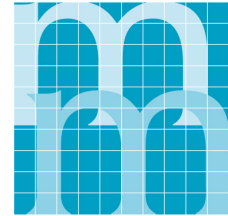


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Make Email Work Harder for Your Business

by Margaret Cain



**M squared Corporate
Communications**

In my work as a marketing communications consultant, I often see organisations investing in flashy websites and sophisticated 'emarketing' campaigns, but completely ignoring the emails which their clients and associates receive every day.

Email isn't only about fast, easy communications. It can be a valuable image-maker, offering even the smallest business an easy, low-cost way to create a favourable, professional impression.

Correctly addressed

Nothing shouts 'amateur' more loudly than having a generic email address, such as 'jenny267@yahoo.co.uk'.

So, make it a priority to sign up for a business-strength internet service and choose one which lets you have your own domain name. You can then send emails from 'jenny@wrentraining.co.uk' or direct any sales queries to 'info@wrentraining.co.uk'.

Instantly, and without pulling the wool over anyone's eyes, your one-woman business is punching above its weight.

Registering your own domain and having a personalised email address can cost less than a pound a week. If you're not technically inclined, it's worth ensuring that your internet service provider has a responsive support desk. I have found Eclipse (www.eclipse.net.uk) very helpful in this respect.

Don't miss an opportunity

With your professional address in place, you need to think next about your email stationery or signature. This is simply the sign-off that is automatically inserted at the bottom of every outgoing email, with your full name, job title/role and contact details.

Exploit email as a selling tool by adding a line underneath your contact details that sums up in a nutshell what you can offer. A simple statement such as 'Affordable accounting services' is all you need. You could even modify the message to target different markets.

Experiment with colours and typefaces in your stationery but keep it simple and easy to read. Use no more than two colours or typefaces.

You can also add a line with your professional credentials. However, no one wants to read your CV at the end of every message; an accepted *maximum* length for a signature is four to six lines.

Less is more

One recent survey found that we spend an average of 1½ to 2 hours a day on email. Here are a few pointers for organising email content to be kinder to your correspondent...

- Use a very legible typeface for the body text – Ariel 10 point is good.
- Stick to black text – not blue. It's easier to read on screen and when printed.
- Don't be overly creative: background colours, patterns and 'watermarks' are an unnecessary distraction.
- Use headings and bullets to break up the text and guide the reader (rather like this article!).

These are all simple techniques which can be easily incorporated into normal working practices, so that any business from sole trader upwards can look good, every time.

Next time...email etiquette – what's acceptable and what's not in today's email communications.

About the author:

Margaret Cain of M squared Corporate Communications helps businesses to get their message across to clients, partners and employees, in print, over the web, and in the media. To contact Margaret...

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