CHAPTER 5:

Communicating Electronically

5-CI CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

5-1 Discuss the effective use of email, instant messaging, and text messaging in business communication.

5-2 Explain principles for writing effectively for the Web.

5-3 Discuss the effective use of voice and wireless technologies in business communication.

5-4 Consider legal and ethical implications associated with the use of communication technology.

TOPIC 4-CR

TOPIC 5-1

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5-1 APPROPRIATE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology offers numerous advantages, but a technological channel is not always the communication method of choice. Before sending a message, be certain the selected channel of communication is appropriate by considering the message's purpose, confidentiality issues, and human relations factors.

Match each type of claim to its definition.

Adjustment messages	A request for an adjustment
Claim	Statements made about related merchandise or service
Persuasive claims	Messages that assume that a claim will be granted quickly and willingly, without persuasion
Resale	
Routine claims	Messages that assume a claim will be granted only after explanations and persuasive arguments have been presented
Sales promotional material	A discussion of goods or services already bought
	Messages that are fair responses by

SUBMIT

5-1a **Determine the Purpose of the Message**

> *Before sending a message, be certain the selected channel of communication is appropriate.*

If a message is straightforward and informative, chances are a technological option might be appropriate. Although the use of instantaneous and efficient communication methods is quite compelling, keep in mind that written communication, printed or online, cannot replace the personal interaction so essential in today's team-based work environments. Employees that are floors apart or in different offices or time zones benefit from email and Web communications, but two people sitting side by side or on the same floor shouldn't have to communicate solely by electronic means.

A second question when selecting among communication options is whether a permanent record of the message is needed or if a more temporary form such as a phone call or instant message would suffice.

5-1b **Determine Whether the Information Is Personal or Confidential**

As a general guideline, keep personal correspondence off-line if you don't want it to come back and haunt you. The content of an email message could have embarrassing consequences since such documents often become a part of public records, and wireless communications might be unexpectedly intercepted. Your company technically "owns" your electronic communications and thus can monitor them to determine legitimate business use or potential abuse. Undeliverable email messages are delivered to a mail administrator, and many networks routinely store backups of all email messages that pass through them.

Even deleted messages can be "resurrected" with little effort, as several public figures discovered when investigators retrieved archived email as evidence in court cases. For sensitive situations, a face-to-face encounter is often preferred.

5-1c **Decide Whether Positive Human Relations Are Sacrificed**

Be wary of using an electronic communication tool as an avoidance mechanism. Remember, too, that some people do not regularly check their email or voice mail, and some have unreliable systems that are slow or prone to losing messages. Some news will be received better in person than through an electronic format that might be interpreted as cold and impersonal.

Additionally, some people, especially those of certain cultures, prefer a personal meeting even if you perceive that an electronic exchange of information would be a more efficient use of everyone's time. Choose the communication channel carefully to fit both your purpose and the preference of the receiver.

TOPIC 5-CI

TOPIC 5-2

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As you read in Chapter 1, the continuous evolution of technology has dramatically changed the way we communicate. Electronic mail (e-mail), text (instant) messages, and voice and video technologies are impressive tools for accomplishing company goals. In fact, email has overtaken the telephone in terms of the most common workplace communication tool. The ability to use email consumes almost no time and is essentially invisible to associates in nearby cubicles.

Match each description with the underlined communication in the letter.

a. Letter-like message	e. Instant Messaging
b. Collection of e-mail messages	f. Web pages
c. Text messages	g. Blog
d. Shares readers in a community of interest	h. Wiki

Concerns of a business, liability, and security are issues that does not apply to personal use.

Does not require special writing skills for callouts

Facilitates the exchange of information within and outside the company

Has readers who can comment or influence other readers

Has easier chat rapport to video conferencing

Leading program of people with common interests or interests

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5-1 Advantages of Email

Electronic mail, or email, offers numerous advantages. Its really availability, convenience, and ease of use have resulted in its day-to-being popularity. The advantages of email are numerous:

- **It facilitates the fast, convenient flow of information among users at various locations.** Email is convenient because it is fast, flexible, reliable, and inexpensive. Email is also convenient because it allows you to communicate with people located in several locations and time zones. For these reasons, email is used extensively by companies that have employees in multiple locations, such as Hewlett-Packard, Cisco Systems, IBM, Dell, and Intel.
- **It increases efficiency.** Email reduces "telephone tag" and unnecessary telephone calls. Communicating by email also eliminates the time that is usually required to make a telephone call.
- **It reduces costs.** Sending email messages represents a substantial savings to companies in long-distance telephone and postage costs.
- **It reduces paper waste.** When an electronic message can be read and responded to online, there is no need to print a hard copy.

5-2a Guidelines for Preparing Email Messages

Following these guidelines will enable you to use email efficiently and effectively when communicating with internal and external audiences. Prepare email messages:

- **Never use single or multiple addressees.** The owner message can be sent to one or more recipients simultaneously. Many companies have employees who receive dozens, routinely, routinely during the email address of each recipient is one implication of the electronic mail system.
- **Provide a useful subject line.** A descriptive subject line tells the reader what the message is about. Busy readers appreciate subject lines that help them prioritize their email messages. Subject lines are also helpful when readers search for a particular message. Vague subject lines such as *Hello*, *Information*, or *Request* are not helpful. Also, think of the like *Hello*, *What Was*, *Which*, *Where*, and *Why*—to give you some ideas for composing useful subject lines. Remember that the subject line is the most important subject line in Your Message.
- **Remove the subject in the body of the message.** Typically, the message should be a complete thought that stands on its own. Including the subject in the message helps the reader understand the message more quickly and efficiently. Also, Even if the reader misplaced the subject line, the message would still be clear, logical, and complete.
- **Focus on a single topic directed toward the receiver's needs.** An email message should be limited to one topic whenever possible. Remember that the shorter the message, the more likely it will be read promptly and completely.
- **Keep the message short and to the point.** Most people receive many messages every day and appreciate messages that are brief and to the point. Limit your message to one screen whenever possible. Revise emails to achieve a shorter text. Remember that the shorter the message, the more likely it will be read promptly and completely.
- **Separate your ideas based on well-prepared reader reaction.** As you learned in previous communication courses, organization is important. Good writers group ideas into logical units. Use bullets, numbers, boldface, or italics to highlight important points. Also, Use bullets to highlight important points. Also, Use bullets to highlight important points. Also, Use bullets

Most organizations now have their own websites to accomplish a number of activities, such as updating employees and customers about organizational changes; selling products and services; advertising employment opportunities; and creating a first point of contact for customers through order entry, customer service systems, and online call centers. Although effective web page development is a highly specialized activity, understanding the process will be useful to any business communicator. Organizations can use the Web not only to communicate with customers and clients but also to interact with business associates.

TIP SHEET

The following tips will help you compose appropriate Web content:*

- Be brief. A good rule is to reduce the wording of any print document by 50% when you put it on the Web.
- Keep it simple. Use short words that allow for fast reading by people of various educational backgrounds. Use mixed case because all caps are slower to read.
- Consider appropriate jargon. If all of your site users share a common professional language, use it. Otherwise, keep to concise yet effective word choices.
- Use eye-catching headlines. They catch interest, ask a question, present the unusual, or pose a conflict.
- Break longer documents into smaller chunks. Provide ways to easily move through the document and return to the beginning.
- Use attention-getting devices judiciously. Bolding, font changes, color, and graphics do attract attention but can be overdone, causing important ideas to be lost.
- Avoid placing critical information in graphic form only. Many users are averse to slow-loading graphics and skip over them.

Designing web pages that are accessible by the millions of people with permanent or temporary disabilities, including visual impairments, is good for business.* Research by the 2004 Disability Rights Commission has found that the websites that were most accessible for users with disabilities were also easier for people without disabilities to operate, with some online tasks performed 35% faster on the more accessible sites.* US businesses have legal requirements for online content to be available to everyone under equal opportunity and antidiscrimination laws. The National Federation of the Blind filed a class action suit against Target Corporation because the online store offered values that could not be accessed by screen reader software.* The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provided by The World Wide Web Consortiums (W3C) at www.w3.org are helpful resources for ensuring Web accessibility. The same group has also developed Mobile Web Accessibility Guidelines for making websites usable from mobile devices.

5-3a Writing for a Website

Many of the same standard rules for writing apply, whether writing for the Web or print. However, some important differences exist between readers of paper material and Web users:*

- Web users do not want to read. They skim, browse, and hop from one highlighted area to another trying to zero in on the word or phrase that relates to their search.
- English-speaking readers typically start scanning at the top left side of the main content area. Their attention moves from top to bottom and left to right. Given this pattern, placing frequently accessed items close to the top of the content area is important. Information should follow the pyramid style of writing common in newspaper writing: the main idea or conclusion is presented first, and subsequent sections and pages expand upon it.
- Users can more quickly scan items in columns rather than rows, especially if they are categorized, grouped, and have headings. You can have more lists on the Web than in a typical print document.
- Users refer infrequently to directions. It is unlikely they will read little notes, sidebars, and help files, so directions must appear in simple, numbered steps.
- In recognition of these Web user characteristics, writers should tailor their styles accordingly.

Effective Web writing involves moving beyond the paper mode into the Web mode of thinking. Understanding the distinctive expectations of Web readers will allow you to structure your ideas effectively and efficiently.

5-3b Social Media

Web 2.0, which encourages online interaction, made it possible for people to participate on the Web. Unlike web pages, which are not generally interactive, social media enables people to connect online and have a conversation. Web 2.0 technologies include blogs, wikis, video, and social networking sites that enable users to generate their own content.

More and more organizations are using social media tools to communicate with customers. Seventy-nine percent of the Fortune Global 100 companies use at least one of four social platforms—Facebook, videos, Twitter, and blogs—for this purpose.* As with company websites, most employees are not responsible for posting to their organization's social media platforms, but as with web pages, employees should understand the process and expectations for doing so.

WRITING FOR WEBLOGS

A weblog, or blog, is a type of online journal typically authored by an individual and does not allow visitors to change the original posted material, but only to add comments. Some of the millions of blogs now populating the Web are online scrapbooks for pasting links, information, and quotes. Some resemble personal diaries, often illustrated with digital snapshots. Others serve as digital soapboxes, providing a platform for airing opinions and commentary about the world at large or on a special topic of interest. Users (known as bloggers) add entries (referred to as posts) using a simple online form in their browsers, and the weblog publishing software takes care of formatting the page layout and creating archive pages.*

Blogs differ from websites in that blogs are dynamic, with rapidly changing content that does not require authorization to post. The creator of the message does not have to be familiar with special coding and uploads a message simply by clicking the "Publish" button.* Blogging allows average citizens to become publishers. Bloggers, however, should write each post with the realization that it is publicly available.

Blog formats have been adapted for business uses, including commercial publishing, marketing, and as a knowledge management tool. Blogs can store knowledge in searchable archives for future use. This function can be helpful, for example, for service teams as they search past communications to troubleshoot current problems. Many companies, such as Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, and General Motors, encourage blogging among employees.* An effective corporate blog begins with a clear goal, such as winning business or building customer loyalty, and then provides relevant, frequently updated information for the target audience to return to regularly. Like other effective Web communications, blogs must be promoted creatively to attract avid readers.*

Internal blogs can be established that are not published to anyone outside the company. They present similar legal issues to those surrounding email and instant messaging. One of the most important considerations is whether posts are truly anonymous. The potential for anonymous speech creates an atmosphere that can encourage irresponsible behavior, such as harassment, defamation, and gossip. To reduce this problem, IT professionals can configure internal blogs so that all users can be identified, at least by the company.*

WRITING WIKIS

Although a traditional website's content is usually controlled by the sponsoring individual or agency, a wiki is a collaborative website that hosts the collective work of many authors. Similar to a blog in structure and logic, a wiki allows anyone to edit, delete, or modify content, even the work of previous authors. Although allowing everyday users to create and edit a website encourages cooperative use of electronic information, the content posted at such sites should not be considered authoritative. When wiki writing, avoid the first-person blogging style and conform to the tone and flow of the existing article. Wikis are not typically the place for personal opinion and analysis. Instead, present factual information in clear, concise, and neutral language.*

Many businesses make use of wikis to encourage free flow of ideas within the organization. Content in a wiki can be updated in real time, without any real administrative effort, and without the need for deliberate distribution. Contributors simply visit and update a common website. Wikis facilitate the exchange of information within and between teams. They allow maintenance of a series of unique documents with evolving content. Placing a document in a wiki does not necessarily make it editable by everyone with access to the wiki. For example, the marketing department can make a PowerPoint slide deck available to the sales team or the company at large without letting them change or overwrite it. Most companies implement their wikis behind a firewall to limit participation to their internal user base.*

SOCIAL APPS FOR WORK

Boxcar is a social media app that lets you have one central location for all of your social connection apps. It has notifications from your email, Twitter, Facebook, and Google accounts as well as any RSS feeds that you follow. The iPhone will give you a push notification every time you get a direct message, are mentioned in a tweet, get new followers or friends, or when your preferred websites add new content. For example, software programmers can hook up Boxcar and Github if they need to make sure their team is committing code or they want to monitor commits to open source projects. With a hookup, they can get notifications whenever a commit is made.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking sites are for communities of people who share common interests or activities. Common social networking sites include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. Early on, social networking sites were used largely for making personal connections, but more and more, companies are using them to interact with customers. Companies such as Dell and Southwest Airlines employ "communities and conversations teams" or a "social media team" who track comments posted on sites such Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and Facebook, verify facts, and respond quickly to any customer complaint appearing in cyberspace. In addition to being an early warning system, these online conversations are sources of feedback on customer needs and pain points that lead to innovation in products and services.*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

As use of social media platforms becomes more common in organizational settings, more companies are creating policies to ensure that employees use them responsibly. Harvard University, Intel Corp., and medical and religious organizations all have policies for use of social media. Typically, these policies address three broad areas: communicating honestly and ethically, protecting the corporation's proprietary information and employee privacy, and maintaining the employee's credibility and the organization's reputation.

- **Communicate honestly and ethically.** When using social media platforms, writers should be transparent about who they are, who they work for, their role, and whether they have a vested interest in an issue. Contributors should write about their area of expertise. For example, a marketing specialist should not contribute information about human resources practices.
- **Protect the company's proprietary and employees' private information.** This should be obvious. Sharing proprietary information can cost an organization thousands or millions of dollars. Sharing private employee information can expose the writer and the company to legal damages and may endanger or harm individuals if personal addresses or information that enables identity theft is publicized.
- **Protect yours as well as the company's reputation.** When communicating on social media sites, the writer should be concerned about projecting a professional persona for him or herself and a reputable image of the company. Making negative statements about competitors, supervisors, colleagues, or company policies may expose the contributor to disciplinary measures or the company to legal threats or bad publicity.

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5-4 VOICE AND WIRELESS COMMUNICATION

Not so long ago, voice communication referred strictly to communication over phone lines, and using the telephone effectively is still an important skill in any profession. Although the traditional telephone still plays an important role in business activity, voice communication extends to voice mail systems and cellphone usage. Both voice and data can be transmitted now using wireless communication systems.

Complete the sentences about using technology by placing the correct word in the appropriate blank.

1. If a message is _____ and _____, chances are a technological option might be appropriate.
2. Although the use of _____ and efficient communication methods is quite compelling, keep in mind that _____ communication, printed or online, cannot replace the _____ interaction so essential in today's team-based work environments.
3. As a general guideline, keep personal correspondence _____ if you don't want it to come back and haunt you.
4. Choose the communication channel carefully to fit both your _____ and the _____ of the receiver.

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5-4a Voice Mail Communication

Voice mail technology allows flexibility in staying in touch without the aid of a computer and reduces telephone tag. Just as email communication can be enhanced by adhering to some basic principles, voice mail communication can be more effective by following recommended guidelines:*

- Update your greeting often to reflect your schedule and leave special announcements.
- Leave your email address, fax number, or mailing address on your greeting if this information might be helpful to your callers.
- Encourage callers to leave detailed messages. If you need certain standard information from callers, use your greeting to prompt them for it. Such information often eliminates the need to call back.
- Instruct callers on how to review their message or be transferred to an operator.
- Check your voice mail regularly, and return all voice messages within 24 hours.

When leaving a message, you can improve your communication by following these tips:*

- Speak slowly and clearly, and repeat your name and phone number at the beginning and end of the message.
- Spell your name for the recipient, who might need the correct spelling.
- Leave a detailed message, not just your name and number, to avoid prolonged phone tag.
- Keep your message brief, typically 60 seconds or less.
- Ensure that your message will be understandable. Don't call from places with distracting background noise or an inadequate signal connection.

The sound of your voice makes a lasting impression on the many people who listen to your greeting or the messages you leave. To ensure that the impression you leave is a professional one, review your voice greeting before you save it. Rerecord to eliminate verbal viruses ("um," "uh," stumbles), flat or monotone voice, and garbled or rushed messages that are difficult to understand. Consider scripting the message to avoid long, rambling messages. As you are recording, stand, smile, and visualize the person receiving the message; you'll hear the added energy, enthusiasm, and warmth in your voice.*

Remember that the voice mail message you leave should be seen as permanent. In some systems the digital files are backed up and stored for possible retrieval by managers or other company personnel. A voice mail message can also be used as evidence in a lawsuit or other legal proceeding.*

5-4b Cellphone Communication

Cellphone use has significantly enhanced the ability to communicate when away from the office. It has also been shown to dramatically improve performance among salespersons by improving their outreach to clients.* Unfortunately, the increasing functionality and ease of use of cellphones have led to their misuse, in many cases. To address this, some employers are developing policies for proper cellphone use. According to a recent poll, almost 7 out of 10 Americans say they observe poor cellphone etiquette at least once every day.* Cellphone abuse in the workplace causes annoyance and intrusion that leads to ineffectiveness and can endanger employee safety. Your attention to a few commonsense guidelines will help ensure that you are not seen as a discourteous cellphone user.*

- **Be aware of company cellphone policies and obey them.** Some companies do not allow cellphone use for personal reasons during work hours. Most companies have policies prohibiting the harassment of others, and today's smartphones make it easy to send thoughtless messages using various media instantaneously. Not only might these messages damage the sender, but they may also reflect poorly on the employer if posted to Twitter or some other public social medium.
- **Observe wireless-free quiet zones.** This obviously includes theaters, performances, and religious services, but can also include meetings, restaurants, hospitals, and other public places. Exercise judgment about silencing your ringer, switching to vibrate mode, or turning off your phone. To increase the effectiveness of meetings, cellphone policies in some businesses ask that employees leave their cellphones at their desks; vibrating mode is acceptable for an anticipated emergency. To encourage proper cellphone etiquette, one business requires managers to deposit a designated amount of money in a jar should their cellphones ring during a meeting; monies collected are donated to a charity.
- **Respect others in crowded places and be wary of publicizing company information.** Speak in low conversational tones, and consider the content of your conversation. You should use good judgment in determining when and where to discuss proprietary company information or client data. Divulging such information in public places might enable its abuse by others.
- **Think safety.** Some states and municipalities have banned the use of cellphones while driving. Others allow the use of hands-free devices only. Even if not illegal, cellphone usage increases the risk of accident by distracting the driver. Some companies are implementing cellphone policies that prohibit operators of company-owned vehicles from using cellphones or other communication devices while driving in order to minimize risks to their employees and liability resulting from accidents.

Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock.com

Be cognizant of time and place when discussing business on a cellphone.

COLLECT STUDYBIT

Cellphone users should remember that the technology is not secure. Perhaps you have overheard another party's phone conversation when using your cellphone. The radio frequencies that transmit the voice signals can be picked up by other equipment. For this reason, information that is confidential or sensitive should be shared using an alternate communication channel.

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With the many communication innovations that have occurred in the last 20 years, one can only wonder what the next 20 years will hold. Whatever the breakthroughs, wireless technology will figure strongly in the changes. Wireless communication has freed us from the necessity of being literally plugged in while enabling us to communicate voice and high-speed data transmission virtually anytime, anywhere.

Wireless technology drives many of the significant changes that are affecting today's businesses. Smartphones offer advanced capabilities, such as the continuing development of innovative phone apps (shorthand for phone applications) that customize smartphone capabilities to fit users' needs. Security will continue to be a challenging consideration as workers use their phones to hold and transmit confidential information.*

The mobility provided by wireless technology, though, wouldn't be possible without the corresponding development of smaller, faster, and smarter computer chips. Computer chips will likely continue to get smaller, enabling us to carry the technology of a laptop on our wrist.

Voice input and output technology offers the ability to communicate through a computer system without a keyboard. Although such technology has been around for more than two decades, newer systems have more powerful processors, are smaller in size, and better tolerate variances in speakers' accents and inflections without sacrificing speed and accuracy.

As more and more information is stored in the "cloud," threats to its security will likely continue to grow. (Cloud storage is a model of networked enterprise storage where data is stored in virtualized pools of storage that are generally hosted by third-party providers.) The *New York Times* cataloged a list of recent app and cloud-based breaches, including Chinese hackers obtaining access to hundreds of US government accounts on Google's Gmail and a loss of data from a large number of Dropbox customers. More recently, Evernote said user names, email addresses, and encrypted passwords had been stolen in an attack, requiring the passwords of more than 50 million accounts to be reset.* As incidents of cyber attacks grow, billions of dollars are stolen, and billions of people are placed at risk each year. Organizations and their employees will need to spend more time and resources ensuring the safety of company knowledge, and customer and employees' private information.

TO RECAP—EMAIL ADVANTAGES

- Allows communication 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- Reduces telephone interruptions by delivering messages that are unlikely to require a verbal response
- Saves companies the costs of long-distance telephone bills and postal mail-outs
- Reduces the need to print messages

The convergence of these developments will increase the speed of making and conveying key business decisions, resulting in greater revenues and profitability. However, being able to make decisions quickly does not ensure that they will be the right decisions. As in the past, workers will need to have correct and timely information for making decisions, and then use that information ethically. An additional challenge will be balancing electronic communication capabilities with the need for human interaction.

TO RECAP—EFFECTIVE USE OF EMAIL

- Check email promptly.
- Do not contribute to email overload.
- Use email selectively.
- Do not send messages when you are angry.
- Exercise caution against email viruses and hoaxes.
- Develop an effective system for handling email.

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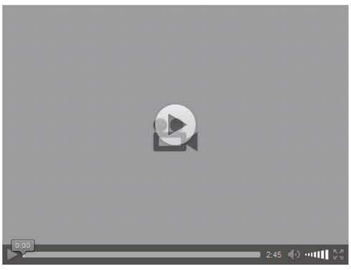

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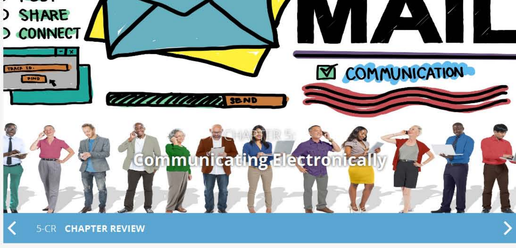
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