BEST PRACTICES FOR EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Unlike voice communications, which use both words and vocal cues to convey meaning, written communication relies solely on words. To avoid misunderstandings and ensure that your message is clear, it's important to choose your words carefully.

This topic is divided into four parts:

- Before You Write
- Composing
- Addressing, Writing the Title, Signing Off
- Before You Hit "Send"

Before You Write

Make sure that email is the right tool for the job. For the situation and the customer, is email the best way to communicate? Or is the message better delivered in person or on the telephone? For example, messages involving sensitive issues, lengthy explanations or complex directions may be better communicated by phone or in person.

Respond quickly. If you can't find the information customers need right away, respond with an interim note to let them know you received the message and are looking into it. Tell them when to expect your follow-up message.

Make sure you are the right person to respond. Do you have the information you need to answer the query thoroughly and accurately, or is the email better sent from someone else, such as a manager?

Are you going to be away? Let them know. Set up an auto-respond email when you are away or sick, stating when you will be back and who to contact for assistance. Ensure that a coworker monitors and responds to customer email while you are away. Remember to remove the auto-respond when you return to work.

Save templates for common questions. If you email similar responses frequently, save the responses as templates. This will save time and ensure that messages are clear, consistent and accurate. Be sure to customize each response with the customer's name and the specifics of their request.

Composing

Get to the point early. Make sure the purpose of your email is clearly explained in the first couple of sentences.

Thank them for the inquiry. Whether they telephoned, emailed or dropped in, begin the email by thanking them for getting in touch.

Be concise. Make your message brief, clear and easy to read.

Be professional. As a representative of your business, use professional language and correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Before sending, use spell check and read the message over. If the message is sensitive or important, ask a manager to review it.

Make it personal. Start with a friendly greeting and personalize the message as appropriate.

Check the tone. Your choice of words will convey your tone. Ensure that they communicate the meaning you intend and won't be misunderstood.

Answer the questions. Read the inquiry carefully and answer all of the customer's questions thoroughly.

Anticipate additional questions. If you can think of additional information the customer might need, provide it. This will reduce the need for back and forth emails.

Use appropriate attachment etiquette. When sending attachments, include a greeting, an explanatory sentence or two and your contact information. Do not send big files; use a file transfer application and send a link instead.

Pay attention to links. If you include links to a webpage, make sure they work before you send the email. If the link is long, consider shortening it using a free URL shortener.

Include the original email. Include the customer's original email at the end of your response so that they can refer to it if necessary.

Addressing, Writing the Title, and Signing Off

Use a dedicated email address for customers. This will help you quickly identify messages from customers and give them priority. For example, service@ourbusiness.com.

Use a meaningful subject line. Add a subject line that clearly communicates the topic of the email. Remove any extra text in the subject line that isn't needed (such as Fw: Fw:).

Start with a greeting. Address the person by name if you know it, using the name they used to sign their email as a reference.

Include a signature. Your signature should include your name, title and contact information, including email address and phone number.

Before You Hit "Send"

Remember: email is a permanent record. It can also be forwarded to others or posted on the Internet. Be sure that your message represents your business in a professional manner.

Be careful when replying to and forwarding emails. Before you hit send, review the list of recipients to ensure that you're not sending the wrong message to the wrong person. When forwarding a message, it may be appropriate to delete information that is sensitive or confidential. Hit "reply all" only if it's appropriate for all recipients to see your message.

Respect privacy. Do not share personal information and email addresses without consent. Use the blind copy (Bcc) function to hide the names of recipients when appropriate.

Do not spam. The Government of Canada has strict laws in place regarding commercial electronic messaging. Businesses are not permitted to send electronic messages without obtaining consent, providing identification information and providing an unsubscribe mechanism. For more details, see the Government of Canada website.

If it's not professional, don't send it! This includes jokes, cartoons, quotes, chain emails, health notices, petitions, etc. Familiarize yourself with your company's policy on the sharing of content.

superhost@go2hr.ca