

# As We Plug In, Thank You Notes Go Out

By Jennifer Wake

Cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, faxing, voicemail.

With all of these technologies, finding a quick way to express gratitude should be simple, right? Not necessarily. Along with this shift in communication technology, has come a shift in social etiquette.

In a 1998 Gallup Poll, 30 percent of adults said they made a point of expressing thanks or gratitude to others only “some of the time.” A 2002 Public Agenda survey found that 16 percent of people practically never hear the words “please” and “thank you.”

Marketing consultant and Moraga resident Paula Pollock has seen this shift first-hand. Tired of waiting, she has made proactive calls to younger relatives to make sure that they received birthday gifts. “It’s up to the parent and the value the parents put on etiquette,” she said. “Acknowledgement is a good thing.”

As a marketing consultant, Pollock advises clients on proper e-mail etiquette as she sees more on-line communication find its way into business. Contracts, approvals and change orders are now sent via e-mail. Cover letters are put in the body of the text with resumes attached in Word documents. “The expectation in business now is there should be a thank you from a prospective employee 48 hours after an interview,” Pollock said. “I advise clients that if they are sending an e-mail thank you, to be sure your main message is in the first paragraph, since some may not read further than that.”

Paperweight Stationery Studio co-owner Kaaren Brickman of

Lafayette uses a BlackBerry, but says because of that, she reads her e-mails ‘on the fly’ and often breezes through the body of the text.

But is sending off a personal e-mail thank you enough?

Not according to etiquette expert Peggy Post. Although it’s important to be prompt, sending an e-mail thank you or posting a generic thank you on a Web site is high on Peggy Post’s Etiquette Don’t list.

Finding a hand-written note amongst the pile of bills and junk mail has become a rare occurrence, making it all the more special, said Brickman. “I absorb more when I have a piece of paper in front of me, something I can take with me and look at,” she said.

Paperweight co-owner Lauren Woolsey says she is still old fashioned, preferring the hand written scrawl to the printed word. “Even envelopes with addresses written out, instead of the ones printed from an Excel spreadsheet, touch me.”

Both Brickman and Woolsey say that their customers are trying to get back to old traditions. “I think the novelty of doing everything online – invitations, thank you notes, e-vites – is wearing off a bit,” Brickman said.

Yet people are busier than ever. Understanding this shift, Pollock no longer expects RSVPs from guests who plan to attend her parties.

“RSVPs have become arduous tasks,” she said. “When I do send paper invitations, I now write on them ‘regrets only.’ And I put



Moraga resident Page Swanson looks through invitation samples for her daughter's eighth grade graduation party Photo Jennifer Wake

my phone number and my e-mail address.”

Pollock uses personalized paper invitations for special occasions, but still prefers e-vites for bigger functions involving a large group of people. “I belong to the Moraga Juniors, and we send out e-vites for some of our functions. It’s much easier to reach our members this way, and it’s less expensive.”

But there can be a downside: e-vites can get lost in an inbox or be marked as spam. Pollock concedes that there is still a certain formality to the written word and a certain special quality that is missing with online communication.

“And there are still people who are not e-mail centric,” she added.

Moraga resident and Paperweight customer Page Swanson simply does not like online invitations. “I think e-vites are rude,” she said.

But even paper invitations

and thank you cards can fall flat. Brickman and Woosley suggest five “P”s – (Personality, Promptness, Penmanship, Particulars, and Precision) – to make a thank you cards work.

“Finding cards that reflect your personality, are sent quickly, and are in your own handwriting express more of who you are and come across as a more sincere expression of thanks,” Woolsey said.

“Just a couple of sentences telling why you liked the gift, or how it will be used add a couple of seconds to the task, but can make a huge difference,” added Brickman.

If you have the right tools (stationery, stamps, addresses), sitting down to write 10 thank you notes is no longer daunting, Brickman explained.

“Once you sit down to do it, it doesn’t take that much time to be thoughtful.”