

Secure Your E-Mail Usage

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Acknowledging the hazards associated with the careless use of E-mail given the extreme, demonstrated vulnerabilities and unsecured nature of this mode of communication, just how can E-mail be used without exposing sensitive information to possible loss? This article will explain what type of information should not be entrusted to E-mail, and how to safely and properly structure the body of your E-mail messages.

What first must be understood and accepted by all who use E-mail, is that this method of communications is intended for only **non-critical – quick messaging**. Remember the “Postcard Test” – **E-mail should contain only information that you would be just as comfortable with if it were sent written on the back of a postcard**. If the information is too sensitive to trust to the open nature of a postcard – it has NO business being sent via E-mail, or even being anywhere on the Internet!

Below are just three examples of both the right and wrong way to use the E-mail system;

E-mail Example A:

Wrong; *“Hector, as the Vice President of Marketing I thought you should know that the XYZ Company will soon be asking for bids to provide them with rental cars for their National trade show to be held in our city three months from now. My cousin who works in their purchasing department leaked this advance information to me by phone today, and told me that a Mr. Arlen in Corporate Transportation is the one who will be reviewing the bids! I think we should prepare a special quotation package and send it to this Mr. Arlen ASAP, and we may even be able to ace out the other bidders before they are even aware of their upcoming rental needs!!! If you would like to speak to Mr. Arlen, my cousin also gave me his number – (xxx) xxx-xxxx. The contract worth is supposed to be around the eighty thousand dollar mark, by their own internal estimates!!! I think we could easily walk away with the contract! I will send you more info soon!”*

Right; *“Hector, I need to meet with you at your earliest opportunity. I have something to discuss with you that I think you may be very interested in.”*

In Example A’s “Wrong” exemplar above, the writer not only fully exposes the details of a very profitable potential business opportunity to numerous forms of compromise which may cost the company a chance at winning the bid, but also provides enough detail to give any competitor who may be privy to this information – a real chance at successfully winning the contract for themselves. The details that were transmitted in the E-mail should have been completely omitted. In the “Right” sample, the writer correctly only transmits the need to meet with Hector to discuss important issues. Also, the way the message was written in the “Right” sample, conveys a sense of importance to Hector – without displaying needless urgency which would draw undue interest in the meeting by potentially aggressive parties. Thus any illicit interception of this E-mail communiqué, would not at all betray the true importance of the issues to be discussed, nor does it draw any undue attention to the future meeting – for the potential compromise of the discussion (by “bugging” devices & related tactics) should aggressive elements be intercepting this company’s E-mail traffic (a favorite supplemental tactic of professional operatives).

E-mail Example B:

Wrong; *“Sandra – when you told me that they were going to fire Dan because of his stealing from the company, I thought its about time! That skunk has been raiding the company funds for the past five years that I know of, and the rumors around my corner of the office is that he has been getting away with it MUCH longer than that! Can you believe that he even created phony reports and filings to inflate the stocks worth, so he can sell his shares at a huge profit?!?”*

I'm shredding all of the documents with my name on them so when the you know what hits the fan, I won't be involved. You should do the same and if you still have any shares in your benefits package – sell them NOW! I will let you know what happens here when I hear the results of their special meeting next Tuesday. Its going to get much hotter around here!!!”

Right: Guess what? There is no “Right” for this questionable type of communiqué. Actual examples of this type of E-mail have been (and still are today!) the central and primary piece of evidence of many a criminal investigations focus. Not only does this kind of E-mail disclose full knowledge of fraudulent and criminal activity (including serious criminal actions which fall into the purview of the S.E.C.), but it also points the finger of complicity to the E-mail parties, and their deliberate efforts to conceal and destroy vital pieces of evidence. When this E-mail is discovered, it will by itself cause unimaginable damage to all parties concerned - though it will not be sole source of their problems! (P.S.; Anyone participating in this type of activity – is already beyond our help!)

E-mail Example C:

Wrong; *“Danny, don't forget the meeting on the 15th, in the main conference room on the 3^d floor. It starts at 8AM. I need to meet with you before the meeting starts to ask you about some questions I still have about our purchase of the XYZ company, so meet me there bout 7:30AM. This purchase is going to put our competitors on their ears when it hits the news – and I need to have certain cover stories straight before it does. Have your projection figures ready and the plans for the sell-off of their sales divisions and the management cuts we decided on. Danson the COO and his staff including the legal teams, are going to be at the meeting and I know they are going want those figures to pick apart. Also, we still have to find out who will be the new CEO at XYZ after the purchase, so bring the candidates short list with you. See you there.”*

Right; *“Danny, I need to talk to you about an upcoming meeting. We need to meet to discuss some questions I have beforehand. Call me to set up a good time.*

In Example C's “Wrong” exemplar, the writer gives away extremely confidential and valuable strategic information about the firms planned purchase of a company, and also provides all of the information a professional operative (or even a rank amateur!) would need to pre-bug the meeting site to collect even more sensitive information on very critical future actions. Details such as meeting location, time and discussion topics will fully qualify this meeting as a target not to be missed for full compromise, by any aggressive parties which may benefit by the information to be disclosed. Many serious company losses at the hands of both professional and amateur operatives, have their successful origins in just this type of e-mail transmission. In the “Right” exemplar, the writer again only advises Danny that the need for a pre-meeting exists, for the discussion of meeting topics. As in Example “A”, no critical information is disclosed and neither is undue interest in the future meeting generated by the way the message is conveyed.

Think back, have you ever carelessly or inadvertently discussed sensitive issues via E-mail? Are you still? Do you now see why this mode of communication is so often exploited by pro's and amateur espionage operatives alike – for the wealth of information that is guaranteed to them?

If your current E-mail practices conform more with the “Wrong” exemplars presented here, than with the “Right” versions - we strongly recommend that you promptly initiate revisions to the prevailing usage of E-mail, and that all parties be fully advised as to the dangers associated with the careless and unguarded use of the E-mail system. Make no mistake, E-mail is extremely vulnerable to MANY forms of undetected compromise by numerous avenues. Failure to recognize this fact and properly modify and adjust your usage of this perilous mode of communications, may someday add you or your firm to the rapidly growing ranks of newly certified victims. Disregard secure procedures at your own peril.

Be Smart - Practice "Safe E-mail"!

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