

## "It says what?"

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Welcome to the 21st century the 'communication era', or is it? No one will dispute the fact that we can communicate with each other faster and more easily than we have ever done previously, but have we really improved the quality of our communication?

In the not too dim and distant past the fax machine revolutionised the way that we sent and received information. At the time it was predicted that this new invention would be responsible for the demise of thousands of postmen. I'm not too sure whether the weight of the post man's bag was significantly reduced as a direct result of the fax machine, but one thing it did do was open up a whole new way of getting junk mail onto peoples desks, well receptions at least. However, even though the method of communication was new the style was still very much based upon the traditional, basic letter format starting with Dear [name] and ending with a formal salutation.

The next major communication revolution was the mobile phone, well a phone that if you had the physique of Charles Atlas you could take out with you. A sales representative I used to deal with dropped his on his foot and spent the following 3 weeks off work with broken toes! As with the fax machine, the mobile phone was still used in a very formal and civilised manner.

Eventually e-mail arrived and as with its electronic predecessor the fax, it was going to make our postmen a thing of the past and do away with all sorts of things, not least paper; but has it? How many people print an email off so that it can be read more clearly or to annotate it? Or how many have to print it off for company or legal reasons? One thing is for sure, if we had to send all the email distributed on a daily basis by good old-fashioned post, we'd be employing more postmen than ever, or maybe because of the huge cost involved, we would look a bit more closely at whether we really needed to send it in the first place.

The e-mail era has also brought with it a change in the way we communicate. In general e-mails are a more informal and relaxed method of communicating, written as if we were chatting on the phone, but without the human interaction that verbal communication brings.

Finally, there's the text message, or should I say txt msg? To many this latest way of communicating is a fad; well it has to be doesn't it, as only the "young 'uns" use it, so it must be unnecessary? My youngest son has a book entitled "litle bk of txt msgsg" which according to its introduction has 1,000 ways to abbreviate your text messages, many of which are beyond me, but one that does make me smile is the abbreviation 'PCM', meaning please call me!

Which brings me nicely on to the art of communication; some of us are happy to text all day whilst others will only use it to initiate a verbal conversation. Others definitely feel more

comfortable with written communication, which offers us the luxury and comfort of being able to take time over what we write and how we express ourselves.

At PDMS we recently decided to pay more attention to the art of communication, something that we usually take for granted, and undertook a one-day course and assessment in MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator). The objective of this was to help all in the business understand the communication requirements we have as individuals, as a team and those of our clients. I won't go into too much depth about MBTI, suffice it to say that like being left or right handed we all have personality traits that affect the way we communicate. I personally am an ISTJ which means I am introverted (quiet), require more detail than most to form opinions or make decisions and work to deadlines, which is perhaps why I am a project manager. Others in the organisation are extroverts who hate detail but just need the big picture, or can't do with deadlines, as there is always more information to gather, or those who cannot see more than one solution to a problem, and the list goes on.

What MBTI helped identify is why some people annoy others either by providing too much detail, or by not providing enough, by being sticklers for deadlines, or by not considering more than one option. This may seem like common sense and most of it is, but how many of you know exactly how best to communicate with your colleagues, let alone your clients and suppliers? How many of you have worked hard to meet a deadline and been rebuked for not providing enough information or the wrong type of information? It is this that MBTI helps us understand; do we write the report fast to meet the deadline, or do we pluck up enough courage to ask for more time so that we can provide the right information first time? If you are a J, the pressure will be on meeting the deadline, but if you are a P it will be in providing the finished report when it is finished and as a P this may be never. Understanding communication at this level helps us to communicate more effectively and use the tools at our disposal to provide it faster if required.

Taking into account some of the aforesaid traits, I will close the article leaving you with an anecdote used in the training and assessment PDMS undertook. The consultant training PDMS was working with a UK based company and asked the MD if he communicated with his staff, the MD proudly replied "yes, every month I send out a newsletter with the salary slips". "Great!" Replied the consultant "you've communicated with half your staff", "no" replies the MD "I send it to everyone", "that's what I mean," replies the consultant, "you've communicated with half of them!" It had never occurred to the MD that half of his staff would never look beyond the payslip to read his carefully crafted newsletter.