

E-mail Etiquette

Somewhere in time between the TV science fiction series, *Lost in Space*, (created and produced by Irwin Allen in 1965) and epic space movie, *Star Wars*, (conceived by George Lucas in 1977) a man by the name of Ray Tomlinson was accredited with inventing e-mail. Over 40 years after its inception, e-mail remains one of the most important applications of the Internet. Many of us, in the more than 600 million people internationally who use this form of communications, tend to pervert, violate and abuse this opportunity for which it was intended.

Most people no longer find e-mail simple or fun. E-mail messaging exceeds telephone traffic and is one of the dominant forms of business communication. It is not uncommon for some workers to spend three to four hours a day responding to e-mail.

This article offers some advice to keep in mind regarding professional e-mail conduct.

Let's start at the top of an e-mail.

- The "To" line is to designated for the person for whom you wish to address, inform or expect a reply from. "All" in your address book should not be an option. Some of your addressees may not look kindly on having their e-mail address open for others to use.
- Cc is an abbreviation for carbon copy. It should be used for people who are directly involved. Be cautious with your use of Cc; its overuse simply clutters inboxes.
- Bcc is an abbreviation for blind carbon copy. Don't use Bcc to keep others from seeing who you copied. Do use Bcc, however, when sending to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a huge list of names.
- Use the "reply all" button only when compiling results requiring collective input and only if you have something to add. Send group e-mail only when it's useful to every recipient.

- Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose. Consider the subject field similar to the title in a news article – brief and to the point.
- Use proper spelling, grammar, punctuation and avoid long sentences. If you have spell check in your e-mail system, it is advised to use it.
- Do not use all lowercase letters; it could suggest the e-mail author looks lazy. Read the e-mail before you send it.
- Do not use all uppercase letters; it makes the e-mail author look as though they are shouting. Again, read the e-mail before you send it.
- Try to avoid abbreviations. Most people are unaware that TNSTAAFL means there's no such thing as a free lunch. And again, read the e-mail before you send it.
- If replying to an e-mail request, respond to all questions promptly.

Remember that e-mail isn't private. An inadvertent e-mail to the wrong person can be forwarded to unintended audiences which could prove to be embarrassing. E-mail shouldn't be used to discuss confidential information.

Summarize long discussions. Scrolling through pages of replies to understand a discussion is annoying. Instead of continuing to forward a message string, take a minute to summarize it for your reader. You could even highlight or quote the relevant passage, then include your response. Some words of caution:

If you are forwarding or reposting a message you've received, do not change the wording.

When deciding on a salutation, the question is "How personal is too personal?" or to be more specific, how should you open your e-mail? "Dear Sir," "Dear Mr. Smith," "Joe" or none of the afore-mentioned. In a non-business situation, bypass the standard formalities. At most, include something along the lines of "Dear Virgil" or just "Virgil."

In the business situation, things are much more complicated. Each situation will need to be evaluated on its own, but as a guide, if you address a person when speaking to them as Miss/Mrs./Ms./Mr. Smith then that's the way to address them in an e-mail. If you normally call them by their first name then omit the salutation or follow the guideline specified in the prior paragraph. If unsure, stick to the formal salutation.

E-mail messaging was initially intended to save costs and to be a more efficient and effective way to communicate. A good communicator, who uses proper etiquette, will not only try to save time himself or herself time but will make it easier for those who he or she communicates.

Web Updates

USPA Web Site

The USPA Executive Board has contracted the design for the new Web site to a union contactor, "Creative Solutions." The site will be financed by the USPA Executive Board and it is expected to be up and running prior to the end of the year. The USPA hopes this new site will assist communicators with an easier, quicker method to download material and it will also feature new applications such as RRS feeds.

Local Union Web Sites

In the last edition of Scoop, it was reported that a project to provide low cost local union Web sites would begin work after local union elections. Presently there is no information or updates on the progress of this project.

John Carter The Webslinger

The word "Webslinger" may not appear in any dictionary but if it was ever introduced, John Carter's name would surely be mentioned. This USPA culprit, in recent years, has been firing out local union Web sites for Steelworkers quicker than you can whistle Dixie.

Which started out as a hobby, designing Web sites has become a full-time extracurricular activity for him. Carter's current job is a vacation and absence replacement filling in for the extrusion department where he has worked at Bridgestone/Firestone in Warren County, Tenn. for 15 years. He is also serving his third term as an executive board member at United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1155.

Even as a teenage, he enjoyed tinkering with electrical devices. His move from gopher and command lines came as he started working with html. In 1995, he designed his first Web site for a company in Dallas, Texas. He also worked as one of the first web developers for one of Tennessee's largest advertising agencies who offered him a job which he turned down because they were unwilling to match the wage and benefits that his union bargaining has provided him.

John now owns his own computer company called John Carter.Net – Creative Web Solutions. The Web sites he designs are database driven, which means the client has total control of site content and is able to update their text, photos, products or whatever at any-time.

When asked how hard it would be for someone to maintain one of his sites, he responded, "If a person can use a program like MS Word, they can maintain one of these sites. I try to offer a "turnkey" system by setting up a site and the social media accounts, do the

Continued on page 2.

Continued from page 1.

site training, and then hand over the keys.”

The amount of time to develop a Web site depends on the features requested by a local and what his workload is at the time. John believes strongly in using social media sites such as Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to spread labor’s message so he tries to integrate these in a site as well. He also can integrate RSS feeds from the USW and AFL-CIO Web sites to add the latest labor news.

John recommends that locals interested in having a Web site built should hire a Web builder. “I cannot stress enough how important it is to have the domain name put in your local’s name or in an official’s name at your local. I have seen too many times shady Web site designers put the domain in their name just to “lock in” the customer. If they have your name then it’s hard to

is doable but it may take a bit longer. A person should buy a few books and learn the basics so the site can “fix it by hand.” The focus of any learning now should be on XHTML and CSS programming which is the absolute core of Web Standards.

Before hiring a designer, John recommends locals go to the USPA Web site and then Member Links. View some of the sites designed by other Steelworker locals (about 150 sites) and decide on what menu items your local would require. Would the local want a Women of Steel or Political Action Committee page, a newsletter page, private areas for negotiations or Stewards?

Once this is completed, begin collecting information for those pages. If your local requires a Web designer, they may want to consider a Steelworker such as John Carter.

“If a person can use a program like MS Word, they can maintain one of these sites. I try to offer a “turnkey” system by setting up a site and the social media accounts, do the site training, and then hand over the keys.”

walk away when you want to try someone else.”

He recommends a database driven site that can be updated by someone at the local union level. He also recommends hiring a Web developer that can meet your needs for support when it is required. If there’s ever a question his contact info is in the administration area of the site and he makes himself available to my customers.

Designing a Web site by oneself

The “Webslinger” enjoys a challenge and is willing to work with any Steelworker local. He will do an interview process and find what options work best for your local. He can be reached at (931) 808-8759 or (931) 946-2716 or e-mailing him at john.carter@carterdts.com.

A couple of his more notable sites include: <http://www.uswlocal3657.org/> or <http://www.solidaritynews.com/>

E-mail Networking

An e-mail network is a system based on a central list of e-mail addresses which receive e-mails from a host. When a message is sent from network address, it automatically is distributed to everybody who has joined. This makes it a simple way of sharing information, advice and suggestions.

There are a few questions to consider prior to establishing an e-mail network.

- Does the local have a person (Network Coordinator) that is qualified and can dedicate the time to set up a network system?
- Does the Network Coordinator have access to the information necessary to keep membership up-to-date?
- Is there enough interest among local union members to participate and for it to succeed?

If your local plans to go forward, a sign-up card should be designed first. The card should automatically include areas for name, address, e-mail address and signature. Your local may want to also consider a check box system containing categories such as Notification of Events, Political Action Notices, Contract News, Election Information or Membership Issues that members can check off. At the bottom of the card, notify members that their e-mail addresses will be kept confidential.

The next hurdle is the collection of e-mail addresses. There are a few ways to encourage members to sign up.

- Include a line for e-mail address on new member sign-up cards and urge new members to complete all lines on the card.
- Have sign-up cards available at union meetings.
- Offer token giveaways (mouse pads, pens or pins) for members who sign up.
- Have a downloadable card available on your local union Web site, if your local has one.

- Start an e-mail network with a sample group of officers, stewards and activists who will help promote the network.

After the members contact information and e-mail addresses have been entered into the e-mail network, set up distribution lists according to the check box system on the sign-up card. Be sure to include a distribution list for “All.” Assign the e-mail addresses to each distribution list according to what members have checked off. Remember, members e-mail addresses may appear on more than one list.

There are a few suggestions that may save the Network Coordinator a lot of headaches, they include:

- Use spellchecker and/or have someone to double check your message to make sure it is correct.
- On the From line, always use the Bcc: to hide member e-mail addresses.
- Be sure to use the correct Distribution list for each e-mail.
- Include a disclaimer at the bottom of e-mail. (sample below)

This message is being distributed for informational purposes only, by the United Steelworkers Local #####. It is intended for Union Members only and media use is strictly forbidden without USW Local #####’s permission! To have your e-mail address removed from this mailing list, send a reply to this message with REMOVE in the Subject Line.

- At the bottom of the e-mail, also include a way for members to send e-mail address changes.

Now it is time to test your system with a test message. Send the first test to the Local Union Executive Board to see how the note appears on different computers and for their opinion on changes. Make your modifications and send to yourself to be sure the changes appear correctly. Now you are ready to use your network. Most people do not like attachments. If you must include an attachment, put it into an Adobe .pdf.

Finally, once the e-mail has been sent out, organize a folder system (preferably by Distribution list name) for keeping all messages.

