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Electronic Mail Etiquette in the Business Setting

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Communicating by electronic mail (e-mail) is now as universal as the telephone. E-mail, possibly, has had the largest impact on business and personal communication since the creation of the Pony Express. Following proper etiquette has always been important, particularly in formal settings. The same is true of online communication.

The appearance of outgoing documents has a direct impact on the recipients' perceptions of the senders' company, its products, and its personnel. E-mail is simply a document delivered via the Internet. Although sending mail electronically is fast and easy, success, both personally and professionally, depends on effective communication. Here are some business e-mail etiquette guidelines:

DO's for Business E-mail:

- Put the company in the screen name and a personal name in parentheses after the e-mail address, i.e. ducksnarow2@aol.com (Ruth Sheets).
- Complete the subject line effectively indicating the message's content.
- Keep messages brief and focused with correct grammar and spelling.
- Exercise discretion in the use of colored fonts and backgrounds.
- Use plain text rather than HTML or Rich Text Formatting.
- Use BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) when addressing a message going to a large group of people who don't necessarily know each other.
- Limit file attachment size. Many systems, especially free ISP services, have limited capacity to download attachments.
- Scan all files for viruses before sending them.
- Include a short identifying signature with contact information at the end of the message.

DON'Ts for Business E-mail:

- Use "Urgent" or "Priority" unless it really is.
- TYPE MESSAGES IN ALL-UPPERCASE. It is the equivalent of shouting and it is extremely difficult to read.
- Use fancy formatting (bold, italic, etc.)
- Use emoticons - small icons, i.e. :).
- Forward 'alerts', stories, chain letters, jokes, advertisements, or news releases without the recipients' expressed wish to receive them.
- CC (Carbon Copy) or reply to everyone to whom the e-mail has been sent unless it is warranted.
- Divulge personal/confidential information that could be made public. E-mail is neither confidential nor necessarily secure and that sent via a company network may be considered company property.
- Send a reply unless a reply is warranted.

Ruth Sheets of Ducks in a Row Consulting provides strategic business consulting to start ups, fix ups, and build ups to turn business pains into business gains. With an operational and marketing focus Ruth works with companies in various stages of transition to launch new products and services, target new markets, eliminate barriers to business viability, and establish and achieve business goals. To obtain more information about Ruth Sheets and Ducks in a Row Consulting please visit www.ducksinarowconsulting.com or call 978-463-2264.

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