



# **Don't Assume That People Will Read Your Email**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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My grandchildren think I am out-of-date. You see I still use email! They choose Facebook and other forms of social media to communicate and hardly ever check to see if they have messages "the old-fashioned way" through an email account.

Now I realize that work and businesses are still using email but that does not at all guarantee that the messages you are sending out will be noticed, let alone read. Here are some of the reasons why this occurs:

1. **Most people are overwhelmed** with the amount of information that is thrown at them every day. Everywhere they turn they are inundated with advertising as well as both requested and unrequested communications from sources that are all vying for their attention. Not everyone is able to prioritize or even handle the demands that are placed on them.
2. **Email messages are often long and boring** - We are becoming more and more used to receiving 140-character tweets or extremely short text messages. When an email arrives, it frankly just looks like too much work to read it!
3. **Many people lack organizational or writing skills** - Before computers we did not like it when people were slow in returning our messages or replying to snail mail letters - but we accepted it. Today, the work of reading and responding to emails can take a large chunk out of the day and those who are not able or willing to devote that time and energy might not meet society's expectations for immediate response.
4. **Priorities and personal habits can interfere with communication** - In the "helping professions" I frequently hear people state "people are more important than paper" but sometimes that seems like an excuse to ignore things that are really important. If a person is uncomfortable with technology or just doesn't think that it should have precedence over other duties might never get messages in a timely fashion.
5. **Messages might lack personal tone** - When you see a list of several people in the address line it is kind of hard to imagine that the message is really created with you in mind. Sometimes the words that are used are very formal which implies distance and at other times, they might be of an overly friendly and almost cheeky type which does not match up with the way you might talk with the writer in person. You know they are not being authentic. People generally want to think that if you really want them to attend a function or participate in a project because you have something to offer and that might not be communicated at a personal level through email.
6. **It's easy to ignore email or make up excuses that you didn't get it** - There is nothing like a telephone call or face-to-face meeting to ensure accountability. You never can be sure, however, if someone got or read the message that you have sent them by email. They might not have received it or might actually just have discounted its importance or decided not to reply.

I remember in the days before computers when we were given messages that said, "Computers will replace humans and the need for paper". Well, I really don't think either of those predictions have materialized. In fact, technology has shrunk our world to the point that everyone who has a

computer has opportunity to place demands on our time through an email message that only takes minutes to create and send.

So, if you are planning something that is important to you, want participation from your colleagues or have information that you believe is vital for others to read and understand, it is likely best to make a personal telephone call or meet with them in person. This will allow you to relay your invitation, talk about the commitment that they are willing and able to make or ensure that the information you provided was received and understood.