

Cool tools fail to make clear comms

By Peter Fulcher-Meredith

I've been around the communications game for a fair while now and I'll tell you what gets my goat: email, IM and SMS are creating real communications confusion for Australian companies. And this confusion is actually costing money in terms of time wasted and poor productivity.

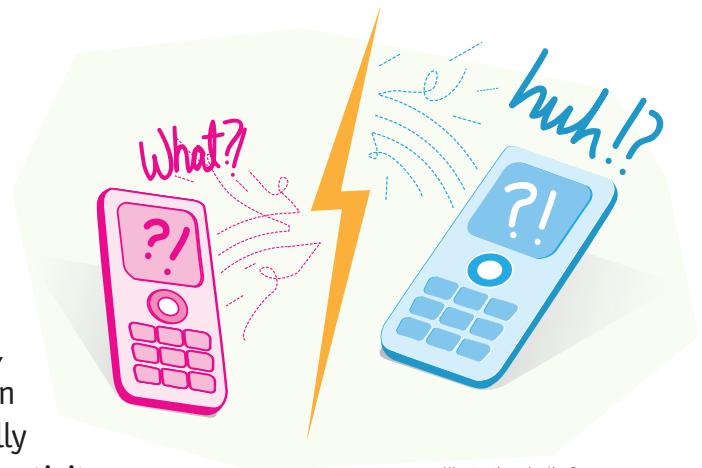


Illustration: Lydia Sumner

■ And all of you Gen Ys with your Crackberrys and Palms and wireless connectivity who think that the tools maketh the communicator: Well, I'm here to tell you, that ain't so. ■ I particularly loathe IM and SMS messaging. Due to timing lags and staggered reception, people are failing to pause and listen before firing off their responses. And now this is contaminating our verbal communication. ■ In fact, consulting to some of Australia's biggest and fastest emerging businesses, I'm also noticing a creeping culture of communications laziness among executives, entrepreneurs and professionals. ■ In actual fact, those closest to these new cool tools – IT professionals – are among the worst offenders. But while they're high on functionality, the tools alone can't handle even the most basic of communications. That's where the human element has to kick in. ■ Far too many professionals are guilty of relying on poorly structured, shorthand and jargon-filled communiqués that fail to clearly communicate their intended points. Some of my biggest challenges are with technical departments who seem to think that cool tools must produce clear comms. But that's simply a lazy cop-out. ■ You see, there's this annoying and widespread misconception that 'e-tools' are mainly about saving time, effort and paper. This fosters flippancy and a lack of thought when messages are being composed. ■ Consequently, far too much time is wasted on multiple e-messages that struggle to clearly express their aims. ■ A face-to-face chat would often be clearer, more productive and foster stronger relationships between co-workers ■ Take this case in point: A major utility we work with had a contentious HR issue. After several email screeds between the two opposing interests, it was no nearer resolution. Almost as a last resort, the parties met for a coffee and – after just 10 minutes chatting – they had come to a mutual agreement. ■ My point? Sometimes you just have to get up off your derrière and actually talk through the communication, rather than waste time on e-comms laden with interpretative ambiguity. ■ Just because e-tools are more immediate and convenient, doesn't mean they're the best option for every communication task. Don't let your communication habits spoil the message you're trying to get across, okay? ■ So the next time you're tempted to upgrade your 'hi-tech' tools, just stop. You may be better served by investing your money in a refresher course on communication fundamentals.

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