

Kristen Bell DeTienne

Guide to Electronic Communication: Using Technology for Effective Business Writing and Speaking

Book Review

—Reviewed by
CHRISTOPHER LAM

Index Terms—*E-communication, firewall, HTML, personal digital assistants (PDAs).*

Prentice Hall continues its series in Advanced Communication with its *Guide to Electronic Communication* by Kristen Bell DeTienne. This book gives examples of types of e-communication, ways to improve e-communication skills, and references to further explore specific subject areas. The introduction identifies the intended audience as anyone who uses electronic communication technology. However, the book is more specifically aimed at business professionals who must rely on electronic communication. With the ever-increasing development of technology, nearly all businesses heavily rely on electronic communication daily. Published in 2002, DeTienne's book is already a bit dated, and therefore may not be pertinent to already tech-savvy professionals. However, for those who need more of a foundation in electronic communication, this book contains relevant information and references to guide and facilitate effective electronic communication.

The introduction of the book outlines three major reasons why the book was written. In contrast to similar books on the topic, this book's purpose is to provide the information in a manner that is brief, practical, and reader-friendly. It is broken down into six chapters including "Trends in electronic communication," "Electronic tools for conducting research," "Electronic tools for written communication," "Designing web pages," "Electronic tools for oral communication," and "Electronic tools for job searches." After the first chapter, which provides the context for the book, DeTienne begins her discussion on electronic communication by exploring various research tools. She points out the importance

of knowledge management in business and then goes on to describe ways to utilize technology to gain knowledge. She divides this chapter on research into three major sections: "Conducting electronic searches," "Using electronic databases," and "Using other electronic sources." DeTienne continues her exploration of electronic communication in chapter 3 by examining the use of "Electronic tools for written communication." In this chapter, she focuses on the various ways to communicate through writing and technology. Although she covers a wide range of written communication types, from "traditional writing" to "electronic discussion forums," DeTienne dedicates most of this chapter on how to effectively use email.

After her discussion on written communication, DeTienne explores a topic in chapter 4 that is highly valuable to nearly all businesses, designing webpages. This chapter gives a general overview of the website design process, without getting too specific or too technical. Chapter 5 covers the different kinds of communication tools used in oral communication. In this chapter, she discusses ways to create presentations effectively utilizing technologies such as Microsoft PowerPoint. She also briefly discusses videoconferencing and the various options businesses can employ in meetings. The sixth and final chapter of the book touches briefly on various tools that can be employed in searching for a job. DeTienne breaks this chapter into two main sections, the first touching on building an electronic résumé. The second major section of the final chapter discusses job search methods using the web.

DeTienne's book is intended as a guide, and in all practicality, is not meant to be read in one sitting from front to back. However, after reading the book in its entirety, it is clear that it is both effective and ineffective in meeting its intended purposes. The book's organization is clear. DeTienne separates the various forms of electronic communication by chapter, making it easy to navigate. The introductory

Manuscript received May 4, 2005; revised May 18, 2005.
The reviewer is with the Technical Communication Program,
Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL 60616 USA
(email: lamchri@iit.edu).

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chapter on "Trends in electronic communication" is highly effective in introducing current and future trends in e-communication to someone relatively new to the topic, placing electronic communication in the context of the exponential growth of technology.

In addition to the overall organization of the book, another important strength can be found in the organization within chapters. Most chapters, including the introduction, feature bulleted lists to organize information, which make it easy for a reader to access desired information. For example, in the chapter on "Electronic tools for conducting research," DeTienne first explains what electronic databases are and how to access them. She then goes on to use bullet points to list and describe various electronic databases such as Lexis/Nexis and Academic Universe. The repetition of these lists within chapters makes it easy for the reader to locate and access important information.

Another advantage of the book is DeTienne's use of simple language and a straightforward writing style. For example, if one wants advice as to whether to send a fax or an email, DeTienne gives specific "do's and don'ts" for each situation. In most cases, this gives the reader a clear answer to what he or she is specifically looking for. This simple language complements the description of more technical aspects of electronic communication, making it easy for the reader to understand. An example of this language can be found within the chapter on designing webpages. It gives the reader a broad overview on the process of creating a webpage in three linear steps: set your Website strategy, plan and design the site, and manage your website. These practical steps, which are conveyed in basic language without too much technical jargon, are good for learning the basics of creating websites. Although the chapter on designing websites is not a comprehensive guide to the topic, it serves as a launch pad for introducing the reader to the basics.

While the author does a good job of creating a concise and easily readable guide, there are some flaws in the book as well. Even though the use of simple language can be viewed as an advantage, some disadvantages also arise from such use. In a positive light, oversimplifying technical processes or complex media can make certain tasks seem less daunting to the reader. However, DeTienne also oversimplifies some information that, in my opinion, does not even need to be included as a topic in the book. For example, the chapter on "Electronic tools for oral communication" gives an overview of how to effectively communicate via telephone. By using simple language

to describe specific guidelines on how to speak on the telephone, DeTienne basically talks down to the reader by including this text. For example, she states, "When talking on the phone, do: speak slowly enough to understand, identify yourself at the beginning of the call, be ready to leave a message" [p. 83].

Another weakness in the book results from instances of overgeneralization. Although the book indeed uses simple, easy-to-understand language, there are still several instances where DeTienne makes a general statement that leaves the reader wondering how to achieve what was stated. For example, in a section entitled "Techniques to help you write faster," she advises the reader to "Avoid writer's block" [p. 32]. Such advice is easier said than done and does not provide any guidance to the reader. Furthermore, the inclusion of such advice in a treatment of electronic communication is somewhat irrelevant. A reader looking for guidance on how to effectively utilize electronic communication may not find such advice useful.

Finally, as stated earlier, writing a book on the ever-changing world of technology means that some sections will be outdated by the time the book is published. One example can be found on the coverage of personal digital assistants (PDAs), found in the chapter entitled "Electronic tools for conducting research." This section describes the power of PDAs as they were over two years ago. However, the use of handheld technology has increased vastly since the book was written. Furthermore, the technology and capabilities of such devices have also significantly increased. Because of the fast-changing nature of technology, the section on PDAs is extremely outdated. A second edition of the book might include an etiquette guide to communication for handheld technology.

Overall, Prentice Hall's *Guide to Electronic Communication* is best used as a reference guide and should be used as a supplementary tool for readers wanting to learn how to better communicate using electronic media. The succinct nature of the book creates several advantages, as well as disadvantages, and can therefore be viewed as a Catch-22. It does make the book easy to read, and more importantly easy to scan, but may leave the reader empty handed when searching for a specific answer to a specific problem. If you are looking for a book that serves as a comprehensive guide to electronic communication, this book is not the best choice. However, if you are looking for a reference guide to electronic communication and a general overview of the topic, this book can be quite helpful.