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[The Twelve Worst Business Email Etiquette Mistakes Ever](#)

[TheLeader](#) on 12 Aug 2008 10:28 pm



(Editors' Note: This is a follow-up article to a post by [TheManager](#) on August 7, 2008 that detailed the most common mistakes in emails. To read that post, follow this [link](#).)

Proper Business Email Etiquette

If you're in business, it's time you knew how to send an email. Just because you can open Outlook and click "send" doesn't mean you're qualified to use email as a business tool.

Though [email was invented in the 1970s](#), our use of it as a business communications tool has never quite evolved. It seems that the streams of business emails received by the editors of AskTheManager.com aren't getting better with time.

Poor grammar, typos and everything in between have become an epidemic among

businesspeople. Even when someone is smart enough to employ their spellchecker, it's clear they don't understand the first thing about their audience.

The editors of AskTheManager.com argued endlessly, but finally created this list of the Twelve Worst Business Email Etiquette Mistakes Ever. (Perhaps we should have spent more time coming up with a better title for this post, though it's important to note that we rejected some really terrible names.)

In reverse order, here are the Twelve Worst Business Email Etiquette Mistakes Ever (to assist our readers, we provide links to the best business writing books, tools and resources available throughout this list):

[12\) Blind Copy](#) – The use of blind copy or “bcc” has, thankfully, been only a minor annoyance in business email. Proper usage is limited to including a colleague in your own company on an email to someone outside your company. Any other use is disingenuous, at best, and displays a very clandestine intention. Managers should read between the lines when they're blind copied on an email – whatever you do, don't reward the sender, and perhaps use this as a development opportunity.

The editors of AskTheManager.com examined 4,000 business emails received from individuals (we discarded anything that was sent from an automated program), and we discovered we were blind copied only 3 times, though we did receive a reply from someone who was blind copied on an email where one of the editors was the primary recipient.

Holy crap, we thought. This idiot didn't realize he wasn't supposed to let the rest of us know that he was blind copied.

It should go without saying, but don't ever, ever respond to an email on which you were just a bcc. If you're the sender, consider eliminating the bcc and simply forwarding the email (after it's been sent) to those you intended to bcc. This way they can never expose you by replying to everyone on the original email.

[11\) Spelling](#) – Weird, with virtually every single email program available providing a free spellchecker, that this would even make the list. Among the 4,000 emails we examined, we noted misspelled words in 486 of them (that's 12%). TheManager's solution is to check the *Help* or *Options* sections of your email program and set up automatic spellchecking. If that doesn't help, perhaps a dictionary might.

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Want To See How I Quit My Job? Proven
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[10\) Grammar](#) – Of the 4,000 emails we examined, we counted grammatical errors in 544 of them. That's almost 14%, and that's too high. Basically, 1 in every 7 emails we received in our business life contained some grammatical misstep.

There's only one solution for this and that's education. Buy a book, take a class or hire an editor, but do something to stop the onslaught of crap coming from your email program to your business partners. (We all thank you in advance.)

9) The Subject Line – The editors have two issues with subject lines: first, include one; and second, write a subject line that makes sense. Believe it or not, we received 43 emails without subject lines. While that's only 1%, we also received 605 emails with confusing, misleading or "lazy" subject lines. Combine these, and over 16% of the emails we examined did a poor job of conveying the true intent of the message they were meant to describe.

A subject line should always be used. Silly to even have to write that, but with 1% of our emails arriving without one, it must be stated.

Additionally, try to give some consideration to the recipient. For example, if the recipient works for ABC Company, don't send them an email with only "ABC Company" in the subject line – they know the name of their company! Do you want them to guess at the real subject of the email? How do you expect them to file this email to refer to it later? Are you just a selfish person who wants to organize your emails without regard to the recipient?

It's important to note that TheManager deletes email from unknown senders that contain only TheManager's company name in the subject line. Not because he's afraid of SPAM or viruses, he's just a very particular SOB.

8) Attachment Sizes – Rule number one for the novice email user: Email programs do not allow attachments of unlimited sizes. As crazy as that sounds, it's true. Typical email programs limit attachments to around 6-8 MB, some less, some more. Even a company's own email servers will limit the size of an email inbox, making it impossible to receive messages that have extremely large attachments.

The largest attachment received in the 4,000 emails examined was 11 MB. Interestingly, it was a PowerPoint document that consisted of only 15 pages. Why was it 11 MB in size? The sender didn't know how to properly use PowerPoint and they didn't bother to compress the images in the document. Once the images were properly compressed, the file size was a manageable 1.3 MB.

The largest attachment the editors never received? Of course, we don't know what we didn't receive, but one sender did wonder why TheManager never responded to an email with an attachment. When he asked the attachment size, the sender replied "sixty-two megabytes." Yikes! The worst part about an email of this size is that any sender dumb enough to think that a 62 MB file will be received successfully, obviously has no idea on how to send something via ftp.

It's not just email programs that create limits on what someone can receive. All of the editors at AskTheManager.com use wireless CDMA cards from cell phone providers on our laptops. These cards enable speeds about twice that of dial up, which means large attachments can literally crush you when you're sitting at the airport trying to access email.

The editors all agreed, the largest email attachment anyone should send should be 4 MB, with anything larger being transmitted via ftp. If you thought ftp was a floral delivery company, check out this [link](#). For those of you who don't know how to compress images in documents, perhaps you want to check out this [link](#).

7) Email Quantity – We all receive too many emails – it's a fact of business life in 2008. Our issue isn't really with the amount of diverse emails we receive, it's with the few senders who don't know how to walk down the hall or pick up a phone.

Quick Tip: Not every communication needs to be documented in email.

Between these few email offenders and the dreaded email string that goes on forever, we are running out of time to do any real work. The solution? File every email where you are not the primary recipient without reading them, and resist the temptation to keep long email strings alive.

Interestingly, the longest string the editors found in the 4,000 emails examined for this article had only 41 messages included. Everyone predicted the winner would include somewhere closer to 100 emails. Oh well, 41 still seems long to most people.

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While we're sure none of our readers have ever committed any of these egregious errors, we felt they needed to be reported so that we can, collectively, destroy the offenders with ridicule.

These were the first six in the Twelve Worst Business Email Etiquette Mistakes Ever. Please follow this [link](#) for the Top Six.

(We think it's important to note that there are resources to help you write better emails. Understanding how to use all of the features of Microsoft Outlook is a great first step. [Outlook 2007 For Dummies](#) is the best Microsoft Outlook training and reference guide available.)

TheLeader Recommends...



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One Response to “The Twelve Worst Business Email Etiquette Mistakes Ever”

1. [TheManager’s Top Ten Resume Tips for Leaders - Free Resume Tips for Out-of-Work Managers - Ask The Manager](#) on 24 Feb 2009 at 10:39 am #

[...] Cover Letter - Yes, you include one. Again, if you’re applying for an entry-level gig, this is less important. The higher up you go, however, the more critical it is to have a great cover letter. Use the same tips we delivered here for your resume that you use for your cover letter. And just like that great resume, we recommend if you want a great cover letter you should invest a few bucks in a good book. Not surprisingly, we recommend Block’s 101 Best Cover Letters. If your cover letter is included in the body of an email, please remember to avoid our common email typos detailed here. [...]

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