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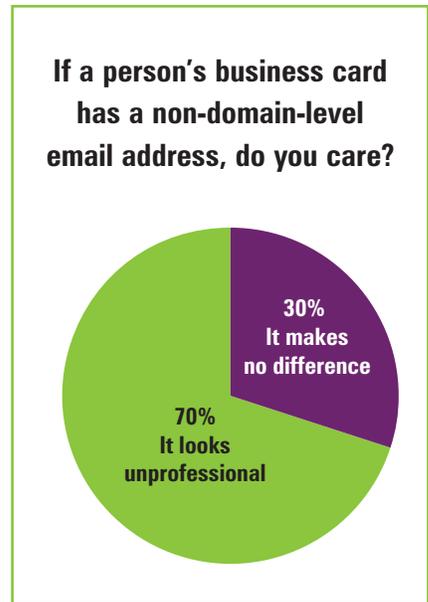Portland, ME 04101
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WHITE PAPER

YOUR BUSINESS EMAIL ADDRESS MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Make the right first impression about you and your business

Start ups, sole practitioners, and small businesses often use email addresses that they already had or were quickly set up on a free or low cost service like hot mail. These addresses are seen as unprofessional by customers and prospects. Visible Logic, a Maine-based branding agency, recently completed an in-depth survey to prove that your email address says a lot about you and your company.

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.

If a person's business card has a non-domain-level email address, do you care?

30%
It makes
no difference

70%
It looks
unprofessional

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. If you're one of the 30% who thinks it doesn't matter? It does.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Excerpts from the survey respondents comments:

I am leary of email addresses that are free account services such as yahoo, Gmail or hotmail. It would make me suspect that the company could be a **fly by night** operation or possibly a **scam**.

There's absolutely no reason, other than **ignorance**, for someone to use anything other than their domain name for their email if promoting a business.

Using a non-domain-level address is just the **height of laziness** (or **cheapness**) and shows a **lack of commitment** to your business.

I can't imagine taking anyone seriously if they presented a professional card with an Aol email.

If a company doesn't bother to get a domain name with email ... **I wonder what else they don't bother to do**.

Free email accounts like Gmail and Yahoo, indicates they're **cheap** and most **likely to cut corners** rather than provide quality work. Using the ISP email account, indicates to me that they're **lazy** and **not worth my time** to deal with.

The results were overwhelming. 70% of people think it matters, and a non-banded 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. And Aol only received a handful. 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.

> **70% of people think it matters, and a non-domain-level email address looks unprofessional.**

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.

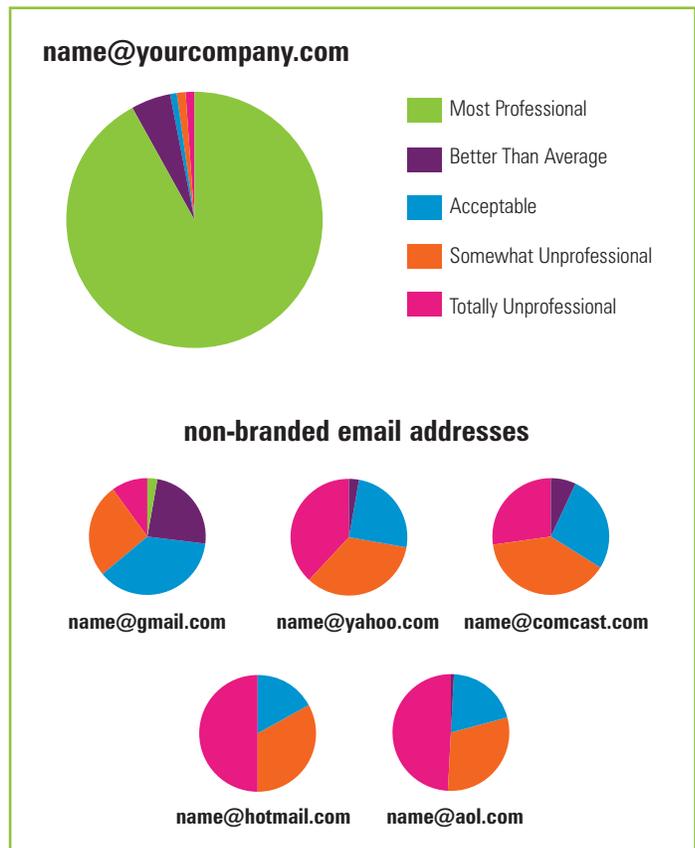**WOULD YOU HANG SOMEBODY ELSE'S SIGN IN FRONT OF YOUR BUSINESS?**

Some commenters described people who use non-domain level addresses as "lazy," "cheap" and otherwise uncommitted enough to their business to be taken seriously. (see sidebar) 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.

Several people mentioned the fact that seeing a familiar domain name in their inbox makes it easier to remember you and know it's not spam. One explained: "I am leary of email addresses that are free account services such as yahoo, Gmail or hotmail. It would make me suspect that the person's company could be a fly by night operation or possibly a scam that could be shut down quickly." 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. But as one commenter mentioned: "I know a lot of people love Gmail's features and are

name@yourcompany.com

- Most Professional
- Better Than Average
- Acceptable
- Somewhat Unprofessional
- Totally Unprofessional

non-branded email addresses

name@gmail.com   name@yahoo.com   name@comcast.com

name@hotmail.com   name@aol.com

Some commenters described people who use non-domain level addresses as "lazy," "cheap" and otherwise uncommitted enough to their business to be taken seriously.

committed to their system, but are unaware that you can host your professional e-mail, calendar, etc on Google Apps for your domain."

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 ELSES

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.

This can be seen with some of the opinions about Aol. One person said: "if it's an Aol address, I always wonder about their level of competency on the computer." But someone else mentioned: "Aol was considered archaic a year ago and lately has improved in terms of corporate branding."

You don't want to tie your own perception and image to a third party that you have no control over.

Gmail got the second highest rating under "most professional" and they got less than 3%.

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.

ABOUT VISIBLE LOGIC

Established in 2001, Visible Logic, Inc., is a graphic design and branding firm that works across all media, from web sites to logos to print materials, to build cohesive and consistent identities for their clients. Based in Portland, Maine, Visible Logic builds complete branding systems and designs individual projects for clients across the U.S. For more information on Visible Logic's services, go to www.visiblelogic.com or contact Emily Brackett at (207) 761-4230 or ebrackett@visiblelogic.com.