



Business Communication: In business, you are what you write

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The business, professional and not-for-profit worlds pay ample attention to networking, obtaining the necessary training and credentials, looking for the next big opportunity, and, of course, making or raising money. Yet, when it comes to professional writing skills, there is often a serious lack of the fundamentals learned back in elementary school. Who can blame anyone for neglecting subject and predicate, verb tenses, split infinitives, capitalization, and when to use a comma or a semi-colon?

With the addition of social media, texting, 140 character tweets and our race to get every thought down before losing the reader's attention, "proper" grammar falls to the wayside. Do your business emails look and sound professionally written? The answer may be seldom or never. We are so used to the casualness of present-day communications that we forget emails have taken the place of the more formal memo or business letter. Please don't get me started about emoticons and exclamation points. Refrain from using them - no matter how tempted you are - in the context of business writing.

Business communication encompasses far more than emails, letters and memos. Marketing materials and advertising are designed to instill confidence and name recognition in a product or service. Websites serve a similar function, in addition to acting as a conduit for timely information and evergreen articles. Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter - among other social networking sites - allow website information to be broadcast to a wider audience, as well as sharing posts, links and other news with the potentially vast Internet universe of followers. Whoever thought the written word could travel the globe in a nanosecond of time?

Have you ever received an email with a long chain of comments, only to find information inappropriate to share with all recipients? (Please don't hit "Reply to all.") Many a career has been upended by the careless use of emails. Paper communications can be torn up, shredded and thrown into the fireplace. Not so with the Internet and certainly not when emails make their way into the "wrong hands." And speaking of emails, how often do you hit send, rather than picking up the telephone? If one trend has done more to ruin communications, it's emails. And this is coming from an admitted email addict. I once worked with two professionals - whose offices were next to each other - who solely communicated via email and sticky notes. I love the written word, but this was to the point of absurdity.

Getting back to writing skills, let's embrace the basics. Good writing is a competence that cannot be underestimated. Both within the workplace and when communicating beyond the cubicle, office, automobile, Starbucks, laboratory, classroom, dining room table - or wherever you work - your messaging reflects the substance of you and your business or organization. To quote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "The written word has this advantage, that it lasts and can await the time when it is allowed to take effect."

Mindy Wolfle is president of Neptune Marketing LLC, Long Beach, N.Y. and chief marketing officer of Armao LLP, Garden City, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540