TRANSCRIPT
PODCAST #5: E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

VOICE-OVER: Here is this week's Raising The Bar podcast for Business To Business Magazine with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley.

ROBIN: E-mail is like money—an excellent servant but a terrible master.

Hello and welcome to another edition of Raising the Bar's coaching series. I'm Robin Hensley and this week we will be talking about how to turn e-mail into the excellent servant it was meant to be. We will look at strategies for using e-mail to increase your effectiveness and decrease its disruption to your time and attention. We'll start with some e-mail basics and finish up with an action list you can put to work right away.

First, let's talk about what e-mail is and what it is not. E-mail is not the same as hard copy, according to Dawn-Michelle Baude, Ph.D. and author of *The Executive Guide To E-Mail Correspondence*. In her book, Dr. Baude explains the differences this way.

1. E-mail is designed to move or transact information as rapidly as possible from the writer to the reader. It usually produces immediate action, often in the form of another e-mail. Hard copy, on the other hand, is designed for contemplation over time and does not necessarily move the reader to act. E-mail is a transaction; hard copy is a reflection.

2. Unlike hard copy, e-mail is more than rectangular. It appears in a window, with clearly defined edges. These edges focus reading in a way that is very different from the way we read hard copy. The edge of a piece of paper is not so insistent. It's easier for the eye to lift, to wander, to reflect.

3. E-mail is boxed-in with multiple frames that relentlessly focus the eye on the text. Rigid borders confine the gaze and keep it on the words. The trapped-in quality of the text affects our expectation about the purpose and intent of reading. When we look at an e-mail message, we expect to receive information—right away. We get frustrated when we don't get it.

Why is it important to see the e-mail page differently from hard copy? If you understand how e-mail information is seen and processed at a conscious and sub-conscious level, you can use that knowledge to create messages that are more likely to be read and acted upon. We'll talk

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more about this later in the program. Right now, let's shift attention to some of the basic rules of e-mail courtesy.

First off, we've got to be sure that people take us seriously when messages with our name in the header arrive in their inbox. The quickest way to brand yourself as silly and someone who will fall for anything is to succumb to e-mail chain letters and cutesy information that urges you to pass it along. Asking others to join your on-line link-ups can also be annoying. In Europe and California, Linked-in and other such services are wildly popular and considered imperative to one's professional career. Here in Atlanta, most people haven't figured out where the benefit is yet. If these kinds of on-line services have proven to be a beneficial part of your business building strategy, then be sure to smooth the way with a brief e-mail message in advance of your invitation. Be selective in your invitations and make sure that you live up to your on-line profile. Keep in mind that your links are often public information. Do you want everyone to know who your customers are?

If your inbox is clogged with digital junk, spam protection, either through your Internet Service Provider or through third-party software, will slow down or eliminate it. You can also direct e-mail that isn't urgent, like newsletters and other subscriptions, to one or more separate e-mail accounts you can check at your leisure. That way you can respond to your most important messages without being slowed down by those that are not time-sensitive. Yahoo and g-mail offer free e-mail services you can use for this purpose. Signing up with them is quick and easy.

You wouldn't write a letter or a check and send it off without your signature, would you? An e-mail without a signature isn't finished either. It's also discourteous to the reader. Of course, by signature I mean the information you include at the bottom of your message that shows how to contact you. Signatures are easy to set up so they will attach to every message. If you're not sure about how your e-mail program handles signatures, your service provider should be able to help.

One more thought before getting back to our main topic and that is about text messaging. You may already know this, but I was surprised to learn that recent studies show that text messaging is rapidly replacing e-mail. Like hard copy, e-mail may never disappear entirely, but text messaging is the future and if you haven't used it, you may want to look at how you could incorporate it into your communication strategy to advance your goals.

Now that you've thinned out your e-mail inbox, stopped adding to what others may consider junk and made it easy for people to contact you, let's jump back to how to maximize your e-mail impact. Here are ten ways to make every message you send more effective. No need

to jot anything down now. You can download a complete transcript of this program at btobmagazine.com or stop by my website at raisingthebar.com.

1. **Make your message fast and easy for the reader**. At the beginning of the program, we learned that e-mail implies action; that it creates an expectation. That means the first thing you must do is to make your message fast and easy for the reader--mapping your message so that the reader intuitively knows where to look for specific information. For example, the subject line is the first place the reader looks. Make the subject short and compelling, capturing the information like a newspaper headline would. Include a signature line, as the reader will intuitively look for contact information there. Make the message itself stand out with bulleted points that move the reader's eye where you want it to go.

2. **Write for skimming and scanning.** Readers skim e-mails giving different levels of attention to its different parts. They scan looking for specific information while ignoring the rest. Set your e-mails up to help your reader do both.

3. **Use white space to speed up skimming and scanning**. To skim and scan, the eyes need to move around the text, focusing in some places, resting in others. A dense block of print discourages rapid eye movement. According to Dr. Baude, our expert on e-mail effectiveness, contrast speeds things up. Alternating print with empty white space "gives the reader wings".

4. **Use white space to add meaning.** White space is not empty. It's full of meaning. White space tells the reader that there's a change in idea, a shift in the argument, an example on the way, a contrast coming, or an objection being raised. Readers use white space to navigate information in an e-mail as much as they use printed words on the screen.

5. **Make the first sentence count.** In business e-mail, the first sentence of the text is the most important. Readers decide to read an e-mail immediately or save it for later based on the first sentence.

6. **Begin with your conclusion, then explain.**
   - For replies, give your answer in the first sentence and explain your reasons below.
   - To save time when making a request, tell the reader straight out what you want.
   - For updates, summarize the situation in the first sentence and then detail it in the rest of the e-mail
   - If you have a question, ask it right away
   - If the reader has asked you to reply, remind him or her of that at the start

7. **Keep it simple to keep things moving.**
    - Use headers and sub-titles to enhance skimming
    - Use short sentences and common vocabulary as much as possible
    - Keep your message length to screen size to eliminate scrolling
    - Use simple, straightforward language to get your message across right away
    - Use simple present and past tense
    - Use simple salutations. A first name followed by a comma is less formal, a name followed by a colon is more formal and signals something important is about to be said
    - Cut the e-mail thread and start a new e-mail when the length becomes cumbersome
    - And, as we mentioned earlier, use the subject line to gain the reader's attention.

8. **Build connection through your tone.**
    - Avoid using CAPITALS. The reader interprets them as SHOUTING.
    - Avoid using punctuation such as exclamation marks ("!") when your message is intended to be formal.

9. **Proof then send.** To get a fresh perspective and to pick up typos and errors,
    - Change the typeface to see your message with fresh eyes
    - Enlarge the type size
    - Print a hard copy and/or
    - Read your message aloud to listen for errors.

And finally,

10. **Know when to call instead of e-mailing.** Use the telephone to build or enhance your connection with the reader:
    - When you need to communicate how you feel
    - When you need to break bad news before you send the e-mail or
    - When you have been e-mailing back and forth for several weeks without achieving resolution.

In closing, e-mail is an excellent servant but it is you that must change to master it. Set specific times of the day when you check your e-mail, use e-mail with people who tend to be long-winded on the phone, copy only those that need to know and make friends with your "Delete" key. Be selective about who you give your email address to and treat your e-mail just as you would hard copy--act on it, forward it, file it or trash it.

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For more on e-mail dos and don'ts, sample texts for a variety of situations and visual cues to give your messages more impact, pick up a copy *The Executive Guide To E-Mail Correspondence* by Dawn-Michelle Baude, Ph.D.

Until next time, I'm Robin Hensley.

VOICE-OVER: You have been listening to a Raising The Bar program on e-mail with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley. For a full transcript of this program, stop by the Business To Business Magazine website at btobmagazine.com or raisingthebar.com

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