¶1375

E-Mail

The volume of e-mail messages continues to grow at an explosive rate—and for good reason. The use of e-mail eliminates the time lag involved in sending documents by regular mail (also known as *snail mail*), and it avoids the expense of sending documents by express mail. It also does away with the frustration that results from playing telephone tag (leaving messages but never connecting).

The following guidelines (¶¶1375–1389) suggest how to make the best use of what this technology has to offer.

The Nature of E-Mail

1375 **a.** The term *e-mail* refers to a way of transmitting messages electronically. In that sense it is an alternative to snail mail, express mail, and faxes. Whether we say we want "to send a report by *e-mail*" (using the term as a noun) or "to *e-mail* a report" (using the term as a verb), we are referring to e-mail as a mode of transmission.

b. The term *e-mail* can also be used to describe messages that are formatted by means of a special template. Thus it is quite acceptable to say, "I received three *e-mails* from Tony LaBalme today."

NOTE: As a way of preserving the distinction between these two meanings, the following discussion will use *e-mail* to refer to the mode of transmission and *e-mail message* to refer to a document formatted in a special way.

c. Not everything transmitted by e-mail has to make use of an e-mail template. Letters typed on a letterhead template, messages typed on a memo template, as well as reports, contracts, itineraries, and many other types of documents are often sent by e-mail. However, special precautions are required in order to preserve the original formatting of these documents. (See ¶1385.)

1376 **a.** Many people consider e-mail to be a *very informal* means of communication, and therefore they assume that e-mail messages do not have to comply with the normal standards of written English. This assumption is reflected all too often in hastily written messages that are badly organized and ridden with errors in spelling, grammar, usage, and style. If there were a motto for this style of e-mail composition, it would be "Anything Goes."

b. The "Anything Goes" approach may be acceptable in one's personal e-mail messages, but business communications are business communications, no matter how they are sent—by e-mail, fax, or snail mail.

c. E-mail messages can range from the extremely formal to the extremely informal as specific circumstances dictate. When making initial contact with someone outside your organization, it is appropriate to write more formally. Once you have established a friendly relationship with this person, your subsequent exchanges can become more informal. By the same token, your e-mail messages to higher-level managers will be more formal unless a relationship is established that permits a more casual approach. But even when circumstances warrant a less formal style, this does not mean that you can ignore the rules for grammar, usage, and style.

d. In short, if you are writing as an individual on your own behalf, you can be as casual and as sloppy as you wish. But when you write e-mail messages on behalf of the organization you work for, you must observe all the standards that apply to other forms of business communications.

e. Always remember that every e-mail message written on an organization's equipment belongs to that organization. If higher management decides that the contents of an e-mail message are improper, the writer can be disciplined or even fired. Also keep in mind that e-mail messages produced as evidence in civil lawsuits have led to judgments against organizations. An e-mail message has even been the basis for convicting the writer of the message of a crime. Be very careful not to put anything in a message that could have damaging consequences for you or your organization.

f. Even though you intend an e-mail message to be read only by the recipients you have specifically named in the heading, you cannot be sure that others will not have access to your message. Therefore, never put anything in an e-mail message that will embarrass you if the message is read by anyone other than the designated recipients.

1377 E-mail messages sent on the Internet can be distributed through local and wide area networks, bulletin board systems, and online services. Procedures for sending and receiving e-mail messages will therefore differ, depending on the system you use. Even the construction of mailing addresses will vary as a result.

a. An e-mail address consists of several elements. Here are a few examples:

toddwaltz@aol.com   info@amazon.com
marthalynch@bellsouth.com   subscriptions@wired.com

(1) The address begins with a *user name* (the distinctive name used to sign on to an e-mail system). For example, a person named Rita J. Bella might use *ritajbella, rita.bella, rita_bella,* or *rbella560*. An organization might use the name of a position, a department, or a function as a user name (for example, *info* or *customer service*).

(2) The user name is followed by the symbol for *at*—@—which is sometimes referred to as a "strudel" because of its resemblance to a type of rolled pastry.

(3) The final element of an e-mail address is called the domain name and consists of two parts: the name of the host computer, followed by a dot and a top-level domain (TLD), which indicates the type of organization that owns the host computer. If you use America Online, the final element will appear as *aol.com;* if you use BellSouth, the final element will appear as *bellsouth.net.* Many organizations have their own host computers; for example:

mcgraw-hill.com   cornell.edu

national.unitedway.org   senate.gov

NOTE: It is possible to create your own domain name—for example, one that is based on your personal name or the name of your business. You would then pay a company to host your domain on its server.

(4) The top-level domain is expressed in abbreviated form. For example, *.com* usually signifies a commercial enterprise, *.org* signifies a nonprofit organization, *.edu* signifies an educational institution, and *.gov* signifies a governmental institution. Here is a brief list of typical e-mail addresses:

info@wiredmag.com (*Wired* magazine)

doctors@newyork.msf.org (Doctors Without Borders)

webeditor@kellogg.northwestern.edu (Kellogg School of Management)

president@whitehouse.gov (the President of the United States)

➠ *For a full list of the top-level domains now in use, see ¶1508b.*

b. E-mail addresses may be typed in all-caps, in lowercase, or in some combination of the two. The use of lowercase is simplest. As a rule, you may lowercase an e-mail address that the user has chosen to capitalize. However, in rare cases a host computer may not recognize an e-mail address unless the user name is typed in the style established by the user. To be sure that a user will receive your e-mail, preserve the style he or she has given you. In any case you may lowercase the domain name without fear that your e-mail will go astray: domain names are never case-sensitive.

c. Never alter the spacing, the punctuation, or the symbols that appear in an e-mail address.

➠ *For guidelines on how to divide a long e-mail address at the end of a line, see ¶1510b.*

E-Mail Netiquette

1378   *Netiquette* is the name given to a code of behavior for people who send and receive e-mail messages. Upon first hearing, the term suggests the electronic equivalent of a set of fussy rules that tell you, for example, which fork to use with the salad course. But netiquette does not consist of a set of rigid rules. It encourages you to adopt a certain attitude of thoughtfulness—to be more considerate of the people you