



Geo-Strata

JULY/AUGUST 2012

Post-Disaster Geotechnics

What happens after
the smoke
clears?

ALSO

Running From the
Waldo Canyon Fire



Oh, Dear

“Dear Mr. Jones:

Enclosed please find our proposal to [blah-blah the blah blah].... If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call....”

Look familiar? It should. You’ve probably written it thousands of times, just as your geoprofessional forebears did. And just as all of your competitors still do.

Commodity: a mass-produced unspecialized product

It doesn’t do much good for people to yell at the top of their lungs, “We’re not commodities,” when – apparently – they all make no effort to appear different from one another. If your cover letters (not to mention what they convey) are almost bolt-for-bolt the same as your top-ten competitors’, how do you appear *not* mass produced? And, if you are a commodity – and you *are* if that’s how others see you – why would anyone want to give you a seat at the project’s grown-ups table? If anyone can do the job and come out with something acceptable, how important could you and your services be?

The most important word in marketing is “only,” as in “We are the only geoprofessional firm in our area that can....”

Face it: You don’t get to be regarded as someone special – as *not* a commodity – by doing things the same way everyone else does them. “We are the only....” is good advice. And with that in mind, let’s look again at the humble cover letter; what may be the first original document you generate for a prospective-client representative to see...and to evaluate as a representation of your firm and its philosophies.

“Enclosed please find....”

My guess is that this bit of ancient formality came into being early in the 19th century. In today’s world, no matter how many millions of times it’s written every day, it’s just plain dumb. Think about it: “Enclosed please find....” You have a one-page letter that covers a 16-page proposal: Do you honestly believe the recipient is going to have trouble finding this behemoth in the envelope? Or did you hide it somewhere? Under the stamp perhaps?



What if you communicated only via electronics? Realistically – i.e., nit-pickingly – you would not in that case be able to “enclose.” Nor would you be able to “attach.” (Staples and e-mails don’t mix.) You’d have to “append” or “embed.” Personally, when I do e-mails, I “append” things. People tell me I’m silly; that “everyone says attach. You’re the only one I know who doesn’t.” Only?

So, what could you write? Well, something like this would be better:

“Our proposed project team is genuinely flattered to have been asked to submit our proposal – appended – for this challenging project. We are”

Better still:

“We’re flattered that you asked us to submit our proposal for this project. We’ve presented the “nuts and bolts” in the appended summary. Our project manager – Doug Downs – provides much more information in our streaming-video proposal at ourcompetitionissolame@defgeo.com....”

Next, “Please do not hesitate to call....” Imagine, if you will, the reader of your cover letter and its contents. The individual has looked at how many similar packages? One? One hundred? One thousand? Way more than one thousand? One thing’s for sure, it’s not one. So this “old hand” is reading the proposal and has a question. Imagine the person struggling, “Should I call? Should I not call? I don’t know what to do. HELP! But wait: It says, ‘Please do not hesitate to call.’ Oh, thank goodness.”

What’s another way of saying that? Don’t say it; you don’t need to. Instead, you might try something like, “We’d love an opportunity to demonstrate why our firm is truly the only one of its kind.”

Did you notice I skipped over “Dear Mr. Jones:”? That was no accident.

I receive about 100 e-mails a day. Those that begin with “Mr. Bachner:” or “John:” are so brusque I regard them as rude. And those that begin “Dear Mr. Bachner:” I find to be off-putting; some-

how, “Dear” seems alien to an e-mail. Best, I believe, is a brief friendly greeting/salutation, like “Good morning, Mr. Bachner” or “Greetings, Mr. Bachner” or a salutation that is a simple sentence that includes the recipient’s name; e.g., “I enjoyed speaking with you today, Mr. Bachner.”

But what about hard-copy letters? I don’t write many of those anymore, but yesterday I had a chance to. I didn’t write “Enclosed please find....” nor did I reassure that, in case of questions, the recipient should “not hesitate to call.” But, I did wonder why I began the letter by calling the person “dear”? In fact,

the person is not dear to me nor is the person, to my knowledge, a dear. So why “Dear”? Because that’s the way it’s been done for the last two centuries or more. I’m wondering if it may be time for a change, at least for me. What would be the reaction, do you suppose, to “Greetings, Mr. Jones. Thanks for this opportunity.” without considering whether or not Mr. Jones is dear? Would Mr. Jones be offended? Doubtful. Might he think, “That’s the only firm that does this. Its people really seem to think about things”? And if he thought that, wouldn’t that be a good thing? Unless I actually wanted to be a commodity.

AUTHORS

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