunities.

Let's say you're an entrepreneur, freelancer or small business owner who communicates with clients via email on a near-daily basis. That means you have a near-daily opportunity to enhance your reputation and build strong relationships with your clients -- and you also have a near-daily opportunity to weaken said relationships and diminish your value in the eyes of your clients.

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Thus, it's essential to give email communications the attention they deserve. You (hopefully) already know it's important to use a professional email address, employ proper grammar and spelling, and avoid using language that could be misinterpreted in a negative ways. Beyond these basics, there are several email etiquette strategies that can make or break your relationships with clients. Here are seven of them.

1. Determine whether your client likes email in the first place.

It's easy to assume everyone's defaultcommunicationpreference is email. In reality, some via the old-fashioned technologies known as the telephone or (gasp) in-person meetings. Before establishing an email relationship with a client, first ask if they *want* to communicate via email -- then adhere to whatever preferences they share. Asking this question will communicate to clients that you’re truly invested in making their life easier.

2. Be responsive.

Nobody’s saying you need to be glued to your inbox 24/7. The point here is a client should never have to wonder if you’re going to get back to them, because by the time they’re asking that question, their trust in yourprofessionalismhas already started to erode. Whenever possible, make a habit of replying within 24 hours (and remember to use out-of-office reminders if you won’t be able to do so). Clients want to feel like they’re a priority and that you’re there to assist them when they need it.

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3. Keep it brief.

The average office worker receives emails a day, and odds are good your client isn’t an exception. If you consistently send them long, rambling emails, you’re going to get earmarked as an annoyance pretty quickly. In contrast, shorter emails are more likely to be read and processed. Before sending an email, challenge yourself to -- and scrap anything not in service to that objective. Then, aim to write the email in no more than five sentences.

4. Be friendly.

Obviously, don’t ramble on and on about the minutia of your life -- that would antithetical to no. 3 above. But do open and close your email with friendly salutations that will help set a personable tone for your client communications. Making note of personal knowledge -- like “ Hope you had fun at your daughter's play!" -- can help maintain a sense of positivity and familiarity in your relationship.

5. Keep it organized.

Email overload costs companies billions each year, and a lot of it comes down to a lack of efficient communication in this medium. Just as no client wants to wade through giant walls of text, they also don't want to scroll through pages upon pages of carets and irrelevant forwarded chains, only to still be left wondering how they're supposed to respond. Any email you send should be kept as visually uncluttered as possible. It should also provide clear-cut information and highlight any actions that need to be taken. To that end, make a habit of adopting the following strategies:

- Use a clear subject line. A client should be able to know what your email is about simply by reading the subject line. This means each with its own specific subject. Whatever you do, don't spend months communicating in the same thread with a (now irrelevant) subject line. It will make it that much harder for everyone to stay on top of things.
- Distinguish who the email is for. on an email unless they absolutely need to be part of a thread. If you are including multiple people, address them each directly in the body of the email so everyone knows what's expected of them. Remember that classic email etiquette says the " To" field is reserved for people who need to take action on the email, while the " CC" field is meant for people who just need to be kept in the loop.

- Include all the necessary information up front. Prioritize the specific over the general. Include every detail that might be needed for a client to make a decision or take action, and try to preempt any questions you know might arise from the content of your email. If you're replying to an email, make sure you respond to every question posed in said email so the client doesn't need to send you yet another query asking for additional responses. All of this will communicate to clients that yourespecttheir time.
- Highlight actions that need to be taken. Take a page out of Tim Ferris' playbook and provide " if-then" guidelines for your clients. For example, you might say " If this looks good to you, then no reply is necessary." Or " I can talk on the phone at 9: 30 am EST. If that does not work for you, then please send me two times that would work." This helps eliminate any doubt about the next course of action.

If you're having trouble drafting an email that's concise, organized and actionable, then take a few minutes to before tackling it again. Whatever you do, don't just give up and send off a convoluted email. It'll come back to bite you in the form of your client's confusion or frustration.

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6. Respect clients' privacy.

When clients work with you, they implicitly trust you to keep their business information confidential. Honor that trust by making it a policy not to share your client's messages, attachments, contact information, or files without their permission. If you have permission to share any of this information, make sure the entity you're sharing with will also respect your client's privacy. Failing to do this is a quick way to lose your client's trust entirely (and possibly get you into hot water).

7. Read before you send.

How manyanxietyattacks could be avoided if everyone in the country committed to proofing emails before sending them? Avoid the panic of realizing you misspelled your client's name or forgot to include an attachment by carefully proofreading emails before hitting send. If you want to be extra cautious, consider and reading it in your inbox so you can see exactly how it will appear to clients. Only when you're certain an email has followed all the guidelines on this list should you send it.

Employing these strategies might take more time than dashing off a missive from your iPhone on your way to lunch. But the extra thought and effort will pay off in the form of client trust and a reputation for stalwart professionalism.