

STYBEL PEABODY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



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Use These Techniques to Improve Your Email Influence.

We will call our client “F.” He is a general counsel applying for professional jobs by directly emailing CEOs in his target market.

F reported that he felt depressed that he had not heard back from one CEO he reached out to. F wasn’t necessarily expecting a job offer, but F and the CEO had worked together at the same company. He was expecting a polite “Thank you. I will keep your resume on file.”

The lack of any response was upsetting. The CEO's non-response symbolized his feelings of professional isolation and inadequacy.

F uses a popular virus detector on his personal computer. One day he discovered that the virus software had its own junk mail folder. In that folder was the response of the CEO—who thanked him for reaching out, recalled their time together, and suggested that they discuss opportunities at his company via Zoom.

F emailed the CEO and suggested some dates-times. Ten days later, the CEO still had not responded. F left a voice mail for the CEO. F contacted us to let us know what happened:

“I just got a voice message from [the CEO I was telling you about].

“[The CEO] called me today to say he was following up on his email to me. He had not heard back from me!

“I imagine my email response likely wound up in HIS junk mail!

“He called me to set up a time to speak and left me his cell phone number.”

Easy and Cheap Does Not Necessarily Mean Effective.

All leaders have a tool kit of communications to influence others. One of the cheapest and easiest tools is email. “False positives” refer to email messages that are valid but are classified as spam by computer filters. Such false-positive messages are sent to the junk file.

The operational definition of "false positives" is consistent within the information technology profession. There seems to be no commonly accepted technique for measuring false positives. Writing in *Network World*, Joel Snyder said that one spam filter system had false positives of 56.3% while another filter had a rate of 0.7%. (2003)

In 2020 Microsoft sent a message to customers warning that “Lots of false positives are generated” when Windows’ spam-filtering option is enabled. It recommended against enabling its own spam filters. Notice the lack of precision about the frequency of false positives.

In other words, email may be an inexpensive and easy communications tool. If you use email, however, beware of false positives on the sending and receiving end.

Influencing Others Via Email.

The safest course of action is to assume that your computer system is generating a percentage of false-positive messages ranging from 0.7 to 56.3%. That broad range suggests that you check your spam or junk folder weekly.

A second suggestion is to not assume the email you send out has been received. Try to get confirmation of receipt. For example, if you are writing to Robin Smith, you might use this phrase in your Subject Line: “Ms. Smith, please confirm receipt of this email.”

A third suggestion is to follow up an important email with voice mail:

“Ms. Smith, I just wanted to get confirmation you received the email I sent you last week. My phone number is xxx-xxxx-xxxx. That’s xxx-xxx-xxxx.”

Notice that we repeated the phone number twice. Cellular communications on the receiving end may not be as clear as on the sending side. You may have said your phone number too fast for it to be understood. Repeating the phone number twice helps reduce your risk.

Summary and Conclusions.

With more decision-makers working from home, using traditional hard copy mail to an office may result in letters being left in a pile at the office. On the other hand, email exposes you to the risk of false positives. False positives can be a problem sending and receiving.

If the topic is important to you, consider our suggestions for subject headings and telephone follow-up.

References

Microsoft. September 18, 2020 “Lots of False Positives are Generated.”
<https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/office365/troubleshoot/antispam/false-positives>

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Stybel Peabody provides companies with “leadership and career success” for valued senior level talent. Core services include retained search for leaders on Boards or whose jobs touch Boards (Board members, CEOs, COOs, CFOs), leadership coaching, and executive-level outplacement for leaders who should be networking with Board members.

The readers of *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* voted Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. “Best Outplacement Firm” in 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017.

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