

The path to comprehensive emailing....



Undoubtedly, the evolution of technology has caused email to become one of the most common and widely used ways of communication.

Nowadays, the use of email is a valuable tool for Shipping Professionals, aiming at an effective, rapid and enhanced communication method either externally through the broadcasting of messages to other Shipping Professionals or internally, within the Company or amongst the fleet.

It is common for Shipping Professionals to send or receive hundreds of emails within a month but writing emails can be more complex than most people believe. What may not be clear to some is that when writing emails, they have to appear both professional and polite but at the same time be very explicit in only a few lines so that the recipient understands the meaning and responds effectively.

On the other hand, it has also been observed that when a new email is received, some of the contents of the message or its meaning may be overlooked or misunderstood due to the complexity, format, unknown abbreviations or misuse of the language.

Apart from taking into account the aforementioned, the aspect of the Human Element plays a significant role, especially when communicating emails amongst the fleet where a multicultural environment is present. Undoubtedly this element plays a key role with regards to the correctly understanding of the message or the attention paid by the recipient. Hence, there is the likelihood either the recipient may not grasp or understand the meaning of the message in full due to its complicated format or poor knowledge of the used language, or even worse the recipient may not devote the necessary time to read it due to the

length of the message, the heavy workload or inappropriate time that the email was sent.

Tips for comprehensive messages

An email should be 'captivating' starting from its subject line. This is necessary as even excellent formatted emails tend to be lost amongst other emails in the Inbox which are also looking to attract the recipient's attention. Therefore the sender should ensure that the subject of the email emphasizes its importance and contains a brief but meaningful description of what is to follow.

By doing so, the email becomes easily traceable by the receiver who will be pleased to see that limited time from their working time is spent in identifying the message.

As far as the email format is concerned, there is no specific template that should be followed but there are tips which will convert your email into a fully comprehensive message.

These are:

Before starting to compose your email you should take into consideration **the subject, to whom you are addressing your email** to and the **existing relationship** between the recipient and the sender. It is nice to start with the greeting such as '**Good Day**' or '**Good morning/Afternoon**' as it creates a positive impression on the recipient.

The next step is to name the recipient i.e. **{To: ABC Company}**, the sender i.e. **{From: Mr. Addison}**, repeat the subject and do not forget to enclose the

reference number of the subject case if one exists. This step is usually omitted by some senders but it is considered of paramount importance if you want your message not to be overlooked or disregarded amongst other emails that do not state or make clear their purpose from the very beginning.

If for example your message is communicated to the fleet, regardless if the message is directed to the Master of the vessel or not, it is preferable that the message is addressed to the Master of the vessel by adding below the person who it is directed to. This undoubtedly shows respect to the Head of the ship where the working environment is built on 'vertical integration'.

When you are about to send a message to a recipient for the first time and you know their name, you can address your message by following some of the below options. The same applies whenever the name of the recipient is unknown. A formal tone should always be maintained:

- ❖ Dear Mr./Ms. [Surname]
- ❖ Dear [Full Name]
- ❖ Dear [Title & Surname i.e. Captain Rock]

Line spacing between the opening greeting and the text of the email is an added value as it stipulates a well-organized email from the very beginning and at the same time permits the text to flow smoothly without creating discomfort to the reader. Another tip is that a comma being placed after the initial greeting together with a line space will leave a positive impression on the reader.



When using a more informal tone in message exchanging, you can start directly by using a greeting such as 'Hi Scott' but if you are communicating your email to an organization or a company where emails might be seen by other

employees it is preferable to use a greeting such as 'To: Scott'.

Content of the email

In the content, the text should be accurate, precise, clear and comprehensive. Especially when you inquire information from the recipient, it is preferable to separate your queries by utilizing line spacing and bullets or numbering, enabling the recipient to easily identify the requested details and reply back efficiently and effectively enclosing all the necessary information. This will prevent the readers from losing concentration on the subject issues and also avoid the process of exchanging further emails over the same issue especially when you are addressing your email to the fleet for additional vital details where barriers such as the time difference are present.

Remember to show respect throughout the written text and always be polite and avoid words of imperative nature. Particularly, whenever sending messages to the fleet, the complicated tasks undertaken by the reader, the surrounding environment, the time difference and the position of the ship should always be considered.

In addition, as the ships tend to respond on each issue separately without deviation and are sometimes non descriptive and provide no further details, as a sender you should consider inquiring more details on the subject issue even if at first this may seem irrelevant; however, extra information may assist essentially in making safer conclusions and avoiding any assumptions in the future.

Given that most shipping professionals or vessels receive hundreds of emails on a weekly basis, it is

important to ensure that only essential details and information is written in the email and most importantly no grammar mistakes are made.

Non-recognized abbreviations should be avoided as they may be the source of misunderstandings or assumptions being made.

Whenever attaching documents, explicit reference to be made in the text regarding their purpose, their format (i.e. PDF), and the information contained therein. This will help the reader to easily identify the referred documents amongst others and it will further prevent frustration.

Concluding your email is important. Although there is no specific pattern, it is nice to 'end' your message politely by using phrases such as: **[Yours sincerely,]**. In the Shipping Industry especially when addressing a message amongst the fleet phrases like **[Best Regards]** or **[All the best,]** are widely used. Try to write something that applies to the job description of the recipient i.e. **[Wishing pleasant voyages,]** as this will demonstrate recognition to the mission or tasks undertaken by the reader and will encourage and promote smooth cooperation on a professional level.

Finally it is essential to type the sender's name, position and contact details as it will assist the reader to identify the

sender and when a meeting takes place, to be able to place a voice or face to the message promoting as such productive bonding and an amicable affiliation.

What is the appropriate time to send email to the ship?



Unless it is an emergency, before sending an email, the sender should always remember the complex working environment on board, the ship's current position, the surrounding conditions, other on-going tasks undertaken by the Mariners, the quantity of requested information and the essential time which is required to track, identify and cross check first the subject information before the recipient replies to the incoming message.

Here are some useful tips:

- ❖ Try to collect as much as possible all your inquiries in a minimum number of emails and avoid sending multiple messages to the ship within the day. This will considerably reduce the workload and prevent frustration.
- ❖ In order to avoid misunderstandings with respect to expectations of the ship's reply soon after the message is delivered, it is preferable to mention the available time limits within which the recipient should forward their reply by allowing ample and sensible time for collection of the essential information. In case of an emergency, make the situation clear to the recipient.
- ❖ Before setting the available time limits for a reply, contact other departments or colleagues within the office in order to become aware of other undergoing time consuming tasks on board and to calculate properly the said time window.
- ❖ Firstly evaluate the type of requested information or given tasks in the email and how these are affected by the surrounding conditions or current position of the ship. Take into consideration whether it is better to wait a few more days before sending your email otherwise it might be lost or overlooked.
- ❖ Calculate the time difference between the office and the ship's location.
- ❖ In case of an emergency, a call would assist attracting the necessary attention to the email.

- ❖ A call from time to time and a short discussion on a personal level is considered essential and it would assist the Master and the Mariners on board to put a voice or a face to your emails.
- ❖ Do not assume that the recipient is as PC literate as one would expect.

Editor



Founder of 'Prevention at Sea', Mr Petros N. Achtypis, is holder of an MSc Diploma in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering of the National Technical University of Athens in Greece. He holds an MLC 2006 Trainer/Inspector Certificate issued by the ILO, he is an IRCA certified Maritime Auditor and holds both ISO 9001 & ISO 14001 Lead Auditor Certificate. He is involved in auditing & inspections ashore and on board, research & development of Risk Assessment mechanisms, Investigations and Behavioral based Audits.