

YOUR BUSINESS EMAIL ADDRESS MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Make the right first impression about you and your business

Entrepreneurs and new business owners are always struggling with how to increase brand equity. A simple way to make you and your business look more professional is to set up a domain-level, branded email address for yourself and put it on your business cards. This means your email address matches the domain name for your web site. For example, nancysmith@yourcompany.com.

Yet some business people still have a non-branded email address on their business cards, and instead provide an email address from their Internet Service Provider (ISP) or free third party email services. These include @comcast.net or @gmail.com or @yahoo.com.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS You never get a second chance to make a first impression, and it's amazing how strong and quickly people are forming opinions about you and your business just by the email address on your business card.

The results were overwhelming. 70% of people think it matters, and a non-branded email address looks unprofessional. Name@yourcompany.com is essentially the gold standard of what people consider professional with more than 90% ranking this type of email address as "most professional." No other type of email address garnered anywhere near that type of positive response.

Gmail got the second highest rating under "most professional" and they got less than 3%. And if you are using certain email service providers you are really making a bad impression. We gave survey respondents 6 different type of email address to rate and 50% rated @hotmail.com as totally unprofessional, 48% rated @aol.com addresses as totally unprofessional and yahoo, comcast and Gmail received 38%, 27% and 11% respectively as "totally unprofessional." Hotmail did not receive a single rating in the "better than average" or "most professional" category.

Comcast was used as the example of an ISP-generated email address and it rated just slightly higher, but still 93% of the respondents would still only rank it as acceptable or worse. Gmail stood noticeably above the rest as an option for non-domain-level names, but don't get complacent if you're promoting yourself with a @gmail.com contact info: 36% of people consider that to be somewhat or totally unprofessional.

WOULD YOU HANG SOMEBODY ELSE'S SIGN IN FRONT OF YOUR BUSINESS? Some commenters described people who use non-domain level addresses as "lazy," "cheap" and otherwise uncommitted enough to their business to be taken seriously. Why put yourself in a position where you have to overcome these extremely poor brand perceptions?

In addition, people expect an email and web site domain name to match. It tends to raise unnecessary questions when they don't. All these subtle ambiguities and questions never make a good first impression. Also, by giving someone your email address as a domain-based address you are basically giving them the web site address too as a two-for-one. With email such a prevalent form of communication you need to quickly present yourself in a professional manner.

WHY ARE PEOPLE STILL USING NON-BRANDED EMAIL ADDRESSES? Some survey respondents were not attached to a business or group, such as the unemployed or retired. But for business people, they relied on third party email services for their convenience. Several people cited using those types of accounts because they were free, and easy to access.

Whether you use something like Google Apps to host your email, or just forward your address to another account, there is no reason that you should do anything other than promote yourself on your business card with a branded domain-level address.

DON'T TIE YOUR OWN BRAND TO SOMEONE ELSE'S Both the data and the comments showed that alliance with third parties is risky. Currently Gmail is viewed as the best of the non-domain options according to our responders, but how long will Google ride this wave of positive brand perception? We can all remember back to when Yahoo was so cool, but today 72% of our respondents did not rate Yahoo favorably. You don't want to tie your own perception and image to a third party that you have no control over.

SUMMARY Don't take the risk of creating a negative perception of you and your business with something that is so easy to fix. Domain level, branded email—based on your name and those of your employees—create an immediate and favorable impression. Does anybody really want to do business with whoknowsyou@aol.com? Survey says... No.

Pretty much every GROW team has a marketing expert and/or a website developer on their team. Please lean into them for more expert guidance on this topic.

