

How to Write Mass Emails at Work That People Actually Like:
What Yummy Spam Looks Like

By Laurie A. Prange

1. **Start by putting the date of the email in the body of the email.** Many email programs don't display the date (and time) of an email once it has been opened, only when shown in the list display. Help the reader out; put the date in the text of the email. No one has ever said to me that it was too much information.
2. **Take a tip from old fashioned memorandum and fax cover sheets; include a "to" and a "re" statement.** I'm amazed by the number of times I've heard from people that they thought they received a mass email by mistake. For whatever reason, if it doesn't have their name at the top of the email, they think it's for someone else. Unfortunately, that's just not possible with every mass email you send out. So far, the best solution I've found to this problem is to use the old-fashioned memorandum style of address. If you find something better, please let me know!
3. **Tell them where they can get more information.** You're sending out a mass email to share important information with everyone that they don't already know, it's only natural that some readers will want more information. Someone out there will find your email cryptic and won't want to admit that they don't know what you're talking about because that's just human nature. There will also be someone who will want to know more about what you're talking about, but doesn't have the time to send you a reply email to ask for more information. There may even be one person who will send you a snarky reply, complaining that your email is elitist because it doesn't have all the information that they need. Yes, all of these happened to me on a regular basis until I figured out how to prevent it. Be smart and don't ever forget to include a statement that starts with "For more information, see..." The best scenario is where you can direct them to a webpage with a simple URL that links to many different points of related information but you can also refer to other sources of information, such a manual that everyone may already have in their office.
4. **Use the signature feature in your email program for every email.** Your email will be forwarded, I can promise you that, and you have no control where it's going to end up. Including your contact information in your signature is the virtual equivalent of stapling your business card to a memorandum (which is a smart thing to do). Help the stranger out that will read your email and will want to contact you, automatically include your contact information in your email signature. That's what it's there for!
5. **No colour please.** Don't change the background colour or the colour of the lettering. I know, it's very tempting but what happens is you look like you're sending out party announcements instead of important work information. Unless you are a party planner, leave the fun colouring and fonts for the truly fun emails and you'll never regret it. It's better to have a mass email that looks boring than to have one that looks unprofessional, especially when it's going to so many people.
6. **Avoid HTML in your email.** Many people have put filters on their work email to keep out junk, porn, and other nuisances by screening out those email that contain HTML elements. This is one of the simplest steps you can do to ensure that your mass email reaches all the recipients on your list instead of in the trash folder.

7. **In the right context, you can include a picture, but just one picture.** I personally do this only once every three years or so because I know how a picture inserted into an email can garble a message, you may have different circumstances. Trying to illustrate something? Are you referring to something particular? Take a nice digital picture or screen capture and add it at the end of the email or the beginning. People find it hard to read if a picture is in the middle of the email and might not even realize that there's more text after the picture... it was this very phenomenon that made me stop including pictures. Remember, you have no control over what email program the receiver is using to read your email. Who knows how the picture will be enlarged or shrunk in their display? Avoid using pictures as much as possible; include a URL to where they can see the picture instead. The one and only exception to this rule is if you need to include your organization's icon and then that should only go at the start of your email, like printed paper with a letterhead, or in your email signature.
8. **Emails are a form a communication; make it clear that you're keeping the lines of communication open.** Include a statement saying that if the reader has any questions or needs help with whatever you're talking about, that you can be reached. But don't just say that you can answer questions, list the various ways that you can be reached. It's my personal pet peeve the number of emails I see without this simple, polite phrase. My standby is "If you have any questions or need help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (main phone number) or (main email)."
9. **Keep things short enough that an average print-out isn't bigger than an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper (whatever is "normal" where you are).** People love to print out emails. There's no such thing of the paperless office, at least just not yet. Do the planet a favour, keep the email short enough that it fits on one sheet (and can be recycled later).
10. **Sign-off with a friendly but professional goodbye.** The old standby is to end with "Sincerely, (your name)." Other favourites include "yours truly," "looking forward to hearing from you," and "thank you." My personal favourite is "cheers" because it is friendly without being too intimate and it is how I speak naturally. While seemingly innocuous, I find that this part of the mass email can raise some of the most passionate debates. Check any old fashioned book on office communications or an etiquette book for a list of the choices. If you are still unsure, watch to see what senior managers at your workplace use and copy their style. It may seem like a petty thing to worry about, but it speaks volumes about your professionalism in just one or two words.
11. **Last, but not least, cut out any slang.** This is professional correspondence being read by large numbers of people and if you do not take the time to edit your work, you will look unprofessional and, quite possibly, very immature. Avoid all colloquial statement, especially any slang, and anything that can be confusing for someone with low literacy skills or a new English-speaker. Please, do not use any short-forms, smiley faces, or texting style of typing in your mass email. I've seen emails like this and I just cringe for those people. You know that someone in management is seeing that and making a note to themselves not to promote that person. Don't be one of those people who get blacklisted, save your familiar style of email writing for personal emails and write mass emails at work that people actually like!