

New Federal Government Rule Changes E-Mail Writing for Business

E-mail training experts say that when writing e-mail for business, prevention is always cheaper than the cure.

San Francisco, CA (PRWeb) December 15, 2006 -- On December 1st, the US Federal Government passed new rules requiring that companies keep better track of their e-mail communications and instant messages (IM) in case of litigation. In the event of a federal lawsuit, both sides must now produce "electronically stored information" as part of what's known as e-discovery, the sharing of evidence before a trial. The bad news is that if your business is ever required to produce electronic records as evidence, you will probably end up spending hundreds of thousands of dollars - prior to any legal fees - just sifting through the backlog of e-mail records and copying those that might be relevant to the case.

"Then there is the matter of what you will find," say Karen Leland and Keith Bailey, creators of the [The Essential E-mail Training](#), the online e-mail training program and authors of the bestselling business book, *Customer Service For Dummies - 3rd Edition*, "Many businesses we have worked with have been shocked to discover the vast amount of inappropriate, unethical and unprofessional writing contained in e-mail messages that their staff have been sending both internally to coworkers and externally to customers, vendors and others outside the company." Politicians, CEOs and software companies have hit the headlines in recent months because they were apparently unaware of some basic electronic communication guidelines.

According to Leland and Bailey - who have had over 30,000 people from some of America's biggest corporations attend their live [e-mail training program](#) or view the online version - prevention is always cheaper than the cure. "Our clients take a preventative approach to e-mail issues," says Keith Bailey. "By training their staff in the proper business [e-mail writing](#) and IM writing, companies have an immediate - and low cost - impact on what they communicate electronically and the opportunity to prevent problems before they end up as part of a potentially costly court case."

Excerpted from their Essential Email online e-mail training program and their book *Customer Service For Dummies 3rd Edition*, Leland and Bailey offer the 10 most common e-mail and IM mistakes along with some simple solutions that can help your company avoid an e-mail nightmare down the road:

Mistake 1: Thinking e-mail is good for everything

Don't let convenience blind you, sensitive issues, confidential information, provocative subjects and areas of conflict are just a few of the messages that should be off-limits to email and dealt with via phone or face-to-face.

Mistake 2: Not [writing e-mail](#) from the reader's perspective

Could your message be misinterpreted? Could an innocent tongue-in-cheek remark be misconstrued? Re-read all your e-mails and become sensitive to their "tone" and how readers might interpret them.

Mistake 3: Forgetting about the importance of etiquette

It's always a good idea, no matter how rushed you are, to create a positive impression by using an opening and closing (for example, Dear Mr. Smith or Regards, Joe Black), correcting sloppy grammar and spelling, using a clear and descriptive subject line, and not using jargon and abbreviations that might mystify the reader.

Mistake 4: CCing the world

Often, people courtesy copy (cc) others as a means of cyber-gossip or to vent their frustrations. This leads not only to traffic jams in others' in-boxes, but in the worst case, defamation, and in the best case, hurt feelings. When writing e-mail, only cc those parties that are directly related to the situation or email message.

Mistake 5: Believing that an erased e-mail is gone forever

Even if you delete an e-mail message from your in-box, it is retrievable from the company's system, the recipient's computer, or from the recipient's company's network. With technical know how, e-mails can even be retrieved from your computer's hard drive. Learn to think of e-mail documents as permanent.

Mistake 6: Viewing instant messages as less 'formal' than e-mail

The nature of IM or chat is similar to a conversation where both parties are responding to one another in real time. Living up to their name, IMs happen in the moment and, unlike e-mail, they are reactive. The next thing you type depends on the message you receive. With their rapid-fire speed it's easy to forego discipline and make silly mistakes - such as making assumptions that have little or no facts behind them, promises that can't be fulfilled or disclosing private company information.

Mistake 7: Assuming people have time to read your entire message

To be most effective, whenever possible, e-mail messages should contain all the most pertinent and important data in the first paragraph. Most of us have a short attention span when reading from a computer screen and if we think we know where the message is going, it's easy to save time and move onto the next message without having read the nugget of information buried in the last paragraph.

Mistake 8: Mismatching the sender's tone

One of the toughest aspects of writing e-mail is developing a feeling of rapport - especially if you don't know the person with whom you are corresponding. Writers with a formal, no-nonsense style usually like a similar response. For others who take a more chatty and expressive approach to their emails, respond in kind.

Mistake 9: Lack of a clear request

You know how frustrating it can be to read and reread an e-mail and not know what the sender really wants, "Is it an FYI or do I need to do something?" Email senders take note; specific requests are essential in email. Make sure yours are clearly defined, have a timeframe attached to them and include any necessary background information. If your email isn't a request label it an FYI.

Mistake 10: Not re-reading before you hit 'send'

As any contractor knows the rule is "measure twice, cut once." By reading your e-mail over before you send it you can catch and correct all sorts of mistakes before they get to the recipient and possibly create a bad impression or put you and/or your company in hot water.

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