Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Write effective e-mail messages, instant messages, and Web content for businesses and organizations.
2. Use the business writing rules in e-mail messages.
3. Discuss when to send messages by e-mail and when not to.
4. Manage your overloaded e-mail inbox.
5. Describe why employers are implementing Internet use policies, describe what these policies generally cover, and discuss the ethics of the issues involved in implementing these policies in the workplace.
6. Discuss ways to recognize the e-mail culture of the business organization for which you work. Avoid an e-mail mistake or an e-mail career killer (ECK).
7. Avoid creating confusion, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings with your e-mails. Ensure you get the busy reader’s attention by thinking and planning before you draft and revise your message.
8. Follow the rules of e-mail etiquette (netiquette) when writing e-mail.
9. Describe the two defining characteristics of instant messaging that make it a compelling alternative to e-mail and voice-mail, both of which have a tendency to pile up.
10. Practice good instant messaging etiquette.
11. Discuss the role of instant messaging in organizations.
12. Develop readable, coherent, grammatical, and accurate online text.
13. Discuss how text messaging is used in the business place.
14. Define blogging and discuss ways blogs are used in businesses.
15. Implement good skills for planning, drafting, and proofreading user-friendly Web content.
16. Describe ways to write effectively for websites.
17. Describe social networking sites and discuss ways they are used in businesses.
18. Discuss how Twitter is used in the business place.
Select Key Terms

**Blogs**

**Text Messaging**

**Instant Messaging**

**Social Networking**

**Websites**

**E-policies**

**E-mail**

**Twitter**

**Facebook**

**Linkedin**

Benefits of Learning about Electronic Writing

1. You will understand the impact of electronic writing on the way people communicate in the workplace.
2. You will learn how to communicate effectively using e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and blogs.
3. You will understand the importance of netiquette when composing e-mail and instant messages.
4. You will learn how to get the Web browser’s attention with clear, scannable, and credible content.
5. You will understand the growing roles of instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, websites, and social network sites in the business place.

The intent of this chapter is to provide you with information on writing electronically. This goal is realized through discussions of the following topics: electronic written communication in organizations, writing effective e-mail messages, writing effective instant messages and text messages, instant messaging and text messaging etiquette, writing effective business blogs, writing for websites, writing effectively at social network sites, and choosing the right medium.
Electronic writing refers to messages developed and transmitted via e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, websites, social network sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), and tweeting. Speed and convenience are the two main reasons electronic communication has become so popular in U.S. organizations and elsewhere. However, writing for these media presents challenges. We describe three of these challenges here.

1. **Honing Traditional Writing Skills and Acquiring New Skills.** Readers read differently online than offline, thus, you must adapt your online copy to meet readers’ needs. Specific writing suggestions for e-mail, instant messages, text messages, blogs, websites, tweets, and social network sites appear throughout this chapter.

2. **Merging the Writing Process with the Speed, Convenience, and Protocols of Electronic Communication to Achieve Effective Documents.** Popular electronic media such as e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, blogging, tweeting, websites, and social network sites encourage the development of short messages and invite some to ignore grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules. In addition, many writers do not edit and revise their electronic messages before sending them. Too often the result is poorly written, confusing memos and letters that contain too little detail to achieve clarity, leaving readers with a poor perception of their communication partner’s writing abilities. Be careful. Poorly written communications can be career killers.

3. **Being Realistic about the Importance of Building Relationships.** Before expanding on this challenge, understand that in the U.S. business place strong relationships with stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, clients, suppliers) are crucial to job stability and career growth. Building business relationships is best accomplished through face-to-face interaction. Herein lies the challenge. Avoid doing so much of your communicating (written or otherwise) electronically that you fail to build strong relationships with your stakeholders. Communicating electronically is appealing and efficient on several levels. However, communicating too frequently via e-mail, instant messages, text messages, blogs, and tweets can compromise your ability to achieve your career goals. Despite our good intentions, we cannot always meet with others face-to-face. When you cannot,
but should, place a phone call or hold a videoconference instead of e-mailing or texting. Phone calls and videoconferences are more personal and better support relationship building than do e-mailing and texting.

In this chapter you will learn to write effective, reader-friendly e-mail, instant and text messages, blogs, website content, and social networking site content. Competency in these areas will enable you to take advantage of the possibilities of each medium, while avoiding inherent pitfalls. Since electronic communication will certainly comprise a large percentage of your business communications, mastering the basics now will give you a competitive edge.

**Figure 5–1: Job/Career Threats**

You have probably noticed in your classes the occasional student who spends more time texting than participating in class discussions. (This certainly does not describe you!) Those students who text or search the Internet during class either do not know how inappropriate, rude, and distracting their actions are or they simply do not care. Unfortunately, they are forming bad habits that will be hard to break. Thus, they are likely to carry them forward into the workplace, where their job stability and career growth can be easily derailed by their unprofessional actions.

Forming perceptions and making judgments about others’ actions and behaviors are commonplace in most settings, be they professional or otherwise. Inappropriate actions and behaviors are typically noted and often taken into account when making decisions regarding bonus distributions, pay raises, promotions, and dismissals. Remember that the majority of U.S. managers prefer that their employees do not text, tweet, and browse the Internet at inappropriate times and for nonwork-related purposes.

Currently e-mail is the most widely-used communication medium in U.S. organizations, although it will likely not always be the case. Humans have a long history of eventually replacing one technology with a newer one. For example, PCs quickly replaced typewriters. Cell phones and smartphones are steadily replacing landline phones. This is not to suggest that texting and tweeting will replace e-mail anytime soon. However, the rate at which electronic communication media ranging from texting and blogging to social network sites are growing in popularity is astounding. While e-mail remains popular, will this always be the case, or will e-mail eventually fall from favor? When? Time will tell.

**Electronic Written Communication in Organizations**

We write and transmit business documents in numerous ways. Common forms of written communication include memos, letters, reports and proposals, e-mail, instant messages (IMs), text messages, website content, blogs, and tweets. In addition, organizations routinely post written information on company social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook.
In this chapter we focus on e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, websites, social networking sites, and tweeting. The other forms of written communication mentioned above are addressed elsewhere in the book; memos and letters are discussed in chapter 8, and reports and proposals are discussed in chapter 9.

Formality plays an important role in selecting the best medium for each writing situation. Written documents and messages are frequently viewed as being formal, informal, or semiformal. For example, letters are considered formal documents. Documents and messages developed and/or transmitted electronically (e.g., blogs, e-mails, e-memos, IMs, text messages, tweets) are considered informal. Awareness of such differences in perception is important because readers’ formality expectations vary and must to be taken into consideration. For example, for an important message to an external client, you would be expected to send a formal document, in this case, a hardcopy letter. In contrast, if you need to send a brief message with routine, straightforward information to a subordinate within the company, an informal written media such as e-mail is a good choice. Or, if you and a fellow worker, who are both on the same job level, need to discuss some points pertaining to a routine, noncontroversial matter, IM would be the informal media of choice. Before moving on, let’s look at one more example that lands you midstream on the formality spectrum. If you need to send a message to subordinates about changes to internal procedures, a semiformal document is necessary. In this case, it would be a memo.

**Writing Effective E-mail Messages**

E-mail is the predominate communication medium in U.S. organizations, and elsewhere for that matter, and no wonder why. It is a fast, convenient, and inexpensive way to reach one or multiple recipients with a few clicks of the mouse. Owing to its popularity, e-mail has replaced messages that were once transmitted exclusively through hardcopy letters and memos. E-mail has also replaced the need to send faxes as often. Some even send sensitive correspondence via e-mail, although you must be careful to remember that e-mail is not a private medium.

The prevalence of e-mail means that more workers than ever are writing. Even entry-level employees who used to be exempt from most writing activities now write e-mails to accomplish a host of activities from explaining procedures to coworkers to apologizing to a customer for a billing error. Where once we picked up the phone to communicate business and personal information, today we use e-mail. In fact, more people used the Internet in its first 3 years than used the telephone in its first 30 years.
Employees use e-mail for personal as well as workplace communications. When asked by Vault.com how many nonwork-related e-mails they send in a day, 18 percent of office workers said none; 56 percent said 1–5; 13 percent said 6–10; 6 percent replied 11–20; and 7 percent said they sent more than 21 nonwork-related e-mails a day. According to a survey by AmericanGreetings.com, 76 percent use e-mail to send jokes, 75 percent to make social plans, 53 percent to send online greeting cards, and 42 percent to gossip. By replacing phone calls with e-mails, we have created a process by which informal conversations are recorded and formal business decisions are documented electronically. The result is an unprecedented amount of documented business communication that can be used against an employer or employee should a workplace lawsuit be filed.

The convenience of e-mail comes at a price for employers: increased liability concerns. Many companies are reducing their exposure to legal “e-disasters” by establishing and enforcing policies that govern employees’ electronic writing. These policies are discussed next. On the employee side, the convenience of e-mail means that much of your relationship with coworkers, customers, and supervisors may rest on your e-mail exchanges. In this writing-centered environment, e-mail is no longer the equivalent of a casual lunch conversation, and your ability to quickly organize and clearly express ideas in e-mail becomes important to your overall success in any organization. In today’s electronic workplace, written communication makes a competitive difference.

To write effective e-mail messages, you must think before you send. Therefore, the standard rules that apply to all business writing (e.g., appropriate tone, logical organization, grammatical correctness) are required when you write e-mails. When written with consideration for your audience, e-mail is a productive communication tool that allows you to make a direct, positive, and polite connection with your reader. This, in turn, will win you the attention and goodwill of coworkers, customers, and other stakeholders. The trick is to develop an effective e-mail style.
Selecting the Right Medium: To E-mail or Not to E-mail

Not all messages should be sent by e-mail. While corporate e-mail cultures differ, some rules on whether to e-mail the message apply across the board.

Consider the formality or informality of the message context. For instance, when introducing yourself or your product to an organization, the proper route to take is still a formal letter, report, or proposal. In addition, even though e-mailing a thank-you note following a job interview is usually acceptable, sending a promptly-mailed letter would definitely garner more attention and probably would be more appropriate.

E-mailing a thank you for a job well done is always appreciated, but a face-to-face thank you is better. Likewise, important job requests, such as requests for a raise or promotion or a resignation announcement, should be done face-to-face. An e-mail that requests a raise would most likely be considered spineless or not be taken seriously. A request for a sick day should be made over the phone in most offices.

On the other hand, e-mail is widely used to communicate routine, daily business messages since it is cost efficient and fast. Direct requests or informative messages to coworkers; companywide announcements, like the time and place of the holiday party or the next staff meeting; or a change in an organization's travel policy can all be sent safely by e-mail as long as everyone in the office has access to it. Equally safe to send by e-mail are major personal announcements, like the happy news of a new mom or dad or the sad news of a death in a coworker's family. Other announcements, like graduations or birthdays, probably do not warrant a companywide e-mail.

Do not use e-mail, however, if your message meets one of the criteria listed here. Instead, make a phone call or immediately hold a meeting. Place a phone call or schedule a meeting if:

- Your message requires an immediate response. You cannot assume that your recipient will answer his or her e-mail right away. It is inappropriate to send a follow-up message demanding to know why a recipient has not responded to your message.
- You want to hear the tone of your communication partner's voice so you can read between the lines.
- Your message has many discussion points and needs an extended response or extended negotiations to resolve.
- You want your comments to be private. No message that is private, confidential, or sensitive should be sent by e-mail.

When deciding whether to e-mail your message, ask yourself if your need is for speed and/or mass distribution. Speed and mass distribution are e-mail's strengths. If you need your reader to receive your communication in a few seconds rather than a few days—especially if you have a tight deadline and want to work up to the last minute—e-mail is the way to go. Remember, though, that a quick message does not necessarily mean a quick reply. The recipient is under no obligation to answer your message quickly even though good e-mail etiquette recommends responding to e-mail promptly.

If you have multiple recipients for that 20-page report, consider e-mailing it as an attachment rather than making 50 copies for distribution. Be sure to check with your recipient first to make sure he or she can open an e-mail attachment and if there is a size limit to an attachment. With e-mail, you can send your message to six recipients or to 6,000.

Third, e-mail is a good tool for communicating across time zones and continents. Rather than call your business contact in Germany in the middle of the night, e-mail lets you and your international recipient conduct business during your respective normal business hours.
Managing High-Volume E-mail

According to the findings of the 2005 Microsoft Office Personal Productivity Challenge survey of 38,000 people in 200 countries, U.S. office workers received an average of 56 e-mails daily while their counterparts abroad received 42. This study did not report how many e-mail messages they sent daily. It is likely that on average they sent at least as many as they received, if not more. In contrast, a survey conducted by Pitney Bowes in 2000 reported that U.S. employees sent or received an average of 50 e-mails a day. Both surveys go back a ways, so it is probably safe to assume that the average number of e-mails sent daily has increased. However, some of e-mail’s original workload is already being replaced by text messages, tweets, and the like.

Given the high volume of e-mail activity, you are among the lucky few if you have an assistant who sorts through your incoming e-mail, deletes the detritus, and forwards summaries of the important messages to you. If not, you alone must decide how to deal with all those e-mails that arrive in your inbox daily. Good luck with that! However, help has arrived. The following tips can help you manage that overloaded inbox.

• Follow the Last In, First Out rule. Read the last e-mail in a series e-mail in case the issues from the previous e-mails have been resolved. If you need to reply to the series, read them all first before you reply.

• If you are away from the office for a few days and return to an overflowing inbox, respond to the last day’s e-mail first; these responses will not be late. As for the other e-mails, since you are already late in replying, adopt a last in/first out order after you prioritize by sender or subject.

• On first reading, do something with your e-mail even if it is only to group “Read Later” e-mails into a separate folder rather than leaving them to clutter your inbox.

• Deal with all non-urgent messages at one time rather than taking time out to deal with each message as it comes up during the day.

• Use the archive function to inspect e-mails not previously saved and either delete or archive them. Set up the function to delete nonessential e-mail older than a specific number of days.

• Delete chain letters and spam. Unsubscribe to mailing lists that you rarely read.

• Set up other e-mail accounts, outside of your office e-mail, for ordering online and for personal correspondence.

• Use filters to prioritize your mail into separate folders. Some suggestions for ways to organize your mail include:
  • Separate internal office mail from outside mail that does not include your company’s domain name.
  • Separate mass mailings from those addressed directly to you. Route messages in which you were cc’d or bcc’d to a mass mailing folder.
  • Create a separate folder for family e-mail after you are sure your company’s electronic policy allows you to receive personal e-mail at work.
  • If you are going to be away from the office and your e-mail account for an extended period, activate an automatic “Out-of-the-Office” reply. That way, anyone who needs your answer right away will know not to expect it. This feature will help you keep messages from building up in your inbox while you are away.
To reduce potential liability associated with e-messages, organizations develop e-policies that address matters ranging from corporate-level wheeling and dealing to employee jokes. E-mail with its shoot-from-the-hip qualities of speed and mass distribution exponentially increases this potential for liability. International Data Corp. estimates that millions of U.S. workers send billions of e-mail messages daily. Not all these messages are related to work. According to an Elron Software survey, many employees with Internet access report receiving inappropriate e-mails at work, including e-mails with racist, sexist, pornographic, or inflammatory content. Whether solicited or not, these types of messages in employees' electronic mailboxes can spell e-disaster for the company and the sender.

Evidence of executives and companies stung by their own e-mails abound. Probably the most well-known example is Microsoft's Bill Gates who was stung along with other Microsoft top executives in the first phase of his company's antitrust trial when the government's lead attorney used e-mails from as far back as 1992 to back claims of Microsoft's corporate aggressiveness. Other examples that proved costly to corporations include the 1995 Chevron Corp. case in which sexist e-mails, like “25 Reasons Beer Is Better Than Women,” circulated by male employees cost Chevron $2.2 million to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit brought by female employees.

In another case involving The New York Times' shared services center in Virginia, nearly two dozen employees were fired and 20 more were reprimanded for violating the company's e-mail policy. They had sent and received e-mails with sexual images and offensive jokes. In this case, one of the fired offenders had just received a promotion while another had just been named “Employee of the Quarter.” These kinds of incidents cost any company negative publicity, embarrassment, loss of credibility, and inevitably, loss of business.

Another example was a lawsuit against American Home Products Corp. over a rare, but often fatal lung condition some consumers developed after taking the company's diet pills. Insensitive employee e-mails contributed to the company's decision to settle the case for more than $3.75 billion dollars, one of the largest settlements ever for a drug company. One e-mail printed in the Wall Street Journal expressed an employee's concern over spending her career paying off "fat people who are a little afraid of some silly lung problem." This example shows how important it is to review and revise your e-mails for potentially inflammatory content before sending.

Still another example involves unauthorized use of a company's computer system for a mass e-mailing. At Lockheed Martin, an employee sent 60,000 coworkers an e-mail about a national day of prayer and requested an electronic receipt from all 60,000. The resulting overload crashed Martin's system for six hours while a Microsoft rescue squad was flown in to repair the damage and to build in protection. The company lost hundreds of thousands of dollars, all resulting from one employee's actions. The employee was fired for sabotage.

The list of corporate disasters goes on. Companies recognize that e-mails can cost them dearly. If one badly-worded, thoughtless e-mail gets in the hands of defense attorneys in a lawsuit, the company may have to pay up to the tune of a six-to-ten-figure settlement.

With these kinds of productivity, profit, and public relations disasters resulting from e-mail and Internet use, it is not surprising that employers are implementing e-policies. Whether a company consists of two part-time employees or 2,000, the best protection against lawsuits resulting from employees' access to e-mail, IM, and the Internet is a comprehensive, written e-policy, one that clearly defines what is and is not acceptable use of the organization's computers. According to Nancy Flynn, Internet guru and policy consultant, the best policies are straightforward, simple, and accessible. These e-policies inform employees of their...
electronic rights and responsibilities as well as tell them what they can expect in terms of monitoring. While employees believe they have a right to privacy where their e-mail is concerned, the federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) states that an employer-provided computer system is the property of the employer, and the employer has the right to monitor all e-mail traffic and Internet activity on the system.

According to the 2000 American Management Association Survey of Workplace Monitoring and Surveillance, the number of major U.S. firms checking employee e-mail and Internet activity is up to 38.1 percent, more than double since 1997. More than half of participating companies monitor Internet access for inappropriate uses, ranging from playing games to viewing pornography or shopping. Similar surveys today report more than 80 percent of companies monitor employee electronic activity. Monitoring programs can determine if e-mail is being used solely for business purposes.

Some companies monitor every keystroke made on every keyboard by every employee. Electronic monitors screen for words that alert managers to inappropriate content and some monitors can be configured to spot “trigger” words that indicate everything from profanity and sexually explicit or racially offensive language to the exchange of sensitive information, such as trade secrets and proprietary information.4

Although sanctioned by the ECPA, monitoring has its downsides. For example, employees may resent being unable to send an occasional personal e-mail to check on their kids or to make dinner reservations online without violating company policies. The feeling of being watched can hurt morale and eventually may cause good workers to quit, which means lost money for the company. Some employees are striking back at e-policies, claiming protection under state statutes that include a right to privacy.

Finally, even monitoring programs cannot ferret out the hostile tone or the badly-worded document open to misinterpretation, especially when being dissected by opposing lawyers. The haste and recklessness with which we tend to write e-mail, along with its high volume, exacerbate an old problem: mediocre writing skills. Only careful attention to employees’ writing habits can halt the production of bad e-mail documents.

Policies that govern e-mail use often incorporate electronic writing policies, electronic etiquette (netiquette) guidelines, company-use-only guidelines, and retention policies that outline how long e-mails are saved before they are automatically deleted from mail queues and mail host backups. Some companies purge all e-mail older than 30 days and do not keep backup tapes of e-mail. Some experts advise companies to retain no e-mail since a lawsuit could require a review of all backed-up e-mail. However, some industries such as financial firms are governed by federal securities laws that require them to retain e-mails relating to the brokerage firm’s overall business for three years.

What is clear is that more organizations and employers are implementing e-policies. Therefore, as an employee, you need to familiarize yourself with your employer’s e-policies and follow them closely. Since every document you write, including e-mail or IMs, is not only a reflection of your professionalism but also a reflection of your organization’s credibility, you need to reflect corporate goals by writing clear, clean e-mails that observe company policy. In addition, before firing off that first e-mail at your job, take time to learn your organization’s e-mail culture.

**Getting Familiar with the E-mail Culture of Your Organization**

Corporate e-mail culture varies greatly. Some companies use e-mail as their main form of communication; others use it only occasionally. Some companies do not mind if you send personal messages e-mail; in others, it is a dismissible offense. Some top executives welcome
e-mails from staff; others follow a strict hierarchy of who can message whom. Therefore, when you move to a new job, take time to observe the e-mail culture for answers to the following questions so you avoid e-mail mistakes or, worse yet, the e-mail career killer (ECK). A good example of an ECK is sending your new boss a jokey “let’s get acquainted” e-mail, only to discover his or her dislike for using e-mail except for formal communications.

• Notice the tone of the e-mails among coworkers. Is it formal or informal? Do they use e-mail for socializing, joking, and gossiping, or is it reserved for formal, job-related messages?
• What is the e-mail chain of command? Can staff skip over their supervisors and e-mail suggestions or questions to upper management?
• How are urgent or sensitive messages usually communicated?
• Do all employees have access to e-mail? Do they check it regularly?
• How are staff-wide announcements made, via e-mail? bulletin board? memo? intranet?
• Are personal announcements, such as “My house is on the market” or “I just found the cutest puppy; any takers?” acceptable over companywide e-mail?
• What are the company’s written policies on e-mail, IM, and Internet use? Is any noncompany-related browsing allowed? To what extent are e-mail, IM, and Internet use monitored?41

Become familiar with your employer’s e-culture as soon as possible. If you are uncertain about where the organization stands on such matters, do not guess. Ask your immediate supervisor or an HR representative.

**Writing Effective E-mail Messages**

The fiction that quick, poorly-written business messages are acceptable is fostered, in part, by the medium itself. Unlike writing memos and letters where we tend to be more guarded and take time to write thoughtfully, e-mail brings out the worst of our bad writing habits. As Gregory Maciag, president and CEO of ACORD, the nonprofit industry standards association, points out, the medium can hamper communication: “In place of thoughtful content, we send and receive short bursts of often grammatically and emotionally challenged communiqués that we sometimes regret.”42 As writing consultant Dianna Booher laments: “They log on; they draft; they send.”43 To avoid creating confusion, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings with your e-mails and to ensure that you get the busy reader’s attention, think and plan before you draft an e-mail message, then revise it before you hit Send.

**Planning:** Using the following form to help you quickly plan short e-mails on paper before committing your message to the screen. Once you begin to compose on the screen, do so offline. That way, you will not be tempted to scrawl and send without careful proofreading.

**Drafting Effective E-mail**

Competition for the electronic readers’ attention grows daily with tens of millions of e-mail users online. The challenge for those who send e-mails is to get their targeted readers’ attention. To help you get your reader’s attention, follow the guidelines we discuss here, beginning with the all-important subject line.

**Subject Line** Some busy executives get hundreds of incoming e-mails a day. To get through them quickly, they look at the subject line. If that grabs their attention, they scan the
first screen. Messages that do not get the reader’s attention at the subject line run the risk of never being read or of being deleted. To avoid “e-mail triage”:44

- Always include a clear, informative subject line. It should communicate the topic of the message, and like the subject line of a memo, it should be specific and brief. A subject line such as “Staff meeting changed to 3 p.m.” provides the necessary information. A subject line such as “Meeting,” “Information,” “Guidelines,” or “Hey” convey nothing. If you use “URGENT” or “!,” too often, you reduce the urgency of the message in the reader’s mind, and he or she eventually ignores it.45
- Be brief. Write the important points of your topic in the first half of your subject line. In an inbox, only the first 25–35 characters of the subject line usually appear. In a string (thread) of exchanged e-mails, change the subject line if the subject changes. That way, if you have to refer to an old e-mail, you won’t have to reread every message with the same “Re.”46

Body  The first thing to appear in the body of your e-mail may be your e-mailhead (e-mail letterhead; see Figure 5-2 for an example). E-mailheads appear routinely when e-mail is used to transmit formal contracts, proposals, offers, and other business transactions. Companies that provide e-letterheads, like Dynamic E-mail Stationery from StationeryCentral.com, offer graphically enriched e-mail that reflects your corporate identity.47

When you use an e-mailhead, be sure you have a clear purpose for including it, such as making it clear that the message is from your company. Otherwise, the reader may object to the wasted lines.

Always include a salutation. Including a greeting at the start of your message personalizes it, plus it establishes your role in the message’s history.48 If you normally address a person by his or her title or if you do not know the person well, include his or her title when addressing them: “Ms. Jones,” “Dr. Smith,” “Prof. James,” etc.

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**Figure 5–2: E-mailhead**

To: recipient@byco.com  
From: Mia Deal (mdeal@herco.com)  
Subject: Offer to Purchase Smartboards

Her Company Inc.  
3024 Main Street  
Chicago, IL 54890

Dear Mr. Brown:  
text  
text  
Sincerely,  
Mia Deal  
Marketing Manager  
(mdeal@herco.com)
If you are unsure how to address a person, err on the side of formality (this cannot be
stressed enough). Being too formal will not offend even the most informal of people and will
satisfy the most traditional formalists. However, if you are too informal at the outset, you run
the risk of ruining your credibility with that person or organization. You can always change
the salutation in subsequent messages if the recipient indicates that informality is fine.

Although business correspondence greetings like “Dear Sirs” are outdated forms in the
United States, greetings are more formal in other countries, such as Japan and Germany.

Keep the body of your message short, no more than 25 lines or one screen’s worth of
words. For longer documents, send an attachment. Some companies do not accept attach-
ments for fear of viruses, so check with your recipient first. If you must attach a document to
an e-mail, use clear headings in that document to break up the text and allow for skimming.

Remember there is a live person on the other end of your communication, so get right to
the point in the first or second sentence and support your main idea with details in the next
paragraph. Begin your e-mail with your main idea or request. Most important, keep the body
of the message brief and to the point. Focus on developing one topic only, and make respond-
ing easy. For example, phrase a message so that your reader can respond with a quick “yes” or
“No.”

In summary, make your message reader oriented to help your recipient grasp your message
quickly:

• Begin with your bottom-line, main idea, or a precise overview of the situation. If you
want the reader to take action, begin by making your request. Include the requested
action in the subject line for emphasis. If the message is for the reader’s information
only and needs no follow-up, put “FYI” in the subject line.
• Keep messages under 25 lines long, and use short sentences.
• Use white space before and after your main idea to highlight it.
• Use short sentences and short paragraphs that cover one idea. Separate short para-
graphs with white space.
• Use bulleted or numbered lists to help readers quickly differentiate multiple points or
directions.

Signature Block Always close with something, even if it is only your name. Simple
closings, though, like “Regards” or “Best wishes,” add a touch of warmth to this otherwise
cold medium. Add credibility to your message by adding a signature block after your name.
For consistency, create a signature file (.sig) containing, at a minimum, your name, title, and
address. You could also include phone and fax numbers; your web address or website; an
advertising message, slogan, or quote; your business philosophy; or ASCII art created from
text and symbols. However, many organizations have eliminated these slogans and quotes
from employees’ signature files in an effort to steer clear of potential litigation. The best advice
is to know and follow your organization’s policy. Avoid duplicating material in the signature
that is already in your e-mailhead, if you use one.

Revising E-mail Messages

Every document you write is a reflection of your professionalism and your organization’s cred-
ibility. Good e-mail is businesslike, well written, and free of grammatical errors and typos.
Before you hit Send, always take a minute to proofread. And remember, whatever you send
could get forwarded to the one person you do not want to see the message. Message privacy is
not guaranteed in cyberspace.
Proofread Your E-mail Carefully  Do not let poor spelling and typos detract from the credibility of your message. Use the grammar and spell checker, but then reread the message yourself before you hit Send. You cannot depend on a grammar or spell checker to catch every error.

Contrary to popular belief, businesspeople do pay attention to typos, no matter what the medium. Typos and grammatical errors undermine your credibility and the credibility of your e-mail message, and they subject the message to misinterpretation. Sloppy writing shows a lack of respect for your reader. Remember that some decision makers go out of their way to catch spelling or grammatical errors in business documents. Catching careless coworkers’ errors in office e-mail is a common pastime in many organizations. To avoid being the joke of the day, proofread. Take the following example:

“If e-male is writon with speeling mistakes and gramitcal errors, you mite git the meening, however, the messige is not as affective, or smoothly redable.”

After proofreading, always ask yourself, Would I want to see this message in a New York Times cover story or taped to the office refrigerator? If not, do not send it.

Humanize Your E-mails Use a tone appropriate to your audience. E-mail is an impersonal medium that is fertile ground for misunderstandings and hurt feelings. Temper your messages with politeness and objectivity. Strive for a professional, yet conversational tone. Use personal pronouns (“I,” “you,” “me”) to humanize the connection.

To humanize your e-mail, avoid the “e-tone.” Nancy Friedman, a consultant and trainer, invented the term “e-tone” to refer to the miscommunication that occurs when you have one tone of voice in mind as you write e-mail, but your recipient reads it with a totally different tone. Friedman urges e-mail writers to use words that express feelings—“please,” “thank you,” “I’m happy to report,” or “sorry to say”—to tell them how you feel. Friedman contends that even sensitive topics, such as apologies, can be addressed in e-mail if done properly.

Although not widely used in business documents, emoticons (smileys) can give your e-mail humor and temper the e-tone. However, overuse of punctuation marks and emoticons can also cause misunderstandings. For example, a subject line in an e-mail to a professor that says “Grades???????” might sound as if you are unhappy with your grade, when you may just want to find out what your grade is. Similarly, overuse of the exclamation point can offend people because it can make you sound pushy or overexcited!!!!!!!!

Proofread to Guard against the “ECK” An ECK (E-mail Career Killer) could be the too-cute reply to your boss or the off-color joke sent to your buddy that offends whoever sees it or whomever it might be forwarded to. ECKs stem from e-mails greatest assets: speed and ease. To avoid them, carefully check every message for tone and errors, and look twice and three times at the names listed in the TO, CC, and BCC blocks to ensure that nothing you have written could be misinterpreted or cause a problem for anyone.

Be sure the e-mail you are about to send does not contain a reckless or emotional outburst. For example, do not send an e-mail in which you stridently complain about your boss to a coworker because the offensive e-mail could get forwarded, accidentally or on purpose, to your maligned boss.

Observing E-mail Netiquette

We are all encouraged to follow the rules of netiquette (electronic etiquette) when developing and sending e-mail messages. Netiquette refers to etiquette rules governing electronic content and use. Netiquette rules apply to all electronic communications—blogs, social media, e-mail, text messages, etc.—business or personal. These rules of polite behavior have sprung
up alongside the etiquette that governs our off-line behavior and have quickly become a universally understood behavioral standard that transcends cultures, businesses, and geographical boundaries.  

**Avoid Flaming** Avoid publicly criticizing people in e-mail or discussion groups using inappropriate language. An e-mail flame is a hostile, blunt, rude, insensitive, or obscene e-mail. Flames are immediate, heated reactions and have no place in a business environment. If you are upset or angry, cool down and rewrite your hastily-written, angry message before it damages you and your organization. Remember that any e-mail you send—whether strictly business, gossip, complaints, or personal issues—could wind up in your boss’s inbox.

**Avoid Shouting** Shouting is using all CAPS in your message. An e-mail with the line THE MEETING WILL BEGIN AT 3PM will be interpreted as demanding and obnoxious. Conversely, do not write in all lower case letters. Stick to standard capitalization in e-mail.

**Avoid Spamming** Spamming refers to posting junk or unsolicited e-mail posts to a large number of mailing lists.

**Avoid Acronyms and Abbreviations in E-mail** Do not use acronyms and abbreviations unless you are e-mailing good friends. If you do use them, always explain what they mean. It seems that with increasing volumes of e-mail coming across computer screens daily, the substance of each communication drops, so that the average e-mail message now looks something like this: “OMG did u c K’s latest x LOL!!!!!!!!” or “I’m on my way. I’ll be there soon,” has now degenerated to “im on my way!!!!!!! Ill be thr son!!!!” Remember that e-mail not only reflects your level of professionalism, but also lives on in backups that could come back to haunt you.

**Watch What You Forward** Forward is perhaps the most dangerous command on your e-mail program, second only to Reply All. While forwarding is a time-saving way to share information, used without thinking, it can turn into an ECK. Think twice before forwarding e-mail. Although sometimes necessary for business reasons, most people do it more often than they need to. For example, refrain from passing on chain letters, jokes, rumors, and wacky stories unless you know your recipient shares your love of this Internet flotsam and jetsam. Many e-mail users resent having jokes and stories fill their inboxes. Respect your reader’s time and ask before you forward.
Do not forward all or parts of messages without the consent of the sender as well as the intended recipient. Remember that anything a person writes is copyrighted the minute the author writes it, whether it is an article from the Wall Street Journal or the musings of your best friend and coworker. Would you send a photocopy of a handwritten letter to someone else? Phillip Zimmermann, creator of Pretty Good Privacy encryption, says the same thought and respect should go into forwarding e-mails.

**Ask Before You Send an Attachment** Some organizations prohibit e-mail attachments due to hidden viruses. Before you send an attachment, ask if the reader would prefer receiving the material as an attachment or in the text of the message. In addition, do not simply send an attachment without explaining what it is in the body of the e-mail. “See attached” or a blank e-mail with an attachment raises suspicions that it might be a virus. In such a situation, the recipient will most likely delete the message without opening the attachment.

**If You Need an Immediate Response or Action to Your E-mail, Use the “Receipt Notification” Option** Receipt Notification lets you know when the reader opens the message. However, some readers resent the use of receipts, saying that receipts imply a lack of trust on the sender’s part. Your better option might be to phone the recipient, letting them know that a pressing e-mail is on its way and that you would appreciate a quick response.

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**Figure 5–3: International E-mail Etiquette**

- Before you begin writing, determine your reader’s needs. You may have to translate your message into your reader’s language.
- Be careful with dates and times. Most Europeans would interpret 3/5/14 as May 3, 2014 (with the month appearing in the middle), rather than March 5, 2014. The Japanese, in contrast, sometimes use a year/month/day format. To avoid misunderstanding, write out the name of the month as in March 5, 2014 or 5 March 2014.
- Most countries use a 24-hour system, so be sure to use that time format when setting up videoconferences, conference calls, and IM meetings: “The conference call will begin at 13:00 on 3 March 2014.”
- Since most countries use more formal written communications than United States does, be formal when you e-mail internationally. Address people by their surnames and titles, and use a formal tone throughout your message. To help you sort out titles used in different countries, like “Monsieur” or “Madame” or “Herr,” check a reference work, like Peter Post and Peggy Post’s *The Etiquette Advantage in Business*.
- Use specific language and avoid acronyms, abbreviations, business or technical jargon, and humor. They do not translate well.
Figure 5–3: International E-mail Etiquette continued

- Before using monetary denominations, state the currency (e.g., US$10,000).
- Give country codes for phone numbers. The U.S. country code is “1” (e.g., 001-608-123-4567).”
- Use generic names rather than brand names (e.g., photocopy rather than Xerox).
- Be specific when you mention geographical locations: Use New York rather than East Coast.
- When indicating time, be sure to indicate which time zone you mean. For example, “I’ll call you at 6 p.m.” could mean your time or theirs.


If You Want Your Reply to Go Only to the Sender, Hit “Reply,” Not “Reply All.” If you hit “Reply All,” your message will go to all the recipients on the list. Getting messages not meant for them irritates many listserv members. They might send you a flame for this netiquette breach e-mail. If you want your reply to go only to the sender, type in that person’s address. Be considerate of people’s privacy.

Only CC People Who Need to Read the E-mail Many managers and executives complain about being copied on messages they do not have to read. Unless your boss has requested it or it is standard practice for your workgroup, keep message CC’s to a minimum.

Beware of the blind copy (BCC). BCCing means you can sneak a copy of a message to someone without the main recipient knowing, since the BCC’ed person does not appear in the main recipient’s header. You have no assurance that the person BCC’ed will keep the “message secret.”

Before E-mailing Over Your Boss’s Head to Upper Management, Know What Is Customary in Your Office In most cases, your boss wants to be kept in the loop when you are e-mailing up the chain of command, so let him or her know about ideas, requests, or questions that you plan to send to upper-management. Tell your boss before you e-mail up the command chain, rather than in by CCing him or her.

Do Not Use Company E-mail to Circulate Personal Requests Otherwise, use bulletin boards or a Web message board to post personal requests.

International E-mails Pose Language, Culture, Time Challenges Before writing and sending an e-mail message internationally, think about your reader’s communication needs.
Summary:
Section 1—Writing E-mail Messages

- Businesses and organizations increasingly use e-mail to send routine and sometimes even sensitive messages to employees, clients, and business contacts. E-mail recipients scrutinize what employees are writing, looking for typos.
- Along with business-related e-mail, workers are also sending many nonwork-related e-mails, all of which are backed-up regularly. For employers, this increased use of e-mail causes liability concerns.
- When deciding whether to send an e-mail, consider how formal or informal the situation is and your need for speed and mass distribution. Know the tips on how to manage high volumes of e-mail to avoid getting overwhelmed.
- Employers are developing e-policies to protect themselves from lawsuits. Know your company’s e-policies and why they were designed.
- Become familiar with e-mail your organization’s e-mail culture before you send e-mails.
- Know how to write effective e-mails to communicate your thoughts clearly and to avoid misunderstandings. Rather than drafting and sending a message, take time to plan, draft, and revise before you send it e-mail.
- Abide by the rules of e-mail etiquette (netiquette) to avoid offending a recipient.
- Before you send messages internationally, familiarize yourself with the rules of international e-mail etiquette.

Writing Effective Instant Messages

Even though e-mail is more widely used in U.S. organizations, instant messaging is also used extensively.

Major Uses of IMs in Business

Instant messaging (IM) is a form of online chat. While IM was once used mainly by night-owl teens chatting with their friends, it is now a standard business communication medium. The two defining characteristics of IM, presence awareness and near real-time operation, make it a compelling alternative to e-mail and voice-mail. According to a recent report, some 60 percent of business phone calls never reach their intended recipients. These deficiencies of traditional forms of business communication help explain the explosive growth of business IMs.

Combining the real-time benefits of using the phone with the convenience of e-mail, IM offers a variety of advantages to the corporate communicator. IM’s popularity as a business communication tool can be explained by its quickness, flexibility, and versatility.
IM Is Quick  A sender can detect whether a user is online, send an IM, and institute a back-and-forth conversation, virtually, in real time. Unlike e-mail that can remain unanswered in someone’s overloaded inbox for days, IM can detect someone’s presence online, which is good for an immediate response. IM also eliminates long e-mail threads.

IM Is Flexible  Many people can be in on the same conversation. In that way, work groups can use it to get tasks done quickly. Along with making team communication easier, IM allows users to have more than one message thread going at a time. IMs are so easy to handle that you can be on the phone and still respond to them. In terms of security, with commercial-grade IM software, users have the option of archiving IMs for legal or management reasons or purging them to avoid being susceptible to court-ordered discovery processes.

IM Is Versatile  IM facilitates communication among geographically distributed workgroups; it improves communication with business partners and suppliers; it quickens response time between customer service and support departments and customers; and it facilitates cross-business unit communication. Users can even send files via most IM applications when a report, contract, or invoice needs to be quickly reviewed or approved. As a collaborative tool, IM easily enables team members to meet in a dynamic space, share files, set up whiteboards, and discuss changes. The space disappears when users are finished. Collaboration is much easier than in the pre-IM day.

The buddy list, an IM staple first developed by AOL, has become “presence management” in business contexts, where detecting who is online to answer a question or to buy a product in real time means increased productivity and profits. Presence management refers to being able to determine if others are online and available. Companies like AT&T, IBM, Boeing, the U.S. Army and Navy, National Cancer Institute, and a host of other high-tech, financial, and retail companies use IM to assemble virtual teams from locations around the world. IMs allow employees to communicate with coworkers, clients, customers and other business contacts from their virtual offices. Retailers like Landsend.com and 1-800-flowers.com use IM to answer customer questions when they arise. It is faster than e-mail and cheaper because customer reps can reply more quickly.

A good example of a business that thrives virtually by using IM is the CPA firm of Carolyn Sechler. She heads a 14-member virtual office workforce that serves 300 clients, primarily nonprofit organizations and technology entrepreneurs, in several states and countries. From her home office, Sechler works with CPAs from Alabama to British Columbia. She meets her core team of four every two weeks using her IM service, ICQ. She believes in making people feel comfortable: “At 9 a.m. we all tune in—and we can archive the chats. What’s the point of making people go anywhere when they can be comfortable?”

IM is the tool that makes her virtual business possible, a business that has grown 10–15 percent every year. Sechler says that she has used ICQ since its inception. She keeps a “buddy list” of team members up and running on her computer so that they can communicate throughout the day. She can exchange quick messages or files with any of them by IM—a faster service than e-mail—and they can have “improptu conversations” that bring together four, five, or six members into one chat area. According to Sechler, being accessible on-line strengthens ties with clients, circumvents crises, and lets the firm find out early about new consulting opportunities.
How to Use IM

Instant messaging works this way: A small piece of client software is loaded onto a PC, smartphone, or other device and maintains a constant connection to a central hosting service. Anyone who is logged onto the service is flagged as online. The software includes a “buddy list” that enables the user to store the nicknames (everyone has a nickname on IM) of clients, coworkers, and other business contacts. When a buddy is online, the name or icon lights up. The user clicks on the icon to send the buddy an IM or a file attachment. After that, messages fly back and forth, all in the same window that scrolls up as the conversation continues. Unlike e-mail, which can take time to reach its destination, IMs reach their destination instantly even if the person is continents away.

You can also control when others can send you a message. Privacy options include saying that you are away at lunch and that you don’t want to be bothered. You can even block the fact that you are online.

IM is great for those messages that are too brief to pick up the phone or too urgent to try to play phone tag. In many cases, IM has replaced phone use for short transactions. Since it does not require your full attention, you can even talk on the phone while messaging other people.

Another useful feature allows you to invite several people into the same session. Unless you need the archiving function to save the message, these messages usually disappear when you log off.

Writing Effective Text Messages

Texting is a popular way to communicate in the workplace, thanks in great part to the proliferation of affordable, dependable smartphones and tablets working in sync with wi-fi networks.

Business Uses of Text Messages

Many of the same rules and uses for IM apply to text messaging. A text message is a type of IM. Text messaging has gained wide popularity in the United States and elsewhere since its inception. The first text message (Merry Christmas) was sent on December 3, 1992. Although usually sent from one mobile phone to another, text messaging is often integrated into IM software so that messages can be sent via an IM, but received on a mobile phone. Text messages are no longer limited to text. Video clips and pictures, which are often captured with a mobile phone, are easily integrated into these messages.

Text messaging is popular in the U.S. business community for many reasons. First of all, text messages are relatively inexpensive compared to phone messages. While some communications are involved and do not comfortably lend themselves to text messaging, some companies find they can save more money than phone calls. Another text message advantage is its ability to communicate in real time. When e-mailing or IMing, if the recipient is away from their computer or if their phone lacks Internet capability, they cannot be reached. Text messaging has the mobility of phone calls as well as e-mail functions, such as one message going to several people at once. It should be no surprise that text messaging is used extensively in industries, such as real estate, construction, and transportation. Each of these industries has people working in the field who are not connected to a computer all the time. They are able to receive alerts, updates, and quick messages throughout the day without having to rack up phone bills.
Figure 5–4: Drivers, Beware. Or Is It Beware of Drivers?

Today’s mobile communication technologies allow drivers to send and receive text messages, tweets, and phone calls while operating vehicles. Unfortunately, many drivers who chose to do so have caused car, truck, motorcycle, bus, and train accidents, resulting in injuries and fatalities. Some of these drivers lived to tell their side of the story in court, while others were not so lucky. Texting, tweeting, and placing phone calls while driving defies both logic and responsible citizenship. It is basically selfish, narcissistic behavior. However, this has not stopped all drivers from taking chances with their own fate as well as the fate of others! These activities have prompted several U.S. municipalities and states to consider or pass laws making it illegal for drivers to text, tweet, and participate in phone conversations while driving. Several countries outside of the United States are considering or have already passed similar laws. The U.S. government is also considering such measures.

Drivers in some countries have made great headway in reducing instances of simultaneous driving and texting, tweeting, and talking on cell phones. For example, in the United Kingdom texting while driving is socially unacceptable behavior. Thus, UK citizens are policing themselves on this matter. There appears to be a similar trend in Los Angeles. These are positive signs.

Hopefully you are not risking your safety and the safety of others’ by practicing such dangerous behaviors. And hopefully, the defensive driver in you is constantly on the lookout for other drivers who are not as considerate.

While driving recently, I observed an additional texting-related distraction. It was a humorous, yet serious bumper sticker. It read, “Honk If You Love Jesus. Text While Driving If You Want To Meet Him!” No matter how tasteless you might find this bumper sticker, it is one more reminder to those who read it to be responsible, careful drivers.

Of course text messages are not limited to business use. In the United States the most common use of text messaging is to communicate with consumers through retail or reality TV shows. It is not uncommon to see advertisements soliciting ring tones by texting “win” to a certain phone number. Nor is it uncommon to have the next American Idol decided by voting via text message. While these are the first uses of texting, more are coming. Text message marketing is a foreseeable field, whether it be advertisements or product notifications. Further, text messaging can notify buyers of order confirmations, shipping, back orders, etc.

**Instant Messaging and Text Messaging Etiquette**

Many companies do not allow employees to install IM services because those employers believe IMs distract employees from their work. For instance, you might be in the middle of an important project and suddenly a message from your spouse pops up with a reminder to take the dog in for a flea bath. Unwanted interruptions can be avoided by using the privacy functions on your
Finally, be sure to practice good messaging etiquette by following these suggestions.

- If someone is marked as unavailable or if you have received an away message from that person, refrain from messaging until they return. Although you may be in a chatty mood, a coworker or family member may be busy and unable to respond promptly. If the recipient uses the same IM service for work and personal messages, the person cannot shut it down since it is a work tool, like the phone. If they are at work and available, be courteous and ask them if they have time to chat, “Got a minute?” If they do not, do not be offended. Ask them to message you when they are free. If you are on the receiving end, don’t be afraid to let people know you are busy. Learn to say “no” or ask them to message back later.87

- When responding to someone’s message, it is a good idea to type your answer, send it, and then wait for the recipient’s reply before sending another message. That way, things will not get confusing because you each respond to one idea at a time.

- Know when to stop. Do not let a thread go on and on. A simple “got to go” or “bye” or “ttyl” (talk to you later) should be sufficient to end the conversation.

- Check your grammar. If you are communicating at work, take a few seconds to reread what you have written before you send it. More and more people are chastising those who misspell the same words consistently. Misspelling can ruin your credibility.

- Do not use IMs for long messages. Betsy Waldinger, vice president at Chicago-based OptionsXpress Inc., spends a lot of her day working on an online customer service chat system. She recommends either sending short messages or breaking up long ones over many screens. Typing long messages keeps the person at the other end waiting while you type. IM should not replace e-mail. Use IM for quick-hit messages that require fast responses. Use e-mail for longer discussions.88

- If you work in an office where IM is part of the culture, send a message before you drop in on someone. This gives the other person a chance to say whether the visit would be convenient.

- Log off IM when you are not using it. Otherwise, you may come back to find messages waiting and senders wondering why you are ignoring them.

- Do not hide online. Some managers use the ability to be invisible online as a way to watch employees. This is a quick way to discourage workers from using IM. Being on or off IM is not a good way to determine whether your remote employees are working. Be courteous, and if you are on, be visible. Use the service busy icons, like “Do Not Disturb” or “Busy” to indicate your availability.89

- Use proper punctuation and capitalization as though you were typing an e-mail or letter.

- Use two carriage returns to indicate that you are done and the other person may start typing.90

- Remember that chat is an interruption to the other person. Use only when appropriate.

- Be careful if you have more than one chat session going at once. This can be dangerous unless you are paying attention.

- Like e-mail, set up different accounts for family and friends and for work-related IMs.

The need for speed when instant messaging has prompted the creation of acronyms that express nearly every sentiment. Figure 5-5 contains some examples of common IM and texting acronyms. In addition, visit buzzWhack.com online for the latest acronyms.

When writing IMs and text messages, be cognizant of using standard acronyms and abbreviations. Not all your communication partners may understand what you are saying.
I noticed a drink coaster recently in a local restaurant. It had a reminder printed on it that applies to using acronyms and abbreviations in IMs and text messages. It read, “2 much txting mks u 1 bad splr.” No matter whether you are writing business reports, letters, memos, e-mails, IMs, text messages, blogs, website content, or tweets, misspellings have the potential to wreck your credibility.

**Figure 5–5: Instant Messaging and Texting Acronyms**

- **IM**: instant message
- **BRB**: be right back
- **CID**: consider it done
- **OMW**: on my way
- **G1**: good one
- **VM**: voice-mail
- **W8**: wait

**Summary:**

**Section 2—Instant Messaging and Text Messaging**

- Presence awareness and real-time operation make IMing and text messaging compelling alternatives to e-mail and voice-mail in the workplace.
- IM’s flexibility is also another feature that attracts workers who use it. For example, since many people in remote locations can be in on the same conversation thread, team communication is easier and faster than in the past.
- IM is versatile. It facilitates communication among remote work groups, it can improve communication between business partners and suppliers, and it quickens response time between customer service and customers.
- Some firms see IM’s downsides as stumbling blocks to its use. For example, security and interoperability are two issues getting attention now by commercial-grade IM services. In addition, some managers believe that IMs are a distraction that interferes with employee productivity.
- If you use IM in your workplace, follow the rules of messaging etiquette.
- Text messaging is a viable alternative to e-mail and phone calls. Text messaging can cut costs and keep people in touch no matter where they are. The uses continue to grow for company-to-consumer relations.
Writing Effective Business Blogs

Blog is short for “web log,” a type of user-generated website that acts as a communicating and networking medium for the masses. It is a type of self-publishing via the Internet done through easy-to-use Internet applications and websites. Many websites that host blogs are free, so they are easy to start and require little technical knowledge to operate.

Blogs are built for flexibility and designed to be short and updated frequently, unlike long essays or prose. Although blogs have been championed by social networks for personal use, they have made a significant impact on the business world, the journalism world, and academia, where they are used in the classroom. External blogs that the public has access to are considered to be in the blogosphere, which is the universe of blogs.

Business world blogs can be broken down into several categories. The main type of business blog is the corporate blog. Corporate blogs can be used as e-newsletters, viral marketing campaigns, and an open channel between businesses and consumers. For making sure readers are current on a blog post, frequent blog readers use a tool called RSS. RSS stands for “really simple syndication,” and it is a way to notify readers that their favorite blogs have been updated. The ease of use and relatively low cost make blogs an excellent medium for businesses, which is why they are growing so quickly in corporate settings.

Corporate Blogging

Since blogs are usually updated at least once a week, blog managers make sure the corporate website is constantly freshened with new information. When a blog becomes popular, it guarantees that consumers or even frequent bloggers will view a company site again and again. These blogs differ from the traditional website in several ways. They are:

- interactive,
- written in a conversational tone,
- frequently updated, and
- can be used to express personal opinions, not only company policy.

The most popular type of blog is the external blog, which can be seen by anyone with an Internet connection. Internal blogs are also growing in popularity.
established by companies so that only employees or a select group of people can see them. These are usually password protected, and sometimes are on a local intranet. Internal blogs are a good starting place for companies that are testing the waters of blogging. Internal blogs can be used as testing grounds for speed, content, frequency, and authorship before a company enters the blogosphere. Although they can be a warm up for external blogs, internal blogs also have a place once a company is comfortable with the medium.

**Figure 5–6: What to Do with Your Internal Blog**

Communications and technology expert Shel Holtz provides us with the following list of ways you can use an internal blog:

**Alerts.** Don’t you hate getting those e-mails that let you know when the server’s going to be down? People who need to know can subscribe to the list server status Weblog. Instead of having to send out those e-mails, IT can simply request that employees subscribe to their blog.

**Projects.** Companies have terrible institutional memories when it comes to projects. Anybody who needs to delve into a project’s records to find out how a decision was reached a year ago is probably out of luck. Project teams can set up a group blog to maintain an ongoing record of decisions and actions. Project leaders can also maintain a blog to announce to the rest of the company the current status of the project.

**Departmental.** Departments can maintain blogs to let the rest of the company know of current offerings or achievements. Imagine the marketing department being able to submit a simple post to its own blog announcing the availability of new marketing brochures or other collateral.

**News.** Employees can contribute industry or company news to a group blog or cover news they have learned in their own personal blogs.

**Brainstorming.** Employees in a department or on a team can brainstorm about strategy, process, and other topics over blogs.

**Customers.** Employees can share the substance of customer visits or phone calls.

**Personal blogs.** Even though it sounds like a timewaster, a personal blog can prove valuable in the organization. Consider an engineer who reads a lot and attends meetings of his professional association. He updates his blog with summaries of the articles he’s read in journals (with inks to the journal’s website) and notes he took at the meeting. Employees who find value in this information (other engineers) will read the blog; those who don’t care probably aren’t missing anything if they don’t. And if the engineer posts an article or two that has nothing to do with work, well who said work can never be fun?

**CEO blogs.** What a great way for the CEO to get closer to employees. Imagine a new CEO hosting a blog called “My First Hundred Days” in which he writes about his experiences daily and lets employees comment in order to help him get acclimated.

*Source: Debbie Weil, The Corporate Blogging Book: Absolutely Everything You Need to Know About Blogging to Get It Right. (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).*
Shel Holtz’s point about personal blogs coincides with another use of blogs, knowledge management, which are sometimes referred to as K-Blogs or knowledge blogs. **K-Blogs** refer to when an expert keeps a topic-specific blog that allows users to tap into his or her expertise when needed. New tools and applications are being designed specifically for K-blogs to facilitate references to documents, journals, essays, and e-mails.

As time-ordered business records, blogs have many uses. They are great for project members or leaders who can track projects and ideas without adding an extra archiving step. New project members can easily get an overview of the project and how it is developing. Possibly the most valuable use is for legal discrepancies. If a decision or action was subject to questions, the business would have clear and thorough documentation.

One big selling point for internal blogs is that they can act as e-mail killers. Imagine this, Jill wants her department to know cake and sandwiches will be in the break-room at 2 p.m. Since everyone in her department has something to say, they all hit Reply to All and send everyone in the department responses like “Can’t wait!” or “See you there!” Now everyone’s inbox is full of the original memo and fifteen responses. If Jill had posted a blog with the memo everyone could have logged on in the morning, seen that cake and sandwiches would be in the break-room, and left their comments on the blog page, leaving all the inboxes free of clutter.

**External Blogs**

While internal blogs are useful, to reach their full potential, corporate blogs need to be part of the blogosphere for everyone to read. One of the biggest distinctions in external corporate blogs is who writes them. According to Chris Anderson, author of *The Longest Tail: Why the Future Is Selling Less of More*, the best business blogs are not written by top managers or marketers, but by midlevel employees. They are often more entertaining, more honest, and less likely to repeat everything in the latest ad campaign or mission statement. They can also be more informative about the company’s inner workings. Consulting company Accenture directs new recruits to its Careers page, which displays blogs written by employees in various departments to give recruits a taste of the day-to-day activities of a new management consultant. Or, they can read the rants of a recruiter so they know what not to do. Everyone wins in these situations because recruiters no longer have to read vapid cover letters, and prospective employees may discover, for instance, that they do not care for the extensive travel required of management consultants.

For organizations, one big draw of blogs is the feedback they receive from consumers. Because bloggers comment on blog posts in the relative anonymity of the Internet, consumers are less reluctant to tell companies exactly what they think. This uncovers valuable information, formerly only available through expensive polls and surveys. It is also instant, and sometimes preemptive. Bloggers can tell a company what they think of a product before it hits store shelves, for example. That is the real key to successful blogs; a conversational style that solicits and receives feedback.

The most-often cited use of external blogs is for marketing. Instant publishing is a powerful tool, as it can potentially be read by the very demographic the company in targeting. With a real-time, searchable, easy-to-use public relations tool like blogs, some have asked if blogs will replace traditional marketing communications. While it is true that blogs are one of the latest waves of Internet marketing, they are not meant to be a one-stop shop for companies. They are an additional avenue, that when combined with TV and print advertising creates a more robust marketing campaign.
Much like K-Blogs, external blogs establish thought leaders. Thought leadership blogs are used to establish experts and respected leaders in narrow fields. These blogs are usually updated frequently; usually several times a week if not daily. CEO and senior executive blogs usually fall into this category, along with top consultants.

One type of blog referred to as customer evangelists has become a powerful resource for companies, and they do not even pay for it. Some company brands have a powerful and passionate consumer following, so these companies benefit from consumers who do the blogging for them. Customer evangelists are loyal consumers who start blogs devoted to their favorite product or company. These customer-written blogs act as a meeting place for passionate consumers to discuss their favorite products. They are often seen as a fair judge of products, because they are independently written. While these blogs are a great asset for the companies and products they are devoted to, they have drawbacks. Because the company has no say in the content, if the company makes a decision that their blogging customers dislike, there is a chance the blogs can turn negative. It takes a different kind of public relations effort to manage customer evangelist’s blogs.

Whether blogs are written by evangelists, midlevel managers, or CEOs, they all have the power to impact product or service sales. Therefore, it is more important than ever to craft coherent messages through writing style, content, and type of blog. While many companies may know what an ideal blog should be, they do not always know how to create one. With this gap between the perceived power of business blogs and how to create them has emerged a new profession—the professional blogger. This is someone (in-house or consultant) whose job is to create, write, edit, and promote a corporate blog as well as stay up to date with other corporate blogs.

Blog Writing Tips

The main concern for many businesses when starting a blog is: What do we write about? The answer to this important question determines the blog’s success or failure.

First, the blog should have a narrow focus, but broad and complex enough that you do not run out of things to say. If a blogger jumps from topic to topic,he or she risks losing readers. Bloggers who focus on a particular subject tend to do well because they grow a faithful fan base. That said, to keep content fresh and the writing style entertaining, controversial content works well. Taking risks on controversial topics often increases the number of links to your post, which increases the number of readers. At the same time, an author who wants to be controversial must be ready for the consequences. A controversial post can elicit comments both attacking and defending it. Editing these comments can be a daunting task. Ultimately, the decision whether or not to make a blog controversial depends on the company’s goals and objectives for it. If the goal is merely to garner a large number of hits and readers, then controversy is the way to go. But if an organizational blog exists to portray a company in the blogosphere, then it is inappropriate to include controversial material.

In any case, controversial topics must remain balanced and in check. Even if the organization desires high readership, one slip in an entry or an unchecked comment could result in costly lawsuits and the loss of jobs. Nancy Flynn, author of Blog Rules, recommends having a lawyer review official corporate postings and the incoming comments. Of course, for a small business without staff lawyers, the guideline is to be careful and follow good blogging etiquette.

After a topic has been established, the trick to getting readers to return is the writing style. The appropriate tone for a blog is tricky because if it is too dry or resembles a press piece, no one will read it. But if it is too informal, it might affect the organization’s professional
image. The true winners are the blogs that maintain this balance yet feel like a conversation. They are informal as if you were writing an e-mail to a friend, but professional enough not to taint the corporate image. Debbie Weil, author of The Corporate Blogging Book, says she thinks of a blog as if she were sending an e-mail to the world or, as she puts it, the “cc:world.” She says much of her blog content comes from e-mails from readers, and that it is like writing a letter.93

One feature that makes blogs a more powerful tool than a website is the frequency of updates. So it would only make sense that a good writing practice for blogs is to maintain the frequency. There are no hard and fast rules, but a general guideline is that good corporate blogs are updated at least once a week. Often corporate bloggers give themselves deadlines so that every week on a certain day at a certain time they update the blog. This way readers know when to expect posts, and it adds to the conversational atmosphere. For busy business executives there is often an extended time between posts, which readers may understand, although they expect an explanation. Keeping readers informed of a break in posts shows respect to the readers.

**Figure 5–7: Blogging Etiquette**

- Think before you speak in public.
- Be discreet. Be professional. Be mindful of the future.
- Need therapy? Do not write a blog. Seek counseling instead.
- Do not use your blog to let off steam.
- Watch your language.
- Do not blog anonymously. Stand behind your posted opinions.
- Do not comment unless you have something legitimate to add to the conversation.
- Be 100 percent honest.
- Keep an eye on spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Be gracious to readers and commenters.
- Develop a thick skin.


**Blogging Guidelines**

In the exciting world of corporate blogging it is important to establish guidelines so the organization’s employees know what is acceptable and what is not. How restrictive the policy is depends on the company. On both the company side and the employee side the threat of lawsuits posed by blogging is real. Everything from defamation to intellectual property infringement to trade secrets can be litigated, plus a whole lot more. In several cases employees have lost their jobs due to personal or company blog postings, so it is in everyone’s best interest to abide by a common set of guidelines. Employment attorney Mara Levin has crafted blogging guidelines for several private companies. Here are some guidelines.

- Do not defame or discuss your colleagues and their behavior.
- Do not write anything defamatory.
Do not write personal blogs on company time.

Identify your blog as a personal blog and state that the views are your own (e.g., include a disclaimer).

Do not reveal confidential information.

Do not reveal trade secrets.94

Although it is important to have rules in place to protect companies and their employees, some would argue it is more effective to offer advice on how to blog. That is what IBM's blogging policy does. There is a difference between a policy and a code of ethics. A policy covers what a person can and cannot say for legal or company reasons; whereas, a code of ethics gives instructions on how to act in the blogosphere. The code of ethics works in tandem with blogging etiquette.95

Figure 5–8: Sample Blogging Policy and Code of Ethics

Sample Corporate Blogging Policy

1. Make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of your company.
2. Respect the company’s confidentiality and proprietary information.
3. Ask your manager if you have questions about what is appropriate to include in your blog.
4. Be respectful of the company, employees, customers, partners, and competitors.
5. Understand when the company asks that topics not be discussed for confidentiality or legal compliance reasons.
6. Ensure that your blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.

Sample Blogger Code of Ethics

1. I will tell the truth.
2. I will write deliberately and with accuracy.
3. I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly.
4. I will preserve the original post, using notations to show where I have made changes so I maintain the integrity of my publishing.
5. I will never delete a post.
6. I will reply to e-mails and comments when appropriate and do so promptly.
7. I will strive for high quality with every post—including basic spellchecking.
8. I will stay on topic.
9. I will disagree with other opinions respectfully.
10. I will link to online references and original source materials directly.
11. I will disclose conflicts of interest.
12. I will keep private issues and topics private, since discussing private issues would jeopardize my personal and work relationships.

Source: From Blogging Policy Examples by Charlene Li. Copyright © 2004 by Forrester Research, Inc. Reprinted by permission.
In closing, here is a blog-related term to add to your already-extensive vocabulary. The term **hedonometer** refers to a computerized sensor that surveys the Web to measure the collective happiness of millions of bloggers.

**Writing for Websites**

A **website** is a set of interconnected Web pages that build from a homepage. Websites are commonplace in today’s businesses and are used predominately for sharing information with and selling goods and services to customers.

What follows are some suggestions to keep in mind when developing written materials for business websites.

**Most People Who Browse the Internet Skim** This means they do not read content in its entirety. Nor are they big on scrolling. What does this mean to those who write Web content? Write concise, skimmable text. Grab your readers’ attention quickly. Make your main points on the first screen. If you don’t, your reader will likely be off to one of the millions of other sites, just clicks away.

**Write Concisely** Web readers do not want to wade through excess verbage, so write concisely. However, do not do so at the expense of clarity. Include the level of detail needed to achieve this goal also.

**Write with Design in Mind** Include keywords, subheads, bulleted lists, and short paragraphs. Use clear, informational headlines. Then provide objective, supporting details. Experts say that your Web page is too text heavy if you can place your open palm over a block of text on your website without touching a graphic image.

**Write Comprehensively** While it seems like a contradiction, Web writing also demands comprehensiveness. Web browsers will stay around if they like what they see.

**Use Links to Interior Pages Where You Can Tell the Rest of Your Story** Use links to keep them hooked. However, keep links to a minimum and always provide a link back to your home page.

**Avoid Puffed, Exaggerated “Marketese” and Stuffy, Bureaucratic Prose** Write in a conversational voice, do not talk down to Web readers, and do not exaggerate your product or service.
Use the Web's Interactivity. Build your website so your readers can react to your site through e-mail feedback or discussion boards, and use drawings, graphics, animation, audio, or video where they enhance your words.

Your website must serve the business community’s needs. Knowing how to write effective website content will serve you well in this environment.

Writing Effectively at Social Network Sites

Social networking refers to online media tools that allow users to form communities, communicate with each other, and produce content. Online social networking sites, also referred to as social media sites, allow users to increase personal and professional networks and find others with whom they share interests. The sites help users connect with other people, and keep up communication with friends and associates with whom it may be otherwise hard to stay current. Boyd and Ellison define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”96

Social network sites are hosted on a number of popular websites including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. These sites usually require users to create a profile that features demographic information, interests, preferences, pictures, and updates about current events or happenings in that individual’s life. The sites also provide tools for users to create and facilitate content. Users can upload pictures and videos, create blogs, review media, and share opinions and comments. Users can also group themselves depending on geographic location, interests, heritage, professional and social associations, or topics of interest. These groups make possible communication and management of subgroups within larger social networks.

Social Networking Sites

Facebook is currently the largest social network site, with approximately 850 million users worldwide. Originally this site was only accessible to college students, but has since opened up so that anyone can create a free account. Users are loosely grouped by
“networks” such as school affiliations or geographical locations. Users can join multiple networks and can also join or start other groups based on any criteria they chose. Facebook uses the “wall” onto which users can post comments or links to their friends. They also use “status updates” so users can post what they are doing or thinking and can also post media links.

Interestingly, a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey reported that several college students said they regularly shared their Facebook passwords with friends to force themselves to study for exams. They instruct their friends to change their password, which temporarily locks them out of their Facebook account and they can study. Aside from the potential study benefits, for obvious reasons one would certainly want to know that the person to whom he or she turns his or her account is an honest, long-term friend.

**MySpace**  
*MySpace* was at one time the largest social network site. It currently has approximately 33 million users. MySpace maintains a special niche for musicians. Bands create their own pages and upload music. Then they use these pages to keep fans informed of shows and information about the band.

**LinkedIn**  
*LinkedIn* is a specialty social network site that caters to business professionals. Users are able to upload résumés and present a professional online presence rather than the social one portrayed on other social networking sites. LinkedIn has approximately 150 million users worldwide, nearly half of them in the United States.

Nancy Flynn, author of the *Social Media Handbook*, sums up social media etiquette as follows: Adhere to the rules of social media etiquette. Be polite, polished, and professional. Write, post, and publish content that is 100 percent appropriate, civil, and compliant. Figure 5–9 contains additional social media etiquette advice.

### Figure 5–9: Social Media Etiquette

- Fill out your online profiles completely with information about you and your business.
- Use a different profile or account for your personal connections.
- Create a section on your main profile detailing whom you want to befriend.
- Offer information of value.
- Don’t approach strangers and ask them to be friends with you just so you can then try to sell them your products or services.
- Pick a screen name that represents you and your company well.
- Don’t mail requests for birthdays, invitations to play games, or other timewasters for those using the site.
- Don’t put anything on the Internet that you don’t want your future boss, current clients, or potential clients to read.
- Check out the people who want to follow you or be your friend.
- If someone does not want to be your friend, accept their decision gracefully.
- Never post when you are overly tired, jet lagged, intoxicated, angry, or upset. You do not want to post argumentative or inappropriate texts.
- Compose your posts, updates, or tweets in a word processing document so you can check grammar and spelling before you send them.

*Source: Lydia Ramsey, Top 12 Rules of Social Media Etiquette. www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Facebook-users/Summary.aspx*
Twitter

Twitter is one of the fastest-growing social network sites on the Internet, with approximately 300 million users worldwide sending 400 million tweets per day. Twitter differs from other social network sites in users do not set up an information page. Twitter is a series of miniblogs ("tweets"), similar to the Status Updates on Facebook. These tweets are usually one to two sentences and can contain links, to a maximum of 140 characters. Users can subscribe to other users’ tweets and receive their messages via their account or through text messages. With the rapid growth of Twitter, businesses have been discovering new and creative way to leverage Twitter to communicate with customers. To date, companies use Twitter predominately as a customer service and public relations tool.

Figure 5–10: Six Secrets to Online Success with Twitter

1. **Immediacy**. Real-time flow of comments and adaptability to mobile handsets makes tweeting more immediate than blogging.
2. **Brevity**. Limiting messages to 140 characters makes them easier to produce and digest.
3. **Pull and Push**. The ability of users to choose whose tweets they follow makes it less random than e-mail.
4. **Searchability**. Messages can be searched, making the content more accessible than the comments on a social network.
5. **Mixing the Public and the Personal**. A user’s personal contacts are on equal footing with public figures’ contacts.
6. **Retweeting**. By copying and retransmitting messages, users can turn the network into a giant echo chamber.

*Source: Richard Waters, “Sweet to Tweet.” Financial Times (February 27, 2009).*
If you suffer from a bit of vocabulary deficit, add the term premature tweeting to your word bank. **Premature tweeting** refers to posting messages on Twitter before the facts are properly verified. Obviously, confirming your facts before tweeting is both professional and courteous. The same advice applies when posting entries on Facebook.

**Figure 5–11: Tweeting or Texting While Walking**

Sadly, pedestrians have been injured and even killed by drivers who were busy texting or tweeting. Other pedestrians have been injured and killed in accidents they caused by texting, tweeting, or talking on phones while walking. Some have stepped out in front of moving cars, trucks, and buses. Those injured or killed by irresponsible drivers would certainly have had a greater chance of avoiding injury or death if they were not distracted by their own texting, tweeting, and phone conversations.

Such tragedies are not limited to accidents involving vehicles. One fellow, who while texting and crossing a street simultaneously, died when he stepped into an open manhole and struck and fractured his skull when he landed. Of course, drivers are encouraged to be on the lookout for such pedestrians who are not looking out for them. However, the responsibility ultimately rests with the pedestrian. Be careful out there!

Social networking sites are useful to businesses in a variety of ways. One of the most well-researched uses is online advertising that targets customers.

Much like blogs, businesses can use external social networking sites, and they can create their own internal networks. Internal networks are useful for collaboration, problem solving, and building relationships within a company, without some of the legal issues that arise when employees use external network sites.
1. **Return on Investment.** Private social networks provide organizations with a return on investment for all their people. A social network can reveal hidden gems—people who lack the nerve to talk aloud but have ideas and expertise to share. A social network can encourage and reward online contributions so that the hidden gems can reveal themselves through their contributions.

2. **Unlocked Information Silos.** Many large organizations develop information silos, which are self-contained departments that do not communicate outside the “silo,” precluding extensive connections across the organization. Private social networks organizations can break down silos by fostering interaction, knowledge sharing, and collective problem solving throughout the organization.

3. **Improved Teamwork.** Sales is a competitive occupation. Traditional compensation plans reward individual sales achievement. Cross-fertilization of successful strategies through the deployment of customer relationship management (CRM) tools runs counter to this “all-for-one” sales mentality reality. A private social network that encourages mentorship and rewards cooperative behavior creates winning sales teams that share strategies and compensate top salespeople for helping the “newbies.” This represents a significant cultural shift for the normal sales organization. It means new compensation plans that acknowledge and reward both individual sales achievements and collective knowledge-sharing contributions.

4. **Increased Customer Engagement.** The new business model is “customer web-centered.” It has always been true that it is easier to sell to an existing customer than it is to recruit a new one. Hence private social networking addresses existing customers. Through a private social network, customers can be invited into online communities. These communities may include other customers with similar challenges. Communities become great listening posts for organizations to learn about common customer problems. They are also great places to do collective sales pitches.

5. **Better Employee Morale.** Private social networks begin with individuals creating profiles, and these profiles can reveal great ways to discover hidden talents. We tend to pigeonhole people by job title, but most of us are much more than our jobs. For example, I write music and do orchestration when I am not working with clients. People in the accounting department or in shipping may also enjoy music or play instruments. This type of discovery can pay huge dividends through improved morale. It can even impact the bottom line when you find out that someone is experimenting with open source software application development at home and has come up with a new widget or gadget that can be shared with others in the organization with similar interests, leading to who knows what.

In growing numbers small businesses owners and operators are discovering how social networking sites can promote their businesses. While some small business owners write, blog, and post their own Twitter and Facebook entries, others do not have the time to do so. This situation has fueled a number of support businesses that specialize in providing advertising and public relations services to businesses for their social networking sites. Among these support businesses are 3 Green Angels, Everywhere LLC, Red Square Agency Inc., and ThinkInk LLC.

Figure 5–13: Potential Health Threats for Your Consideration
Excessive use of many of today's electronic communication devices can potentially cause us physical damage. This is not to say that all these devices are bad or that we should not use them. Instead, it reminds us that we are human beings and we have physical limitations. Three potential threats come to mind—nerve damage, hearing impairment, and vision problems.

Nerve damage Over a relatively short time some people develop carpal tunnel syndrome (repetitive motion nerve damage) in their thumbs and wrists from too-frequent keyboarding on small smartphone, tablet, and netbook keypads.

Hearing impairments Some people develop hearing problems from frequent wearing of ear buds and similar devices. Ear phones (headsets) that rest on the outside of one's ears do less damage. For most, they do not look cool. However, hearing loss is even more uncool.

Vision problems Still other people develop vision problems from viewing small screens too frequently. Common sense tells us that we are straining our eyes when we look at tiny smartphone, tablet, and netbook screens.

Hopefully you are not going for the potential threats trifecta; that is not exposing yourself unnecessarily to these three threats. It is just not worth it.

Choosing the Right Communication Medium
Imagine you are a businessperson who wants to communicate with existing and/or potential customers or clients. Given the many electronic and non-electronic options available to you, how do you select the right medium? Do you choose e-mail, IM, text messaging, tweeting, website, or blogging? Do you place your message on a social network site such as LinkedIn or Facebook? Do you choose to place a phone call or have a face-to-face meeting? Or, do you saturate the market, so to speak, by transmitting your message over all available media options, in the hopes that current and potential customers or clients will spot you? With so many choices, making the right media choice can certainly be overwhelming!

Jim Blasingame, one of the world's foremost experts on small business and entrepreneurship, offers some practical advice to help you make good media choices. He encourages businesspeople to use the following two approaches when making communication media choices: (1) ask yourself which communication medium best suits the circumstance and
(2) ask your customers and clients which communication medium they prefer. Regarding Blasingame’s second approach, remind yourself that not all of your clients or customers will share your interest in and your ability to use each electronic communication tool that you are comfortable using. Nor do they all have access to the technology you prefer to use. For example, most people around the globe lack access to the Internet by circumstance or choice, including many in the United States. Blasingame’s advice mirrors some of the basic communication suggestions presented earlier in the book. In chapter 1 you were urged to reflect on the circumstances before selecting a medium. For example, messages about routine matters can typically be communicated effectively via e-mail, while messages involving important and/or controversial matters are best communicated face-to-face. Furthermore, you learned earlier that the better you know our communication partner, the more likely you are to achieve effective communication.

Summary:  
Section 3— Business Blogs, Websites, Social Network Sites, and Choosing the Right Communication Medium

- The main type of business blog is the corporate blog.
- Web content that is readable, accurate, and user friendly is what keeps users coming back to a website.
- Web content planning demands that you analyze your audience, develop a purpose and objectives, and organize the site.
- Navigational aids such as links help users find information quickly on your site and show where they are in the site’s structure.
- Test your content for authority, accuracy, objectivity, and currency.
- To name links, use specific, informative words or phrases.
- When drafting Web content, be sure that it is clear, concise, and credible.
- Elements that enhance scanning are headings, bolding text, bulleted lists, graphics, captions, and clear topic sentences.
- When editing and proofreading Web content, check for consistency of style and usage. After you run the spellchecker, proofread the text again for spelling and other errors.
- Know that social networking sites have several business applications, and sites are growing in popularity within organizations.
- When making a communication media choice, be it electronic or otherwise, consider which one best suits the situation and which one suits your communication partner prefers.
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