Target 11— Eleven Tips to Better Email Communications by Anju D. Jessani, MBA, APM

How do we manage our emails communications to better enhance our professional reputation with clients and colleagues? Here is a checklist of eleven improvements to your email practices that are free for the taking and easy to implement today.

1. Don't assume that every client uses email, or that both/all parties to a dispute use email. Even if the majority prefers email, offer an alternate method of communicating to the parties who do not - such as sending faxes or mailing copies of emails.

2. Include a signature with each outgoing email that includes your full name. I get email from NJAPM members where the sender expects me to them recognize them from their email address. For client emails, include the firm name if applicable, the mailing address, phone number, fax number, email address and website address. Make it easy for clients to follow-up with you. Most email programs including Outlook and Outlook express allow you to automatically add a signature to each outgoing message; go to *Tools* then *Options* and then *Signatures*. While you are at it, add a "Confidentiality Notice."

3. Include an appropriate topic in the "Subject" field in outgoing email so that the recipient has a preview of the subject matter, and that they know in advance that your email is legitimate. If you are responding to an email, make sure the subject email reflects what you want to convey, and do not just reply to sender without reviewing the subject line, and editing it if not appropriate or relevant.

4. In replying to emails include the original email if it helps clarify points in your email. However, if it is a photograph or information that is superfluous, just delete the original portion of the mail. This can be important in answering listserv messages, where readers do not really appreciate viewing the original message repeatedly.

5. Be careful in "Replying to All" versus "Replying to Sender." Who hasn't had that sinking feeling after we have hit "send" that we really did not want all the parties to see a response? Be cognizant that on some email programs such as Yahoo groups, you have to type in the recipients email address in responding – otherwise, the response will automatically go to all the members of the list. It may be prudent to get into the habit of clicking *Forward* on the menu and manually entering the name of the recipient, rather than clicking *Reply* or *Reply All,* when sending to a response to an individual.

6. Reference any attachments in the text of your email so that the recipient can feel more comfortable opening the attachment. Try to name your attachments so that they are related to the subject matter. If there is an alternate way of accessing the file such as visiting a specific your website, let the client know that is an alternative.

7. Manage the attachments to make it easier for clients and others to access these files. Be cognizant of the size of the file, and see if you can compress the file for quicker downloading. If you are using a new version of software, when possible, send it as a lower version of the software (e.g. Word 2003 rather than Word 2007), unless you know the client has the newer software. Also send the file as a PDF file if you are not sure the client has the required software to open the file, and always ask them to contact you if they have any problems opening the attachment. I use a free PDF writer available at **www.pdf995.com**.

8. Keep your communications brief; people tend to have less patience reading email communications than "snail mail" If your emails sounds like you are attempting to have a conversation, then its time to pick up the phone! If you have to write a longer email, present the ideas organized as a pyramid under a single point as Barbara Minto suggests in her book, *The Pyramid Principle*. I suggest a summary at the beginning of the email, so that the reader has a preview of your missive, with headers for each different topic, so that the reader does not get lost in the email.

9. Write your emails with the same tone and professionalism you would use in a formal letter. That includes your salutation, appropriate use of upper and lower case letters, utilizing spell and grammar check, and signing off appropriately, depending on your relationship with the recipient.

10. Keep posting those vacation messages if you are not going to read or answer emails because you are out of the office. We all know what its like to keep checking for a response to our email.

11. Finally, when writing in anger or hurt, save the message to your draft file and review it after you have had time to reflect on the issue. Think about how your email might be viewed if it were printed on the front page of *The New York Times*. When in doubt, sleep on it and read the email again when you are refreshed. Still in doubt? Get feedback from a trusted colleague or family member.

Tallying the Results: So, how did you do on the checklist? We all make mistakes using email. Nevertheless, being more mindful about writing emails will definitely prevent disasters and help your professional reputation. In our next issue of this newsletter and on a related topic, I will be discussing how to improve professional telephone communications. If you have any tips or pet peeves on the subject, please email me and I will be glad to reference them in my article!

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