

Why every company needs a writing style guide

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A style guide or "house style" is the way your company presents written communications. This includes visual elements such as layout and font type. But also, grammar and spelling, uniform ways of writing dates and words that have different spelling options, and much more.



Source: pixabay.com

It looks unprofessional and reflects badly on a company when clients receive emails and letters from various staff members and, bar the logo, you wouldn't know they came from the same organisation. Because they all look different, with layout and font left to the various writers' preferences.

What needs to be done?

The agency that designed your logo will have made recommendations how it should be used on your building signage, printed material, your website, your email signature, corporate gifts – really on anything with your logo on it.

But it doesn't stop there. Your writing style needs to be aligned, too. Collect a sample of every type of document you send out: letters, pitches, reports, newsletters, emails, etc.

A marketing professional can then assess the best style for each document: when to use which fonts and heading styles, what line spacing should be applied, etc.

In addition, you need rules on spelling and grammar. Here are a few examples:

- How to write and abbreviate your company's name
- Capitalisation of words unique to your industry or your company that would usually not be capitalised in the English language
- The type of bullets and punctuation to be used for lists
- Whether to write abbreviations with or without full stops
- How to write dates and time (18h00 or 18:00 or 6 pm)
- Which way to spell words that have alternative spelling options (judgment or judgement; focused or focussed, etc)
- How to write numbers, when to use italics, and more...

The key is consistency

Once your house style is in place, communicate it to everyone – and make it non-negotiable. It must be used and applied to all your communications: in house and to clients. And that includes newsletters, brochures, and your website.

Another important issue, when it comes to writing marketing material, is your firm's tone of voice: Your own, distinctive writing style. Of course, it may depend on your industry and target audience how formal or casual this should be.

The design elements, your house style, and your organisation's tone of voice are all part of your corporate identity. These are important for every company, regardless of its size. Even if you're just starting out, if you position yourself in the market from the outset with these elements in place, it's easier to transition smoothly into becoming a bigger company.

ABOUT ANDREA PAULSEN

I provide freelance writing, proofreading and editing services, with main focus on professional services.

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