

Working title: **"Using emails and internet wisely"**



The electronic age has revolutionized the way we do business. Emails and the internet are incredibly powerful tools for the office. They provide a fast, cheap and effective way for us to collect and distribute information, and to communicate with work colleagues and clients. However, just like a powerful car, these powerful electronic tools can be highly dangerous if they are used irresponsibly. Inappropriate use of emails and the internet can damage your company's reputation - as well as your own career.

Being professional at work involves many things, such as dressing appropriately, being punctual and treating your colleagues with respect. These things are fairly obvious to new graduates when they start their first job. When it comes to the use of emails and the internet, however, it is not obvious what is appropriate. The golden rule is that, when at work, emails and the internet should be treated as *business tools*, not as sources of fun and entertainment. Many graduates forget this lesson and make one or two 'e-mistakes' shortly after starting their job - which is an embarrassing first impression to make!

Here are some of the do's and don'ts when it comes to using emails and the internet at work.

- Don't send group emails that are not work-related, unless you are sure that the recipients will appreciate the message. While you might think the information is interesting, your work colleagues might consider it a distraction and a waste of their time.
- Be careful when replying to group emails. Don't click on the 'Reply All' button by mistake. If you are accepting an invitation or thanking someone for their information, there is usually no need to let the whole office know.
- Don't email jokes or political statements during work hours or from your work email address. Sending jokes is a clear waste of your time. More importantly, somebody might be

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offended by the joke - even if you think it is inoffensive. Whatever you do, *never* send a joke or message that contains sexual, racial or religious references, no matter how innocent you think it is.

- Don't over-use emails. A common mistake is to spend half an hour typing a detailed message to a colleague when you can just as easily pick up the telephone or walk over to their desk. Face-to-face conversations are still the most effective way of communicating.

- Use professional language in your emails. In most cases, the tone of an email can be slightly less formal than the tone of a letter. However, it is still important to be professional. Pay attention to your spelling and grammar.

- Be very careful when emailing someone about a sensitive issue. When expressing your concerns or providing negative feedback, remember that the recipient often interprets these types of emails more negatively than the writer intends. Be polite and choose your words carefully.

- Don't assume that the only people who read your email are the ones you send it to. Once you send an email to someone, you don't know who that person will forward it onto. That is why it is always best to be careful what you write. Don't complain to somebody about another work colleague or a client, because there is always the chance that the other colleague or client will be forwarded the email by mistake. The potential consequences can be devastating.

- Never open, save or forward material from the internet that is clearly inappropriate, such as pornography or other material that is offensive. In some companies, this may be grounds for instant dismissal.

- Be aware of your company's policy on internet usage. Some companies strictly prohibit the use of internet for personal purposes, whereas other companies have a more relaxed approach that leaves things up to the employee's discretion. Remember that permission to use the internet for personal purposes is not permission to waste time. You will still be expected to keep such use to a minimum.

- Be careful how you use social networking sites such as Facebook. There are plenty of stories of people being fired after their boss has seen something inappropriate on their Facebook page. The safest option is to treat your Facebook page like a public document - don't write anything that would cause you problems if your manager, a work colleague or a client somehow got access to it. Another option is to keep your Facebook page 100% social by never inviting work colleagues or clients to join as your Facebook friends. Finally, use the privacy settings on Facebook to restrict access only to your friends.

More generally, make yourself aware of your company's policies on emails and the internet. If your company doesn't have written policies or guidelines, ask your manager, IT manager or HR manager to explain what type of behaviour is acceptable and not acceptable. When in doubt, ask yourself whether such behaviour would be expected from a person who is 100% professional in their approach to work.

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