

Tips To Help You Send Effective Networking Emails

Whether you're launching a virtual job search or hoping to deepen your professional relationships while working from home, using email to network brings with it several unique challenges and opportunities.

Email is a productivity tool that is primarily used to quickly exchange information. It lacks many of the essential elements that help you make a stronger connection in person (or on video), such as allowing eye contact, body language or the ability to share a laugh together. Unlike a live conversation, you can't predict when you will receive a response from your emails which further stifles the potential for the kind of back and forth exchange that leads to an authentic dialogue.

Despite these challenges, neglecting to network through email would be a big mistake. When skillfully crafted, emails can be just as effective of a networking tool as in-person meetings, if not more, because the disadvantages of email can be overcome or outweighed by the efficiency of the process. With email, you don't have to find a compatible time slot for both parties to connect. Even when you invest the effort into writing your very best message, email still takes a lot less time than an in-person meeting that you would have traveled to.

If you want to quickly grow and deepen your network while social distancing, learning how to write interesting and thoughtful emails is an essential skill. These four tips will help you make a memorable impression.

1. Set the tone early

In email, you can't rely on your or another person's interpersonal cues to drive the emotional tone of your interaction. Instead, you'll have to create the feeling you want to convey using words alone, which is why the first few sentences of your email are so important. The opening lines of your email will disproportionately impact the tone of the entire exchange.

Often, the best way to begin a networking email is with a reference to your last meeting, a shared memory or a comment about the reason they came to your mind today. However you choose to start, make sure it reinforces the feeling you want to express. If you select a funny story, it will establish a light and humorous tone. If you select wording that is heartwarming, you will likely have a deeper, more sentimental dialogue. Either way, decide what feeling you're going for at the very beginning and continue to weave it throughout.

This point about tone is more important than ever to consider, since today's news headlines might seem like the most appropriate place to begin. But remember that if you start out by talking about how bad things are in the world it will add a heaviness to the exchange that you may not have intended. In some cases, the news may still be the most fitting place to start but make sure you are making a conscious decision about how you want the rest of your message to land.

2. Keep it short and personal

If there is only one thing you take away from these tips, let it be this: never (ever) copy and paste in a networking email. No matter how much you think it will go unnoticed if you add one unique line in at the beginning or the end of the email, this simply isn't true. Rarely can you send the same message to multiple people without assuming a more general tone that is detectable. Copy and paste emails must

be generic to appeal to a broad audience, but that is the opposite of what you want your networking emails to be. Email networking only works when the exchange is authentic and affirms the relationship.

Instead, focus on making your emails short, warm and ultra-specific. Before pressing send, read your message one final time and consider if it would still be appropriate if you sent it to someone else. If so, it's not as strong as it could be. Try to make multiple references to things that only apply to your recipient—comments about their family, pets, hobbies, and personal and professional aspirations are always great touch points to bring up.

This tip is still relevant to messages to recruiters and those connections you don't know very well yet. It is certainly harder to personalize your emails when you know little about someone, but there is often enough on LinkedIn or the company website to help you get started. You may know less about them, but that should help you keep your messages sharp and concise. Don't write long emails filled with details about you to fill the space. Keep the focus on your recipient, especially in the first exchange, and let the connection build naturally.

3. Show that you care

"How are you doing?" "Just wanted to check in." "Hope all is well." How many times have you seen these phrases in your inbox over the last few weeks? Chances are, it's a lot. There's good reason for that because people have indeed needed to be checked in on and there's a sense of collective hope that everyone will remain healthy and rebound well.

It is not a problem to use these phrases when they are true, but know that your message will be better received and get more attention if you don't use these common opening lines. People become numb to phrases they hear over and over again and often well-meaning words can start to lose a bit of their power.

By using well-known phrases, you run the risk of failing to express your true sentiments. The phrase can come off as just another filler expression there to help you transition to your real reason for reaching out. The purpose of avoiding common phrases is so it's clear that you aren't simply looking to have a transactional exchange. You actually care about how the recipient is doing.

Depending on the relationship, consider digging deeper, and don't shy away from asking more specific questions that promote dialogue and sharing, such as: What has been the hardest part of social distancing for you? Have you discovered any silver linings in all this? Is there anything you plan to do differently when this is over?

Even in email, you can feel when someone has taken the time to genuinely check in on you. This is particularly valued these days when it is so tempting to rush past the obvious adversities everyone is experiencing and get on with the message.

4. Be sensitive about your requests

People have a lot on their plates right now so be cautious before making requests on their time. While you may have more capacity to network, keep in mind that others may not have the same ability to engage.

If you'd like to have a follow-up call, set up a video meeting or be introduced to others, don't feel bad about making the request. However, be sure to give the recipient an easy way to defer to a later time or cut out steps that aren't essential.

For example, if you would like to arrange a virtual coffee, explain that you'd love to catch up more if they have the bandwidth at this point and if not now, hopefully once things have settled. If you want an introduction to someone in their network, consider requesting it through email instead of asking for a call. This consideration will surely be appreciated by the recipient and your sincerity will ring through.

It's a tricky time to network or ask for favors, which is why email may be your best approach. It allows for flexibility in how and when your message gets answered but can still leave a lasting impression.

Remember that investing the time to send better and more thoughtful emails will remain one of the most effective ways to stay connected and build your network, even when the world returns to normal.

Credit: <https://www.forbes.com>