

NETIQUETTE

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The principles of correct procedure and of good manners which were once understood and accepted by the educated few, now with international and global trade, need to be looked at again in the light of the advent of the Internet, the world wide web (www) and email programmes essential to the life of modern business.

In broad terms, good manners and procedures equal etiquette and vice versa. These travelled from social life into business life over a slow period of some five thousand years. But in the past fifteen years, those good manners and procedures have come under pressures as never before because of the Internet.

Previously, a scribe or letter-writer would laboriously write or type a single letter and dispatch it to its intended addressee. The typewriter gave us the ability to carbon copy (cc.) an item rather easily, and the stenographer – the original typist - could send perhaps half a dozen carbon copies to interested parties.

With the arrival of the Internet and the world wide web, a single email or piece of electronic mail can be sent either to a single person or to a million or more people on a mailing list, with one touch of a key.

New procedures of good manners and etiquette, be they for business in general or the translator in particular, have therefore been needed and a new form of etiquette has arisen, simply called Netiquette.

Netiquette is a neologism made up from *interNET* and *etIQUETTE*. It comes in various forms, such as customary, conventional, technical, social, or even, unwritten etiquette.

Conventional Netiquette

All things are ok to those who between themselves agree on them. Conventional Netiquette however is for things NOT so individually agreed.

In sending emails, it is, at present, conventional to write in a general business letter or agreed format e.g. avoiding rich text format such as coloured print, no **bold**, no *italics*, no underlining unless **previously** so agreed.

The reasoning is simple. There are many email software packages around the world, in many languages whose internal structures, letters and ideograms work differently.

Putting words into *italics* is simple in Western languages but has different implications in other language. Underlining words is not possible in other languages whose letters 'sit' or 'hang' from a line, where the underlining simply looks bad.

It is conventional to have your Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) settings among your Internet options set to the International Standards Organisation Western Alphabet ISO-8859-1 unless otherwise agreed. This setting gives you the reader and sending of emails a maximum set of symbols and diacritics to cover most western languages.

Nor should the sender of emails write in strange or unusual formats as would be avoided in a normal business letter.

How are you?
I
hope you well!

While the above is quite understandable, it is not normal or conventional.

Cultural Netiquette

International Readership

It is important to remember that a mailing list is very often international in its readership. As a rule of thumb, never send a joke about politics, religion or sex. The hilarious joke in your culture may well be quite insulting on the opposite side of the world.

Racism

Strictly speaking, racism is that stated or implied communication either that one race, nation or people is superior to any or all others or that one race, nation or people is inferior to any or all others.

In a broader sense, the word racism is widely used, though improperly, to imply intolerance of others not of your own nationality or race. Such connotations or intolerance are **NOT** acceptable Netiquette.

Prejudice

Prejudice is the inability to accept new facts due to a preconceived opinion.

In an Internet forum where new facts of a technical nature appear every day and where an open mind is essential for progress, prejudice is a poor companion.

Almost ALL people, due to failures in their education, are prejudiced in some area or another, pro or con choices and tastes. It may be as simple in matters of dress or food. It is more serious when it refers to people or categories of persons or caste. It can therefore only be through gradual further education through contact with other cultures or ways of life that such prejudice can be overcome.

Customary Netiquette

Internet politeness dictates that one writes in both small and CAPITAL letters. SENTENCES SHOULD NOT BE WRITTEN IN FULL IN CAPITALS. This is deemed to be SHOUTING over the Internet and is held to be impolite.

The use of a single word in CAPITALS may be used as form of emphasis, as mailing lists, at present, generally do not allow for underscoring, underlining or *italics* for emphasis.

Social Netiquette

This is netiquette as applied to society generally.

Bad manners

Simply put, bad manners are essentially unacceptable social behaviour which their owner fails to realise is offensive to others. Such behaviour can only be corrected by the example and words of others. While prejudice resides in opinion, bad manners reside in conduct.

Tone

The disrespectful tone of a communication may contain portions of all the points made in this section on social Netiquette.

It essentially arises from the inability of the writer to realise that the addressee is entitled to just as much respect for their informed opinion and stance the writer is to his/hers. Tone is basically a question of respectful space in our addressing of others.

Lack of professionalism

This problem is essentially one of correct education in the business field by accepting, respecting and maintaining agreed protocols. It can only be addressed initially by drawing the person's attention to the fact and then subsequently to their professional grouping.

Lack of discretion

This problem is essentially one of lack of correct standards of social interaction. It is a learnt code of behaviour and can only be addressed by a direct one to one contact with the person concerned.

Dishonesty

This problem, whether real or imagined, is a question of the person's morality and culture or of as a deliberate failure to respect contracts.

Dishonesty can only be addressed in three basic forms:

- one, appealing directly to the person concerned pointing out the wrong;
- two, appealing to the person's professional body for assistance;
- three, appealing for assistance to the laws of the respective land.

Technical Netiquette

Data Transmission

Technical Netiquette refers to the easing of systems of transmission of data, by having one's own computer system set up properly so that it will not cause problems to others, *e.g.* by always sending receipt of acknowledgement emails, by having date and time set accurately, *etc.*

Snip and Clip

When referring to a previous email message, please *Copy and paste*, or have the computer settings adjusted accordingly. There is **no need** to quote the entire previous message, simply the relevant portion to show the connection or point you are making.

Quoting the entire message again takes up what is called *bandwidth* or an excessive waste of time and space on Internet transmissions.

Bandwidth

Never send a person a very large file megabyte (MB), *e.g.* 50 MB, without first clearing it with the distant party. Not every internet user has ISDN or broadband. ASDL settings may well be in place either to reject large files or to keep them stored. In either case, the client does not get to see your transmitted file.

However, if a large file is sent, its downloading may well *take over* the distant party's computer for 15 to 20 minutes, which is wrong, where no advance warning has been given and transmission rates are slow.

What is unwritten Netiquette?

This is what many people take for granted in all cultures, *e.g.* no derogatory comments about dying, sick or invalid persons. When in doubt, leave it out!

If you have the slightest doubt about the correctness of your message on a mailing list, ask a Moderator or colleague before you send it.

What is flaming?

Flaming is sending an angry reply to an email you have received. Please *never* do it to a person or to a mailing list. If you lose your cool, it means that you have lost the argument, whatever it may have been. In the cool light of morning, flaming looks bad and reads worse.

What is phishing?

Phishing is dictionary-defined as '*the fraudulent practice of sending emails purporting to be from reputable companies in order to induce individuals to reveal personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers.*' **Never ever** reply to any such email.

What is spam?

Spam is generally any unsolicited email that you receive. There may be a 'unsubscribe' instruction at the bottom of the message. Use this 'unsubscribe' function with caution.

Most modern email programmes allow you to create filters to help you get rid of any email not addressed specifically to you.

To send unsolicited emails to person you do not know is considered impolite and annoying, and, in some jurisdictions, it is now an offence in law.

There is a perceived difference between getting a flyer in through the letter-box

and a spam email. Spam, by its volume affects not just you and your computer, but frequently causes the failure of your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or server if you are on a Local Area Network (LAN).

If the spam persists, simply send the email back to the ISP server to abuse@(put in the domain of the spam email) and most importantly, send it with the **FULL** headers. Each ISP has an officer who is obliged to stop spam when notified of it.

The YahooGroups system of email mailing lists does not allow for spam and it has various in-built anti-spam protection measures which normally do actually work!

Historically, spam was a type of unappealing tinned/canned meat. Certain unappealing users of the Internet has merely resurrected it in a new form!

Conclusions

Overall, netiquette is learned behaviour. In the increasingly fast-moving world of business whose procedures are more than ever not just international but global, it is very difficult, at times, to find a work ethic which embraces and respects the best in all cultures. The field of translation, as part of that great business world, is not immune to the influences which daily impinge upon its activities.

Translation has left the quill and inkwell behind. It has left the cloistered and quiet world of monasteries and exchanged its venue for the world's marketplaces. In twenty five years' time, our Netiquette will have changed, but for the moment, the above points on Netiquette are some of the best of what we have to hand.

Comments are most welcome and can be sent to translations@infomarex.com

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