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The 5 digital etiquette faux pas that really stick in my craw

From email to social media and Zoom, there is growing consensus on how to behave in digital environments.



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BY NATHAN RICE
5 MINUTE READ



It would be expected not to give much thought to digital etiquette, that is, until you are affected by inappropriate digital behavior. Personally, I've maintained a more than passing interest in etiquette, and more recently, digital decorum specifically. I love when the rules of etiquette allow others to feel more comfortable in their surroundings.

Digital etiquette is defined by how we behave within digital environments, including email, social media, and video platforms like Zoom. And, when I think about etiquette, I feel less about the [Balissande Finishing School](#) version and their excellent Instagram account of classical etiquette and more about the gracious host making the guest the center of the world, choosing to make everyone a little more at ease by following (often unspoken) social rules.

Many things considered proper etiquette are socially constructed standards that not everyone realizes or recognizes. And when standards are expected or enforced, it can create quite the opposite of the intended expectation—making people feel uneasy.

Do you remember when you first learned that ALL CAPS equated to shouting? It was a bit jarring for me. And that seemed like a simple shift. It's on another level to know when and how to appropriately use emojis during a digital business conversation. For example, I'd advise keeping eggplants and kissy-face emojis out of those conversations.

What we say and do on our digital devices affects others—making it very important to know how to be a gracious digital host. Most of us know not to text in a theater (I said most) and that playing your YouTube or TikTok at full-blast in public is akin to fully extending your seat back on an airplane. But what about more subtle forms of digital communication? How can you be a gracious host in the digital world? In other words, what are today's ALL CAPS moments that are still blind spots for some?

My top 5:

THE DREADED GATED CONTENT

if you are sharing gated content, know that it is likely your end-user will not be able to read it. You have a couple of healthy options; some publications now allow users to share subscription-based content if you use their share button to obtain and provide the link. Or you could save the article and attach it as a PDF—maintaining the integrity of the source. In both cases, summarize the piece and your point of view



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Dr. James Hamblin wrote a great piece on email etiquette in 2016 that is still relevant today; my favorite line from the article is, “brevity signals respect.” I’ve personally broken this guideline too many times, always wanting to provide all the information and social niceties, but I think he has a strong point. Hubspot, the online marketing software company, will tell you that 200 words or less are ideal for an email.

One straightforward way to help keep emails concise is to mind your website addresses. They have gotten ridiculously long and, in some cases, could take up half of an email text, and now many of those addresses have tracking codes making them not only long but a potential privacy hazard. The good news is that you don’t need to paste the full long link in an email. Instead, create an elegant hyperlink. And when you need to send an attachment, make it as small as possible (PDF Shrink is a great tool).

THE BOSS EMAIL

This one came from a friend who received a *boss email* recently, and it’s a good one. If you are a boss or a higher-up, be aware of the “can we talk?” or “let’s connect at 3” type of subject lines. Instead, provide context, or most people will assume the worst. Your intention might just be to brainstorm live about an upcoming project or share news on a change in the company that is easier done in person. Still, without context, it’s easy for anyone to wonder if it’s performance-based, or worse, layoff-related.

THE SOCIAL TIRADE

I almost left this one off the list because it should be so obvious, but it could actually be an article in and of itself based on the number of tirades I still witness. The general rule here: everything you write in a social post or a digital forum should be something you’d be completely comfortable with having an in-person conversation about. Including the tone in which it’s written.

Too often, perhaps because we aren’t seeing the people in real-time, social media posts read like angry tirades. Beyond the impact those posts have on you and those around you today, they’re also fair game for future scrutiny—either by an employer or others. In this case, your online reputation is at stake. One



I've noticed more and more, with both Zoom and in-person conversations, phones. They are always in reach and quite often checked in real-time in meetings. Everyone sees that, and I expect it will never become normalized. At best, your colleagues will feel unconsciously off-put, and at worst, they will feel outright disrespected. This comes down to time and attention, and the phone draws away from both of those.

Speaking of Zoom, most of us are still learning our video etiquette, but one great piece of advice—help the host of the meeting be successful. Perhaps be ready to provide at least one bit of *chit-chat* at the beginning of a session. Or letting them know why you are turning your camera off before just going dark. That way, the host isn't left with all the responsibility.

It's clear what we say and do in the digital world or on our digital devices affects others directly. At the end of the day, it is all about being a gracious host, whether you are the host or the guest of the party. Perhaps not in the too distant future that dinner party will be in the metaverse, where there will likely be a whole new set of expectations.

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