Compare Use of Email, Instant Messages, and SMS (Text Message) in Business

1) Email vs. IM vs. SMS: Choosing the Right One

Communication is the lifeblood of productivity. Businesses need to communicate with customers, managers need to communicate with employees, and workers need to communicate with peers. Effective communication is a crucial element of getting things done.

Technology provides us with a plethora of options for communicating. You can send an email, use an instant messaging service, or text someone on a mobile phone. There are benefits and drawbacks to each, and you will communicate more effectively if you understand what they are and select the best method for your situation.

Here are some of the factors you should consider before choosing:

Email

Email has some issues, but it is the most widely used, and accepted form of electronic communication. Email is tried and true. It is the de facto means of written communication – especially in business. However, it’s not always the most efficient method. In fact, one IT company is working to eliminate email for inter-company communications because it feels it is a distraction that wastes more time than it’s worth.

Pros:

- It is universal. Everyone has an email address, and you can send a message from any email provider to any email provider.
- You can send a single message to a large group of people. Rather than sending out a bunch of separate text messages, or engaging in various instant messaging situations, you can communicate with an entire team, or list of individuals at once.
- It provides a written record. Messages can be centrally stored and archived, and the history of replies or forwards can be maintained.

Cons:

- It is slow. “Slow” is a relative term, since email messages are delivered to the other side of the world in a matter of minutes—perhaps seconds. But, when a message is actually retrieved is a function of the mail server and email client software, and you don’t really know when it is actually received.
- It is filled with spam. Although efforts like Microsoft’s campaign to take down botnets have reduced the deluge of spam, a recent Symantec Intelligence Report suggests spam still accounts for nearly three-fourths of all email.
- It is a primary means of spreading malware. Whether it is a link to a malicious website, or an infected file attachment, email is the preferred method of propagating malware attacks.

**Bottom Line:**

Email is still the most widely used and commonly accepted form of communication. It is effective for communicating and sharing files with groups of people, and it provides a valuable written record of the communications.

**Instant Messaging**

Instant messaging, or IM, is fast – it has “instant” right in the name. It is a particularly good tool for communicating within an organization, but may not be the best choice for messaging third parties.

**Pros:**

- It is instant. Assuming the intended target is online, the message will be received as soon as you send it.
- It is brief. Instant messaging tends to be confined to a single thought or sentence rather than a lengthy essay.
- It is conversational. Instant messaging has an immediate back and forth exchange that lets you collaborate in real-time.

**Cons:**

- It is intrusive. Instant messages pop up on the screen, announcing their presence with loud alert tones when you’re in the middle of doing something else. Granted, you can configure the instant messaging software not to do that, but then you run the risk of missing the incoming message altogether which negates one of the “pros” of instant messaging.
- It is proprietary. Communicating via instant messaging requires that both parties have accounts with a given instant messaging service. There is some cross-communication, and there are instant messaging clients that are capable of simultaneously working with multiple instant messaging services, but basically if your target recipient is using AIM, you need to be logged in to AIM as well.
- You need to sign in. If you don’t log in to your instant messaging service of choice, nobody can communicate with you.
- You lose the history. You can log your instant messaging communications, but each exchange is like an island unto itself. When you need to reflect back on a chain of communication a year from now, instant messaging logs will not be very helpful.

**Bottom Line:**

Instant messaging enables people to communicate and collaborate in real-time. While there are instant messaging phishing scams and malware concerns, they are not nearly as pervasive or crippling as with email. Instant messaging is particularly suited for working together within an organization.
SMS (Text Messaging)

Text messaging lets you communicate in real-time from virtually anywhere. It is not as “professional” as email or instant messaging in a business sense. But, SMS text messaging has some distinct advantages in certain scenarios.

Pros:

- It is immediate. Like instant messaging, SMS text messages get from Point A to Point B in real-time. It is a particularly effective means of sharing photos or video clips from a mobile phone with others for immediate feedback.
- It is universal. Like email, text messaging is not constrained by proprietary platforms. As long as someone has a mobile phone capable of receiving text messages, you can send a message from any other capable device.
- It is available. People typically have their mobile phones on them 24/7. It is in their pocket, or purse, or sitting on a desk or side table. They may not see an email or instant message for hours, but odds are good that a text message will always be within arm’s reach.

Cons:

- It is intrusive. When someone is away from their desk, they probably have a good reason. A blaring text message alert tone while you’re standing in line for lunch, or enjoying a movie on the weekend (even though the phone should be off, or at least silenced) can be very annoying.
- There is a cost involved. Many wireless service providers offer unlimited texting, or at least have unlimited text message plans available. But, many people still have text messaging plans with a limit on how many messages they can send or receive.
- No written record. Most mobile phones retain a history of recent text messages, but compared with email there is no useful history of text message exchanges recorded for future reference.

Bottom Line:

Because the mobile phone is almost always nearby, SMS text messaging is a very effective method of reaching someone immediately. It is a preferred method for reaching someone when you know they aren’t sitting at a computer, or when the situation is urgent and you need to reach them now.

There are some tools that blur the lines. For example, you can use instant messaging to chat in real-time with a group of people rather than just one on one. It is also possible to configure some tools to cover more bases – like alerting you with a text message when a new email arrives.

Your mileage may vary, but email, instant messaging, and text messaging all have their strengths. There is no clear “best”, just a “best for the situation right now”. You can communicate more efficiently if you understand the pros and cons of each, and choose the right tool for the job at hand.

Of course, if something is truly urgent you should actually call the person…on a phone…with your voice.

http://www.pcworld.com/article/248142/email_vs_im_vs_sms_choosing_the_right_one.html
Tips for Effective Email Messages

2) Effective E-mail Communication

E-mail is a good way to get your message across when:

You need to get in touch with a person who is hard to reach via telephone, does not come to campus regularly, or is not located in the same part of the country or world (for instance, someone who lives in a different time zone).

The information you want to share is not time-sensitive. The act of sending an e-mail is instantaneous, but that does not mean the writer can expect an instantaneous response. For many people, keeping up with their e-mail correspondence is a part of their job, and they only do it during regular business hours. Unless your reader has promised otherwise, assume that it may take a few days for him/her to respond to your message.

You need to send someone an electronic file, such as a document for a course, a spreadsheet full of data, or a rough draft of your paper.

You need to distribute information to a large number of people quickly (for example, a memo that needs to be sent to the entire office staff).

You need a written record of the communication. Saving important e-mails can be helpful if you need to refer back to what someone said in an earlier message, provide some kind of proof (for example, proof that you have paid for a service or product), or review the content of an important meeting, deadline, memo.

http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/effective-e-mail-communication/

Writing Effective Emails

3) Writing Effective Emails

The average office worker receives around 80 emails each day. With that volume of mail, individual messages can easily get overlooked. Follow these simple rules to get your emails noticed and acted upon.

1. Don't overcommunicate by email.
2. Make good use of subject lines.
3. Keep messages clear and brief.
4. Be polite.
5. Check your tone.
6. Proofread.

http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/EmailCommunication.htm
4) Ten Tips for Effective Email

1. Think before you write. Just because you can send information faster than ever before, it does not mean that you should send it. Analyze your readers' needs to make certain that you are sending a message that will be both clear and useful.

2. Remember that you can always deny that you said it. But if you write it, you may be held accountable for many, many moons. You may be surprised to find where your message ends up (as an example of "What Not To Do" in our writing class?).

3. Keep your message concise. Remember that the screen only shows about half of a hard-copy page. Save longer messages and formal reports for regular (snail) or overnight mail. On the other hand, do not keep your message so short that the reader has no idea what you're talking about. Begin long email messages with summaries.

4. Remember that email is not necessarily confidential. Many companies retain the right to monitor employees' messages. (Refer to #1 and #2.) Do not send anything you would not be comfortable seeing published in your company's newsletter (or your community's newspaper).

5. Do not "flame" (send hostile messages to) your readers. It is unprofessional to lose control in person; to do so in writing makes any situation worse. (Refer to #2 and #4.)

6. Don't "spam" your readers. Don't send them unnecessary or frivolous messages. Soon, they'll quit opening any message from you. (Refer to #1.)

7. DON'T TYPE IN ALL CAPS! IT LOOKS LIKE FLAMING! Remember, if you emphasize everything, you will have emphasized nothing.

8. do not type in all lower case (unless you are e.e. cummings). if you violate the rules of english grammar and usage, you make it difficult for the reader to read.

9. Use the Subject line to get the reader's attention. Replace vague lines ("Information on XYZ Project," or "Status Report Q1") with better hooks: Exciting Career Opportunity, Serious Problems with the New Veeblefetzer, or Free Money.

10. Take the time to proofread your document before you sent it. Rub the document thru the spell checker and/or the grammar checker. Even simple typos will make you look sloppie and damage your professional credubility.

http://www.protrainco.com/essays/emltip.htm

Netiquette

5) Netiquette
We expect other drivers to observe the rules of the road. The same is true as we travel through cyberspace. That's where netiquette, a term allegedly coined from either network etiquette or Internet etiquette comes in handy. To guide you through your online communications, keep these pointers in mind:

1. Avoid writing e-mail or posting messages in blogs, newsgroups, forums, chat rooms and other online venues using all capital letters. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING! Not only that, it's difficult to read.

2. When you talk with someone, the tone and inflections of your voice convey great meaning. To add personality and humor to your messages, use smileys, also known as emoticons, expressions you create using the characters on your keyboard. Below are some of the more popular smileys. Can you guess what they mean? Roll your cursor over each one to find out.

3. Keep your written communications focused. This is true whether sending e-mail or posting messages online. Few people like reading lengthy text on a computer screen. Many people now receive e-mail on mobile phones and other portable devices. Tiny screens make reading e-mail challenging.

4. To shorten messages, use common abbreviations:
   < BTW > means By the Way.
   A < G > enclosed in brackets indicates grinning.
   A good one to keep handy in case you're worried about offending someone is < IMHO > -- In My Humble Opinion.
   One of our favorites is < ROTFL >, which stands for Rolling on the Floor Laughing. A shortened version is < LOL >--Laughing Out Loud. And if you get called away while chatting online, try < BRB >--Be Right Back.
   For help with abbreviations, consult a dictionary of Internet Slang.

5. Remember that comments you post to a blog, newsgroup, forum or website and write during a public chat session is a publicly available. You never know who's reading it or who may copy and spread it around. It could come back to haunt you.

6. Stick to the topic when posting a message. Don't indiscriminately post unrelated comments, or worse--advertisements. This practice, known as spamming, will quickly lead to another unpleasant Internet practice, flaming. What is flaming? Sometimes you might offend someone unintentionally. Be prepared to read some angry responses or be treated rudely in a public discussion. This is called being flamed. If you retaliate, you may spark a flame war. To contain the heat, the best response usually is no response at all--or a heartfelt apology.

7. When sending e-mail, make sure that the subject line accurately describes what the message is about. If the topic changes during a string of messages, alter the subject line.

8. If you post a commercial message or send it as an e-mail, clearly identify it in the subject line. That way people who aren't interested can quickly delete it.

9. FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are handy documents to read before asking questions. Always consult them whenever available.

10. Electronic communications may seem ephemeral, but when you hit the Delete key, they don't go away. In all likelihood, your missives are stored on a mail server and can be retrieved. Think twice before you send e-mail. Consider all your electronic communications to be public and act accordingly. The same holds true for comments you post. They usually can't be retracted and live on and on.

Netiquette isn't something you learn overnight, so don't let your fear of not knowing online protocol hold you back. For more tips, visit Wikipedia's netiquette article.

6) Netiquette: Rules of Behavior on the Internet

The etiquette guidelines that govern behavior when communicating on the Internet have become known as netiquette. Netiquette covers not only rules of behavior during discussions but also guidelines that reflect the unique electronic nature of the medium. Netiquette usually is enforced by fellow users who are quick to point out infractions of netiquette rules. The summary of email rules in the information below is based on published sources such as Shea's (2004) online book, Netiquette.

- **Identify yourself:**
  - Begin messages with a salutation and end them with your name.
  - Use a signature (a footer with your identifying information) at the end of a message.

- **Include a subject line.** Give a descriptive phrase in the subject line of the message header that tells the topic of the message (not just "Hi, there!").

- **Avoid sarcasm.** People who don't know you may misinterpret its meaning.

- **Respect others' privacy.** Do not quote or forward personal email without the original author's permission.

- **Acknowledge and return messages promptly.**

- **Copy with caution.** Don't copy everyone you know on each message.

- **No spam (a.k.a. junk mail).** Don't contribute to worthless information on the Internet by sending or responding to mass postings of chain letters, rumors, etc.

- **Be concise.** Keep messages concise—about one screen, as a rule of thumb.

- **Use appropriate language:**
  - Avoid coarse, rough, or rude language.
  - Observe good grammar and spelling.

- **Use appropriate emoticons (emotion icons) to help convey meaning.** Use "smiley's" or punctuation such as :-) to convey emotions. See website list of emoticons at http://netlingo.com/smiley.cfm and http://www.robelle.com/smugbook/smiley.html.

- **Use appropriate intensifiers to help convey meaning:**
  - Avoid "flaming" (online "screaming") or sentences typed in all caps.
  - Use asterisks surrounding words to indicate italics used for emphasis (*at last*).
  - Use words in brackets, such as (grin), to show a state of mind.
  - Use common acronyms (e.g., LOL for "laugh out loud").


**Tips for Effective Email Subject Lines**

7) The 9 Best Email Subject Line Styles to Increase Your Open Rates

There's a lot to be said for minimalism – users need you to be clear and concise in your subject lines, as time is always an asset.
MailChimp conducted an email subject line study and found that short, descriptive subject lines fare better than cheesy lures. Some might bristle up at the accusation that humor and creativity should take a back seat when creating good subject lines for emails, especially since many marketing experts say otherwise. It's worth noting that this succinct approach is most applicable with notification emails, in which a user already has a connection with the content you’re delivering.

Most of these subject line examples involve updates or notifications connected with a user's social media activity, order status, etc. These emails have a specific purpose, and so their subject lines should be specific as well.

http://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2014/03/31/email-subject-lines#.

8) 5 Tips for Writing Winning Subject Lines

Email subject lines are one of the key elements – along with the from line and preview pane – that drives your open rate. In this month’s feature, we share 5 tips to help your subject lines do what they’re supposed to – entice recipients to open your emails and convert.

Tell it like it is.

What’s in your email message? That’s what your subject lines need to succinctly communicate to recipients. If you’re sending an email newsletter, make it clear by including the title and issue. If you have a special promotional offer, highlight that. You may come up with creative, cute, and clever subject lines. But if they don’t tell your readers what they need to know, you’ll not only have poor conversion rates in that email promotion, but you also may damage your reputation for future promotions.

Keep it short and simple.

This is always great advice for subject lines. Your subscribers are likely hurried and quickly browsing through their multitude of mailbox messages to determine which emails to open or delete. Plus, keep in mind that the typical email carrier displays on average between only 38 and 47 characters, and where your subject lines are cut off in a recipient’s mailbox is out of your control. Click here for a spreadsheet tool from Email Marketing Reports that lets you paste in your subject line and see how it reads at different truncation points.

“Front-load” the benefits.

While keeping subject lines short is important, a recent study by the marketing services firm Epsilon shows that focusing only on length won’t deliver the best results. In this study, which analyzed 568 million emails, the choice and order of word placement were found to be just as important as subject line length. Specifically, the study found that email marketers should “front-load” the words that will likely have the biggest impact – including the benefits to readers – placing them within the first few words of the subject line. Here are a couple of examples of
recent FulcrumTech subject lines that followed this advice and performed well: “Boost ROI tenfold with segmentation” and “10 tips for using Twitter.”

Use top brand names and industry buzzwords to improve open rates.

When appropriate to the content of your email messages, include top brand names in your subject lines. Here’s one that we used successfully earlier this year: “5-step strategy to Facebook success.” Plus, consider what industry-specific words (relevant to your email message) are bound to pique your subscribers’ interest. Since search engine optimization (SEO) is currently a hot topic for email marketing, the following subject line is a good example: “Use SEO to build a great list.”

Look beyond the open rates.

Although the open rate is an important criterion for judging the effectiveness of your subject lines, it shouldn’t be the only metric you look at. A subject line may generate a high open rate, for example, but result in below-average click-through and conversion rates. In such a case, your recipients may have determined that a subject line did not relate to your email’s content – or even may have been misleading.

http://www.fulcrumtech.net/resources/email-subject-lines/