KB CommEntary

Greetings!

Here Comes the Sun

Happy spring from all of us at KB COMM! We're ready to wave goodbye to the cold weather and ring in a season of sun, flowers, and quality communications. Though we're not qualified to guarantee you the first two, we're here to help with the third—which is why in this issue of *KB CommEntary* we'll be discussing style guides and consistency in corporate documents.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Creating technical documentation for a financial-transaction system developer

- Creating and revising job descriptions for the Careers website of a high-tech manufacturer

- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer letters, trade show presentations and materials, and product marketing brochures

- Writing, formatting, and performing quality control reviews of large, complex chemical residue studies intended for regulatory submission on behalf of a federally funded, cooperative research organization

- Writing supplements and formatting modules of electronic submissions to FDA for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company

- Reviewing and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to FDA and other health authorities on behalf of a medical device manufacturing company

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

Style Guides: Your Documents' Dress Code

The more employees a company has, the more difficult it is to maintain consistency in corporate documents, e-mails, reports, and other forms of communication. If there are dozens (or even hundreds) of people creating content, there may be dozens (or hundreds) of variations in how it looks, reads, and sounds. Creating an official style guide helps to keep company documentation consistent and professional.

If this sounds familiar, it may be because the March, May, and July 2010 issues of *KB CommEntary* covered the specifics of creating consistent Microsoft Word documents, with close looks at font choice, margins, page numbers, indentation, and other important details. This month's issue will look at style guides more generally.

What's in a Style Guide?

Style guides cover at least three or four main topics: how to talk about the company, how to format a document, how to use company-specific and commonly struggled-with words and phrases, and how to cite relevant sources.

Talking about the company: The style guide should specify how the company, its products, and services are referred to. For example, should the British East India Company always be referred to by its full name? Are the more abbreviated East India Co. or the initials EIC acceptable? If so, under what circumstances? Which names are trademarked, and which types of trademarks apply?

If different documents—or worse, different sections in the same document—use variations of names for the company and its products or services, things can get confusing. Deciding and documenting which name(s) should be used in which situations will create the consistency essential for successful branding and make documents clearer and more professional. Inclusion (or exclusion) and placement of

details like company logos and slogans is also important for consistent, effective branding. Note that there are important legal considerations associated with the use of company and product names, logos, and symbols, so you should always consult with a legal specialist when assembling this section of your style guide.

Formatting documents: The style guide should specify how documents should appear, in regard to conventions such as font color and size, page margins, header and footer options, placement of page numbers, and other formatting choices. Consider, for example, if each paragraph should begin with an indentation, or whether the name of a report should be included at the top of each page.

For a more complete look at these details, we again point you to the March, May, and July 2010 issues of KB CommEntary. Here's a link.

Note: Some companies maintain formatting standards and specifications in a formatting or graphic standards guide separate from their style guide. That's totally OK with us!

Using company-specific or problematic words and phrases: In addition to legal and informal names for products and services, companies usually have an impressive and bewildering array of words and terms for just about everything you can imagine—names of and terms that describe internal groups, titles, roles, functions, programs, processes, events, locations—it goes on and on. Inevitably, there are myriad variations on all these terms, many of which find their way into company communications and serve to further confuse the hapless and unaware.

We recommend collecting and standardizing these terms and documenting the official versions in your company's style guide. Then at least people will know what terms they're supposed to use, even if they choose not to. Likewise, there are many terms commonly used in the business world for which no hard-and-fast rules and many variations exist. *Companywide* vs. *company-wide*, *e-*whatever, *log in* vs. *login* (by the way, *login* is NOT a verb), *web site* vs. *website*. Assemble a list of these terms, decide how you're going to use them in your company, and document the official usage in your style guide.

Note that we aren't suggesting you reinvent the wheel with this section of the style guide. There are excellent general-purpose style guides available, including *The Chicago Manual of Style* and the *Associated Press Stylebook*, that you can and should adopt as your basic reference for issues of style, grammar, and usage. But these guides can't address company-specific jargon, sometimes don't lay down hard-and-fast rules, and don't always agree on things. It's these gray areas that you should clarify in your company style guide.

Citing sources: Finally, the guide should consider how outside sources (such as research or other company documentation) should be referenced. We all learned in school that not citing our sources is plagiarizing, but there are lots of rules about how citations actually work. Entire organizations exist to create and maintain these rules, and figuring out which ones your company should follow is important.

The citation standard most commonly used in general American business is *The Chicago Manual of Style*, but there are also many industry-specific guides, particularly for health care and the sciences. Find the one(s) that makes sense for your company and do what they say. But because these third-party citation standards can be excruciatingly detailed and often offer a variety of ways to cite sources, it's helpful if your company style guide condenses and summarizes their recommendations.

In addition to *Chicago* and the *AP Stylebook*, another good style guide to have on hand is Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, which covers writing more generally and helps to settle arguments on the finer points of grammar and usage.

Every office has a certain protocol—there's a specific way to clock in and out, to file and store information, and to communicate between departments. Think of a style guide as protocol for your writing: it puts everyone on the same page and keeps things running smoothly. If you're having trouble with or looking for someone to write, review, or re-do your guide, you know who to call—KB COMM will do it all, and in style.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

Kbcommllc.com