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Last Updated: 4:15 am | Sunday, July 20, 2008

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BlackBerry has own etiquette rules

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For good or bad, technology has changed not just how we communicate but where and when.

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In my corporate consulting I have found improper use of the BlackBerry and other e-mail cell phones to be one of the top complaints from companies and employees. For example, a CFO told me he was interviewing a potential employee who answered his phone during the interview. Very unprofessional.

I also know of an executive who was leading a meeting that included some of the company's top clients. During the meeting he had to drop notes to two of his own employees asking them to turn off their BlackBerrys.

I'm picking on the ubiquitous BlackBerry because its addictive qualities earned it the nickname "crackberry," but other PDAs are culprits as well.

When devices began offering easy access to e-mail - which we can check quietly in a meeting - the temptation to multi-task seemed too much for many to resist.

Giving someone your attention and presence is vital to professional success. It's dismissive to opt for technology instead of a person.

Here are some guidelines:

Avoid the goofy ring tone.

Hearing Guns N' Roses blaring from a professional's BlackBerry is juvenile and highly irritating.

Don't send or read e-mails during a meeting.

Some think it sends a message of productivity, but the opposite is true. You run the risk of looking rude, dismissive, disinterested and bored.

Avoid placing the BlackBerry on the table during a meeting.

This will prevent the temptation to check for messages. Again, be present and available to the people you are meeting.

If you are expecting an important call during a meeting, advise the person running the meeting before the start, keep the phone close by (again on manner mode) and leave the room immediately before answering the phone. Also, don't answer calls during a meeting or interview, especially to say that you are in a meeting and can't talk. That's what voice mail is for.

When sending e-mails via BlackBerry, be concise and use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.



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