Holiday Greetings - A Little History

Holiday cards are hardly a recent phenomenon. In 1822 the U.S. Superintendant of Mails complained that he had to hire sixteen additional carriers to handle the December deliveries and petitioned Congress to limit the practice. (Fat chance!) Britain holds the honors for the first commercially printed card, commissioned in 1843 from artist John Calcott Horsley by Sir Henry Cole, who was looking for a tasteful card to send to friends. Wishing “A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to You,” a thousand cards were printed. The idea caught on and by the 1860s printed cards were big business, featuring both seasonal and religious themes.

No matter what you celebrate, the holidays are a time when many people make an effort to stay in touch. Season’s greetings, family newsletters, cards and notes of thanks and appreciation flood mailboxes and e-mail boxes around the globe.

I have many non-Christian friends, is it rude to send them cards?

Cards that offer the message “Seasons Greetings” or “Happy New Year”—with no religious figures, messages or symbols on it—are appropriate for a wide range of friends and acquaintances. Sending seasonal greetings goes beyond any particular religious holiday, and it’s long been an accepted practice to wish one’s friends well at least once a year. Sending a card early in the new year can also de-emphasize the religious aspect of the season.

Is it okay to e-mail my holiday greetings instead of mailing cards?

Sure. The electronic version of the traditional card is definitely greener and less expensive. The sky’s the limit—everything from a note with attached photo to an animated extravaganza. Since your goal is to reach out and touch everyone in your address book, keep a few points in mind:

- Send e-greetings to those friends and relatives who actually use e-mail. Your great aunt Sara may still prefer a traditional card.
- Write your message as you would a traditional card.
- Limit the size of attachments to 1MB or smaller.
- Don't show other recipients' addresses in the "To" line. Keep their info private by using the Bcc feature.
- Use a personal rather than a work addresses. Many companies have policies against receiving and sending personal e-mail at work.

Is it necessary to write thank you notes to family members?

A thank you note is always appreciated, but a note isn't needed if you've thanked someone in person for a gift—the most personal thanks of all. If you receive gifts from family members that you won't see to thank in person, write them a thank you note, both to let them know their gift arrived and that you liked it. Remember that relatives from 'the old school' may still expect a written note even if thanks were given in person.

What about an e-mailed thank you note for holiday gifts?

While it may be all right if you and the giver e-mail each other frequently, it's still no substitute for a handwritten note. Thanking the person the old-fashioned way will emphasize how much the gift means to you.

Use our handy guide to address your holiday cards .