

I recently spent two hours purging my email inbox of old emails. The move was forced by my purchase of a new computer and a wish to cleanse my old computer of useless files. During the purge, which was the first such undertaking in over two years, I came across hundreds of press releases and emails from PR people. I deleted many of these and in the process, came up with some suggested email rules for PR people.



1. Put a subject line on your email: I simply don't understand why people send out emails with no subject line. The purpose of the subject line is to inform the recipient what the message is about. If there's no subject line, you've apparently got nothing to tell me.

2. Again, no attachments: What I find absolutely amazing is that people send out emails with gigantic file attachments to unsuspecting recipients. There is no reason why something in the form of a Word document can't be cut and pasted into the body of an email. If it's something that is graphically intensive, put it on a website and provide a link.

3. Include my name: My name is not Bill, Bob, Joanie or Chachi. It is also not "name here" or "first last". Why send an email if you don't even know who you're addressing?

4. **>>>>: Thank you for forwarding me the press release:** You were obviously too lazy to cut and paste the actual release into the email. Instead, you simply forwarded it to me with the annoying caret symbols included. Oddly, this is becoming somewhat of a sticking point among reporters who feel this is a definitive sign of disrespect and laziness.

5. **Oh, that subject line:** Please say it's a press release. Here's an example, "Press Release: XYZ Corp. Announces Launch of Corporate Benefits Program." You'll actually find that people are more likely to read the release than a deceptive headline meant to fool someone into opening. I have a "rule" set in my Microsoft Outlook that puts any email that contains the term "press release" in a special folder. I look through this folder at least twice each day.

6. **Spell check:** It's bad enough that lazy journalists like me make spelling and grammatical mistakes. Run spell check before sending out your email and take a minute to actually read the email before you send it. I found a number of emails where people misspelled their client's name. In one case, I couldn't figure out what the company's name was because the person spelled it differently a few times and used different branding elements (capital letters and hyphen).

7. **You're a professional, act like one:** Emails that begin with the greeting "Yo!" are what I expect from my friends, not from people I've never met.

8. **It's not the quantity, it's the quality:** Long emails are annoying and waste of my time. Get to the point and end it there.

9. **Contact, please:** I found at least one hundred emails where people did not put their contact information. I also found some strange occurrences where people did not put an area code for their phone number.

10. **Please stop emailing me:** I've asked time and time again to be removed from various press lists and rarely have my pleas to be removed been heard. Keep your email list updated and as a professional courtesy, please remove people when they ask.

11. **Yes, I got your email:** Emailing a journalist three times and asking them if they received your email is not a good use of your time. I realize that many PR people keep lists for projects that they update regularly. I know that next to my name there's usually something like, "Sent email, called, no response." Do you get the picture? Flooding someone's inbox with countless emails is a way to get put in the spam folder.

12. **Hide your distribution list:** The "BCC" function is there for a reason. Seeing a lengthy distribution list is not only annoying, but it's strategically unwise. Now I know what other journalists have seen the news and may write about the subject. As such, I have no interest in writing about the subject.

13. **Do you, uh, Yahoo!?:** Perhaps this is totally nitpicking, but I have a problem with flaks or companies that use free email services. Another is that it seems odd to me that a company doesn't have its own email service. I get it that gmail is a great email service but they offer Google Apps that you can use under your own domain. I think anyone in PR without a website or an email address on their own domain isn't doing their job properly.

14. **Virus-free on wheat bread:** A press release with an attachment I received recently infected my computer with a virus (despite the presence of anti-virus software and a firewall). Think I'm mad?

15. **Is it really high-priority?:** 'Nuff said.

16. **Format in plain text:** Inserting your company logo or using graphics in the body of an email can make the email cumbersome. These images may also not appear properly in some email programs and the email will appear in a way that makes it strange or even completely unreadable.

17. **Use email wisely:** Read Aesop's "The Boy Who Cried Wolf."

18. **Target your emails properly:** I have no clue why I get hundreds of press releases about biotech companies (I never cover the subject) or emails giving me the opportunity to interview

“American Idol” judges.

19. **Personal emails are a no-no:** You don’t know me, so wouldn’t it be strange if you received an email from me in which I ask you to help me find a new apartment or job for a friend?

20. **Careful what you forward:** I was shocked to see a number of PR people had forwarded me political and religious material. In one case, a flak forwarded me some politically-charged spam about Israel and Palestine. She didn’t hide the distribution list and I noticed a lot of other Silver, Gold and Wein types on the list. What you forward to your friends and family is usually not appropriate to forward to professional contacts.

As always, I hope these “rules” are helpful. I realize most people use email wisely in a professional setting, but there are too many who don’t and they reflect badly on those of us who rely on the medium for our work.

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