

Guidelines for Digital District Communications

Digital Communications

Email, Social Media, Blogs, FTP, and APPS, are more than words, too many they represent the electronic media worlds we enter on a daily basis. There are an established set of “professional” standards and manners which should be used at all times.

As elected officials and public employees in the State of Ohio it is important to remember that all communications you send and receive that pertain to the management and work your office, are considered Public Records. As such they may and will likely be viewed by persons other than those that they were intended for. While many consider digital communications as a less formal way of communicating, many professional standards and common courtesies still apply.

Here are tips on what some have termed Netiquette:

Email is an essential part of our professional life. If you want your messages read, consider your recipient. That’s what the rules are all about.

- Think short: Limit the message to three or four paragraphs, tops, each with no more than four sentences. If you must include more, introduce points with short preview- for instance, “Deadline? Did I miss it?”
- Just the “Plain” Facts: Avoid the fancy formatting, flowery or colorful backgrounds, some people still use email programs that support plain text only. Also, what’s cool on your monitor may look like hell on mine.
- One person, please: If you’re sending an email to a large group of people, hide the recipient list to keep the file size down. It’s all right to use your email app’s carbon copy (cc) feature if you need to let everyone know who else is getting the message, but otherwise use the blind copy (bcc) feature. You can address the message to yourself (of leave the “To:” field blank, if your software allows it) and bcc everyone else
- Clean it up: Forwarded messages are overloaded with annoying brackets (>), extra spaces and returns.
- Risky attachments: Unless you know the person, don’t attach anything-images, programs, or Internet movies-to an email. If you must, and if the file’s larger than 1MB, be sure you get the recipient’s permission first. You can save yourself grief by setting your email program not to accept attachments over a reasonable size.
- Are you a groupie? Email, LISTSERV groups, Mailing listssound familiar? Under United States law, it is unlawful "to use any telephone facsimile machine, computer, or other device to send an unsolicited advertisement" to any "equipment which has the capacity (A) to transcribe text or images (or both) from an electronic signal received over a regular telephone line onto paper." The law allows individuals to sue the sender of such illegal "junk mail" for \$500 per copy. Most states will permit such actions to be filed in Small Claims Court. This activity is termed "spamming" on the Internet
- Password or Passport? NEVER give your User ID or password to another person. System administrators that need to access your account for maintenance or to correct problems will have full privileges to your account. Never assume your email messages are private or that they can be read by only yourself or the recipient. Never send something that you would mind seeing on the evening news.
- Spreading the word or spreading manure? When quoting another person, edit out whatever isn't directly applicable to your reply. Don't let your mailing software automatically quote the entire body of messages you are replying to when it's not necessary. Take the time to edit any quotations down to the minimum necessary to provide context for your reply. Nobody likes reading a long message in quotes for the third or fourth time, only to be followed by a one line response: "Yeah, me too."

- Who do you think you are? Include your signature at the bottom of Email messages when communicating with people who may not know you personally or broadcasting to a dynamic group of subscribers. Your signature footer should include your name, position, affiliation and Internet addresses and should not exceed more than 4 lines. Optional information to include is address and phone number.
- You can almost hear the email talk! Capitalize words only to highlight an important point or to distinguish a title or heading. Capitalizing whole words that are not titles is generally termed as SHOUTING!
- Here' are some additional tips:
 - Never send chain letters through the Internet. Sending them can cause the loss of Internet access.
 - Complaint Department? Follow chain of command procedures for corresponding with superiors. For example, don't send a complaint via Email directly to the "top" just because you can. Be professional and careful what you say about others. Email is easily forwarded.
 - You can be rude without trying: It is considered extremely rude to forward personal email to mailing lists without the original author's permission. Also, attaching return receipts to a message may be considered an invasion of privacy.
 - Funny weird or Funny Ha? Be careful when using sarcasm and humor. Without face to face communications your joke may be viewed as criticism. When being humorous, use emoticons to express humor. (tilt your head to the left to see the emoticon smile) :-)= happy face for humor
 - More alphabet soup: Acronyms can be used to abbreviate when possible, however messages that are filled with acronyms can be confusion and annoying to the reader.
- Email rules to remember:
 - "e Responsibly!" The content and maintenance of a user's electronic mailbox is the user's responsibility:
 - Check Email daily and remain within your limited disk quota.
 - Email that relates to your work is considered a public record
 - Non work related emails may be deleted to reduce storage requirements.
 - Keep messages remaining in your electronic mailbox to a minimum; move unwanted older messages to an archive folder where they can be stored until they can be deleted based on your records retention schedule.
 - Mail messages can be downloaded or extracted to files to be backed up for future reference.
 - Never assume that your Email is private and will only be read by yourself and the recipients; others may be able to read or access your mail.
 - Never send or keep anything that you would mind seeing on the evening news.
 - Keep files to a minimum. Files should be downloaded to your personal computer's hard drive or stored on CD's, USB drives or backup servers.
- Routinely and frequently virus-scan your system, especially when receiving or downloading files from other systems to prevent the spread of a virus.
- Your files may be accessible by persons with system privileges, so do not maintain anything private in your disk storage area.