

## **SIGBI Email Protocol**

In the old days of pen and ink and even the early days of the word processor, which most of us can still remember, it was usual to read through the letter or memo we had written, indeed some of us may even have planned the note in rough draft before typing it up. It was printed off and put in an envelope and sent, by internal or external postal service. All of this took time and involved some careful consideration to what we wrote in those letters and memos and how we phrased things. The Internet is a wonderful place, it speeds up our response time, it enables us to communicate with each other whatever time zone we are in, whatever we are doing, wherever we log in and if you have mobile email on your mobile phone or other handheld device – anywhere we are! There are drawbacks however to all this wonderful speedy communication. People do not give as much thought or consideration to the words they use or the tone they adopt to write emails. They are often written in haste and maybe even while multitasking! It is timely for us as Soroptimists to give some thought to just how we use that medium and to be sure we are upholding the ideals and objects of our organisation in the way we communicate electronically.

### **Why are you sending this email?**

Consider communicating the information in a phone call or face to face conversation. When our email system went down at work recently I was shocked to see how many members of staff sat listlessly in front of their dead screens and could not think of any other way to communicate. Something long and involved which people need to read and analyse does need to go by email. A message to someone on the other side of the globe who lives in a different time zone does need an email. But ‘do you want to share a lift with me to Regional meeting?’ could be a phone call away!

The expectation is that the person that email is being sent ‘to’ is expected to act on the message or to respond. The person sent a copy in the ‘cc’ field is being sent for information. If you want to copy this to other(s) but you do not want other recipients to know about this, use the ‘bcc’ field. Anyone else should not be included.

### **Content**

Use the subject field to identify clearly what the content is about, so that users can prioritise and file their emails.

Avoid writing in CAPITAL LETTERS as this is the electronic equivalent of shouting. It is worth remembering that most email authoring is done in plain text and this is the most compatible format for people to read regardless of their provider, browser or internet connection. If you prepare your content in another package, such as Word, and paste it into your email, you may find that formatting, codes, punctuation or even language does not translate readily to the e mail package in which it is being read.

Avoid sending unnecessary information, keep emails brief and to the point. It is good practice if possible to focus on one topic per email. Sending and receiving large amounts of email makes it far easier for important messages to go unnoticed. Using the ‘priority’ or ‘urgent’ flag when sending an email that requires urgent attention helps your recipient to identify that urgent action is required. Do not misuse this or the object will be defeated.

### **Tone and language**

Never email in haste, consider the facts and consequences of the message. Imagine yourself in the position of the recipient and read the content through to gauge how you would feel about receiving the message. Would you send the message to a work colleague or your line manager if this was a business email? Would you send it to a supplier, customer or client? Consider the sensitivities of the potential recipient and alter or tone down any phraseology as appropriate. Be professional and careful about what you say about others as emails are easily and sometimes inappropriately or accidentally forwarded.

If you are forwarding an email received from someone else, check that all the content in previous emails in the 'string' are appropriate to be forwarded to a third person. Offence can be caused or sensitive information can be inadvertently forwarded at the end of a long exchange between other people.

### **Signing off**

Identify yourself in each message, include your name and any Soroptimist position at the end, and a relevant web address – the SIGBI one ([www.soroptimist-gbi.org](http://www.soroptimist-gbi.org)) or your own Club, Region, National Association if more appropriate to the audience. Omit details such as home phone number and address unless you are sure that you want to be contacted in this way and want all recipients to have this information. Signatures can be set up automatically to save time and provide a formal style response.

### **Checking delivery**

If it is important to you to know that your email has been received by the recipient, it is advisable to set it up so that you are automatically advised when it is received or opened. Most email accounts allow for you to set 'acknowledge receipt' or 'request receipt' before you press 'send'.

### **Attachments**

Careful consideration should be given before sending large attachments, especially if you are uncertain of the capacity of the recipient's in box or of the resilience and speed of their internet connection.

Attachments should always be sent as a common file type, eg Word, Excel or as a pdf wherever possible. Sound and graphics attached to emails will reduce the speed of delivery to your recipient, avoid attaching these items if they are not pertinent to the message being sent.

The sender should always state on the email what the attachment is and the purpose for which it is sent.

Never send attachments to journalists, paste press releases into the message and never attach large photographs which are unsolicited. If photographs are requested, it is best to send a sample as a thumbnail and to send a high resolution version once the journalist has confirmed the size and quality required.

### **Sensitive information**

Emails should be regarded as the electronic equivalent of a postcard. Anyone can read its content along the delivery path. Sensitive information should always be sent by post or via a secure transfer system. Marking emails as 'confidential' or 'private' does not ensure their security. It is possible to password protect the content of an email or of files sent as attachments and if this is done, it is advisable to send the password to the intended recipient via an alternative means (eg phone call, text message)

### **Copyright and legal issues**

Be aware of copyright and libel issues for example when sending scanned text, pictures of information downloaded from the internet. Be aware too of data protection issues when sending personal information by email. Do you have permission to disclose this information? An email can be contractually binding. Therefore care should be taken when expressing personal views that these cannot be misinterpreted as belonging to SIGBI. Never send an email that is offensive, threatening, defamatory or illegal. Emails can constitute harassment and can be used as evidence of such. Emails have also been used successfully in defamation and libel cases.

### **Group emails**

If you are sending an email to a large group of people, check that they all need to receive it. Do not copy in a long list of people in a response email unless you are sure that all the recipients, and not just the originator, need to see your reply.

### **Using workplace email**

Many members choose to use their workplace email account for Soroptimist activities. You should check with your line manager or equivalent that this is acceptable and it is always best to get approval for this in writing. Your workplace may have its own code of practice or protocol on use of email and you should check that using it for communication not connected to your employment is acceptable. There may be legal implications for your employer of your use of email for non work activities because emails sent from an organisation or a company carry the same authority in law as letters on headed notepaper. If you are using your workplace email with the appropriate permission, check also that they are happy for you to add your Soroptimist signature at the end.

If your employer does not wish you to use your work email account for Soroptimist communication, it is very easy (and free) to set up a personal 'google' or 'yahoo' account. Once you have set it up you can log in and collect emails on any computer or mobile device that links you to the internet. It is important that you regularly check any additional accounts you set up so that email does not go unanswered or unacknowledged.

### **Spam Emails**

The term 'spam' is used to describe junk received by email. Typically spam is unsolicited, sent in bulk and will contain commercial content. Many contain 'get rich quick', 'too good to be true' or pornographic content. It is estimated that about half of all emails sent are spam. It is almost impossible to protect your email account from such unwanted emails. Most email providers allow you to set a spam filter but be careful that you do not set it so high that it filters out (for example) attachments or 'yahoo' or 'google' email accounts, which many members use for communication.

Spammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated and will employ various methods to distribute their messages and avoid detection. One such method is known as 'spoofing', where address details are taken from another email or an address list or more often are simply guessed at. The most common form is to receive an email purportedly from 'yourself' to yourself. It is almost impossible to protect yourself from spam or spoof emails. Do not reply to spam, even if it offers an 'unsubscribe' link. This just confirms to the spammers that the email address is active, and can result in more spam.

### **What is a virus?**

A virus is a piece of programming code usually designed as something else that causes some unexpected and usually undesirable event. A virus is often designed so that it is automatically spread to other computer users, for example as an email attachment, as a file download. The sender of the email is often unaware that they have sent a virus. Viruses are activated when the program or attachment in which they are contained is opened. If a virus attacks a computer, it can corrupt or delete all stored information from the hard drive, including system software.

You should keep your computer protected with a reputable anti-virus package and ensure it is kept updated with the latest virus profiles.

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