

Course: Professional Issues in Information Technology

Week 10: Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

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Lecture learning outcomes

At the end of this lecture, the learner should be able to:

1. Distinguish the terms etiquette and netiquette
2. Describe good email etiquette
3. Describe bad email etiquette
4. Describe the professionalism expected while using E-mail channels of communication

Introduction:

In this lecture we evaluate the area of communication on the Internet in this age of blogs and social media. There are rules and customs that one could use while communication over the Internet via email. We highlight some but not all of these dos and don'ts.

Definition of terms:

Etiquette

- ✓ Etiquette refers to the customary code of polite behaviour in a society or among members of a particular profession or group ¹

¹ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 1

Netiquette

- ✓ Netiquette is therefore some guidelines on good ways to help someone communicate and interact with others on the Internet.
- ✓ There are many rules that one can use and other rules that can be added with time as technology evolves.

Electronic Mail (E-mail)

- ✓ This is a major communication tool in the Internet and there are rules that IT professionals should follow while writing emails and replying to emails²
- ✓ There are various dos and don'ts that have been proposed and adopted worldwide and we highlight a few in this lecture.

(A.) Good Email Etiquette

- i. Check the organization's email policy since many organizations have rules about the type of message that can be sent and whether inbound or outbound emails are monitored or screened.³
- ii. Think about the message content before sending it out. A proper and complete introduction of oneself is important at the beginning of an email.⁴
- iii. Ensure that the content is relevant to the recipients since nobody likes to receive junk email.

² Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 9

³ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 137

⁴ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 17

- iv. Be polite and pleasant in writing because terseness can be misinterpreted. Spell check emails before sending them out.⁵
- v. Always trim any quoted message down as much as possible before sending it out.
- vi. Humour and irony should only be used sparingly. Smileys such as :) or :(to indicate facial expressions may be used, but only after confirming that the recipient understands what they mean.
- vii. Ensure that you have a relevant "Subject" line that sends a summative message of the email content.⁶
- viii. Quote from the original message where relevant and break down the quoted message into paragraphs and comment on them individually to make it clearer.
- ix. Be patient with other Internet users, especially with inexperienced email users.
- x. Give people the benefit of doubt since some people are familiar with email etiquette while others are not
- xi. Include a brief signature on the email messages to help the recipients understand the source of the email - who it is from, job title, organization etc. especially when dealing with people not known very well⁷.
- xii. Be careful when replying to mailing list messages, or to messages sent to many recipients.
 - i. Replying to the whole list? - use "*reply to all*" option
 - ii. Replying to the sender alone? - use "*reply*" option ⁸

⁵ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pgs. 27, 28

⁶ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 19, 31

⁷ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 12

⁸ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 20

- xiii. Delete anything that is not needed or is deemed trivial.
- xiv. Tell people the format of any attachments sent with the email.
- xv. Tell your correspondent if you forward a message to somebody else to deal with an issue, so they know who to expect a reply from.⁹
- xvi. Use emphasis only where its useful to do so. If your email system doesn't allow bold or *italics* then a common convention is to use a *star* on either side of the word you want to emphasize.¹⁰
- xvii. Understand that languages such as English differ in spelling between different countries. "Organization" and "humour" are the correct spelling in British English, but in American English it would be "organisation" and "humor". Non-native speakers of English may use a variety of national spellings.

⁹ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 15

¹⁰ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 16

(B.) Bad Email Etiquette

- i. *Replying to email messages when angry, as one may regret this action later. Once the message has been sent, this action cannot be undone and one may not be able to recover it*¹¹.
- ii. *Keeping mail on the servers longer than necessary, especially large attachments.*
- iii. *Copying out an entire, long message just to add a line or two of text such as "I agree ". This portrays laziness and the recipient may miss the one-line response due to the lengthy message copied and pasted*¹².
- iv. *Typing emails in UPPERCASE letters i.e. typing in CAPITALS. This is considered as SHOUTING to the recipients and it is one of the rudest things one can do*¹³.
- v. *Overusing exclamation marks ("!"). They are meant for emphasis and one should avoid using more than one exclamation mark ("!!"), especially if your email is quite formal. Also, over-use of the period sign (full-stop) e.g. "...." can make a message difficult to read.*
- vi. *Sending irrelevant messages more so to mailing lists or newsgroups*¹⁴.
- vii. *Sending large attachments without checking with the recipient first.*
- viii. *Sending excessive multiple postings to people who have no interest. This is known as "spamming" and it portrays ignorance and may lead to serious trouble with the employer, the Internet Service Provider (ISP) or IT the department*¹⁵.

¹¹ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 14

¹² Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 24

¹³ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 16

¹⁴ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 33

¹⁵ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 18

- ix. Sending chain letters or "make money fast" messages. There are hoaxes spreading online and they are linked to the spread of computer viruses. One should never pass these on without checking with the IT department first¹⁶.
- x. Criticizing people's spelling is considered petty. Many people have no way of running a spell check on their messages and will certainly make typos. Not all nationalities spell words in the same way¹⁷.
- xi. Conducting arguments in public, for example on a mailing list.
- xii. Sending people abusive email messages, which is also known as "flaming" people¹⁸.
- xiii. Making personal remarks about third parties via E-mail. E-mail messages can come back to haunt someone. ¹⁹
- xiv. Sending out unsuitable emails or attachments, especially anything obscene, lewd or of sexual nature as they may well be found by a third party later²⁰.
- xv. Overelaborating signatures on the email message. Avoid using screaming colours in the signature, they may distract the recipient and the message in the email may not be internalized fully. Also avoid using scanned images in a signature as these tend to be very large²¹

¹⁶ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 29

¹⁷ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 109

¹⁸ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 112

¹⁹ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg 112

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²¹ Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 13

- xvi. Marking things as urgent even when they are not urgent. In future correspondences, one may have an urgent message and it may not be treated in the way it deserves²².
- xvii. Posting personal email addresses on web sites and other public parts of the Internet unless you want to be deluged with spam.

Content Covered in Week 10: Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

We have been able to cover the following:

1. Distinguished the terms etiquette and netiquette
2. Described good email etiquette
3. Described bad email etiquette
4. Described the professionalism expected while using E-mail channels of communication

Course Text Books

1. Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, *Software Reference Ltd.* (2006). ISBN: 0955461405
2. Professional Issues in Information Technology. Bott, F. *British Computer Society, UK.* (2005)
3. Ethics in Information Technology, 4th ed. Reynolds, G. *Course Technology, Boston, USA.* (2011)
4. Computers in Society: Privacy, Ethics and the Internet. George, J.F. *Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey.* (2004)
5. Cyber-ethics: Morality and Law in Cyberspace, 5th ed., Spinello, R.A. *Jones & Bartlett, Burlington, Mass., USA.* (2013)
6. Contemporary Issues in Ethics and Information Technology. *Schultz, R.A. IRM Press, USA.* (2005)

²² Netiquette: Internet etiquette in the age of the blog. Mathew Strawbridge, Software Reference Ltd. (2006). ISBN: 0955461405 Pg. 21