



Lawyers Should Turn Off “Sent From My [Smartphone]”

By Christopher Hopkins, Chair,
Law Practice Technology Committee

How many emails a day do you receive with a signature line, “Sent from my iPhone” or “sent by [mobile device]”? Why do we permit those advertisements on business and personal emails?

Unknowingly, those signature lines give away hints about our work product and habits. Lawyers, as well as anyone in business or politics, should disable the “Sent from my...” signature line on smartphone emails.

Yes, there was a *moment* of tech-chic in 2007 when iPhone users sent their first email which automatically appended “Sent from my iPhone” at the bottom. It was a rare opportunity for early tech adopters to look sophisticated and bask in the glow of the Apple aura. “Sent from my iPhone” was a digital bumper sticker which suggested you took your tech as seriously as you respected the need for people to reach you. A “virtual” Marlboro man.

But, like bumper stickers and the Marlboro Man, trends fade. In the tech world, they fade even faster. Android-based phones flooded the market in 2009 and, within months, Apple debuted the iPad in early 2010. But even Apple’s auto-signature had lost some luster by the time “Sent from my iPad” arrived. In copycat fashion, signature lines sprouted up in emails from non-Apple devices, e.g., “Sent via Good” or, at a wordy extreme, “Sent from my HTP on the Now Network from Sprint!” Throughout this article, we will use the iPhone as our example since they pioneered the signature line phenomenon (before then, RIM’s Blackberry had silently dominated business email without a signature line).

There are many reasons to turn off “Sent from my...” but three reasons, for lawyers, are unassailable. At least one of them involves a serious basis.

Reason #1: As a lawyer, you need to be everywhere yet never appear to be running around. The fact that your email is sent from a mobile device gives away too much information. To your supervisor, an early morning reply with “Sent from my...” betrays that you have not made it to the office yet. To a client, it says that you are on the road... working on someone else’s case at the moment your client wants something from you today. To an adversary, it suggests you may be out of the office and may be helpless to respond to that 4:59 p.m. responsive pleading coyly sent via fax. If you are late for a meeting, it confirms you are typing while driving. At the very least, no one is paying the slightest attention to “Sent by my...” There is no reason to hand over your location (“not in the office”) just because you are sending an email.

Reason #2: as illustrated above, your smartphone’s coolness is gone. No one cares that you have chosen sides in the iPhone or Android debate. Your sly announcement that you were among the rare few to possess an iPad 2 the day after its release is now... stale. The politics of “which smartphone do you own?” is not part of your professional image. You disagree? Consider receiving an email which says, “Sent from my Blackberry” at the bottom. Do you have a positive emotional response to the fact that, in 2011, someone is emailing you via Blackberry? Worse, recognize that you are running a digital billboard for the phone manufacturer. Would you put a “South of the Border” bumper sticker on a new

Mercedes? Instead, enjoy the subtle sophistication of your gadget in silence. Fear not, fellow tech owners – and the envious – will bathe you with the attention you desire when you pull out the latest device at a calculated moment during lunch.

Reason #3: our third reason to delete the “Sent from my...” message is closely tied to the second reason and comes in two parts. You run the risk of subtly *alienating* people. First, the client you are emailing may recoil at “Sent from my iPhone” (or whatever device you are using). Perhaps that person holds an ardent anti-Apple mindset – as much as there are Apple fans, there exist detractors who view their non-Apple smartphones with strong emotion. Or maybe that person had a dispute with AT&T over cell reception or dropped iPhone calls. Perhaps the envious recipient had to resort to a non-smartphone since his employer took away the perk and he cannot afford one. Maybe they chose a competitor since they thought that device was better than Apple (a decision which, in our hypothetical, conflicts with your viewpoint). Or, worse, maybe you are emailing someone who works for or is closely tied to a tech competitor. In short, for no reason – *and no benefit* – you may actually rub someone the wrong way merely by the “Sent from my...” line.

Second, since the iPhone cool-ness factor has deflated since its lauch *four years ago*, leaving that signature line in place suggests that you do not know how to remove it. There goes your tech-savvy image. Indeed, since so many lawyers clog their email footers with IRS and confidentiality disclaimers, the fact that you left “Sent from my...” at the bottom of your email hints at a lack of detail.

Turning off (or replacing) those signature lines is easy: iPhone/iPad: go to Settings-Mail, Contacts, Calendars-Signature. Android/Good: go to Options-Email Option-Append Signature. Sprint HTC: go to Email-Menu-Tools-Options-Signature. Blackberry: Setup-Email Setup-[account]-Signature. Others: Google search “[device] + signature line”

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