EMAIL CULTURE

INTRODUCTION
A communications evolution began in 60s, which got a boost in 1972, when @ was picked for the use in email. It became a revolution in 90s and exploded into 2.6 billion email accounts\(^{(2)}\).

Recent statistics from the Office for National Statistics indicate that the UK has the second-lowest rate of productivity out of the leading G7 industrial nations - putting it behind the US, Germany, France, Italy and Canada, but ahead of Japan. The UK's development of a "macho culture" in which employees wanted to be seen to be available by email at all hours, was causing stress and depression, and in turn making workers less efficient\(^{(2)}\).

Email has become and stayed ubiquitous form of business communication, although other forms of informal communications mushroomed such as Instant Messaging (IM), social networking, text messaging, Mobile IM, tweeting, etc. According to a report\(^{(3)}\) based on 2013 statistics, there were about 4 billion accounts and about a billion business email accounts worldwide and about 2.6 billion users\(^{(4)}\). Despite all of its drawbacks and problems\(^{(5)}\), it is impossible to get rid of email from working lives any time soon.

PROFESSIONAL EMAIL ETIQUETTE
Experts in professional writing identify the following items to be important for a proper “email etiquette” in this global Internet and email based business world:

1. Recipients
It is important to be selective and judicious in selecting your recipients relevant to the subject. Otherwise it would cause confusion. It is also possible that once an email is sent, it can be forwarded by any one of the recipients to a total stranger or it may go viral on
the internet. In addition, if the unnecessary recipients are copied, they will ignore future emails from the writer.

If it is a reply to an email, it is important to make sure if all the recipients need to see your response. Just because the original sender copied certain recipients, they are not automatically and necessarily recipients to the response.

Before responding to an email, it is important to make sure that the intent of the sender is clear, if it is not clear, making assumptions will cause problems. It is better to get clarification by phone or in person, rather than to make a wrong assumption and jeopardize the relationship.

**Forwarding Email**

When forwarding an email, it is a good practice to provide an introduction of the subject and the role of the new recipient, in general; and when forwarding a long chain of emails to a new recipient, in particular. Otherwise, the reader may get lost in the trail and may fail to see the reason for which it was forwarded.

It is also important to note that people feel that their time is precious, in general. If an email fails to catch their attention, it may be perceived as “junk” that does not serve a specific purpose or provide any benefit. There is a high probability of it being deleted and the sender being identified as spammer.

**2. Subject**

After you have filled in the fields such as TO, CC and BCC, the next item is the “Subject.” An email must have a subject for the following reasons:

a) The subject helps the recipient to know the relevance of the content of the letter, just like in any professional letter writing, where the subject is identified under the heading RE.

b) The subject also helps the recipient in filing, retrieval and reviewing as needed.
c) An email without the subject may not be read at all, as there is a lot of email, including spam, in any inbox, nowadays.

d) A wrong subject is even worse than no subject. Sometimes, the writer finds an old email of the recipient and simply replies, without changing the subject. The recipient will be confused and may misfile it, because the subject is not the real subject of body of the email.

e) Queries in the subject with blank body may be considered spam. It is better to write an email with subject, salutation, body and signature.

3. Salutation
There has to be a proper salutation, such as “Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Family Name” or “Dear Jane/John,” in a formal letter or email.

However, it has become a norm to simply give the information, without a salutation and signature, in many office communications, as if it is an informal texting, Instant Messaging or Chat. Although used in a professional setting, these communications are informal and informational. Whether this informal email is proper is a question best answered on a case-by-case basis. One has to use commonsense and judgment depending upon the context.

4. Color, Font and Format
As there are different email clients with different capabilities available, the formatting in the writer’s email may be lost in the recipient’s email system, losing all the emphasis placed on bold, underlines, colors, indents, bullets etc., which are appropriate in normal business writing on paper.

Generally, black text on a white background should be used to make it easy to read in an email based formal business communication. Typically, in paper communications, colors such as blue, red, or green may be used to call attention without distracting the reader, and also in word documents in which “tracking” activated for the purpose of
distinguishing the changes from the original. Colored words within a body copy may make it difficult to read, not only for the color blind, but also for normal people due to settings in monitors and background colors. Use color highlighting to focus the reader’s attention is a common practice, but using wrong colors would make it difficult to read, e.g., red color to highlight black text would be impossible to read. In addition, color may be lost in the recipient’s system.

Similarly, it is advisable to use common fonts that are shared across all systems, such as Times New Roman, Verdana, Arial, Georgia etc. The purpose of a professional email is to make sure people get the intended message conveyed without any confusion or distortion.

Other issues to consider:
All capital sentences are considered yelling or shouting emphasis. All capitals for headings are acceptable, as bold and color may be lost in transmission.

Patterned backgrounds may cause problems, making it difficult to read. In addition, it may be lost in transmission.

Avoid emoticons in professional emails, which also may be lost in translation.

5. Body
Emails should be professional, short and informative. Long emails confuse people. Nowadays, nobody has time to read long emails. When it is a long letter, it may be a good idea to prepare a memo on a letter head and attach to your email. However, it may not serve any purpose to attach a two line note in an attachment. In addition, attachments have limitations in size and have to be screened for viruses.

It is better to be bland and avoid sarcasm and jokes, which may be interpreted as unprofessional or offensive, depending upon the sensitivities of the recipients.
6. **Proofread**

Any letter or email should be proof read before it is sent out. Missing verbs, prepositions, punctuation, and typos will make it difficult to understand the intent of the letter and writer. Such errors are considered as proof of writer’s lack of communication and writing skills, although such errors are very common.

7. **Signature and Contact Information**

Just like in any professional letter, a professional email should contain the writer’s name, postal address, phones, fax, email and web address etc., so that the recipient can easily get in touch with the writer, if and when needed. In an email, it would be very easy to include a signature, with all the contact details, which can be automatically appended to every outgoing email, under the signature.

8. **Commonsense-Business Sense**

Finally, it is important to use the business email for business purposes only and personal email for personal issues. It is not only professional etiquette, but also commonsense, because business email is company’s property that is owned and monitored by the company. When using business email, senders are representing the company, and there is no expectation of privacy or secrecy.

When using the personal email, senders are representing their individual identities and personalities and a reasonable expectation of privacy exists, and the employer cannot not monitor under normal circumstances. Courts usually side with the employer when it comes to email privacy. A survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) revealed that more than half of the responding companies monitor employee email, and one quarter of them had fired an employee for misusing email. Further, the AMA study showed that 15% of the companies surveyed had faced a lawsuit triggered by employee email, providing a legitimate reason for the employers to monitor employee communications.
In addition, unless affirmative steps are taken to encrypt messages\(^\text{(10)}\), email cannot be a confidential method of transmitting information. This is because anonymous hackers can intercept it, law enforcement officials with a warrant can seize electronic correspondence, and the Internet service provider may legally be able to scrutinize email.

9. Things to Avoid

As a rule of thumb, any message that would be uncomfortable or results in a blush, when a coworker or employer reads it, should be avoided. Email is not an urgent message delivery system. Emailing people who do not need to know should be avoided. Avoid wrong subject and no subject.

EMAIL FOR FAMILY\(^\text{(11)}\)

As a family matter of safety, putting personal information in an email is not always a good idea, contrary to the discussion above. Important information, such as full name, address, phone number and passwords should not be shared through email.

Recent data\(^\text{(12)}\) suggests that social media venues like Facebook and Twitter have surpassed e-mail as the preferred method of communication in all age groups. While today’s tweens and teens may be more digitally savvy than their parents, but their lack of maturity and life experience can quickly get them into trouble with these new social venues. For this reason, it is imperative that parents talk with their children of all ages about social media and monitor their online social media use to help them navigate this new online social world.

A federal law, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)\(^\text{(13)}\), was created to help protect kids younger than 13 when engaged in online activities. COPPA imposes certain requirements on operators of websites or online services directed to children under 13 years of age, and on operators of other websites or online services that have actual knowledge that they are collecting personal information online from a child under 13 years of age. Since the implementation of the rule, several companies have received rather large civil fines for violations of COPPA. COPPA prohibits unfair or deceptive
acts or practices in connection with the collection, use, or disclosure of personally identifiable information from and about children on the Internet. Most recently, UMG Recordings was fined $400,000.00 for violations\(^{14}\).

**REFERENCES AND NOTES**

\(^{1}\) Dr. Rao Vepachedu is the Managing Director at Cardinal Risk Management and registered patent attorney with extensive experience in the management of intellectual property and extensive experience in research and teaching. He currently works for Cardinal Intellectual Property (CIP), Cardinal Risk Management (CRM), and Cardinal Law Group (CLG). In addition, he is the president of Vepachedu Educational Foundation Inc. (www.vepachedu.org), a 501(c) (3) educational foundation. For more information visit: www.linkedin.com/in/vepachedu; http://www.avvo.com/attorneys/60201-il-sreenivasarao-vepachedu-764535.html, and http://www.crm-ip.com/vepachedu.html. Contact: svepachedu@yahoo.com or rao.vepachedu@cardinal-ip.com: www.linkedin.com/in/vepachedu and http://www.crm-ip.com/vepachedu.html.

\(^{2}\) Peter, The history of email: Ray Tomlinson is credited with inventing email in 1972. Like many of the Internet inventors, Tomlinson worked for Bolt Beranek and Newman as an ARPANET contractor. He picked the @ symbol from the computer keyboard to denote sending messages from one computer to another. So then, for anyone using Internet standards, it was simply a matter of nominating name-of-the-user@name-of-the-computer: http://www.nethistory.info/History%20of%20the%20Internet/email.html; accessed on August 31, 2015

\(^{3}\) Email epidemic is damaging UK productivity: http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-32622224; accessed on August 31, 2015


\(^{8}\) Proofreading is the reading of a galley proof or an electronic copy of a publication to detect and correct production errors of text or art. The author confesses to proofreading errors and apologizes for any confusion due to such errors, which could have been avoided with diligence.

Proofreading means examining your text carefully to find and correct typographical errors and mistakes in grammar, style, and spelling. Here are some tips: https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Proofreading.html; accessed on August 31, 2015

This handout provides some tips and strategies for revising your writing: http://writingcenter.une.edu/handouts/editing-and-proofreading; accessed on August 31, 2015

Proofreading is primarily about searching your writing for errors, both grammatical and typographical, before submitting your paper for an audience (a teacher, a publisher, etc.). Use this resource to help you find and fix common errors: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/01/; accessed on August 31, 2015

The Importance of Proofreading: http://www.papercheck.com/proofreading.html; accessed on August 31, 2015


Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA), available at: https://epic.org/privacy/ecpa/; accessed on August 31, 2015


Clinton says 'sorry' for email confusion: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton has said she is sorry that her use of a personal email account as secretary of state has caused confusion. She is facing criticism from opponents over the issue. http://www.dw.com/en/clinton-says-sorry-for-email-confusion/a-18695013; accessed on August 31, 2015


"... the company's interest in preventing inappropriate and unprofessional comments or even illegal activity over its e-mail system outweighs any privacy interest the employee may have in those comments." Michael A. Smyth v. The Pillsbury Company, C.A. NO. 95-5712 (1996).


"We hold that, under the circumstances, Stengart could reasonably expect that e-mail communications with her lawyer through her personal account would remain private, and that sending and receiving them via a company laptop did not eliminate the attorney-client privilege that protected them. By reading e-mails that were at least arguably privileged and failing to notify Stengart promptly about them, Loving Care's counsel breached RPC 4.4(b)." the Supreme Court of New Jersey, in Tengart V. Loving Care Agency Inc LCA, 2010 WE 1189458 (N.J. March 30, 2010). See more at: http://caselaw.findlaw.com/nj-supreme-court/1522648.html#hash:GSt5e70Uv.dpuf; accessed on August 31, 2015


(10) A process that uses sophisticated software to garble your words and then allow the recipient to unscramble and read them. http://www.esentia.com/a-parents-guide-to-kids-online-safety/a/262.html; accessed on August 31, 2015


Teaching Kids to Be Smart About Social Media: http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/social-media-smarts.html#tracking=P_RelatedArticle; accessed on August 31, 2015


Email Safety for Students: https://www.msu.edu/~plairsan/Makeover/Email2.htm; accessed on August 31, 2015


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