

Email Follies - How to Make E-friends and Influence E-people

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Note - this is not a technical post. It's strictly intended to make people laugh or at least chuckle. And for the record I like cats.

In a recent meeting with a group of mad guitar players (meaning they have a high skill level - not that they are angry) it was suggested that I write a quick post on email etiquette for posterity. Going around the circle it became clear that each of these "normal users" - that's how us tech types think of everyone else - had stories of emails that were unintentionally vague, ambiguous, redundant and also said the same thing twice. So I thought I'd put my pen to paper so to speak and try to give my take on the proper use of email.

I Have a Name... and It's a Boys Name Too

George Washington had a specific way of addressing letters. If he addressed you as "Sir" you were a mere acquaintance or perhaps someone he was doing business with. If he used "Dear Sir" you were at least a casual acquaintance and someone with which he had eaten or seen socially. If you were addressed as "My Dear Sir" you were a very close friend indeed. If he opened with "My Dear Sir" and closed with "Your *affectionate* and obedient servant" you better be ready to start picking out curtains.

These days such formal nuances are lost among "dude", "homie", "dog" (or whatever vapid teens and rappers are using in lieu of English these days) not to mention all those pictures of you in a speedo on Facebook. Still, when you write an email it is important that you start your email with a salutation. For Example, when you write to the Muse you don't have to use "My dear sir" if that weirds you out, but you can at least address me by name or a reasonable facsimile. "Mark" is fine. "Hey Mark" is ok. "Hey Muse" is tasteful without being gaudy. "Sir" is generally too formal but if you work for the IRS I insist you use it. But whatever you do don't just fire away with whatever important thing you have to say without at least acknowledging my presence. Frankly, the Muse even addresses himself in the third person most of the time.

Complete Thoughts Please

If you want to tell me about your latest cat video on You Tube *don't* send me a link with "So Funny!!!!" as your message. Yes I can imagine you sitting there laughing uproariously (the exclamation points are a dead giveaway) and I generally like videos that I think are funny. But just because you think it's funny doesn't mean I'll like it per se. You might mean "funny strange" or it might be something that would make me want to walk toward the light (like another cat video). Therefore, a few helpful complete thoughts in sentence form would be an appropriate use of your time if you *really* think it's necessary for me to see fluffy playing with string or massaging your shoulder with her little kitty claws. "Hey Mark, if you like cats, check this out. This is my cat Fluffy playing in her water dish. It's so cute!"

You see what I mean? When you communicate in this effective and clear fashion I have enough information to be able to delete your message right away. This saves me time and saves you from a follow up email of my video of cleaning fish ("So Gross!!!!!!").

Don't Ask Don't Tell

There are some things to never include in your email. This is very important and in the interest of harmony on the web. These simple rules will also keep me from audibly groaning and from a possible aneurism.

- Don't ask me to take a survey - even if there's a chance to win an iPod, iPhone, iPad, iTunes card, or any other iCrap. And no, if I'm not willing to take the survey myself I am not going to give you the names of 5 people I know so you can ask them to take it.
- Don't send me the latest internet joke making the rounds. You should know that my parents, in-laws and several other older relatives have already beat you to it. They all know I "work in computers" so naturally I'm the first person they think of when they get the latest story about 2 nuns walking into a bar etc. ("So Funny!!!!")
- I don't do chain letters. Participating in bad luck is my way of suffering on behalf of the universe.
- I know you only need 3 more people working for you in your network level marketing plan but I'm not much of a salesman. Marketing hyperbole tends to catch in the back of my throat and make me nauseous. You really don't want me throwing up on the carpet of a potential customer unless you are selling carpet cleaner (then it could be useful). But I wish you luck, and you can send me pictures of your pink Jaguar when you make it big - maybe in a video of you acting like a rap media mogul ("So funny!!!").

It's so Pretty

Finally, even though you just found the "stationary" in your MS Outlook, you should know that it's not nearly as cool as you think it is. Stationary is to email what Harlequin Romance novels are to good literature.

That being said, I don't mind you formatting your emails to make them more readable. For example, you might consider using a line break before you signature - that's always a nice touch. I'm not even opposed to some judicious use of bulleted lists, italics, bold type, indentations etc. And I suppose it's an open secret that the Muse loves and uses emoticons. A smiley can tell me when you are kidding or intend something to be light hearted. But that does *not* mean you have carte blanche to use every cryptic acronym that the texting world has foisted upon us (ROFL!!!!).

Conclusions

Whew! I'm glad I got that off my chest. I'd like to thank BJ "Clapton" Bryant and Jake "Frampton" Adams for the topic suggestion. I never realized how bitter I was over email. Now I guess I'll have to go pray and meditate to recover my natural zen like serenity. Or maybe I could write it all down in an email... hmmm..... that would be so funny!!!

P.S. 10 Muse points to anyone who can tell me what Disney quote is found in this Post.