



Formality is just as important in a business e-mail as in a letter.

By YONG AH YONG

REMEMBER in the good old days when I needed some information from the University of London, I resorted to the then most economical way of sending a faster form of snail mail: the aerogram. It took about five days for my aerogram to reach London from Ipoh, my hometown. It took another five days or so for them to send me back a reply via air mail or aerogram. All in all, it took at least 10 days for two-way communication. Making a phone call in those days was, of course, expensive – far beyond what my financial resources could afford.

Those days are now history. E-mail or electronic mail, in this computer age, has become a standard tool used in businesses around the world for instant communication. Owing to its fantastic speed, business executives are able to receive real-time updates which enable decisions to be made sooner. E-mail can also be used to simultaneously disseminate information to multiple clients, customers, workmates and other people concerned.

Another advantage of using e-mail in business is cost savings. The overhead to maintain an e-mail system is negligible. Businesses can utilise free online e-mail services at no cost beyond their computer and Internet connection expenses. Cost savings can be seen in lower postage, reduced telephone bills and even less travel expenses.

In a connected and paperless environment, everyone in a business organisation is provided the opportunity to e-mail the president, director or manager with ideas, suggestions or comments. Management, likewise, can obtain feedback from the front line, which helps them stay in touch with the day-to-day operations of their business.

E-mail is a more secure method of communication than letters or faxes. Letters or faxes can be intercepted easily in an office since there is physical movement of information materials. Faxes with sensitive information can inadvertently be left in a fax machine for hours. On the other hand, e-mails can only be accessed with the correct username and password. They cannot be read without the aid of



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a machine. E-mails are written in digital form and are thus less exposed to others.

E-mail allows a business to reach customers in a more economical and expedient manner. Businesses can answer customer queries quickly. Promotional material and advertisements can conveniently be sent to selected customers or potential clients. High speed of information flow leads, directly or indirectly, to increased sales and narrowing of the time gap between the commencement of a marketing campaign and customer purchases.

E-mail facilitates exchange of information among team-mates or colleagues. Representatives from various departments and functional areas can convey their valuable ideas to each other. E-mails sent to all team members can serve as an ongoing dialogue without having to discuss in face-to-face meetings.

In our university, at faculty, department and functional levels, staff members are connected via e-mail. Notice boards do not seem to be necessary, as even students are exchanging information with their lecturers, tutors and the general office via e-mail. Today, almost everyone has a PC or laptop and those who do not can gain easy access to one.

E-mail etiquette

In business, all e-mails are official documents, and as such, they must be formal in tone and serious in purpose.

Mobile phone SMS jargon and shorthand

should not be used at all.

The restricted space in the computer-generated e-mail template indicates that an e-mail should be short and simple. Reading a long e-mail on the visual display unit is both inconvenient and tiring. However, an e-mail, like a summary, despite being short, should contain all the main points. As far as possible, full sentences, which are grammatically correct, should be used. A negative impression will be given to others if our e-mail is written in incorrect language.

The e-mail template contains “to”, “cc” and “subject” sections which must be properly completed.

The item “to” contains the e-mail address of your intended recipient while “cc” contains the e-mail addresses of all those people concerned who need to refer to the e-mail.

The item “subject” is the heading or title of your e-mail. It should be a phrase or a few key words. For instance, “drop in sales” is not concise enough; “drop in sales in the first half year” is much better.

Do include a salutation in your business e-mail. “Dear Ms. Priya”, “Dear Dr. Sebastian”, “Dear Manager”, “Dear Sir/Madam” etc are required. “Dear” does not imply that the recipient is lovely, lovable or precious in any way. It is just a sign of respect. You may be writing an e-mail to Abominable Snowman, yet courtesy, manners or etiquette demands that you address him as “Dear Mr. Snowman”.

In the “body” section, just as in other formal correspondence, introduce yourself and

the purpose of sending the e-mail. Other details should be given in subsequent paragraphs. The last paragraph expresses your thanks and good wishes. The complimentary close is the same as in normal business letters: “Yours sincerely”, “Yours faithfully” and so on. Here is a sample of business e-mail with its reply.

To: marywong@gmail.com
CC: ayyong2000@yahoo.com
Subject: Request for copy of invoice

Dear Ms. Wong,
I’m Loga Subramaniam from the Finance Section of Advance Business Technology Co. Ltd., Ipoh. I understand that we have an invoice with your company which has somehow not reached us so far. Kindly send us a copy of the invoice, or its soft copy, so that we can make our payment as soon as possible.
We wish to apologise for the delay in payment. This invoice is for the order made by Dr. Hamzah b. Ismail, Head of our Planning Unit and the delivery of two Samsung laptops and two Panasonic LCD projectors delivered to him on 8 September 2011.
Please send it to our Finance Section or e-mail direct to me.
Thank you very much.

With best wishes,
S. Loga
Executive
Finance Section
Advance Business Technology Co. Ltd
Ipoh

This is the sample reply:
To: loga@abt.com
CC: ayyong2000@yahoo.com
Subject: Ref: Request for copy of invoice

Dear Mr. Loga,
With reference to the e-mail that you sent me today, I wish to thank you very much for taking the initiative of asking for the invoice copy.
As requested, I attach a softcopy of the invoice F11983. Our bank details remain the same.
Thank you.

With best regards,
Mary Wong
Finance Department
Supreme ICT Supplier
Petaling Jaya
■ Yong Ah Yong is a lecturer at UTAR, Kampar, Perak.