

Course: Professional Issues in Information Technology

Week 10: Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

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Learning outcomes Lecture 10: Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

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

Course description

- The course begins with an introduction to terminologies like profession, data and Information Technology. This will be followed by a coverage of the data processing cycle, an introduction to Law, Ethics and the Concept of privacy. Cyber crimes will then be covered to see what the law says in relation to cyber crimes.
- A detailed coverage of Intellectual property rights will then follow with the learners being exposed to various property rights and the glaring issue of plagiarism.
- The four dimensions of ethical dilemmas will then follow to enable learners apply wisdom in matters related to ethical decision making.
- An evaluation of the effect of Information Technology in employment will culminate the course where learners will cover issues related to health and safety at work, **Netiquette**, Software contracts, major internet security issues and Computer misuse.

Introduction

- **Etiquette** refers to the customary code of polite behaviour in a society or among members of a particular profession or group¹
- **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)

- A major communication tool in the Internet is Electronic Mail (E-Mail)
- 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 shall 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 screened³.

- ii. Think about the message **content** before sending it out. A proper and complete introduction of oneself is important at the beginning of an email⁴.
- iii. Ensure that the content is **relevant** to the recipients since nobody likes to receive junk email.

- iv. Be **polite and pleasant in writing** because terseness can be misinterpreted. Spell check emails before sending them out⁵.
- 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 content⁶.

viii. Quote from the original message where relevant and break down the quoted messages 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.

- Replying to the whole list?
- use “*reply to all*” option
- Replying to the sender alone? - use “*reply*” option⁸

xiv. Delete anything that is not needed or is trivial.

xv. 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 from⁹.

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 emphasize¹⁰.

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.

B. Bad Email Etiquette

- i. Replying to email messages when **angry**: someone may regret it later. Once a message has been sent, it is possible to undo this action or recover it¹¹.
- ii. Keeping mail on your **server** 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 pasted¹².

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 do¹³.

v. Overusing exclamation marks ("!") .They are meant for emphasis and one should avoid using more than one exclamation mark ("!!"), especially for emails that are formal. Again, overusing the period sign (full-stop) for example "... " can make a message difficult to read.

- vi. Sending **irrelevant** messages **especially** to mailing lists or newsgroups¹⁴.
- vii. Sending large **attachments** without checking with the recipient first.

viii. Sending **excessive multiple postings** to people who have no interest also known as "**spamming**". This portrays ignorance and may lead to serious trouble with the employer or the Internet Service Provider (ISP) or the IT department¹⁵.

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**.
This **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 **excessive multiple postings** to people who have no interest. This is known as "flaming" people¹⁸.

xiii. Making **personal remarks** about third parties. Email messages can come back to haunt you¹⁹.

xiv. Sending **unsuitable** emails or attachments, especially anything obscene, lewd or of sexual nature as they may well be found by a third party later²⁰.

xv. Using an **overelaborated** signature on your 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.

xv. Marking things as **urgent** if when they are not. In future correspondences, when one has a real urgent message it may not be treated in the way it deserves²².

xvii. Posting personal email address on web sites and other public parts of the Internet unless one wants to be deluged with **spam**.

Content Covered in Lecture 10: Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

We have been able to cover the following:

1. Distinguished the two terminologies:
etiquette and netiquette
2. Described good email etiquette
3. Described bad email etiquette
4. Demonstrated 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)