

TECHGEAR

The new HTC One (starting at \$199 with contract) runs the Android OS on a 1.7-GHz quad-core processor. Its low-light-capable camera can capture 20 photos and a three-second video with one shutter press.



WEBLINKS



ERIC WELTER left Big Law to start his own labor and employment law practice representing employers in 2000. The firm now has five attorneys with offices in three states. Eric comments on employment law at LaconicLawBlog.com.

iPhoneJD.com

Ever since I drank the “Apple juice,” this website has been a good source of reviews and information on apps and accessories to go with a law practice. It also provides an “In the News” update on other stories about iPhone and iPad tips for lawyers.

FMLAInsights.com

This blog helps keep employers, HR professionals, and employment lawyers up to date on developments with the Family and Medical Leave Act.

WaterPoloPlanet.com

This site provides scores, news, articles, and message boards about my favorite sport. And yes, there is water polo in Texas.

Overlawyered.com

The stated purpose of this blog is “chronicling the high cost of our legal system.” It is the stories about the many absurdities in our legal system that keeps bringing me back for more.

DrudgeReport.com

This site is sometimes controversial but always an easy place to get a quick news fix.



Five Ways to Send a Better Email Message

BY CATHERINE SANDERS REACH

We all know that person who constantly sends emails that lack a subject line. Or who sends rambling, lengthy emails that don’t seem to have a point. And there are those who send emails with open-ended questions that require a game of email Ping-Pong. You would never do any of those things—would you?

Sending a clear, concise, and actionable email is the best way to get a proper response. Here are five ways to make sure your recipients open, read, and respond to your messages:

Make the Subject Count—In Barbara Minto’s book, *Pyramid Principle*, she suggests that business writing should be broken down like this:

Situation—describe the current situation.

Complication—describe the tension/issue in the situation.

Question—describe the question in response to the issue/tension.

Answer—suggest an answer to ease out or mitigate the issue/tension.

Apply Minto’s principles to email messages. The first step is to craft a short, effective subject line that suggests what action the reader should take, or what information he should

anticipate. Many people read emails on handheld devices, where they can see only five to eight words in the subject line—so make each word count. Use the subject line to help the reader understand why he needs to open the email and what type of action or response is required of him.

Get to the Point—The body of an email should contain the main point of communication at the top of the missive. There is no reason to build a story at the beginning, and if there is, then email may not be the right form of communication. Start with the main points and action items at the beginning of the email, after your greeting. Use bullet points and lists when possible to further help communicate succinctly. Follow these points with any background materials. Whenever possible, send hyperlinks to supplemental or explanatory information, rather than copying and pasting information that is available in full online. Formatting is your friend. Bullets, numbers, underlining, bold, and italics all can help visually separate and emphasize what you want the recipient to focus on in the message. Although using all caps has long been considered shouting and rude in an email, judicious and careful use of all caps in a limited fashion can help call attention to important items.

Ask the Right Questions—If you need answers to specific questions, the easiest way to ensure you get them is to set up a survey for the email recipients. Not only will this standardize the response, but also if an email is sent to multiple people, then survey tools can significantly reduce administrative time compiling the information received. Free tools like SurveyMonkey and Zoomerang make quick work of setting up and sending a survey. Another option is Google Forms, which is great if you primarily need to capture responses in a spreadsheet tool. If a survey seems like overkill, be sure to format your email to highlight the questions you are asking, preferably with numbered lists or bullets to emphasize their importance.

Close the Loops—One of the most inefficient practices in email communication is what new media expert Chris Brogan calls the loop. The loop begins when one party emails the other with a series of questions that require individual responses. The loop continues as the sender and his message recipients resolve their issues. For instance: “Do you want to get together with some of the stakeholders to discuss finalizing the contract? When and where would you like to meet? Who else should be involved?” A more effective message would be: “I would like to call you and Ray Jones tomorrow at 1 p.m. to finalize the language for the attached contract. Will that work for you two?” By supplying answers in this way, there are fewer items to negotiate in an email exchange.

Similarly, email Ping-Pong is often started when requesting a mutual meeting time from a number of attendees. If the attendees are all using Microsoft Outlook at the same firm, there are several meeting request tools built in that can help to limit the number of email exchanges. Also, Google Apps for Business users

have shared calendars and can see free or busy times to suggest a time that appears to work for everyone.

However, to schedule a meeting with multiple outside parties, consider free online tools like MeetingWizard or GatherGrid to poll attendees about their availability. These tools allow the organizer to suggest several dates and times to his email invitees, who respond by clicking on the dates they are free. The tools tally the responses and notify everyone when a meeting is scheduled. Features allow the organizer to query those who have not responded, and to follow-up with additional items.

Size Matters—Sending attachments with email is common. Unfortunately, large attachments are often rejected by recipients’ ISPs because of size constraints, and the entire email is not delivered. Services like YouSendIt host attachments, so users can send a link to a supporting document rather than sending the document itself. The basic service is free, but for a fee the company also provides users with premium features including security, larger file-size capacity, delivery receipts, and more. There is a free plugin for Microsoft Outlook that lets you configure it to automatically engage when you attach a file of a specified size to an outgoing email. Adobe has a similar feature called SendNow. From an open Acrobat document go to File, Attach to Email, and choose Use Adobe SendNow Online. This requires a (free) account with the service. Alternatively, if you are confident the recipient is fairly tech savvy, you can link to a shared file on Dropbox, Google Drive, Box, or another online file storage-sharing site.

In some cases email may not be the best method to deliver information. If there are multiple topics that need to be discussed, if there is a need to convey unpleasant and difficult news,

or if you need to gauge the reaction of the other parties, then send an email to set up a time to discuss the matter via phone, web conference, or other synchronous means of communication.

Editors’ Note:

This article originally appeared in the Canadian online legal magazine *Slaw*, slaw.ca, where bloggers and columnists discuss all aspects of the law.



Catherine Sanders Reach

is the director of Law Practice Management and Technology for the Chicago Bar Association. She was previously the director of the American Bar Association’s Legal Technology Resource Center, providing practice technology assistance to lawyers. In 2011, she was named one of the inaugural Fastcase 50, celebrating 50 innovators, techies, visionaries, and leaders in the field of law.

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