

Netiquette

Netiquette (etiquette for the Internet) is simple good manners and business courtesy. Some of it may seem basic, but some infringements can result in major problems for others or can create an unintended insult to another user. Below are the basics of netiquette. Please take the time to educate yourself on all aspects of behavior and decorum within the Internet, including Email.

First, be polite:

If there is one rule that should be kept in mind at all times, it is: **USE COMMON COURTESY**. Whether you are posting a message in a forum, sending or responding to an Email, participating in a chat, or writing your Web page text, do not condescend to your reader and do not insult them. The biggest problem people have with the Internet is that they forget or are unaware that the written word has different effects on the recipient than a spoken word. When you speak something, people can hear the tone of your voice and they can interrupt you for explanations or clarifications to make sure they didn't misinterpret your words or intent. If they can see you, they can take visual clues from your face and body to see if you intend humor or if you are trying to soften what sounds like a harsh sentence. This is lost in text, and the immediacy of Email in particular creates many misperceptions in which a hastily written response comes across as terse, insulting, and/or mean-spirited. This is the reason some people use emoticons (visual clues) in their Emails, but these are not considered professional for business Email.

Some "Netiquette" tips to help you overcome the limitations of electronic communications:

- Use asterisks (*) or underscores (_) surrounding a *word* to indicate emphasis.
- Don't SHOUT. Writing in all capital letters indicates shouting and is considered rude.
- Be careful when using irony or sarcasm. It may be misunderstood.
- Use emoticons such as :-) or :- (to signal the tone of your message, but be careful not to overuse them, especially in business communications
- Include a concise informative subject line.
- When replying, include only the relevant portions of the original message. Delete attachments to reduce the size of the message.

Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself - with courtesy and respect. Imagine how you'd feel if you were in the other person's shoes. There is a simple and useful test for anything you're about to post or mail. Ask yourself: "Would I say this to the person's face?" If the answer is no, rewrite and reread. Repeat the process until you feel sure that you'd feel as

comfortable saying these words to the live person as you do sending them electronically.

Remember those are real people out there. Try not to hurt their feelings. Also keep in mind that, when you communicate electronically, your words are written. All Email is stored in archive on backup tape, and in the receiver's in box where you have no control over them. In other words, there's a good chance they can come back to haunt you. Only send messages and files you are willing to have made public knowledge.

Second, respect other people's time and be brief where appropriate:

People today seem to have less time than ever before. When you send email or post to a discussion group, you are asking for other people's time. Be brief.

Unless you are involved in an extended correspondence with someone or are otherwise engaged in a consensual extended exchange of information, don't send out textbook-size Emails promoting your ideas. One of the golden rules of editing is the importance of deleting unimportant information and removing repetitious information. Say what needs to be said and let people contact you for more information. Long e-mails and forum postings also tend not to be read so your effort may all be wasted anyway.

Also consider whether others will actually want to receive your information. It is very easy to send information to huge mailing lists. And we sometimes find ourselves "cc'ing" people out of habit. People are already inundated with more information than they can absorb. Before you copy people, ask yourself if they really need the information. If the answer is no, don't waste their time. If the answer is maybe, think twice before you send.

Third, be professional:

In the electronic communication world, you are judged by what you write. Use proper spelling and grammar. Be polite and pleasant. Don't use offensive language, and don't be confrontational. Keep things as simple as possible, and make sure your messages are clear and logical. When you see yourself writing "it's my understanding that" or "I believe that," ask yourself if you really want to post the note before checking your facts.

Don't flame. Flaming is when people castigate a user via Email (or in forums) in rather mean-spirited terms for an infringement of rules or ideas. It's a slippery slope of bad manners, so don't flame others, and if you are flamed, don't respond. It's like arguing with a drunk at a football game; you will never win. If you are flamed in a forum or chat room, contact the system's administrator and make your complaint. If you receive nasty Email, do one of two things; delete it or ignore the meanness and respond to the sender's actual points, minus the meanness.

Know where you are. What is appropriate in a chat room – celebrity gossip in a Fox TV chat room, for example, is inappropriate in a business discussion group. Leave gossip and innuendo out of business communications.

Not only could you land yourself in legal trouble, you could easily insult people you might want to do business with.

Fourth, be forgiving:

When someone makes a mistake - whether it's a spelling error, a stupid question, or an unnecessarily long answer - be kind. If it's a minor error, don't feel compelled to say anything at all. If you decide to point out a mistake, point it out politely, and preferably by private email rather than in public. Give people the benefit of the doubt; assume they just don't know any better. And never be arrogant or self-righteous about it. Such rudeness is just as major a mistake and extremely poor "Netiquette."