How to undermine your credibility

An important message for Deborah

That was the exact subject line of an email I got this morning from AT&T.

Since I have my cell phone service through AT&T, and the email clearly was *designed* to sound official, and I thought it was service-related news about my usage or bill. But no, it wasn't about my cell phone service at all. Instead, the email was an advertisement for a "flash sale" on AT&T's home security services.

Let's review: A company with which I have an established (and may I add, quite long) customer relationship sends me an email that claims it's important. The subject line is personalized, but the purpose of the email is to sell me other, *unrelated* services.

A case of misdirection

In other words, the subject line of this email was misleading. The email was neither important nor specifically for me. It was a promotion that required a subject line that would hook me into opening it.

Entering the realm of unintended consequences

Today's misleading email from AT&T had two unintended consequences:

- it eroded my trust in AT&T, undermining the company's credibility
- it caused me to unsubscribe from their promotional emails (all of them)

Raise interest but not at the expense of your credibility

Yes, companies and organizations need to have email subject lines that will raise interest and make people open the email. That's the purpose of email marketing after all. But when the subject lines are misleading—designed specifically as click-bait—the organization's credibility takes a hit. No longer will readers believe emails with words such as important, or urgent. Down the road, this can have negative consequences.

Bottom line

Cultivate your credibility, even at the expense of potential sales. Once you've destroyed your credibility, you will have a very hard time getting it back.