Don't Hit that Send Button … business emails
Some thoughts and ideas on controlling and organizing your email, along with some do's and don't's to keep your BUSINESS emails informative and effective.

Today, nearly every corporate citizen is now on email and has to deal with a vast amount of associated junk. In addition to junk email, we now have pop-up ads and other forms of online irritation that slow down the daily chore of separating the useful information from the trash.

Consider performing a daily "clean-out" of your email inbox. Scan the entire list, eliminating the junk emails first. Then group the remaining emails by action needed, just as you would a real inbox on your desk. Handle each email once, deciding when you first look at it whether to discard it, keep it for filing or p[lace it on the "to do" list.

Here are *Commandments* to help you identify times you might want to think twice about hitting "send".

Use email only when it's the most efficient channel for your need
Emails are best for short, informal messages that need to be both written and read. There are other channels which are faster, more immediate and more perishable than email. In the business world, that list of needs should be confined to concrete requests, queries and responses – the bare-bones daily details of work.

Never print your email
This commandment is going to stand up well. It is a nice thought that we can create the paperless society. Because of the litigious nature of our society you may want to keep printed copies of your emails you've sent as well as the emails you've received (the paperless society is not going to arrive any time soon). Email is a very powerful and persistent medium and poses a real and significant risk to companies. If used for the wrong purposes it can have severe consequences. Don't say anything that you would not want to be shared with the world.

Send nothing over email that must be error free
While we certainly want to make every effort to ensure that our emails are free from errors, it is impossible to proofread successfully on the computer screen. If your communication must be error free, then print it out and reread line by line. The reread it backwards, word by word, And remember that spell checkers don't catch the wrong word spelled correctly.

From time to time, delete names from your address book
It can save you time to keep an up-to-date address book and to know how to use it.

Never forward chain emails
This is a practice universally decried, and yet we all know people who do it.

Never send an email when you are furious or exhausted
Don't commit anything to email that you would not want to be red in court or in church. When angry or exhausted, we may be tempted to say things that we might regret later.

Don't pass on rumor or innuendo about real people
Avoid spreading false information about real, live people. It will come back to haunt you.
Even your deleted emails can be resurrected and read in courtrooms by lawyers who are not friends of yours.

Nor should you pass on rumors about companies you work for or may work for one day

Never substitute email for a face-to-face meeting
Never reprimand, reward or fire someone who reports to you via email. We owe it to our humanity to perform these obligations, whether difficult or easy, in person. And when you are trying to persuade some

to do something or someone is trying to persuade you to do something, there is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting.

Remember this sequence: first the meeting, then the phone call, then the voice mail, then the email
For the greatest impact, hold a meeting. You get more "bandwidth" face-to-face. The phone call eliminates body language, but maintains tone and live exchange. Voice mail gets tone but does without live exchange. An email is neither live nor terribly nuanced. Hense, the frequent misunderstandings about jokes or stories attempted over email and those annoying emoticons people try to use to signal emotion.

Your email is hackable and retrievable, and it can be used against you. Use only when absolutely necessary
Email is an extremely efficient form of communication when used sensibly. When used in the business arena, be careful. It's a litigator's paradise.

For personal use, email provides an efficient and effective method to bring people and families together, who otherwise might not be able to communicate. It is free, but still commands the discipline to keep the communication short, sweet and to the point and be respectful of the person who will be on the receiving end.

How do you deal with those who continue to send you volumes of email, many containing an assortment of silly attachments (to be cute, of course) and/or chain letters with requests to forward them on or silly jokes and stories?

Tactfully, tell them to stop doing so. Email overload is all in the eye of the beholder. While some people are overwhelmed by receiving 10 emails a day, while others can easily handle 100. Some may enjoy receiving the endless barrage of stories and jokes. Some may not. The key thing is for you to identify your email preference … then talk to those who continue to fill up your "inbox".
Tell them to stop! Remember, it's not what you say … it's how you say it … and it is best said "face-to-face.

Gary Millar
Tel. (780) 467-6121
Email: gary@millarcom.com

Millarcom Inc.
Communications Management   *Organizational Communication Management Consultants*