

Think Twice, Click Once:

The Little Black Book of E-Style

By Jan O'Neil with Melissa Munroe

Book Overview by Chapter

Part I: Your Business Plan for E-Style

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | You've Got to Have a Plan | What do Hershey®, McDonalds®, Apple®, Inc., and Microsoft® have in common? They all rely on business plans. By applying the elements of a business plan; you can increase your productivity and achieve your business goals. |
| 2 | Your Brand Identity | Comparing Britney Spears to Oprah easily conveys the importance of one's communication style. Improving your style begins with understanding the attributes of your brand identity. |
| 3 | Writing for the Target Market, Your Reader | What happens when you develop works for the target market? Just ask the makers of Oreo® and Heeleys®—you reap success! You'll soon understand the importance of writing for the reader, the target market. |

Part II: The Marketing Plan

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| 4 | Rewarding E-mail Etiquette | Often, it's not what you say, it's how you say it! Review ideas for the most essential part of communication—appropriate and professional tone and tact. |
| 5 | Putting the Spin on Challenging Situations and the Polite <i>No</i> | Understanding how to respond to challenging situations is critical in business. Explained are the following key points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Conveying bad news.✓ Writing on the “sunny side of the street.”✓ Saying <i>no</i> without saying <i>no</i>. |
| 6 | Getting Clean and Clear—Strategies for Clarity | The beauty of clear writing. Writing clearly helps your reader quickly grasp your text. You'll review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The Conversational Writer✓ Big is Not Necessarily Better✓ The Active Voice Writer |

- 7 **E-mail's Ally—the Sentence** **Stop miscommunication now!** You'll be pleased with the added control the ideas in this section present, especially the "The Top Ten Sentences."
- 8 **Separated at Birth: Cereal and E-mail** **What do a cereal box and e-mail have in common?** More than you'd think. Cereal is marketed by its visual appeal and its strategically placed wording—elements that are vital in developing good e-mails.

Part III: The Sales and Advertising Plans

- 9 **The Sales Pitch and the Power of Placement** **Any salesperson will tell you—it's all in the pitch.** Write for your advantage by using ideas in this chapter that will help you sell.
- 10 **The Art of E-mail Persuasion** **What are you looking for? How much money would you like? Where would you like to go?** You'll realize the importance of writing for the reader, especially when you're seeking to persuade.
- 11 **Advantages of Advertising** **Advertise your ideas.** E-mails that call for more than just a simple response can benefit from applying the strategies of advertising.
- 12 **Creating Eye-Appealing Layouts** **Getting attention!** When a company develops a new product, it creates packaging to capture the attention of the consumer. Just like packaging, learn ways to attract the attention of your reader.

Part VI: Production

- 13 **Strategy: Brainstorming** **How do copywriters do it?** When you begin composing an e-mail, it's best to follow a plan to ensure your works are developed efficiently. Review tips that copywriters use to compose.
- 14 **Beyond Spell Check: Write and Edit Like a Pro** **You can't rely on a "magical wand" to edit your text.** Equip yourself with some great tips to ensure error-free works.

Part V: Operations

- 15 **Your Everyday Plan for E-mail** **Want to get in-line, on-line?** Reduce the amount of time spent on e-mail by:
- Communicating quality, not quantity.
 - Working without *it* on.
 - Creating a functional filing system.
- 16 **When and When Not to Send E-mail** **Get E-Efficient.** Save time and become a more productive “e-mailer” by implementing rules for “e-efficiency.”
- 17 **CEO Fired for Sending E-mail!** **Eek!** Thousands of business professionals have been fired for using e-mail inappropriately. Apply the most important aspect of electronic text.

Part VI: Administration

- 18 **The Grammar Organization** **Basic Grammar with a *Twist* of Business.** Review the basics of grammar with a business approach. Also, learn how to avoid common grammatical errors.
- 19 **The Power of Punctuation** **Yes!** With a new grasp of basic sentence structure, you’ll be amazed when commas and other punctuation marks fall neatly into place.
- 20 **Quick Quizzes** **Reinforce your skills.** Quizzes to help reinforce your learning and identify areas that need additional focus.

SAMPLE TEXT

(Includes Chapter 1, 2, 3, 5, and 12)

Introduction:

E-MAIL CHANGED EVERYTHING

Did you see that e-mail? He accidently hit “reply all”! I have 129 messages!

How often do you hear those statements in the office? Unfortunately, these words are uttered within the walls of businesses throughout the world each day. Who would have ever guessed that this five-letter, hyphenated word would change everything about communicating. In e-mail’s infancy, this quintessential software program was magnificent: it offered the opportunity to communicate at anytime, to anyone, and to as many people as we wanted—all within an instant. Wow! Yet, with every great invention, there are often challenges. Over communication monopolizes our business day and many of us are drowning in a massive wave of e-mails we receive.

You’ve got to be a communications expert. The facts state this best: the average businessperson receives over 99 messages a day, interruptions (especially e-mail) represent over 25% of an employee’s day in lost productivity, and 1/3 of businesspeople do not meet the writing requirements of their positions. What does all of this mean? You not only juggle with the multiple choices of communicating, answer an insurmountable amount of messages, but you also must compose quickly and concisely. All of which is now causing great stress for employees worldwide. It’s a wonder that more businesspeople, as Austin Powers would say, “Haven’t gone completely mad.”

Just one more thing. In the “old days,” most professionals relied on administrative assistants to manage their communication tasks. Unfortunately, e-mail has eliminated millions of secretarial positions and has transferred the responsibility of communicating to every professional. Because many businesspeople are not equipped with proper business writing skills, mishaps in communication are commonplace—not to mention embarrassing and even disastrous.

So, how can “The Little Black Book of E-Style” help you? This book will empower you with tools and techniques that can have a great impact on your business life. The book will help you better manage your communication efforts by:

- ✓ Ensuring you’re receiving the right messages—and only the right messages.
- ✓ Choosing the appropriate communication tool—e-mail, telephone, or paper.
- ✓ Composing in less time with greater clarity.
- ✓ Developing messages that get read.

A note from the author on RESPECT. The most essential element of this entire book is to convey the importance of always respecting the recipient of your communication. When you demonstrate respect—you will receive it. It’s a gift that just keeps giving! Let’s get started.

Part I

Chapter One: YOU’VE GOT TO HAVE A PLAN

What do Hershey®, McDonalds®, Apple®, Inc., PepsiCo®, Microsoft®, and Mercedes Benz® have in common? It’s the key element that helps companies meet their needs internally

and externally, and it's also the best ammunition a company can create—it's the business plan. These crucial documents establish a venture's business objectives, strategy, and approach to achieving those objectives, and it also serves as a tool for monitoring and controlling venture operations. Let's consider the business plan Apple, Inc. developed for its successful consumer good, the iPhone™. The rock-solid business plan that introduced the iPhone into the marketplace was developed months prior to its arrival on the store shelf. The executives and management planned and strategized every aspect of this product's launch, from its user-friendly size to its premier at Macworld. The same was true for the introduction of McDonald's Snack Wrap™, as well as the Mercedes Benz new C-Class car line. However, goods and services aren't the only output that requires a plan.

The ultimate product—communication. Communication is a very powerful medium. A report can alter the way doctors treat disease, a letter can persuade millions of people to buy magazines (and win a million dollars!), and an e-mail can ask a friend to join you for lunch. Therefore, it's not just a letter, e-mail, or report; it's a product as significant as The Bill of Rights or as insignificant as spam (not the canned kind).

Your goods. The letters, e-mails, and reports you produce market and sell your ideas, thoughts, and facts. The words you choose to convey your information, the manner in which you organize your text, and the vehicle you select to transmit the message has a great impact on how you are perceived by your readers. More than ever, being a skilled writer/communicator is critical to your success, especially with e-mail. The best way to ensure your products are “working” for you is to implement a comprehensive plan.

Manned with a plan. Because you communicate more and more with e-mail, coupled with the great mass of electronic text you receive, it's important to manage this monumental

communication vehicle with a strategy. Just as the Hershey® Company requires a strategic plan to ensure their target markets buy their chocolate bars, you also require a business plan to ensure your target markets (readers) “buy into” your goods (e-mails and letters). By implementing a plan, you’ll also have a guideline in which to follow that will support your efforts to communicate clearly, concisely, effectively, and timely.

Your E-Style. So what is E-Style? It’s not something you’ll see on TV—it’s how you manage your communication with e-mail. Throughout this book, the elements of E-Style are presented to you based on a business plan: this will allow you to easily retain and apply the concepts you need to improve your skills for communicating. To grasp this book’s approach, the diagram below shows five of the six key parts of E-Style and descriptions of each follows.



Note: The most essential part of this book is reviewed at the end of this chapter. Do you know what it is?

Marketing Plan: Be a true marketer. Successful marketing plans include the purpose for the product, objectives, research, and analysis. The e-mail marketing plan will ensure that your works are not only clear and concise, but also follow the rules of business etiquette. You’ll learn

strategies for clarity, the three parts of an e-mail, as well as how to manage sentences throughout your works. Keep in mind, it's not what you have to say—it's how you say it that makes a difference.

Sales Plan: Put your sales hat on. You may have authored a well-written e-mail, yet does it get your target market to “buy into” the ideas, thoughts, and facts put forth in your work? You'll learn about strategies to grasp the reader's attention through:

- ✓ The Power of Placement: *Where* you place *what* has a significant impact on how your reader assimilates your text.
- ✓ The Art of E-mail Persuasion: Learn the techniques of persuading your reader—it's easier than you think.
- ✓ The Advantages of Advertising: Grabbing the attention of your reader can be achieved a number of ways.

Production: Get your pen or fingers ready. Did you know that the manner in which you prepare a work has an impact on its outcome? Learn about brainstorming techniques that can aid you in developing successful works. For example, the first step in composing is just that, it's composing—forget about grammar and punctuation—just think. You'll also acquire the tools necessary to edit your e-mails and create eye-appealing layouts.

Operations: Know when to stop it and know when to send it. Communicating effectively with e-mail includes two key elements—when to send an e-mail and, more importantly, when not to send an e-mail. All too often, businesspeople send e-text when they should have called or sent a paper letter. Furthermore, many professionals also make the common error of the “on-going” e-mail. This chapter will provide you with the guidelines necessary to know which communication medium is best, as well as understanding how to put a “stop” to those “never

ending” e-mails. In addition, you’ll review the issues of proprietary and personal information. Thousands of employees have been fired from their positions due to poor judgment. Obtain good advice on what type of information should be sent electronically and what shouldn’t.

Product Mechanics: Refresh yourself with the basics. Many business professionals lose track of their grammar and punctuation skills—it’s been a while since the third grade! “The Grammar Organization” reformulates the elements of composition to help you in improving sentence and paragraph structure. Furthermore, you’ll learn about the power of punctuation and how you can use it to your advantage. In addition, quizzes will aid you in “celebrating your knowledge.”

So, what’s the most essential part about E-Style? It’s your reader, the target market. When companies produce their goods, they determine who is best suited for the good or service. For example, each time a car manufacturer develops a new style of vehicle, the product managers know exactly the type of buyers who will purchase it. Each time you compose an e-mail, you’re following the same process—you consider who you’re writing to, in other words, who the target market is. The first chapters will provide you with the know-how to compose for your reader, the target market. You will learn how to modify your perspective on writing, apply e-mail etiquette, and communicate in challenging situations.

Chapter Two:

YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

A brand for a company is like a reputation for a person,

you earn reputation by trying to do hard things well. – Ray Kroc

The power of a brand. It's amazing how a company's name can resonate in our minds. For example, what do you think of when you hear or read the company names of Disney®, Nabisco®, or GE®? Your reaction was created through extensive research, as well as strategic marketing and advertising plans by each of these companies. Ask the CEO of any major corporation in the U.S. about the importance of brand identity, and he or she will tell you it's one of the most important aspects of their business. Companies like Gillette®, Coca Cola®, American Express®, and Nokia® have spent billions of dollars developing their companies' superior brand identities. These brands are built on meeting the demands of their consumers and doing so with quality products and services. When a brand's image is compromised, it has a great impact on not only the company's image, but also on its bottom line.

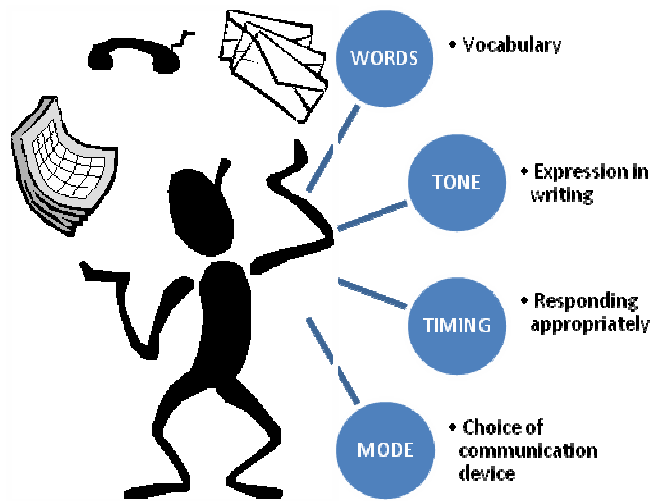
A company that reflects a good image manages each and every aspect of the communications process strategically. It works diligently to produce products that its target market (or markets) are interested in. Such companies communicate to their customers in good and bad situations. Most importantly, they know how to communicate when the information is not favorable. There are thousands of companies that accomplish this each day. It's easy to achieve, when you have a plan.

Your brand identity. You have your own personal identity to manage, which is represented in so many ways, from your choice in clothes to where you vacation. The manner in which you communicate also plays a key role in how we are identified. It's evident each of us has our own choice of words, unique tone, and communication style. On that note, consider some of the very visible executives and personalities you know from the media – people like Suze Orman, Jack Welch, Steve Madden, Barbara Walters, and Al Roker. That's a “bouillabaisse” of people with extremely different styles of communicating. Yet, they all have one thing in common—they're all effective communicators. Each of these professionals chooses his or her words very wisely. Even the “back and forth” remarks between Donald Trump and Martha Stewart are selected with great thought. Look what their banter gets them—better ratings!

How important is your brand identity? Look at what jumping on a couch did to Tom Cruise and shaving her head did to Britney Spears. These are extreme situations, yet they scream an important point. How you communicate has a great impact on how you are perceived. On a more corporate note, look at all of the press that top executives like Bill Gates, Oprah, Steve Jobs, and Warren Buffet receive. Every word that they utter is monitored (when in public) by the press. If any of them say something out of sync—boom—the media is there to talk and write about it. All too often, too often!

Your own communication style. In business, every professional's communication style is an important element, for better or worse, in determining his or her career path. One obvious aspect of our own “brand identity” is clearly represented in our written works. These readable products convey to the target market the level of communication sophistication we possess. The brand identity of our readable products will become increasingly important as we communicate more and more via e-mail. Since you may never meet or talk to a fellow associate, vendor, or

customer; the way you communicate through e-mail is, and will continue to be, a critical factor in your brand identity.



What's my brand identity?

It's a combination of elements that represent your communication style. As mentioned, no two people are alike in their communication style and often, some elements outshine others. Television shows

are good examples of how words and tone work together to represent an individual's character.

For example, *The Office* contains a wonderful array of people with unique styles of communicating. Michael Scott (Steve Carrell) is absolutely outlandish, Pam Bessly (Jenna Fischer) is understanding and kind, and Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) is egotistical and quirky.

Is your brand working for you? Take a moment to consider all of the elements above and how they apply to you. Is there an element that could use an update? Let's take a closer look at the most important part of communication style—it's the target market.

Part II: THE TARGET MARKET

Chapter Three:

WRITING FOR YOUR READER, THE TARGET MARKET

Why was President Reagan known as the great communicator? According to many, it wasn't because he could give a good speech: it was his ability to be a brilliant communicator on

all levels. He understood how the everyday person dealt with issues, and he framed his ideas, thoughts, and facts simply and eloquently in a manner that people believed him. President Reagan isn't the only great communicator. Do you know someone who possesses strong verbal and written skills? What makes this person a great communicator to you?

President Kennedy, President Clinton, and Politicians are perfect examples of people who understand their audience. Great communicators are able to convey their ideas and facts effectively, efficiently, and respectfully. The next time a politician is giving a speech on television, rather than watching the candidate, close your eyes and listen to the words he or she uses: it's an eye-opening experience. You don't have to wait for a speech. Rather than watch the evening news, close your eyes and listen to words the anchor uses to convey today's events.

Just as politicians analyze their target markets, so do companies. It sounds so easy to identify who your target market is, yet all too often, it can be bungled. Ask the executives at Coca Cola. In the mid 80s, they changed the recipe for their most famous soda; rather than selling a new product, they decided to alter the Classic. Customer protests brought the original formula back onto the grocery shelf. Yet, the executives wouldn't give up on this new syrup and continued to sell it under the name New Coke. Hey, has anyone seen my New Coke? All joking aside, the executives assumed its consumers would embrace the new recipe and buy, buy, buy. This is a classic example of not knowing who your target market is. There are also times when a company sells a product that is embraced by its market, yet extenuating circumstances change the marketplace. A good example is the recent demand for more fuel efficient cars. For years, auto manufacturers couldn't make SUVs fast enough to satisfy the market's demand, but when gas prices spiked, those cars just sat and sat at dealerships. Of course, there are just as many examples of companies that zeroed in on their target markets with the perfect product or service,

such as Google®, the makers of Slim Fast®, and Federal Express®.

Your written works are products too. These works sell your ideas, thoughts, and facts. However, just as the management team does at Crocs®, you must also understand who your target market is when communicating. Let's view your perspective for a moment. When you receive a letter, e-mail, or report—what are *you* thinking?

✓ What does this have to do with me?

✓ What do I need to know?

✓ What do they want me to do?

You're not alone; your reader is also thinking this way when he or she receives a letter from you. The quote below by Dale Carnegie defines this best.

“People aren't interested in you. They're interested in themselves.”

Your writing isn't just about what you want to say—it's also about your reader. The instant your reader begins to review your words, he or she is looking for how the information will impact him or her. Therefore, the most important part in developing a product (letter, e-mail, or report) is determining its target market.

Every business plan for a product or service must define the target market: the specific group of people the company will focus its marketing, sales, and advertising plans on to ensure the maximum amount of units can be sold profitably. For example, cereal manufacturers identify the target market for each brand they produce. When you were a child, these companies sought to capture your attention through “prizes” in the box, cartoon characters, and/or wild flavors—and they still do the same today. Just as with cereal, the success of a product nearly always requires

a well-researched, thought-out, and organized plan.

In communicating, the same planning approach is required to produce your “readable goods,” especially e-mail. Again, you sell and market your ideas, thoughts, and facts each time you communicate to your boss, an associate, client, or vendor. For example, you may want to “market and sell” your boss on a new idea; therefore, you creatively compose a comprehensive plan to get him or her to agree or “buy into” the concept. The key is to know what information will interest your reader, the target market.

The elements of writing for the target market. You learned in the last chapter that the four elements that represent your Brand Identity are vocabulary, tone, timing, and mode. Let’s turn it around to consider what elements are needed in writing (e-mail or paper) to communicate effectively to the reader. For well-written works, the key elements are a combination of the following:



The target market. The first step in writing is conducting a bit of “market research” on your target market. This research rarely requires more than taking a moment to consider who you are writing to. It’s easy to compose a letter on a simple subject to someone you know well,

but it's a bit more challenging when you're seeking to persuade a group of people to purchase a product or service. In both situations, you need to consider how you can communicate that best suits the reader or readers. Writing for the target market ensures that each work:

Demonstrates R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Following the rules of business etiquette is critical in writing for your reader. For example, you may receive the same request from two people, yet the e-mail that is more polite, in other words, respectful, is the message that “speaks to you.”

Easy to read. “It's not that this most boring declarative statement would be easy to understand when one reads it.” Ouch. That truly hurts the brain to read—simply because it's not clear or easy to assimilate. The easier it is for your target market to “take in” your words, the easier it is for them to understand you. Clarity is achieved in word choice, sentence construction, and paragraph sequencing.

Gets attention. “Pop up” ads are perfect examples of the way advertisers capture your attention while you're online. In e-mail, writing a good subject line and opening sentence are ways to hook your reader. Always consider your target market's point of view when you write.

Visually appealing. Keep in mind what Billy Crystal said when he portrayed Ricardo Montalban on “Saturday Night Live”: “It's better to look good than to feel good.” Unfortunately, it's often true. Ensuring that your e-mails are visually appealing helps your target market easily “take in” your ideas, thoughts, and facts.

Adheres to good timing. You always hear, “it's all in the timing.” Good timing is essential to communicating, especially in e-mail. Responding to messages promptly and with the appropriate form of communication is absolutely essential!

What do you get when you incorporate these elements? When you communicate respectfully

and skillfully, you will, more often than not, achieve your objectives.

Let's jump to Chapter 5.

Chapter Five:

PR – PUTTING THE SPIN ON CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

AND THE POLITE *NO*

ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX. Each week, the news features companies “spinning” their shortcomings: these mishaps range from serious product hazards, poor marketing strategies, to breaches within a company. When these occurrences are brought to the public’s attention, the organization must communicate to rectify the happening or *spin* the negative information into good. Furthermore, there is no industry that goes unscathed: for example, Hewlett Packard®’s challenges with the board’s leaks to the press, McDonalds dealing with the *Supersize Me* movie, and JetBlue®’s “meltdown” that left passengers stranded across the country.

What about the compelling story about Turner Broadcasting’s marketing campaign gone bad. This intrigue begins with the simple marketing gimmick of dispersing signage of a cartoon character in not-so-hidden spots in major cities throughout the U.S. – not a bad idea. However, the Lite Brite® that displayed this unique character was mistaken for a bomb, which reeked havoc in one major city for an entire afternoon. What did the broadcasting company do? It immediately accepted responsibility, apologized, and sent a press release stating that they would reimburse the city for the costs associated with the mishap. This company stepped “up-to-the-

plate” and accepted responsibility for its actions and did so in a timely manner. How do these stories have an impact on you?

Unless you’re perfect, now and then, you also find yourself having to communicate bad news. You may be unable to deliver a project on time, meet someone for a planned luncheon, or convey unfortunate information. All of us need to learn how to spin unwelcome information in a more positive direction.

I’m not in PR. You don’t have to work for a public relations firm to know how to convey negative information in a positive way. The following are ideas that will help you when you must the “state is not-so-good.”

Don’t ever end on a bad note. Did you know? People are more apt to remember the last idea, thought, or fact that is conveyed; therefore, give the bad news first and end with the good news. This accomplishes two objectives: it gets the bad thoughts out of the way, and it ends the sentence or paragraph on a positive note. However, prior to providing the “bad news,” you may want to provide a buffer of text that will soften the tone of the information.

Example 1

Avoid

Dear Valued Customer:

We can send you a J.T. Polo shirt in Pink or Green. Please call a service representative at 1-800-555-2234 to order a replacement item or another item from our catalog. Please accept our apology, but we are unable to ship the item you requested, the Polo Man shirt in Red.

Better

Dear Valued Customer:

Please accept our apology. We are unable to ship the item you requested, the J.T. Polo shirt in Red. We can send you the same shirt in Pink or Green. Please call a service representative at 1-800-555-2234 to order a replacement item or another item from our catalog.

Example 2

Avoid

David:

Would you be available to meet with Diane Gold from the apparel division to review her ideas? We understand your time is valuable and will pay your fee to redesign these graphics. Yes, unfortunately, due to poor communication from our design team, the graphics you sent us did not meet with our objectives for the new swimwear line.

Better

David:

Thank you for delivering the designs so quickly to us. Unfortunately, due to poor communication from our design team, the graphics you sent us did not meet with our objectives for the new swimwear line. We understand your time is valuable and will pay your fee to redesign these graphics. Would you be available to meet with Diane Gold from the apparel division to review her ideas?

Example 3

Avoid

Cameron:

I hope that you get good news soon. I was surprised to hear after all your work that you lost the Timberlake account. I can't believe he decided to go with the Chelsea Group—of all agencies.

Better

Cameron:

For the past several months, you've worked diligently on the Timberlake account. The account's decision to sign with the Chelsea Group was certainly out of your hands. Your good attitude and strong sales acumen will soon bring a great opportunity your way.

A positive spin. In circumstances where you're writing "not-so-good" information, you possess the power to change the perspective of the information. In other words, regardless of the

text, you can always put a positive spin on it (except for death and taxes!). For example, avoid using negative words such as *no*, *can't*, *won't*, and *not*. Here are some ways to “spin” the negative out of your words.

Negative

Positive

We can't meet today.

We can meet with you at 8 a.m. tomorrow.

Don't use the copier today.

For today, please find other means to copy your materials.

No, I'm not interested.

Your invitation is appreciated, yet I'm unable to join you.

Look on the bright side. If you must provide information that the target market will find disappointing, use your creative skills to change the focus of the message to make it more pleasing.

Example 1

Avoid

Clark:

Unfortunately, the project will not be completed by Friday. The parts for the unit are late, and I'm going to have to work on Saturday. I'll let you know when I think it will be available.

Recommended

Clark:

We've been working diligently on this new unit. Unfortunately, due to the late delivery of parts for the project, we are unable to meet the scheduled finish date. However, with a few hours of work on Saturday, we will have the unit ready on Monday.

Example 2

Avoid...

Dear Jason:

I regret to inform you that your request for a three-week vacation will not be approved by management. As you stated in your request, the timing is just not good. Please send another request for time off to my attention.

Recommended

Dear Jason:

Your request for a three-week vacation is during a very busy time for us at the store; unfortunately, it's a request we are unable to approve. We will approve a request for any time during the months of June, July, or August. Please let me know which month is best for you.

You've just got to say no—so don't beat around the bush! There are times when you must be clear about saying no and you must be direct; however, you can do so in a gentle manner.

Example 1

Avoid

Harold:

I reviewed your idea for shipping samples directly to our sales force from the factory. I'm not sure it will work. Thank for the input.

Recommended

Harold:

Your suggestion to ship samples directly to our sales force from the factory is an interesting concept. The only concern is ensuring that each representative receives the correct sample lines. Therefore, without a company representative at the factory, it's difficult to ensure this can be managed correctly. Again, thank you for the suggestion.

Example 2

Avoid

Steve:

I'm not sure I'm allowed to send those files to you. Sorry.

Recommended

Steve:

The files you requested are proprietary information at this time; therefore, I am unable to provide you with a copy. If the status should change, a copy will be forwarded to you.

But is no. Be careful with the back-handed compliment. Often, the word *but* can convey a negative message. In the examples below, Sentence A conveys a negative message and Sentence B conveys a more positive response.

A1) I agree with your idea, but I need more time to think about it.

- B1) Please give me a little time to consider your idea: it's an interesting suggestion.
- A2) The management team is pleased with your efforts, but you can't expect a raise soon.
- B2) Though we are unable to give you a raise at this time, the management team is pleased with your efforts.
- A3) Jane and Gail liked the new drawings, but they're not sure that they can incorporate them in this month's magazine because of the deadline. The drawings will appear next month.
- B3) Jane and Gail liked your new drawings; yet, due to the deadline, your works are unable to appear in this month's magazine. However, the drawings will appear in next month's issue.

Now let's take a look at Chapter Twelve to get ideas on how to improve the look of your e-mails.

Chapter Twelve:

CREATING EYE-APPEALING LAYOUTS

“I'd rather look good than feel good” was a line Billy Crystal would say on SNL when he imitated Fernando Lamas. We often find that we are first attracted to something by its looks first—we are a very visual specie! On that point, when a company develops a new product, it creates packaging to capture the attention of the consumer. Just like packaging, there are ways you can attract the attention of your reader.

- ✓ List information
- ✓ Apply paragraph headers
- ✓ Align text
- ✓ Bullet-point information
- ✓ Double space
- ✓ Use charts and graphs
- ✓ Incorporate color
- ✓ Add graphics and/or photographs

Make a list and use bullet points It's so much easier to read information in a list format than a paragraph. Here's an example.

In paragraph form,

All sales representatives are asked to bring the following materials to the sales meeting: laptop computer, marketing binder, recent catalogs, sales projections for 2009, and self appraisal.

Better,

All sales representatives are asked to bring the following materials to the sales meeting:

- ✓ Laptop computer
- ✓ Marketing binder
- ✓ Catalogs (recent)
- ✓ Sales projections for 2009
- ✓ Self appraisal

Align text Often, when an e-mail is forwarded, the text is not aligned and "everything is everywhere." Help your reader, by taking a few minutes to "clean up the text."

Double space In the old days, when a paper letter was short, the text was double spaced. It can work for e-mail too. Again, it will help your reader review your text more quickly.

Color, charts, graphs, photographs, and graphics The one thing that the Internet has proven is the importance of information being appealing to the eye. When possible, use these elements to interest your reader.

THE BEST and most underused vehicles to attract attention are paragraphs and paragraph

headers. Unfortunately, in our world of e-mail, too many people send “blobs” of text.

Paragraphs and paragraph headers can make a tremendous difference in an e-mail. The proof is in the following example. The following two e-mails contain the same information; however, which do you find more appealing to read?

TO: Patricia Doyle

FROM: Tom Kendall

DATE: September 15, 2008

RE: Question about Customers

We had an incident at our store today that I have never encountered in my 14 years of service with our company. I'm hoping, in the event the press decides to print this story, that we handled it correctly. A woman arrived at our store at approximately 10 a.m. this morning requesting a refund for a dress that she had purchased. The customer handed the item to our cashier, Ms. Green, and she then informed Ms. Green that she'd like to return the dress for a total refund. Ms. Green then asked her for the receipt, and the woman told her that she had misplaced it. Ms. Green then inspected the garment to find that the tags had been removed, it was stained in some areas, and had a slight odor to it. She informed the customer that we could not accept the garment for a return because of its condition. At this time, the woman demanded to see the manager. I came to the front desk immediately and listened to the customer's complaint. Afterward, I politely explained that we could not accept the item for return, because of the already stated reasons. She then said she would not leave the store unless we provided her with a credit for the garment. Well, she stood in the store for over two hours. I then had to inform her that if she did not leave, we would have to ask our security officers to escort her out. Of course, I had to ask our officers to do so, and when they walked her out, she screamed obscenities, and she bellowed, "I'm contacting *The Globe* about this." As you can see, I did follow company policy; however, I still don't feel comfortable about it. Pat, this is our policy, right?

Tom

Note the difference in appearance when paragraphs and headlines are used in the same e-mail.

TO: Patricia Doyle

FROM: Tom Kendall

DATE: September 15, 2008

RE: Resolution for Recent Customer Altercation in Store No. 1234

Good afternoon Pat,

Your assistance regarding a customer complaint would be appreciated. We had an incident at our store today that I have never encountered in my 14 years of service with our company. I'm hoping, in the event the press decides to print this story, that we handled it correctly.

Refund for Dress

A woman arrived at our store at approximately 10 a.m. this morning requesting a refund for a dress that she had purchased. The customer handed the item to our cashier, Ms. Green, and she then informed Ms. Green that she'd like to return the dress for a total refund. Ms. Green then asked her for the receipt, and the woman told her that she had misplaced it. Ms. Green then inspected the garment to find that the tags had been removed, it was stained in some areas, and had a slight odor to it. She informed the customer that we could not accept the garment for a return because of its condition. At this time, the woman demanded to see the manager.

Request for the Manager

I came to the front desk immediately and listened to the customer's complaint. Afterward, I politely explained that we could not accept the item for return, because of the already stated reasons. She then said she would not leave the store unless we provided her with a credit for the garment. Well, she stood in the store for over two hours. I then had to inform her that if she did not leave, we would have to ask our security officers to escort her out. Of course, I had to ask our officers to do so, and when they walked her out, she screamed obscenities, and she bellowed, "I'm contacting *The Globe* about this."

Your Guidance Needed

As you can see, I did follow company policy; however, I still don't feel comfortable about it. Pat, this is our policy, right?

Best regards,
Tom