



BACK TALK

BY SANDER A. FLAUM

Don't get mad—get even!

It's frightening to see how many people are risking their reputations, careers and friendships by e-ranting. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Someone sends you an annoying e-mail and before you know it, you've rattled off a blistering reply. Or someone forwards an offensive joke (at least it's offensive to you) and *wham!* You let the sender know exactly what you think. Are you with me—so far?

And now you hit ... send.

Oops! Probably not a wise idea. Going e-ballistic can have rapid and dire repercussions. All that the object of your e-mail has to do is forward it to as many people as possible, many of whom will in turn forward it to their friends, and so on. Who doesn't like to pile on when it comes to an e-fight?

Your intemperate e-mail doesn't even have to go viral. All it needs to do is get to someone you care about or with whom you do business. And to make matters worse, you can't even defend yourself. What are you going to do, send out another e-mail?

Another risky form of e-communications is the tweet, especially when you're trying to be funny. If just one reader takes offense, he or she can give you grief in a hurry. Anthony Horowitz, the designated author of new James Bond novels, tweeted that he considers the studio's choice for the new 007, British actor Idris Elba, as a bit too "street" for the role. Was he serious? Was he kidding? One thing is certain—he wasn't thinking!

No sooner had Horowitz's comment hit the "tweeter-verse" than he was being called out as a racist since Elba is black and being called "street" could be taken as offensive. As it turned out, Elba was actually amused by it. Unfortunately for Horowitz, someone had been offended on Elba's behalf and orchestrated the cyber response. All it takes

is one troll to stir up a world of trouble.

A much more serious nightmare befell a woman last year. While en route to Africa she tweeted a callous quip about feeling safe from Ebola since she was white. She was trying to be funny and sent the tweet to a group of friends. But someone outside her circle saw the tweet, was offended and forwarded it to the world. This upright citizen then organized a mass shaming and urged the woman's employer to terminate her position. By the time she returned to the US, she had lost her job and her reputation.

Was she stupid to have sent the tweet? Sure. But who hasn't made an insensitive and foolish remark? We have to face it: Private communications no longer exist. *Anything* you utter may wind up being broadcast.

Yet self-censoring isn't easy, especially when we're angry. Fighting back when attacked or sounding off when offended is instinctive. But we're used to one-on-one verbal battles. It's a

different ball game when anything you say may go global. Remember Howard Dean? One moment he was a serious presidential candidate. The next moment he was ranting in front of reporters. A few days later he was a former presidential candidate.

My advice? The next time you compose an e-mail while angry or find some edgy bit of humor in your in-box, don't hit send or forward. Consider save instead. It'll still be on your computer tomorrow. But when you read it over later with a cooler head, you may be glad you still have a chance to hit delete.

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Is there anyone who doesn't want to pile on when it comes to an e-fight?

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