



49 Ways

to Improve Your Email Brand

Understanding the Purpose and Philosophy of Little Things Matter.

Whether or not they're written down on paper, we all have goals—life goals like love and happiness, professional goals like achievement and success, and personal goals like finding fulfillment in the things we do every day.

Helping you succeed at these goals is what Little Things Matter is all about. The purpose of Little Things Matter is to help you become the person you need to be in order to achieve your goals and live the life you want. You take a step closer to your goals when you realize that success—in all areas of life—boils down to the little things that people do.

Improving Your Email Brand

Have you ever considered that every email you send makes an impression on someone? Each impression plays an important role in defining your personal brand.

Just as every product has a brand, so do each of us. We're all branding ourselves every day, in every way—by how we sound on the phone; by our appearance; by our level of physical fitness; by how we acknowledge people, and through our email communications.

If the people you have corresponded with via email over the last 30 days were surveyed and asked to describe your personal email brand, what would the results show? Now take a minute to think about your goals and consider the person you need to become to achieve your goals. Would these survey results be consistent with this image?

My mentor Jim Rohn said, "For your life to get better, you have got to get better." Improving your email brand is part of getting better. Don't ever allow yourself to think that something as routine as your email messages doesn't matter—every thing matters.

To Your Success and Happiness,

Todd Smith

Creating Your Image

1 Be friendly

Your demeanor in your online communication should be similar to how you interact offline. If you value your relationships, take an extra 15 seconds to type something friendly at the beginning and/or at the end of the email. It could be simple one-liners such as "I hope you had a relaxing weekend," or "Thanks for all you do."

2 Take pride in your emails

Every email you send makes an impression and plays a small role in defining your brand. If email is your primary form of communication, what you say and how you say it will play a significant role in how you are viewed.

3 Assume a formal tone

Always assume the highest level of business formality until a relationship dictates otherwise. Formality communicates respect.

4 Be professional

If you want to be viewed as a professional, then make sure you present yourself as one.

Setting Up Your Email Address

5 Select the right email provider

I strongly suggest that you get an email address from a national company and not one from your local utility company or cable service provider. If you have an email address tied to a local ISP or utility company, you could lose your email address when you move or change utility providers. Select long-standing, recognized companies with names that are easy to spell like Gmail or Yahoo that don't have advertisements.

6 Make sure your name is displayed properly

Most email programs have name recognition software intended to be a time saver. Set your email account up so your first name is first and your last name is last and avoid using initials. This allows people to quickly find you when typing in your name. There are several companies and individuals I communicate with where their names are reversed. It's aggravating because when I send them an email I have to start typing their last name first for my email program to recognize the person.

7 Design an email address that identifies you

A good one will include your first and last name. This will make it easier for people to identify you by your email and find your email address in their address books.

8 Keep your signature files small

People will see your signature file whether it is big and bold or small and subtle.

9 Don't change your email address

If you get a new email address, don't discontinue your old email account. Don't inconvenience your contacts by asking them to change your email address. Just start using the new one and people will slowly convert to using your new email address. I have five email addresses and they all come into ONE email inbox. Current functionality of most email programs offers this simple organizational tool.

10 Include alternative contact information

Anticipate that there will be times when the recipient of your email would prefer to talk on the phone. Consider including your contact information in your signature file as an alternate way of reaching you.

Identifying Your Subject

11 Always type something in the Subject line

Show respect to your recipients by taking the time to summarize the subject of your email in a few short words. Neglecting this simple task may create a negative impression. People may even delay opening your message.

12 Update the Subject line as necessary

When the thread of your email correspondence has changed (which is normal and happens frequently), it's time to update the subject line.

Formatting Your Message

13 Keep your sentences short

Shorter sentences are easier to read and comprehend.

14 Use punctuation

Punctuation has a purpose; it makes your messages easier to read and understand.

15 Use sentence case

Sentence case is the traditional use of capitalization and lower case letters. By now, most people know that using all capital letters is akin to shouting. By the same token, using only all lower case letters sends the message that you don't care enough to hit the Shift key when needed. Both extremes are difficult to read.

16 Write short paragraphs

Short paragraphs will be easier to read and will improve the likelihood of them being read. Try to keep them from exceeding three sentences and always leave a blank line (white space) between paragraphs.

Writing Your Message

17 Use proper names

People love to hear and see their names. Take an extra two seconds to type out people's full name—rather than just an initial. I have a friend by the name of Mark who said he is turned off when people don't put forth the effort to type three more letters after the "M." I also recommend including a greeting before their names, like "Hi" or "Hey" or "Good Morning" or something appropriate for that person.

19 Type the email first

When typing an important email, type the message first and then add the person's name after you have proofed your message. This will keep you from sending the email prematurely.

21 Always put your name at the end of your emails

I can't tell you how many people send me emails with email addresses that don't identify themselves and don't include their name at the end of the email. You can't brand yourself much worse than that.

23 Avoid acronyms

Even though you believe the recipient will know what an acronym means, avoid using it. Acronyms can be misunderstood and can cause confusion. When in doubt, spell it out!

25 Use discretion when you copy people on emails

Make sure you are only copying people who need to be in the know.

18 Covering multiple topics

If your email covers more than one topic, separate the topics using numbers or bullets. This allows you to logically convey your thoughts and makes it easier for the reader to follow your topics and separately respond to each point. Your other option is to send separate emails for each topic or point you want to cover.

20 Verify the spelling of all names

It's imperative that you check and double-check the spelling of someone's name and their company name before hitting the Send button. Nothing will offend someone quicker than seeing their name misspelled.

22 Proof your emails

Never send an email without proofing it at least once. If it is important, then read it two or three times to make sure you are proud. Look for missing words and misspellings that aren't necessarily picked up by the spell check function such as "there" versus "their."

24 Be clear and concise

Say what you need to say as clearly as you can say it, using the fewest number of words possible. No one likes long or confusing emails that they have to read more than once.

26 Don't use text lingo

These are emails, not text messages. Spell things out.

Sending Emails

27 Keep attachments to a minimum

Unless you are sending an attachment that is requested or expected, it's best to ask permission before sending any large files. When you do, be mindful of its size. Learn how to compress or zip your attachments so that your email does not take up unnecessary bandwidth.

29 Don't assume privacy

Email is not a confidential means of communication. Regardless of any disclaimers, it is not safe to assume that your email will not be read by someone other than the intended recipient.

28 Use "bcc" for multiple recipients

If you want to send an email to a large group of people, it's important to keep your email addresses private. To do that put your name in the "To" field and put everyone else's address in the "Bcc" field (blind carbon copy). This will keep your email clean. It also prevents someone from pressing *Reply All* and wasting everyone's time with a response that should only be directed to you.

Responding to Emails

30 Respond quickly to emails

If you don't return emails in a timely manner, you will run the risk of destroying your reputation, losing your friends' respect, and reducing your market value. Most people expect an email response within 24 hours. If you can't return your emails within 24 hours, make those times the exception and not the norm.

31 Acknowledge emails

If you receive an email that you're not prepared to respond to for whatever reason, at least respond to the email by sending a short message acknowledging the email and indicating when you will respond. You don't want to leave people wondering if you received their message.

32 Return confirmation emails

When you schedule a call or appointment with someone and they confirm the time with you, take the extra few seconds to return the email to say "Confirmed." People don't like wondering if the appointment is firm.

33 Know when not to press Reply All

If your response to an email is only directed to the person who sent the email, then don't press the *Reply All* button. Respect the time of the other parties and don't make them read and delete your email.

34 Provide a complete response

When you receive an email that asks multiple questions, be sure to address each subject or question asked. It frustrates people when they have to reply to your reply because you didn't take the time or care to provide a complete response. I often respond to each point individually by using a different color font or numbering the items.

35 If you are going to take the time to read an email, respond at the same time

One of my time management tips is anything you can do in less than two minutes, do it immediately. It will require more of your time to come back and read the email a second time before responding.

36 Keep your inbox clean

During blocks of time I've allocated to returning emails, I will first scan my messages for anything appearing urgent. I then start with the oldest email and work my way through the list reading and responding to each email in the sequence in which it was received. This keeps me from overlooking messages and allows me to keep my inbox clean.

Calling versus Emailing

37 Know when to pick up the phone

If there is something upsetting to you, pick up the phone and call the other person. Don't send emotional emails that scar the relationship and cause you regret. Emails are like words carved in stone—you cannot retract them. If you are at all upset or aggravated, a good guideline is to wait until the next day before sending your message. When you read it the next morning, you'll have gained a more balanced perspective.

38 Don't limit your communication to email

Email is a great way to efficiently communicate, but don't rely on it exclusively. Set a goal to talk to people at least once for every ten email exchanges. Relationships are best built in-person, second by phone calls, and third by the written word. Take full advantage of the first two if you want the relationship to grow.

39 Use the recipient's time zone

When you are scheduling an appointment or a phone call, avoid confusion by using their time zone. This will keep them from trying to convert your time to their time zone, and it will reduce potential misunderstandings.

40 Know when to schedule a call

If your email is going to be long or complicated, just send a short email requesting a time to talk live.

Forwarding Other Emails

41 Be careful what you forward

Everything you forward is a reflection of your personal brand. Don't forward things unless you believe they will provide value, make someone smile, or enrich their lives.

42 Tell recipients why you are forwarding it

When you forward an article, email, or blog post, take an extra 15 seconds to explain why you are sending it. Don't make your reader guess your intent.

43 Never forward hoaxes

If it claims free or easy money, warnings of any kind, or contains the phrase, "If you care about X" and tells you to forward it, it's a hoax. Aside from being annoying, forwarding hoaxes sends the message that you are vulnerable.

Using Special Features

44 Use your out-of-office reply

Learn how to use your out-of-office reply feature. It lets people know when they can expect a response from you if you are not available to answer email. Be sure to set it so that the message gets sent only once to each unique sender.

46 Don't use an email authentication program

I sent an email to a lawyer I was looking to hire requesting an appointment. I received one of those email validation requests so that my email would be forwarded to him. I deleted the email and found a new attorney.

45 Never recall a message

Contrary to popular belief, the Recall feature does not prevent your original message from being sent. Sending a recall message only draws attention to your mistake. If a correction needs to be made, send a second email or call.

47 Do not abuse the 'high importance' designation

Save your priority or high importance flags for truly urgent matters. Overusing may send an undesirable message that your needs are greater than those of your recipients. Also keep in mind that many people do not pay attention to this designation. If I am sending an urgent email, I will type URGENT in caps in the Subject line along with the subject of the email.

Controlling Spam and Spam filters

48 Turn off or down your spam filters

Some email providers allow you to turn off the spam filtering process entirely, and others give you the opportunity to lower the sensitivity level. I would rather take an extra second to delete a spam message rather than miss an important email that ends up in my spam or junk mail folder. This also saves me time from having to check my spam folders.

49 Dealing with spam

Don't complain about it. Just remove it. This is 2010. We all get tons of spam. Changing your email address is not the answer.

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