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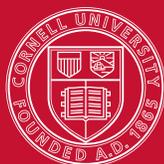


Hospitality Managers and Communication Technologies: Challenges and Solutions

Cornell Hospitality Report

Vol. 9, No. 18, December 2009

by Judi Brownell, Ph.D., and Amy Newman



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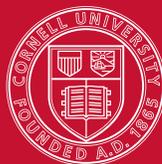
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A study on communication technologies among a convenience sample of 100 hotel managers found that email is both pervasive and intrusive, while other new media (i.e., instant messaging, intranets, wikis, and blogs) are only gradually gaining a foothold in the hotel industry. Although the volume of email was a concern for these hotel managers, even more challenging was the issue of ensuring that messages accurately conveyed both information and emotion. Respondents disagreed somewhat on how quickly one should respond to an email. While most thought a 24-hour turnaround was acceptable, others were willing to let matters slide longer—potentially incurring dissatisfaction from customers and coworkers. Even in such a small sample, respondents showed divergent attitudes toward the technologies based on their age, gender, and native language. For example, as compared to men, women were particularly unhappy with poor grammar and punctuation in emails they received. Young respondents differed considerably from older respondents on the challenge of clarity in received emails, and those for whom English was a second language were most concerned that they could send clear, grammatical emails. Respondents could appreciate the potential value of intranets and other new communication vehicles, but they reported little implementation of those technologies.

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Email has become so ubiquitous that most of us cannot imagine living—or working—without it. To be sure, email absorbs much time. If, for example, you receive 50 messages each work day and send 25, with an average of two minutes spent per email, you're spending 75 days each year on email.¹ Despite people's heavy use of email, we must note its inherent weaknesses. First, all that time spent does not make users more competent communicators or more confident that they have sent an appropriate message. More to the point, hospitality employees, much like their counterparts in other industries, struggle with managing large numbers of messages, understanding what senders really mean, and getting their point across—while striving to maintain positive working relationships with colleagues, customers, and the public. Similarly, related communication technologies, such as instant messaging (IM), intranets, document-sharing, wikis, social networking sites, and blogs provide both opportunities and challenges for how we communicate at work. While many of the challenges brought about by these technologies are universal, the hospitality industry is distinguished by its need to manage guest relationships and expectations without the benefit of face-to-face contact. Every interaction provides an opportunity to build a customer relationship and thereby attract future business.

¹ A calculation first suggested in: M. Song, V. Halsey, and T. Burrell, *The Hamster Revolution* (San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler Publishers, 2007).

Focusing on the use of communication technologies by hotel managers, this report addresses the following questions: How much time do hospitality managers spend on email? What challenges do they confront in sending and receiving messages? Are hospitality managers taking advantage of emerging technologies to accomplish their communication goals?

We first review related studies on the use of email and other communication technologies in business environments. We then summarize the results of a convenience survey of hospitality managers that explored the nature of their daily practices and sought to identify the challenges they confront. After presenting these findings, we provide recommendations to managers who want to improve their business communication effectiveness through more informed use of technologies at work. We suggest that managers can benefit from a better understanding not only of email protocol, but of the potential that other emerging communication technologies offer for improving effectiveness in the hospitality workplace.

Studies of Email

Email has become a standard form of business communication. A 2006 survey of 150 senior executives found that, over the previous five-year period, email had replaced the telephone as the method of communication used most frequently at work. Over 70 percent of respondents selected

email as their most frequent communication channel, with only 14 percent choosing face-to-face communication.²

A review of the literature regarding email challenges in the workplace tells us that email overload continues to be one of the most significant issues.³ This overload comes not only from the number of emails which employees must manage daily, but also from vaguely worded, unclear requests and the feeling that one should respond quickly. Another frequently mentioned concern is the use of email to delegate tasks, which typically drags people into what often becomes a long email chain among several parties. In a 2006 study, researchers found that 56 percent of the employees who responded agreed that email is used too frequently instead of face-to-face communication.⁴ Respondents also felt that too many people are copied unnecessarily on messages, adding further to the perception of email overload.

Several studies have focused on specific practices related to email use. Employees commonly drop other tasks

² OfficeTeam, “‘We never talk anymore.’ Survey reveals few executives use telephone or meet in person at work,” January 18, 2006, retrieved on July 29, 2009, from www.officeteam.com/PressRoom?id=1601.

³ G.F. Thomas and C.L. King, “Reconceptualizing E-mail Overload,” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, Vol. 20 (2006), pp. 252-287.

⁴ T.W. Jackson, A. Burgess, and J. Edwards, “A Simple Approach to Improving Email Communication,” *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 49, No. 6 (June 2006), pp. 107-109.

when they receive an email alert and immediately read (and respond to) incoming messages—a process which, according to one study, causes 64 seconds of recovery time for each email.⁵ With numerous emails, the damage to productivity is considerable, given that employees interrupt other work so they can react to an email within six seconds, and then need more than a minute to return to their previous work situation.

The growing volume of legitimate and spam email compounds the problem. A 2009 survey reported that spam accounted for over 90 percent of all email received.⁶ Even without spam, business-related email is growing. Another study found a tenfold increase in the size of email archives from 1996 to 2006.⁷ Users at this technology company had significantly expanded the number folders they used for categorizing email (an average of 133 in 2006, compared with 47 in 1996).

Although expectations for email response time vary widely, most managers try to respond within 24 hours.⁸ In one recent study, hotel guests who had sent an email complaint indicated that both their satisfaction and intention to return to the hotel were related to the time it took the hotel to respond to their questions. Reported customer satisfaction and return intent dropped steadily within the first 24 hours and then again after a week of non-response. In this study, 60 percent of guests waited longer than 48 hours for a response.⁹

Another study noted the key role of subject lines, finding that 35 percent of users open messages because of what is in the subject line.¹⁰ Most subject lines contain from 8 to 47 characters. Longer lines were found to be less effective unless the sender was attempting to reach highly targeted audiences.

Determining the intended tone of emails is another ongoing issue that managers regularly confront. Without vocal or other nonverbal cues, employees struggle to understand the true meaning of emails and often misinterpret messages.¹¹ In fact, one study found that receivers often misinterpret work emails as having a more negative tone than the author intended. Characteristics of both the sender and receiver, including gender, status, age, and previous relationship, influence the way messages are interpreted.¹²

Emails containing inappropriate content or emotion can be disastrous. Examples of individuals and companies suffering the consequences of having sent emotional emails—angry, sarcastic, distressed—are not difficult to find.¹³ Complicating the situation is the fact that communicators generally believe that their messages are more effective than receivers perceive them to be.¹⁴ In particular, Kruger found that email users are overconfident in their ability to appropriately communicate emotions such as seriousness, anger, and sorrow.¹⁵

One email solution to the challenge of expressing emotions is emoticons. Krohn, following his review of literature on this subject, concludes that the use of emoticons should be based on the recipient's age category.¹⁶ His continuum begins with Traditionalists (born before 1946) and Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), who should receive messages without these cues. Generation Xers (born between 1964 and 1980) and Millennials (born after 1980), on the other hand, expect a more generous use of emoticons in the emails they receive.

Email can also be the source of public embarrassment and discovery in litigation. Countrywide Financial Corporation and other companies have seen internal emails distributed on the internet—with considerable damage to their reputations.¹⁷ According to an American Management Association study, 24 percent of companies have had

⁵ T.W. Jackson, R. Dawson, and D. Wilson, "Understanding Email Interaction Increases Organizational Productivity," *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 46, No. 8 (2003), pp. 80-84.

⁶ L. Whitney, "Report: Spam Now 90 Percent of All E-mail," *CNET News*, May 26, 2009. Retrieved on June 15, 2009, from http://news.cnet.com/8301-1009_3-10249172-83.html/.

⁷ D. Fisher, A.J. Brush, E. Gleave, and M.A. Smith, "Revisiting Whittaker & Sidner's 'Email Overload' Ten Years Later," *Microsoft Research, SSCW 2006 Conference*, November 4-8, 2006 (Banff, Alberta, Canada, ACM Press, 2006), pp. 309-312.

⁸ Y.M. Kalman and S. Rafaeli, "Email Chronemics: Unobtrusive Profiling of Response Times," *Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2005.

⁹ A.S. Mattila and D.J. Mount, "The Impact of Selected Customer Characteristics and Response Time on E-complaint Satisfaction and Return Intent," *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2002), pp. 135-145.

¹⁰ EmailStatCenter. www.emailstatcenter.com/SubjectLines.html (retrieved on July 29, 2009).

¹¹ D. Goleman, "E-Mail Is Easy to Write (and to Misread)," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2007, section 3, page 17; and J. Kruger, N. Epley, J. Parker, and Z. Ng, "Egocentrism over E-mail: Can We Communicate as Well as We Think?," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 89, No. 6 (2005), pp. 925-936.

¹² K. Byron, "Carrying Too Heavy a Load? The Communication and Miscommunication of Emotion by Email," *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2008), pp. 309-327.

¹³ D. Shipley and W. Schwalbe, *SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

¹⁴ Kruger *et al.*, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ F. Krohn, "A Generational Approach to Using Emoticons as Nonverbal Communication," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, Vol. 34 (2004), pp. 321-328.

¹⁷ E. Friedlander, "Oops! Countrywide Chairman Mozilo's 'Disgusting' Email," May 21, 2008. Retrieved on June 11, 2009, from <http://blogs.wsj.com/developments/2008/05/21/oops-countrywide-chairman-mozilos-disgusting-email/>.

email subpoenaed in lawsuits, 15 percent of companies have fought lawsuits triggered by employee email, and 26 percent have terminated employees for misusing email.¹⁸ In addition, threats from hackers and viruses, as well as security issues, continue to plague organizations.

Emerging Technologies: IM, Intranets, and Social Media

Although email persists as the most pervasive communication technology in most organizations, other options are emerging. Instant messaging is becoming increasingly popular in companies, and corporate intranets are evolving to incorporate more social media capabilities, such as wikis and blogs. A number of these options provide hospitality managers with cost-effective approaches to build customer relationships and connect employees in new ways.

Research reveals evidence that IM is used not only as an additional communication option but in preference to the telephone, email, and face-to-face communication.¹⁹ IM users report lower levels of disruptive interruptions than non-users.²⁰ Employees believe that IMs provided timely, relevant information—at the time they choose. Multi-tasking with IM as one of several activities is common.²¹

The 2006 AMA study mentioned above reported that 35 percent of employees use IM at work, and a Gartner analyst predicts that by 2015 approximately 95 percent of employees will use IM as their primary communications tool for voice, video, and text chatting.²² Of those using IM at work in 2004, 68 percent believed IM was positive overall, 50 percent believed it saves “some” to “a lot” of time, and 11 percent said they couldn’t live without it.²³ The next decade is likely to bring even greater dependence on this business communication method.

However, as with email, companies need to be concerned about IM security and potential liability. Fifty percent

of workplace IM users admitted downloading and installing free IM tools from the internet,²⁴ and 24 percent of employees admitted sending or receiving jokes, gossip, and disparaging remarks through IM.

Intranets. Intranets seem well established in many corporations in the United States and other countries. Seventy-one percent of 561 organizations surveyed internationally in late 2008 and early 2009 had used an intranet for more than five years.²⁵ Social media, or Intranet 2.0 tools, are now present in almost 50 percent of companies in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. For instance, 93 percent of the largest companies in Finland have intranets.²⁶ The most commonly implemented Intranet 2.0 tools are discussion forums (46 percent), wikis (47 percent), and blogs (45 percent).²⁷

Despite their pervasiveness, intranets have offered at best mixed results for companies and their employees. Seventy-four percent of respondents in the Finland study considered intranets to be an important source of company information.²⁸ Despite intranets’ potential to encourage increased employee collaboration and interaction,²⁹ however, only 29 percent of organizations’ respondents in the Prescient Digital Media study rated functionality of new social media tools as good or very good, and 24 percent rated them as poor or very poor.

Wikis. A well established concept, wikis may be considered the evolution of online document-sharing and discussion forums. Today, wikis incorporate these functions and others for a designated online community to share and create knowledge. A 2005 study of enterprise wiki users found that wikis made work easier and helped organizations reuse knowledge, increase collaboration efficiency, and improve work processes.³⁰

Blogs. Like wikis, blogs are one of the fastest growing social media tools for businesses, whether internal (exclusive for employees) or external (public for customers and other

¹⁸ American Management Association and the ePolicy Institute. 2006 Workplace E-mail, Instant Messaging and Blog Survey. Retrieved July 29, 2009, from www.epolicyinstitute.com/survey2006Summary.pdf.

¹⁹ A.F. Cameron and J. Webster, “Unintended Consequences of Emerging Communication Technologies: Instant Messaging in the Workplace,” *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 21 (2005), pp. 85-103.

²⁰ R.K. Garrett and J.N. Danziger, “IM = Interruption Management? Instant Messaging and Disruption in the Workplace,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2007), article 2.

²¹ E. Shiu and A. Lenhart, “How Americans Use Instant Messaging,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. September 2004. Retrieved on July 29, 2009, from www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2004/How-Americans-Use-Instant-Messaging.aspx.

²² American Management Association, *loc.cit.*; J. Fenn *et al.* “Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, 2008 [ID Number: G00159496]. Retrieved on May 20, 2009, from www.gartner.com/technology/research/methodologies/hypeCycles.jsp.

²³ Shiu and Lenhart, *op.cit.*

²⁴ American Management Association, *loc.cit.*

²⁵ J.J. Mills, “Intranet 2.0 Becomes Mainstream. 2008. Retrieved June 28, 2009, from www.prescientdigital.com/articles/intranet-articles/intranet-2-0-becomes-mainstream/.

²⁶ S. Lehmuskallio, “The Uses, Roles, and Contents of Intranets in Multinational Companies in Finland,” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July 2006), pp. 288-324.

²⁷ Mills, *loc.cit.*

²⁸ Lehmuskallio, *op.cit.*

²⁹ S. Holtz, *Corporate Conversations: A Guide to Crafting Effective and Appropriate Internal Communications* (New York: AMACOM, 2004); and J. Nielsen, “Enterprise Portals Are Popping.” July 14, 2008. Retrieved on June 28, 2009, from www.useit.com/alertbox/portals.html/.

³⁰ A. Majchrzak, C. Wagner, and D. Yates, “Corporate Wiki Users: Results of a Survey.” *Proceedings of the 2006 International Symposium on Wikis*. Odense, Denmark, 2006.

EXHIBIT 1**Respondents' demographic statistics**

Type of company	
Independent restaurant	2%
Independent hotel	19%
Multi-unit hotel company	72%
Other	7%
Position	
Non-supervisory	4%
Supervisory level	6%
Middle-level management	49%
Senior management	41%
Age	
25 or younger	10%
26 to 35	40%
36 to 45	33%
Over 45	17%
Gender	
Male	66%
Female	34%
Language	
Native English	53%
Non-native English	47%
Education	
High school	14%
Two-year college	8%
Four-year college	36%
Graduate work	31%
Other	11%

Note: N = 100.

constituencies). As of July 2009, 77 of Fortune 500 companies (15 percent) had public blogs,³¹ and corporate bloggers constituted 12 percent of the active blogosphere in 2008.³²

Even with the studies reported here, we think that research has not caught up with communication technologies' pervasive uses in the business environment. In addition, existing literature addresses issues common to general management practice. Few studies have focused specifically on use of communication technology in the hospitality workplace; consequently, we conducted an exploratory study of hotel managers' practices and opinions on electronic communication.

Survey of Hospitality Managers

Based on a comprehensive literature review and our prior research, we developed and distributed a survey through the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research. While application of the results of this exploratory study is limited by the sample size and methodology, the findings are nevertheless useful in suggesting a profile of how hospitality managers are using technology in the workplace. Results also provide direction for future research.

Methodology

The sample consisted of individuals who had agreed to be surveyed by the Center for Hospitality Research and who had indicated that they were hotel managers. This is, therefore, a self-selected sample. We sent these managers an email describing the purpose and scope of the study and explaining that their responses would be used to better understand current email practices and technology needs and preferences among hotel managers. After three weeks, we had received 100 usable responses, a number we deemed sufficient for the purpose of suggesting a general picture of current email practices and challenges among hotel managers. This profile could then be compared and contrasted with findings from previous studies of managers more generally, and also used to develop guidelines for those seeking to improve email practices at work.

The survey was divided into three sections. Questions in the first section covered the frequency and use of email and focused on identifying the challenges experienced in both sending and receiving email at work, as well as exploring the availability and effects of other communication technologies. Part two of the survey was qualitative, asking for respondents' advice to new employees and inviting recipients to share samples of emails they had sent or received that illus-

³¹ J. Cass, "Fortune 500 Business Blogging Wiki." July 29, 2009. Retrieved on July 29, 2009, from message posted to www.asia.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi.

³² Technorati. "State of the Blogosphere, 2008." Retrieved on July 29, 2009, from <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/who-are-the-bloggers/>.

trated their points. The final section requested demographic information.

Findings

Demographic information for all survey participants is summarized in Exhibit 1. Seventy-two respondents worked for a chain hotel, while nineteen worked at an independent property. It turned out that two of our respondents were restaurant managers. Thirty-five were at the corporate level. Forty-one identified themselves as “senior” managers, forty-nine as “mid-level” managers, and six were in “supervisory” positions. The remaining four were non-supervisory. Forty of those participating were between 26 and 35 years old, and thirty-two were between 36 and 45. Sixty-six were male. Of all respondents, just over half—fifty-three—reported that English was their native language. Fourteen had a high school education only, eight were graduated from two-year colleges, and thirty-six from four-year programs. Thirty-one had completed graduate work.

Email Use and Expectations

Four separate questions focused on determining the extent and nature of email use among hotel managers. Respondents were asked how many emails they received each day, how much time they spent on email, and their perceptions of what constituted a reasonable response time for the “non-urgent” emails that they either send or receive. The majority of respondents, 78, indicated that they received 20 to 100 emails each day. Seven receive fewer than 20, and 15 receive over 100. Regarding work time spent on email, 81 reported that they spend two to five hours on email each day, while 11 spend over five hours and 8 less than two hours.

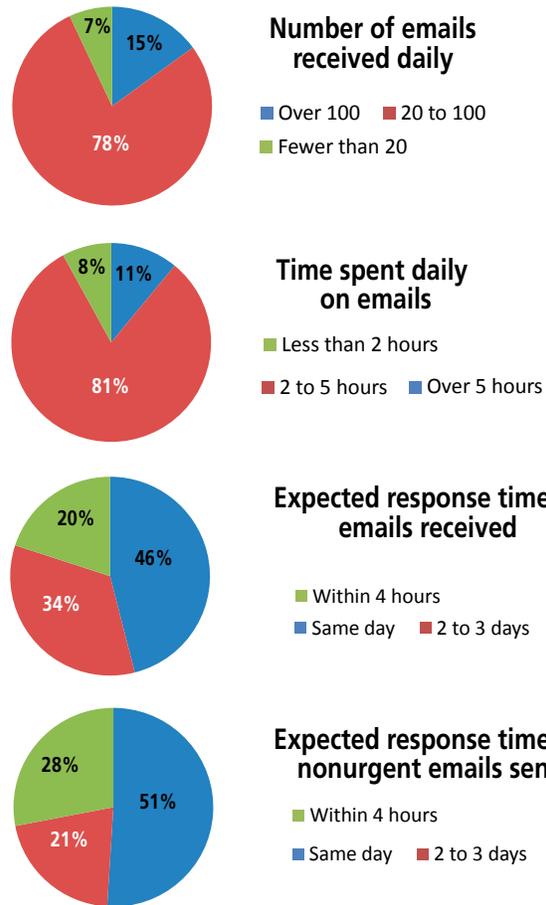
When respondents were asked about their habits and expectations regarding response time, 51 indicated that they felt it was reasonable to respond to a “non-urgent” email the same day, while 21 said they would respond within 2 to 3 days. Over a quarter of the managers who responded—28—would answer an email within four hours of receiving it. With regard to expectations for how quickly they should expect a response to the emails they send, 20 wanted others to get back to them within four hours. Forty-six of the respondents felt that their non-urgent emails should be answered the same day. The remaining respondents (34 percent) were less anxious, indicating that a response within 2 to 3 days was reasonable (Exhibit 2).

Email Challenges

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of challenge they experienced in sending and receiving email. The first question asked participants to indicate the degree of challenge they experienced due to specific characteristics of the emails they receive at work, and the second question focused on the challenges experienced when sending email. These questions

EXHIBIT 2

Email volume and timing



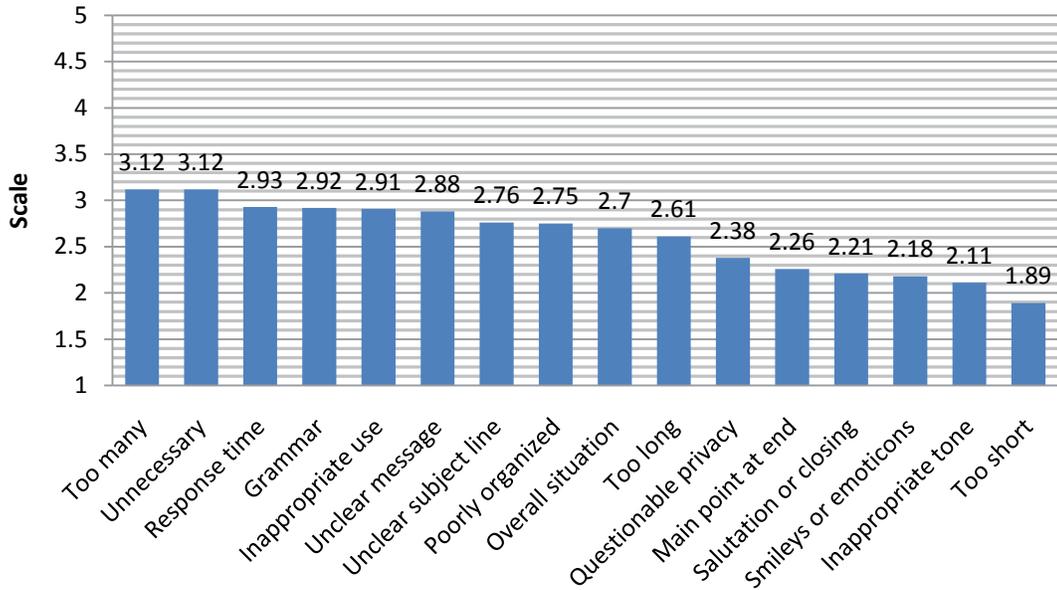
used 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (not at all challenging) and 5 (extremely challenging).

Results revealed five items that respondents saw as particularly challenging. At the top of the list, both with mean ratings of 3.12, were too many emails (21 indicated this was extremely challenging, and 43 rated it either 4 or 5) and “too many emails I don’t need to receive,” which 40 rated challenging or extremely challenging. Also considered challenging was “unrealistic or unreasonable response time requests,” which 32 rated as 4 or 5 and which received a mean score of 2.93. Poor grammar or incorrect punctuation was a challenge (a mean of 2.92; 14 viewed this as extremely challenging and 29 rated it as 4 or 5), as was “messages that should have been conveyed” in another manner (rated 4 or 5 by 31 respondents).

At the other end of the spectrum, hospitality managers were least bothered by emails that were too short (mean 1.89) or used an inappropriate tone (mean 2.11). The use of emoticons, like smiley faces, did not appear to be a concern for most respondents (mean 2.18), nor did a missing saluta-

EXHIBIT 3

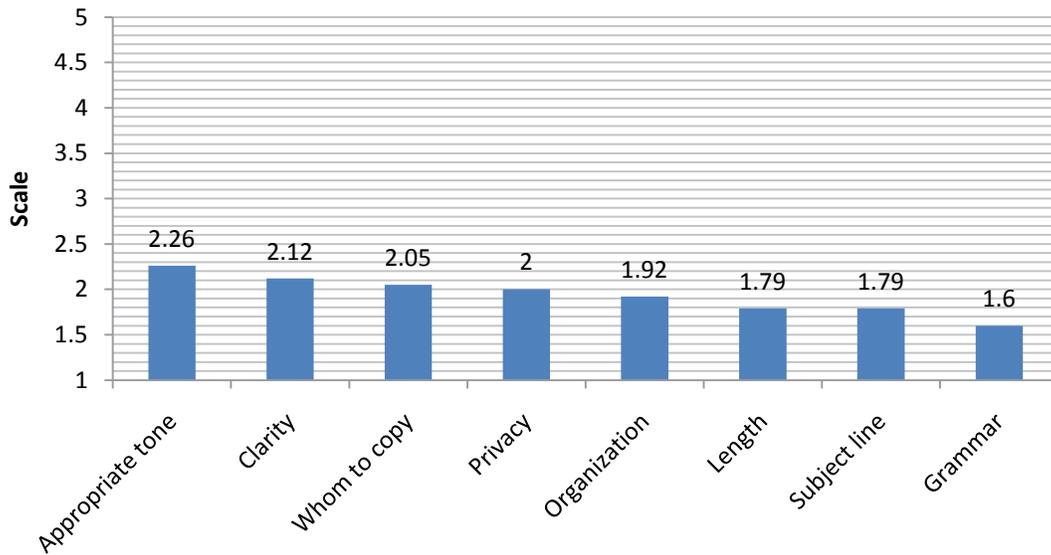
Challenges cited by hotel managers for emails received



Note: Bar lines represent mean score for each challenge based on a scale of 1 (not at all challenging) to 5 (very challenging). *N* = 100.

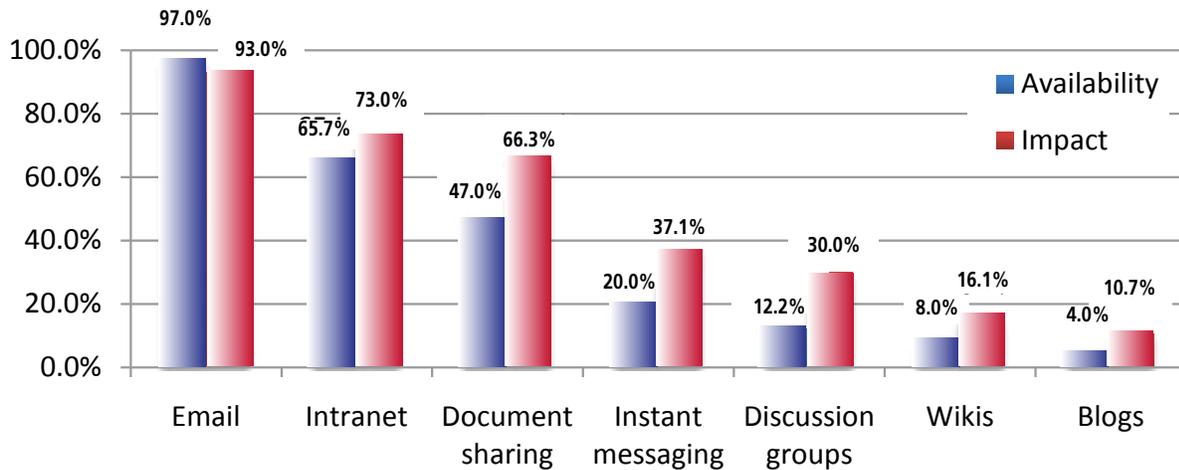
EXHIBIT 4

Challenges cited by hotel managers for emails sent



Note: Bar lines represent mean score for each challenge based on a scale of 1 (not at all challenging) to 5 (very challenging). *N* = 100.

Extent and impact of technology use among hotel manager sample



tion or closing (mean 2.22). Exhibit 3 provides a graph of the means for each of the sixteen challenges posed to managers regarding messages they receive.

Sent emails. Regarding emails they send, respondents saw only minor concerns, with the exception of managing tone (Exhibit 4).

Availability and Impact of Workplace Technologies

The final questions, again involving 5-point Likert scales, explored the availability and impact of the following seven technologies: email, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, document-sharing, intranet, and discussion groups. Availability scores ranged from 1 (not yet implemented) to 5 (used very extensively throughout the company). For the potential impact each item might have on their productivity, the scale ranged from 1 (extremely detrimental to the business) to 5 (extremely helpful to the business; see Exhibit 5).

Availability. Email is by far the most readily available of the seven technologies in question (mean 4.66). Seventy-nine of the hotel managers indicated that email was “used very extensively,” and 90 indicated that it was either “used very extensively” or “used extensively” in their company. The next most available technologies were intranet sites (mean 3.20) and document-sharing (mean 2.60). While just over 43 of the respondents indicated that their company was using intranet sites “extensively” or “very extensively,” over a third of respondents reported that their hotel did not use or was just starting to use them.

The availability of document-sharing was given a rating of “4” or “5” by approximately a quarter of those surveyed,

but over half of the respondents reported that their company was either not using or just starting to use this capability. The other four items all had means below “2,” which indicated that they were just starting to use the technology in some areas of the company: instant messaging (mean 1.74), discussion groups (1.47), blogs (mean 1.25), and wikis (mean 1.22).

Impact of Technology in the Workplace

Given their ubiquitous nature, it is not surprising that email (mean 4.54) and an intranet (mean 4.03) were rated as having a strong positive impact on respondents’ businesses. Email was rated as either 4 (helpful) or 5 (extremely helpful) by 93 of the respondents, while 73 rated an intranet site at 4 or 5.

Three technologies received modestly positive mean ratings for impact. These were document-sharing (mean 3.75), instant messaging (mean 3.26), and discussion groups (mean 3.22). Ratings of the remaining two items, wikis (2.96) and blogs (2.84), showed little positive impact for these relatively new mechanisms.

Ratings and Demographics

Given the small convenience sample, we considered differences among three demographic variables—age, gender, and language. In each category, difference scores between the mean ratings for each item pertaining to email challenges in receiving and sending messages are calculated. Findings are of particular interest when there is more than a .40 difference in the mean ratings between the two categories in each of the three demographics examined. This criterion was selected by examining the range of difference scores

EXHIBIT 6

Differences by age, gender, and language regarding email challenges

Emails received	Age			Gender			Language		
	Younger	Older.	Diff.	Male	Female.	Diff.	English	NonEnglish	Diff.
Inappropriate tone	2.26	1.96	0.30	2.12	2.09	0.03	2.15	2.06	0.09
Unclear or non-specific subject lines	2.82	2.69	0.13	2.77	2.73	0.05	2.60	2.94	-0.33
Emails too long	2.54	2.75	-0.21	2.58	2.73	-0.14	2.46	2.83	-0.37
Too many emails	3.02	3.14	-0.12	2.55	2.97	-0.41	3.14	3.09	0.05
Messages should have been conveyed differently	2.78	3.06	-0.28	3.02	2.70	0.32	2.77	2.68	0.09
Main point at the end	2.54	2.79	-0.25	2.66	2.64	0.02	2.57	2.76	-0.19
Inappropriate emoticons (for example; ☺)	2.00	2.37	-0.37	2.33	1.91	0.42	2.25	2.11	0.14
Too much spam or messages I don't need to receive	3.23	3.10	0.13	3.24	2.82	0.42	3.30	3.13	0.17
Poor grammar or incorrect punctuation	2.94	2.90	0.04	2.88	1.42	1.46	3.04	2.79	0.25
Emails too short	1.94	1.88	0.06	1.97	1.79	0.18	1.85	1.98	-0.13
Questionable privacy	2.61	2.20	0.41	2.46	2.24	0.22	2.34	2.48	-0.14
Poorly organized	3.04	2.65	0.39	2.85	2.52	0.33	2.68	2.83	-0.15
Unclear purpose or request	3.24	2.56	0.68	3.05	3.15	-0.09	2.29	3.27	-0.98
Inappropriate salutation or closing	2.20	2.22	-0.02	1.80	2.33	-0.53	2.15	2.28	-0.13
Unrealistic response time requests	3.04	2.84	0.20	2.92	2.94	-0.02	2.75	3.13	-0.37
Overall email situation at work	2.69	2.73	-0.04	2.74	2.56	0.18	2.81	2.59	0.22
Emails sent	Age			Gender			Language		
	Younger	Older.	Diff.	Male	Female.	Diff.	English	NonEnglish	Diff.
Using correct grammar and punctuation	1.76	1.46	0.30	1.57	1.67	-0.10	1.32	1.93	-0.61
Keeping it short	1.86	1.71	0.15	1.86	1.64	0.23	1.60	2.00	-0.40
Whom to copy	2.10	2.00	0.10	2.09	1.97	0.12	1.81	2.32	-0.51
Crafting an effective subject line	1.86	1.71	0.15	1.83	1.70	0.14	1.55	2.06	-0.52
Achieving clarity	2.30	2.00	0.30	2.23	1.94	0.29	1.87	2.45	-0.58
Maintaining privacy	2.14	1.80	0.35	2.02	2.00	0.02	1.96	2.09	-0.12
Organizing the message	2.02	1.88	0.14	1.94	1.91	0.03	1.72	2.20	-0.48
Conveying an appropriate tone	2.32	2.22	0.10	2.34	2.16	0.18	2.16	2.41	-0.25

and making a judgment on the logical breaks within that distribution (Exhibit 6).

Age Differences

When we look at email use by age category, it is evident that younger managers use email more frequently than their

more senior counterparts do. While only 3 percent of managers under 27 use email less than an hour a day, 27 percent of those over 45 reported using email for less than an hour. At the other end of the spectrum, 27 percent of those under 27 years use email over six hours a day, but only 14 percent of those over 45 are on email for that long.

We split the respondents into two age groups based on the median (exactly the same number of respondents in each group). One group was 35 years and under, and the other, 36 years and over. With regard to received messages, we find that the most striking differences were that managers under 36 were more troubled by unclear messages (.68 difference between mean scores), by issues of privacy (.41 difference), and by lack of organization (.39 difference). Older managers, on the other hand, were more concerned with the inappropriate use of smileys and other emoticons than were their younger counterparts (-.39 difference).

When it comes to creating and sending email messages, younger managers indicated a greater challenge on every item. The highest difference scores were found on the challenges of maintaining privacy (.35 difference), use of grammar and punctuation (difference of .30), and achieving clarity (.30 difference).

Gender Differences

Sixty-six men and 34 women responded to this survey. These two groups differed dramatically on the item related to “poor grammar or incorrect punctuation.” Both men (2.88) and women (1.42) found this to be a challenge, but the difference between these two scores was a remarkable 1.46. There were also a greater number of gender differences in perceptions regarding emails received than we found in our other two demographic-group analyses. Difference scores over a .40 included, the following:

- women found missing salutations (-.53) and too many emails (-.41) more challenging than did men, and
- men found inappropriate use of emoticons more challenging than did women (.42).

Unlike the age-group analysis, men and women saw relatively little difference with regard to perceived challenges in sending emails. The greatest difference score was a relatively low .29, in which men found gaining clarity more of a challenge than did women.

Differences for Native and Non-native English Speakers

Since nearly half of the sample, 46 percent, reported that English was their second language, we were able to make a logical split on that criterion to compare the two groups. First, regarding perceptions related to the emails that managers receive, we find that non-native English speakers rate unclear emails as much more of a challenge than do their English-speaking counterparts. The difference between the mean ratings for these two groups was -.98. Two other items which presented more of a challenge to non-native speakers for received emails were emails that are too long and unreasonable response time requests (difference scores of -.37).

EXHIBIT 7

Managers advice regarding email use

Recommendation	Times Mentioned
Be brief and clear	19
Be professional and courteous	9
Consider whether the phone or personal contact would be more appropriate	9
Reduce/think carefully about copying others	7
Keep copies of important emails and organize files for retrieval	5
Do not use email for personal business	5
Be objective not emotional (flaming)—tone is important	5
Respond to emails as soon as possible	4
Check email regularly	3
Keep in mind you can't take back an email	2
Teach email etiquette	2
Read every email carefully to avoid misunderstandings	1
Never blind copy someone or track emails	1
Don't print out copies unless absolutely necessary	1
Use spell check for grammar and spelling	1
Recognize not everyone uses email	1
Do not use email to resolve a conflict	1

Not surprisingly, with regard to emails that managers send at work, non-native speakers rated every item as more challenging than did their native English-speaking counterparts. The highest difference scores were found for items related to using grammar and punctuation (difference of -.61), achieving clarity (difference of -.58), crafting effective subject lines (difference of -.52), and determining whom to copy (difference of -.51).

Managers' Advice and Observations

We conducted a content analysis of advice that our respondents would give a new employee about email communication. One of the authors and two trained students achieved an inter-rater reliability of 98 percent, with the two student raters asked to place similar responses into emergent categories. Exhibit 7 presents the results of this process.

By far the most frequent piece of advice hospital-ity managers would give to new employees is to be “brief and clear” in their emails (19 responses). Other frequent responses were “be professional and courteous” and “consider whether the phone or personal contact would be more

EXHIBIT 8**Managers' observations regarding email and other communication technologies**

Love email! Much more efficient than phoning most of the time.
I also find many sales managers who do not use correct spelling, grammar or punctuation in their emails to me, and I can only assume that they do the same with customers. One of my pet peeves (besides omitting the subject entirely) is replying to an email with a totally unrelated topic and not changing the subject line.
Email can be an effective tool when used properly as a tool; it is not a replacement for interpersonal communication. Personal interactions are just as important. Email does provide a powerful tool for documentation and history. Currently, it's an excuse for not having to talk to people and interact on a personal level; relationships can suffer as a result.
Email is extremely useful as it supports agreements avoiding misunderstandings and easing trust.
Check your spelling and grammar. Write professionally. You do not want other people laughing at the other end.
It's very important that people learn how to improve the timing of answering and how to write emails.
Good topic!
Computers and systems go down often; one must always acknowledge (no matter how cursorily) the receipt of a "To" email. In an email, "To" you, you are being spoken to—would you ever not reply to the spoken word?
My experience has been that email is more used for CYA (cover your ass) than is really necessary. Everyone gets copied, no one takes responsibility. If one had to type a memo on a typewriter, we would see a lot less email. Behavioral training on the proper use of email, as a tool not a CYA mechanism, just general training on using this tool. I have spent a couple of years working on reducing the cost of email, the actual cost of email storage and the time cost of unnecessary email using distribution lists, etc.
Often, the amount of email you receive is in direct proportion to the amount of email you send out.
Emails are a good way to communicate. They keep the history and what other people wrote previously.
Great survey.
Document sharing and intranet could be helpful if implemented.

appropriate" (9 responses each). Each of three suggestions were made by five respondents: "keep copies of important emails and organize files for retrieval," "do not use email for personal business," and "be objective and not emotional in emails—tone is important."

Observations. Respondents provided a variety of perspectives in comments made to the question asking for general observations. While the efficiency of email was acknowledged by a number of respondents, several managers worried that it too often replaced interpersonal interactions and that workplace relationships might suffer as a result. Another response suggested that communicators who were careless harmed the company's image by either using poor spelling and grammar or by not changing the subject line when the content of an email changed. Another respondent mentioned the importance of professionalism, noting that you "don't want people laughing at the other end."

Email protocol was of concern, specifically, the importance of responding to every email in a timely manner.

Respondents also mentioned that email enabled communicators to keep a history of their interactions. Unfortunately, as one individual noted, email is often used simply to "cover" yourself, and distribution lists frequently get out of hand. As one manager put it, "Everyone gets copied; no one takes responsibility." While complaints about the number of emails in their inboxes are common, it may be, as another respondent pointed out, that the amount of email you receive is in direct proportion to the amount you send.

Mention was made of the need for and importance of training on email protocol. Another respondent believed that newer technologies, such as document-sharing and an intranet, could prove useful to hospitality managers in the future. Comments to this question are summarized in Exhibit 8.

Implications

While care must be taken in generalizing from the findings of this survey, the results draw our attention to several themes that might be explored in future studies.

Demographics. Our research suggests that differences among demographic categories may have implications for the use of communication technology in the workplace. Previous studies have found that not only the amount of email use but also the nature of communication changes according to age. Nearly three quarters of our sample fell into the Generation X category (those born between 1964 and 1980); 10 percent could be considered Millennials (born after 1980), and 17 percent, Baby Boomers. Our findings indicate that managers seeking to introduce technology to improve communication at work would benefit from considering employee demographics with particular attention to differences in language, gender, and age.

Email Challenges

Results of our survey confirm the heavy use of email at work, with four out of five hospitality managers spending two to five hours a day in front of their computers. If we assume that this use is not in one continuous session, and if previous studies reporting the amount of recovery time required for interrupted work are accurate, the potential loss of productivity from this activity is indeed striking. Again consistent with previous findings, hospitality managers who responded to our survey complained of too many emails that they didn't need and that were irrelevant.

Just over half of the respondents in our study reported that they felt that “non-urgent” email should be returned the same day, leaving a significant percentage who would wait longer to respond. We note the research that suggests, however, that the risk of customer dissatisfaction increases when a company fails to respond to their email message within a day's time. Given that unrealistic expectations for response time was given as our respondents' third most significant email challenge, we see a potential problem. This topic may be worth exploring further, as expectations for response time appear to vary, and the choices managers make and the priorities they establish are likely to have a significant impact on both internal and external relationships.

In looking at the challenges managers identified in sending email, our results again support previous findings, in particular, regarding appropriate tone in email. Our respondents put “how to convey appropriate tone” at the top of their list (mean of 2.26) with just over 10 percent of them calling tone a “substantial” or “extreme” challenge.

Subject lines. Hospitality managers also may be underestimating the importance of an email subject line. Nearly half of the respondents rated “how to craft an effective subject line” as no challenge, and nearly 30 percent rated it as a minor challenge. That flies in the face of other studies that have indicated that over a third of all email users open emails based in large part on the content of the subject line.

Thus, we suggest that hospitality managers pay attention to creating more descriptive and compelling subject lines.

Clarity. “Achieving clarity” was one of the items demonstrating the highest difference scores between both men and women and between native and non-native English speakers. Women and native English speakers see clarity as less of a concern than do men and non-native English speakers. While one might expect that non-native speakers would find achieving clarity more of a challenge, it is less obvious why the women are more confident of their communication abilities than the men in our sample. These differences in perceptions may be fruitful areas for further study.

Overall, it is clear that hotel managers are more troubled by incoming emails than by their own messages. This reflects a tendency found in all communications, in which people more readily perceive problems in others' work or behavior than in their own. It does suggest, however, that feedback is critical in order for managers to identify skills or practices that require improvement.

Use and Impact of New Technologies

While it seems that relatively few hospitality managers are currently taking advantage of new technologies, these new forms of communication appear to hold promise for the future—in part because their current availability is limited. Over a third of respondents reported that their hotel did not use or was just starting to use intranet sites, for instance. That figure lags behind the use of this technology in other types of organizations and in other countries. Over a decade ago, 60 percent of U.S. companies used the intranet, and a more recent study found that 90 percent of Finnish companies relied on this technology.³³ In addition, a survey by the telephone and communications carrier Prescient Worldwide revealed that 45 percent of companies have “intranet blogs” and 47 percent have “intranet wikis,” both far outnumbering the usage reported by our respondents.

Likewise, instant messaging seems to have little availability for survey respondents compared to other businesses. Just 20 percent of our hotel respondents indicated that they used IM, but IM users constituted 35 percent in a more general 2006 study by the American Management Association. Another study revealed that 57 percent of Gen Y respondents used IM more than email.³⁴ Further research is certainly warranted, especially given our finding that this sample of hospitality managers anticipated that instant messaging, blogs, wikis, document-sharing, intranet, and discussion groups would all help them do their job more ef-

³³ Lehmuskallio, *op.cit.*

³⁴ Shiu and Lenhart, *loc.cit.*

Checklist for email effectiveness

Before sending an email, consider the following:

Is email the best choice for the communication (or would a phone call, visit, or IM be more appropriate)?	Yes	No
Does your subject line specifically convey the main point of your message?	Yes	No
Will the reader understand what is expected of him or her within the first two lines of the email? Did you include a requested response time?	Yes	No
Does your email convey the appropriate tone? Is it likely to maintain or build your future relationship?	Yes	No
If this is a potentially emotional email, did you wait at least a few hours before sending it, and did you ask someone else to read it first?	Yes	No
Is your email as short as possible to convey your message, or can you edit unnecessary information?	Yes	No
Who should be copied on the email? Are all of the recipients necessary?	Yes	No
Is the email 100% accurate? Have you proofread it for proper grammar and punctuation?	Yes	No

fectively. We anticipate that application of these technologies will expand as younger generations enter the workforce.

Advice to Hospitality Managers

Given the volume of email hotel managers receive and their challenges in managing these messages, this group could benefit from improving email effectiveness and considering alternative ways to communicate. Based on our review of literature and our CHR survey results, we present recommendations in four categories: email, instant messaging, intranets, and other technologies. We also offer the checklist found in Exhibit 9.

Email and Instant Messaging

Reduce the number of messages received (and sent).

Instead of using email as the default for all communication, managers might consider using the telephone, in-person meetings, and alternative technologies. Some companies are experimenting with “email-free Fridays,” where employees resist sending internal email and remain online only to communicate with customers.³⁵

Although they do not reduce the number of emails, programs like Gmail sort messages into “conversations,” so users view fewer disparate items in their inbox. To manage unwanted or irrelevant emails, managers can discourage copying too many people, cancel subscriptions to online newsletters and listservs, and use kill filters.

Manage the urgency of email response.

Managing expectations for response times can help reduce the stress caused by a perceived sense of urgency. With staff, for instance, managers can establish 24 hours as a

reasonable turnaround time for responses. With senior management and customers, managers can request expectations for responses to avoid misunderstandings. Simple status updates can maintain communication about work progress with minimal disruption. A corporate policy addressing response time protocol ensures consistency throughout the organization.

Managers also can check email at specific times of day and turn off notification sounds, rather than making random, frequent scans of their inbox that interrupt work flow. However, when managers do check email, they should respond immediately to messages that take fewer than two minutes, rather than revisit the message later.

Clarify message content.

Although managers have little control over emails they receive, they can control how their own messages are written. This includes writing a clear, precise subject line, which increases the likelihood that an email will be read and helps users manage and categorize messages. Adopting standard abbreviations in message lines will make email more efficient. For example, “EOM” (end of message) could indicate a subject line that is the entire message. A subject line that says, “3:30 meeting moved to room 442. EOM,” gives the reader all needed information.³⁶

Another way to clarify meaning is to put main points early in an email. Within the first two lines, the reader should know the topic and what is expected. Requests and time frames must be clear. It can be helpful to know whether an email is just FYI or whether a response is required.

With fewer emails, managers are free to spend more time on their outgoing messages to ensure that they are clear

³⁵ M.A. Walker, “The Day the E-Mail Dies,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2006, p. B1.

³⁶ (Shipley & Schwalbe, 2008)

and accurate. Because message clarity and grammar and punctuation were more significant concerns for our respondents who were non-native English speakers, they might appreciate someone re-reading messages or asking someone else to review them for clarity. Waiting before sending important emails gives the sender a more objective perspective and may increase the likelihood that the tone is appropriate. *Consider instant messaging.*

Implementing a company-wide IM system can help regulate casual IM use that is likely already taking place among employees. As with email, policies are important for employees to understand appropriate and inappropriate IM use.

Intranets

The following are a few ways to make the intranet more robust and successful:

- Survey employees to find out what they need and want to know.
- Prioritize and organize content into different views for groups within the organization (e.g., by region or job function).
- Track usage statistics and adjust content accordingly.
- Encourage user contribution to create local or department-level sites.
- Add tools and applications to improve collaboration and increase productivity (beyond simple document-sharing and discussion forums).
- Incorporate social media (e.g., blogs, video) and social networking (e.g., Facebook-type applications) for more interactivity.

Other Technologies

Few of our survey respondents have access to wikis and blogs, but these and other social media tools can be useful to reduce email traffic, increase interactivity, and manage work more efficiently. Many experts believe it's only a matter of time before these and similar technologies are common in most organizations, including the hospitality workplace.

Hotel wiki. If employees need an online space to work together, a collaborative website such as a wiki is a good choice to centralize documentation and discussions. A small test group with enthusiastic users might be the best way to start. Companies can assess how wikis are working, and satisfied users can encourage new sites. Free sites such as Google Sites and Wikispaces offer enough functionality to get started in small groups.

Blogs. To increase communication among a community, blogs are a good approach. With one primary voice (for example, a CEO or marketing VP for an external blog, or a front desk manager for an internal blog), readers can respond and post their own ideas. These comments may be monitored to ensure appropriate content.³⁷ While blogs may take time to become established and gain credibility, they offer a new and potentially powerful approach to communication.

Micro-blogging, like Twitter, may be an option for quick communications, like responses to a guest's immediate need and updates during a crisis. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for hospitality managers using these fast-paced, interactive tools is maintaining a professional and consistent image.

Conclusion

The hotel managers who responded to our survey, while a small convenience sample, provided information and insights that should be useful to hospitality organizations. While we have seen only minor differences between our sample and managers in other types of organizations, it seems clear that variables such as age, gender, and native language may have consequences for how individuals use and respond to communication technologies. We recommend that hotel firms take such differences into account as they implement strategies to capitalize on the power and potential of electronic media to enhance their business practices. ■

³⁷ J.L. Cox, E.R. Martinez, and K.B. Quinlan, "Blogs and the Corporation: Managing the Risk, Reaping the Benefits," *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2008), pp. 4-12.

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