

SALES BOOST

Communicate Expertly With Customers

By Christopher Ruvo

THE ADVANTAGES QUIZ

How Good Are You at Business Communication?



Are you polite and concise in your business emails?

Do you carefully proofread business emails before hitting send?

Do you avoid using emoji when texting for business purposes?

Do you avoid excessive abbreviations in business texts?

When angry clients contact you about an order, do you respond in a way that shows you care about their issue as much as they do?

When a client is upset, do you try to talk through the issue on the phone or in person, rather than through email?

On social media, do you share content that is relevant to your clients and ideal prospects?

Do you avoid “hard selling” approaches on social media?

In first-time meetings with prospects, do you ask questions aimed at uncovering their needs, challenges and goals?

Do you listen closely to clients and confirm that your understanding of what they say is correct?

ANSWER KEY:

Yes = 3 points

To an extent, but I could do more = 1

No = 0

What Your Score Means

24-30: Well done! You’re doing a lot correctly in communicating across a variety of formats and situations.

16-23: You’re headed in the right direction when it comes to business communications.

15 & Below: Now is the time to start strengthening your communication skills.

Regardless of your score, the advice in the pages ahead will help you hone how you communicate – an improvement that can lead to stronger client relationships and more sales.

Step 1

Craft Emails With These 9 Tips

Put these strategies into practice to write more professional emails.

► **Nail the Subject Line:** The subject line is your headline. It should encapsulate the essential content of the message and provide an enticement to get the receiver to click through. Emailing a client a virtual sample for an order of mugs? Write: “Virtual Sample Of Your Mugs - Approval Needed.”

► **Include a Greeting:** If you were meeting someone in person, you'd likely start with a “Hello” and the person's name. Take the same approach in email. It sets a polite tone. At the message's outset, it's also helpful to include a quick line like “Hope you are well.” Once the dialog is underway, you don't have to include greetings on each email in the interaction chain, but the initial message should feature the amiable opener.

► **Be Succinct & Stick to the Topic:** After the greeting, get quickly into the meat of the message. Write in short, straightforward sentences. Avoid ranging onto unrelated subjects, which can muddle the main message. Instead, streamline the focus to the essentials. Doing so increases the likelihood that



important information will be understood.

► **Remember Your Manners:** While you want to be concise, there is always room for “please” and “thank you.” Without these words, your message can sound abrupt and curt. Consider: “Please let me know before the end of the day that the artwork is acceptable. Thank you,” sounds friendlier than “Artwork approval needed end-of-day.”

► **Shape the Message:** Blocks

of text in an email can send recipients into sleep mode. So, break things up. If you're writing enough to require paragraphs, limit each graph to a couple sentences. The occasional one-sentence paragraph works, too. Take this approach, and your emails are much more likely to be read in their entirety.

► **Proofread:** Spelling mistakes, missing words, nonsensical sentences, calling someone by the wrong name – such errors can

send your credibility plummeting. Hold back on hitting send and calmly read through your email to ensure it's accurate and worded well. Use spellcheck, and be certain you're sending the message to the correct recipient.

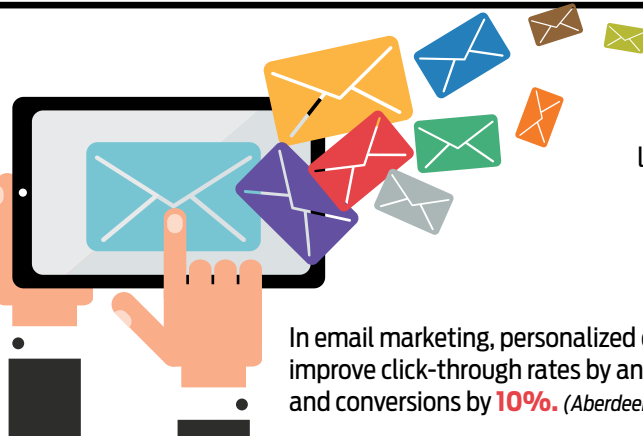
► **Stay Away From Emoticons:** If you're on good personal terms with the recipient, emoticons can have their place. But generally speaking, it's wise to strip these expressives from your business email communications. They can make you look unprofessional and immature.

► **Make Your Signature Polite & Useful:** Include a sign off like “regards” or “sincerely” along with your website, phone number and, if applicable, links to a couple of your most relevant social media pages, such as LinkedIn, Twitter and/or blog.

► **Respond Quickly:** People expect a fast response. Even if you don't immediately have the information high-priority senders are asking for, send them a message confirming that you received their email and you're working on getting them what they need. Also, provide a specific time when you will follow up with them.

By the Numbers

122 The average number of business emails sent and received per user, per day in 2015. The figure is expected to increase to an average of 126 daily business messages by the end of 2019. (The Radicati Group)



In email marketing, personalized email messages improve click-through rates by an average of **14%** and conversions by **10%**. (Aberdeen)

26%

That's how much more likely it is that an email will be opened if it contains a personalized subject line. (Campaign Monitor)



Watch this video for great tips on email etiquette at bit.ly/28SssPu.

Step 2

Use Social Media Correctly

Increase social media engagement with clients by following these simple strategies.

► Engage Buyers on Their Preferred Platforms:

Typically, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are the platforms your buyers – and their companies – will use most often. So when you want to engage clients on social media, first determine what platform they're most active on and then seek to interact with them there, says Natalie Henley. "If you have a client who is on Twitter and Facebook, and you see they update Facebook daily, but haven't updated Twitter in months, then obviously try to communicate with them on Facebook," says Henley, president of Volume Nine, an agency specializing in SEO, social media and content marketing.

► **Actually Be Social:** Engagement centers on interaction and dialog. In the social sphere, that comes from being proactive with clients and prospects – from retweeting their tweets, liking their Facebook posts, and commenting on and sharing their blogs, videos and curated content. This helps promote your clients, indicates you care about them and keeps you top-of-mind. It

also potentially helps expand your online visibility, as many might return the favor.

► Create & Share Original Content:

A consistently updated blog and/or YouTube channel can serve as a strong foundation for your social media outreach. In these forums, you can create content that both establishes you as a promotional products expert and provides valuable information to your clients. The content should be based on your audience's needs and feature insights that help them more easily achieve their goals. A good example of such a blog post is "Great Holiday Gifts For Under \$5" (<http://bit.ly/1UnGKZ8>) from SoBe Promos (asi/245603). As you create excellent content, disseminate it through your social media platforms. You can post links to the same content more than once – just contextualize the link differently within each separate post. "Sharing content can drive traffic to your website," says Henley. "It can be extremely effective long-term to build your lead pipeline."

► Curate Relevant Content:

There's only so much original

content you have time to generate. But that's OK. Find articles, videos, blogs, infographics, photos and other material that would be useful, interesting and/or entertaining to your buyer audience and share those.

► Show a Little Personality in Your Posts, Tweets & Comments:

"Obviously you want to keep it professional and non-offensive," says Henley, "but I wouldn't be afraid to be a little interesting, quirky and funny. Basically, try to be fun and authentic."

► Don't Be Overly "Salesy":

Bombarding clients with pitches. Putting out nothing but a stream of updates on specials. Approaching a new prospect on a social platform with a pitch right out of the gates. These actions are mistakes that can sink your credibility and cause people to brand you an annoying troll. Result? They tune you out – online and off. That said, if you're communicating the right way the majority of the time – sharing good content, liking/commenting on clients' posts – then it's fine to mix in more direct-sell initiatives,

such as posts about great deals on products clients might appreciate.

► **Try Paid Promotions:** Paying to promote posts and executing ad campaigns can help ensure you don't get lost in the social shuffle. "If you are really under the gun to drive leads, I'd strongly recommend considering a Facebook advertising campaign," says Henley. "The interface is very easy to use, the targeting is fantastic and the cost per click is relatively inexpensive compared to Adwords. Facebook has also launched a lead-generation functionality that allows you to capture leads straight from your ad campaign."



Check out this video

from image consultancy IAmAlphaM to learn six social media mistakes to avoid. bit.ly/28MzQZW

By the Numbers

13X

The average increase in LinkedIn profile views for users who list skills on their profile. (*LinkedIn*)

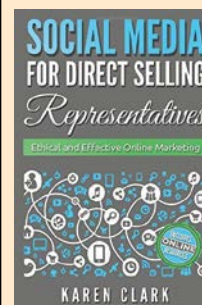


52%

of Twitter users say they've purchased a product they first learned about on Twitter. (*Twitter*)

41%

of U.S. small businesses use Facebook. (*Ebiquity*)



Read

Social Media For Direct Selling Representatives: Ethical and Effective Online Marketing by Karen Clark

Step 3

Master Texting for Business

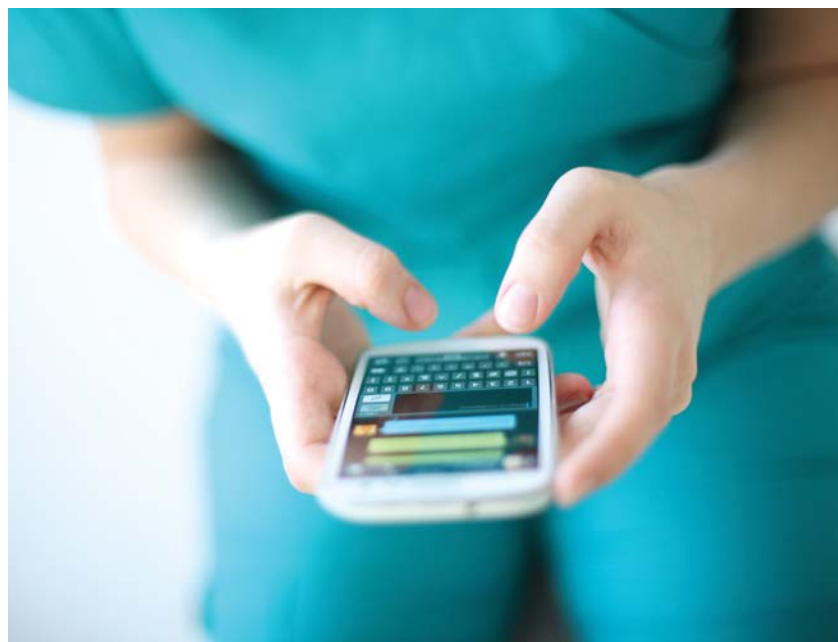
These tips will keep your professional SMS communications on point.

► **Know When to Text:** Texting can be an excellent communication vehicle when you need to convey a straightforward message on time-sensitive matters. Relatedly, it can be used for letting a client, colleague or vendor know that you have a pressing need to speak with them – or that you need them to expediently review an email you’ve sent them with important information. If the matter isn’t urgent, however, email is often the better route.

► **Keep Abbreviations to a Minimum:** Text abbreviations are their own written language. But in business texts, overusing them can confuse some recipients and make you seem unprofessional. While the occasional “LOL” or “NP” is fine with clients and colleagues you know well, it’s often best to type out the words.

► **Be Brief:** Texting is a quick-hit format. If you need to communicate a longer, multi-layered message, then use email or make a phone call.

► **Forget Emojis Exist:** Sure, they’re fun in personal communications, but they can seem puerile in business texting. Plus, different mobile devices may display



the same emoji specification in different ways. This can lead to confusion. You might be an Apple user trying to text a certain emoji to an Android user client who receives an emoji that expresses sentiments unrelated to what you meant. Talk about awkward.

► **Punctuate Properly & Avoid Slang:** Yes, texting is a comparatively informal communication medium. Even so, sticking to accepted spellings and grammar is smart. Put yourself in clients’ shoes for a moment. Would you

feel more assured doing business with the salesperson who texts “Lemme know if u got the sample I sent over ok thanks alot dude” or the professional who writes “Please confirm that you received the sample I sent over. Thank you.”...? More often than not, sales pro two will be preferred.

► **Avoid All Caps:** Capital letters imply you are yelling. They can make your message sound angry or, at the very least, overly forceful, which leaves you looking pushy and obnoxious.

► **Watch Out for Autocorrect:** The spelling suggestion/correction feature can be a boon, but it can also insert words you have no intention of sending, rendering your message nonsensical or worse. Take a second to ensure the words in your text are what you intend to send.

► **Include Your Name:** Signing your initial text in a discussion chain may seem overly formal. But unless you know for certain that the recipient has you saved as a contact, it’s wise to put your name to the message so that they know precisely who is contacting them.

► **Don’t Break Bad News Via Text:** An order isn’t going to deliver on time. An imprint is incorrect. A product you pitched that the buyer wants is now out of stock. Relating such news to clients through text can make you seem callous, so call or meet them in person. If you can’t reach them through those channels, send a professionally worded email that relates the negative development and proposes potential solutions. In the email, let them know you would be happy to discuss matters in more depth.

By the Numbers

69,000

The number of texts Americans sent every second in 2012. (CTIA)



91%

of all U.S. citizens have their mobile device within reach 24/7. (Morgan Stanley)

90 seconds

The time it takes an average person to respond to a text. It typically takes 90 minutes for the average person to respond to an email. (CTIA)



Check out

this humorous video for 10 tips on “how to text like a gentleman.” bit.ly/21kVdab

Step 4

Assuage Angry Clients

Use these ideas to calm clients down and find viable solutions to the issues that have upset them.

► **Match Their Intensity:** Flip the script for a moment. You're the customer. You've called with a complaint that has you burning mad. You explain why you're steaming. And then...the other person responds sounding droll and lethargic. That would probably intensify your anger, wouldn't it? Well, the same goes for your clients. So when they contact you with a complaint, match their energy level. No, that doesn't mean yell and go crazy. It means convey a sense of immediacy, demonstrating through tone and language that you take their complaint seriously. "It shows that you care and want to help," says David Blaise, president of Blaise, Drake & Co., an industry consultancy.

► **Get Them on the Phone:** If a client has emailed you about their issue, quickly give them a call in return. Email allows for the intrusion of extra ambiguity and misinterpretation – especially when people are upset. It will be more efficient, minimize the potential for confusion and show a more attentive touch if you talk out the problem on the phone. If



you get voicemail, leave a considerate message that indicates you are eager to help and would like to discuss it further. Then, send the client an email expressing similar sentiments and saying that you just left a voicemail and would like to talk.

► **Let Them Have Their Say:** Interrupting an angry person will only make them angrier. Allow people to get things off their chest before you speak.

► **Apologize:** Saying sorry shows that you don't wish to be adversarial. It suggests that you're on the complainant's side. Still, watch your phrasing here. You can apologize without necessarily accepting blame, as the problem might not be your fault. Say something like, "I'm very sorry to hear that there is an issue."

► **Fully Understand the Problem:** Apologies done, you must tell clients that you will do

whatever you can to help. Then, ask them to explain – or expand on – the exact nature of the issue. Be thorough in your questions to ensure you get the whole picture. If your questions are piling up and the client seems agitated by that, consider saying, "I apologize for asking so many questions. I just want to ensure I understand everything correctly so I can best help you." When you're done questioning, state your understanding of the problem back to the client and ask them to affirm its accuracy.

► **Collaborate on a Solution:** Propose potential remedies and talk with upset clients to see which option they'd most prefer. If the problem is complicated and there are no immediate solutions you can offer, assure the customer that rectifying the issue is your top priority and that you're getting right to work on it. Give them a specific time when you'll contact them with an update. Then, call them back before the stated time. "It shows you're on top of things," Blaise says. Once you've agreed on a solution, bring it to fruition.

Engineer a Resolution

Here are stat-backed reasons that illustrate the importance of effectively communicating with upset clients to find solutions that leave them satisfied.

91%

of customers who walk away unhappy will not willingly do business with you again.

(Lee Resources)

But...

70% of customers will do business with you again if you resolve a complaint in their favor. (Lee Resources)

Which is great news because...

It typically costs four to 10 times more to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one, according to a range of studies.

Keeping those customers happy through good service is important because....

On average, Americans tell 16 people about a poor experience – nearly twice as many people as they tell about a good experience. (Express Survey)

And because....

60% to 70% is the probability of selling to an existing customer, as opposed to 5% to 20% for a new prospect.

(Marketing Metrics)

Step 5

Make First-Time Meetings Count

These seven tips will help you close more sales by taking a consultative approach.

► 1. Research the Prospect:

Before the meeting, read through the prospect's company website and social media pages. Learn what you can about the particular buyer you'll be meeting with from their LinkedIn page and other social media sites. Do online searches about the company and individual. Twenty minutes of research can reveal valuable information you can use to develop good rapport and client-specific questions that help you understand their needs.

► 2. Read the Prospect's Communication Style: Some buyers want to make small talk. Others want to get down to business quickly. It's incumbent on you to get a sense of what kind of communicator you're dealing with, and then to roll with it. If someone wants to chat about their weekend or last night's game, indulge them. On the contrary, if they direct the conversation straight to business, then follow them there.

► 3. Try Mirroring: Similarly, adopt a manner that mirrors the prospect's manner. If the buyer is buttoned-up and corporate, have a formal, polished approach in your tone, language and bearing. But if the prospect is relaxed and informal, then take on a more easygoing air. When you mirror well, you're more likeable to the prospect, which increases the chances they'll do business with you.

► 4. Don't Lead With the 'About Us': Salespeople often want to share a lot about their company from the outset. Unfortunately, that's a good way to



bore a buyer. Instead of a company bio, start the business conversation by making the meeting about the client. Say something like, "I really want to learn how we can help you. It would be great if we could talk about what your goals are. That way, we can come up with a solution that will work best for you. Would it be OK if I ask you a few questions? Or is there anything you would like to ask me first?" If they ask about you or your company, succinctly relate relevant information. If, however, they give you the green light to proceed with your questions, do so.

► 5. Ask the Right Kind of Questions: "Don't ask closed

questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no.' Instead, ask open-ended questions that elicit a response," says Diane Ciotta, business author, sales coach and keynote speaker. The questions should focus on determining the client's specific goals and challenges; should enable you to learn what's been successful for them in the past and what hasn't; should make clear to you who their audience is; and their expectations regarding service, delivery and budget.

► 6. Listen Closely & Ensure Understanding: Good questions are only useful if you comprehend what prospects are telling you. Pay close attention to what they're

saying and to non-verbal cues, which can potentially yield useful insights. Repeat back to buyers your understanding of key points, and ask them for confirmation on whether or not you're correct.

► 7. Ask for the Sale or Establish the Follow-Up: Once you have a clear understanding of the prospect's situation, discuss potential solutions with them. If you work out the details of a solution buyers are keen on, ask them if there are any other questions you can answer – anything else they'd like to discuss. If they say 'no,' then tactfully ask for the sale. If it's not feasible to close the sale at the first meeting, then communicate a specific follow-up step, including a timeframe for accomplishing it.



Read

Shut-up & Sell by Diane Ciotta



Watch this video

to learn a quick 30-second technique that will enable you to build rapport. bit.ly/28MqYJw