Castleton
A VERMONT STATE COLLEGE

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How to use e-mail effectively

E-mail is a powerful means of communication, but it presents new problems and potential embarrassments for users. Some of these are technological – sending a private response to the entire campus, for instance – while others result from neglecting the essentials of a successful business letter or memo.

Below are some thoughts on the effective and polite use of e-mail in a business setting.

1. By its nature e-mail allows for hasty responses that can be angry, flippant, or easily misinterpreted. At times you may want to put a draft response aside and return to it before deciding if it is appropriate.

2. The rules of traditional business communication still apply.

- Grammar and spelling matter.

- People may not read lengthy communications. Make your points concisely.

- A meaningful subject line helps recipients handle the many e-mails they receive.

3. When replying to a message, make sure you understand the difference between "Reply" and "Reply to All", and choose appropriately. It can be extremely embarrassing to reply to a campus-wide or VSC-wide announcement, and have your "I'll be there" go to everyone, and even worse if you say something private in the reply!

4. Use "Plain Text" for your e-mails, instead of "Formatted" or "HTML." While it looks nifty to use unusual fonts and formatting, the resulting message can end up looking ugly or unreadable to the recipient instead. Not all e-mail programs can handle these formatting features, so when in doubt, keep it simple.

5. When quoting a previous message, only quote the parts that are relevant, as opposed to the entire text. In GroupWise, the ability to include quoted or not to include quoted text in a message is a setting that can be checked or unchecked whenever replying to a message.

6. Don't forward "SPAM" (chain letters, virus warnings, "tell everyone you know" e-mails, etc.). 99.9% of these messages are hoaxes. If you receive something that you're unsure of, contact IT Services and we can verify it for you. Legitimate virus warnings should only come from IT Services.

7. Castleton's e-mail distribution lists -- CSCADMIN, CSCSTAFF, CSCFACULTY, and CSCSTUDENTS – are to be used for college- and campus-related communications ONLY. Any messages sent to these lists go to approximately 2000 mailboxes, so be sure to have ALL necessary information included when sending to it. Follow up "oops" messages are not only annoying, but waste valuable system resources. If you want to send a message to the distribution lists and are unsure if it is appropriate, contact IT Services and we can help determine that.

8. Before opening attachments, look at the sender's name and address and make sure it's someone you know. If you don't know the person, DON'T OPEN THE ATTACHMENT. Even if it IS someone you know, use common sense and caution. It's never a good idea to just blindly open the attachment. If in doubt, call or e-mail the person who sent the attachment asking for more information, or contact IT Services staff to see if a new virus is making the rounds.

9. When working with files, you should assume that the document might need to be shared with other people. To that end, some simple naming conventions should be followed that will allow other people to better receive your documents:

- Limit your filenames to 31 characters.

- Don't use the following characters in filenames: " * / \ <? I . :

- SPAM filters often block attached files with the extensions .EXE, .ZIP, .COM as viruses are often sent as these file types. It may be necessary to change the extensions on these file types to something else to send it, and instruct the recipient to change it back in order to open the file.

10. When sending attachments, particularly within the VSC, please use Microsoft Office or Adobe Acrobat PDF files. The VSC has agreed to standardize on Microsoft Office as our supported office platform, and documents in other formats may not be readable by the intended recipients.