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## **Don't Have a Failure to Communicate.**

By James L. Watson, Founder, Presentations that Stick

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Over the past 20 years, technology has made us more efficient, productive and powerful. It's changed the way we buy, sell and communicate. But despite all the technology, good business still happens for the same reason it did hundreds of years ago: Two people have come to know one another well enough to want to do business together. They've built a relationship.

In his 1982 best-seller "Megatrends," author John Naisbitt wrote, "The more high technology around us, the more the need for human touch." Naisbitt had the foresight to say that long before any of us sent our first e-mail.

In 2007, we have plenty of technologies to choose from to communicate with our clients, including instant messaging, video-on-demand, and the ubiquitous e-mail. With all these options, it's easy to allow the technology to determine how we communicate with one another. But the technologies can be overused, particularly when our objective is to preserve the "high touch" and cultivate that human relationship.

We'd be wise to take a step back and think about how the use of each technology affects our relationships. Are we blending enough "high touch" with our use of the "high tech"?

How do you know when it's better to meet face to face, place a phone call or speak, or simply send an e-mail? Do you consciously think about what communication channel will be most effective in a given situation, or do you simply do what's easy and convenient for you? What are some of the practices that will assure that you're using the most appropriate tools in certain situations to establish the kind of relationship that will lead to good business?

Beyond abiding by your customers' preferences, there are some practices to follow.

Whenever feasible, meet face to face. In person, meetings facilitate deeper communication. When you're with a client, you communicate more than words. You're exchanging social queues, facial gestures and body language that deliver a richer meaning that just can't happen through e-mail, chat or even a phone call.

Great meetings establish a bond that can carry the relationship, and ultimately, carry the business.

There are some situations in which e-mail should be avoided. If you're communicating information that may spark negative emotions, or enable misinterpretation, e-mail can be a poor vehicle. No matter how carefully you word your message, the ultimate meaning will be what the client wants it to mean. When your client reads your e-mail, you have little control over how they choose to respond, to whom they forward the e-mail, or what they say about the message and its sender's intentions. If you need to control the course of the message and its meaning, verbal communication can be the more judicious approach. After gaining agreement during verbal conversation, follow up with an e-mail to summarize the discussion.

Do you remember the days when you had your first e-mail account? When that phrase, "You've got mail!" sparked excitement? Well, the emotional thrill of receiving an e-mail just isn't what it used to be. If you want to convey a positive sentiment, or show a client that you care about them, pick up the phone and tell them in your own voice, or better yet, go see them in person. While the concept of caring can at times seem trite, it's still what matters.

And let's not forget the power of the hand-written notes. While it's faster and easier to acknowledge a meeting or say thank you through an e-mail, your prospects will be far more appreciative when they receive a note that you took the time to write with pen and paper. Few nonverbal communications reveal the human side of a person more effectively than the hand-written, hand-stamped note. When was the last time that you sent one to a client?

The channels that we choose for communicating with our clients can have a cumulative impact on the quality of the relationships that ultimately affect the quality of our business. Don't let technology determine how you communicate. Instead, consciously determine the best method of communicating in each situation. It's not about the technology -- it's about the relationship. Technology is just a set of tools to help you get there.

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