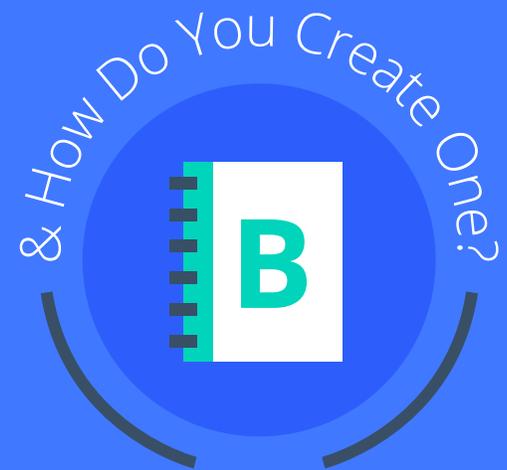


WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE A *Style Guide*



DOES THIS SCENARIO SURPRISE YOU? Each day, companies carry on with their marketing and public relations work without concrete brand style guides. While these businesses continue publishing their content and marketing themselves across multiple forms of media, no one has set aside time to create a unifying set of rules that all employees should follow. You wouldn't hire someone without reviewing the company HR policies and asking them to read the employee handbook, so why are you letting your marketing team members publish content freely without a style guide?

Often, the answer comes down to time and labor. Companies may not have designated team members who should oversee style guide creation. In some cases, even if those people existed, the employees might not want to take on the task. The result is an unspoken code in lieu of a style guide that's verbally agreed upon and never made concrete.

The time for change has come. This white paper will review the benefits of creating a brand style guide and the process of creating one, including pro tips on what material should be included in one. You should leave here with the tools needed to develop your own style guide — even if your guide is a rudimentary version for beta testing only.

What Is a Brand Style Guide?

A brand style guide is a set of rules that any creative, contractor, or employee should follow when representing your brand. Most companies emphasize the forward-facing element of the style guide to make sure the brand is always presented to the public in a unified way, but some also ask employees to represent the brand style internally.

Almost every brand style guide is different based on company needs. Some combine the use of design colors, logos, and representation into the main style guide, while others have separate guides for employees, writers, and designers. The guides itemize the rules for using the brand name and logo. Should there be an apostrophe? How is the brand used in the plural? What precise colors does the logo contain? A style guide helps answer these questions. As a result, some company style guides are literal books, bound and handed to employees on their first days of work.

Companies [create style guides](#) to protect their brand integrity. A Coach bag or pair of shoes is instantly recognizable by its logo, which rarely — if ever — diverts

from the set rules of the style guide. Customers pay more for the brand, which is why the company has to work so



hard to protect its visual identity. Any customer who finds a handbag or scarf that fails to meet Coach's style expectations is most likely purchasing a knockoff.

Image via [BagBliss](#)

Without a concrete style guide, your brand could be at risk. You could have employees using an improper tone and designers altering your logo. This type of execution reflects poorly on your company and could affect business. Even worse, you will have nothing to reference to set those employees straight as long as your company is functioning without a style guide.

Who Benefits From the Creation of a Brand Style Guide?

While you might pass off style guide creation to other team members or management, you could benefit most from a set of rules governing your brand. Employees touch a style guide at some point during their employment, and some benefit more than others.



NEW EMPLOYEES

In all likelihood, your new employees have a general idea about your company's brand, but they won't understand the technical aspects of its use. This lack of understanding can cause

stress over everything from designing ads to emailing supervisors. In the beginning, your new hires will rely on you to learn the ropes while they hope that they represent your brand appropriately.

Creating a style guide gives them a reference to study along with the employee handbook. For example, they'll want to know if they can wear jeans on Friday and

whether or not to use the Oxford comma. With a style guide, you're able to answer their questions and move on to more important aspects of the job.

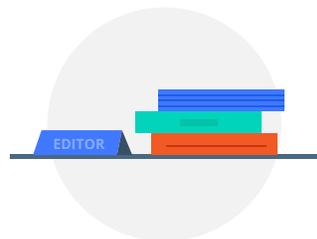


EXTERNAL CONTRACTORS

Internally, you eat, sleep, and breathe your brand. You're surrounded by your branding for at least 40 hours per week and have

perfected its use over several months or years. Your vendors and freelance team have not. When external contractors start working for you, they need to learn about your brand quickly so that they can match your tone and create work that represents your brand well. Without a set style guide, they could study your website and ask you questions, but they make up rules as they go.

Before you start working with any new vendor or freelancer, schedule an onboarding meeting to review the style guide and brand expectations. You can send the style guide a few days before the meeting so that your contractors have time to review it and ask possible follow-up questions. Not only will they learn your rules faster, but they will also have reference material to consult when potential rules or conflict questions arise.



MANAGERS AND EDITORS

Disseminating and using a company style guide has an upward effect for managers. When employees and vendors

have access to a complete set of rules, they don't need to waste their managers' time with questions about use cases. Further, editors and supervisors will spend less time fixing the work of their employees to make sure they're following brand standards. Not only does this effort free up time, but it also facilitates trust and autonomy with employees, which leads to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates.



THE BUSINESS ITSELF

The style guide isn't an internal tool only; it's also a way to protect the brand. Inconsistent messaging can confuse and isolate audiences, reversing all the

work your team invested while bringing clients to your company in the first place.

Remember, your audience chose you because people approve of what you stand for in the marketplace. They might like your professionalism or appreciate the young energy that you put into your work. Representing your brand in any other way means you're not giving your audience what they want, which could lead to drops in engagement and sales.

To see this effect in action, let's look at a few past rebranding fails. [Andersen Consulting changed its name in 2000](#) when the firm broke ties with Arthur Andersen. To appear more modern, the company rebranded itself as Accenture. Experts called their name meaningless and thought it referenced vague jargon. Most importantly, the rebrand told customers nothing about what the company does. The company strayed from its roots and style.

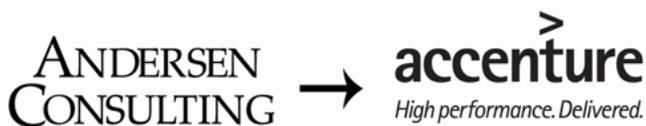


Image via [Business Insider](#)

The style guide is a crucial part of company life, whether you're trying to rebrand while maintaining your core base or trying to onboard any new hire or vendor.

What Material Should Your Brand Style Guide Include?

We mentioned earlier that almost every company maintains a different style guide and includes its own specific information inside that guide. However, a few general guidelines exist that most companies can follow when crafting their own guides.

TONE AND BRAND REPRESENTATION

Along with the technical aspects of brand representation, your style guide should also have soft guidelines that talk about the brand and what it represents. Remember, your brand extends far beyond social media posts and product packaging. Your employees should live your brand in the stores, on sales calls, and in the public eye. Make sure your guide has the following elements:

BRAND OVERVIEW

What does the brand stand for in the marketplace?
What words describe the company and its employees?

BRAND GOALS AND VISION

How does the company intend to be perceived?
What are the overall goals of the company (besides making money)?

BRAND USE AND LICENSING

[Bluetooth](#) has a great example of this concept.

ENFORCEMENT POLICY

This area includes legal ramifications if vendors misuse the brand, along with internal processes for employees.

For a dramatic example of brand guidelines, look at [Kanye West's "Yeezy Season 3"](#) model rules. While the list might not have been specific, the guidelines were certainly thorough. Brand steps included rules such as

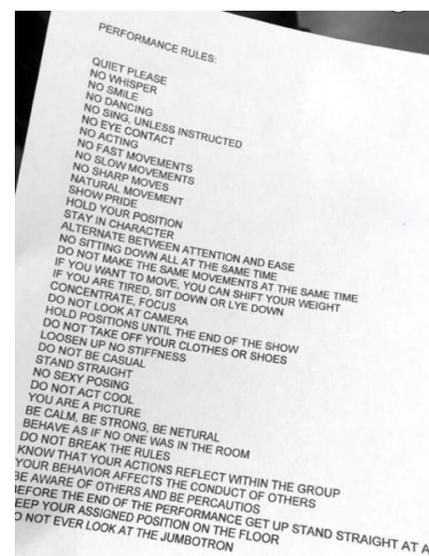
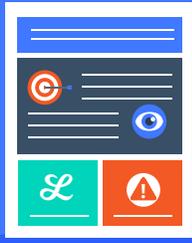


Image via [FashionWound](#)

“no dancing, no eye contact, no fast movements, and no slow movements.” You could certainly say that the style guidelines were on target for Kanye, even if his models struggled to memorize and follow all the rules on stage.



TONE & BRAND REPRESENTATION



DESIGN ELEMENTS



GRAMMAR & WRITING RULES

DESIGN ELEMENTS

This area might not apply to brands that keep their writing and design guides separate, but you'll find design elements included in most cases. These design rules apply beyond the graphics department and into each employee's personal use. If your social media intern shares an Instagram photo with company colors, are those colors correctly represented? If your customer service team members insert the logo into their email signatures, are they using that logo correctly? Below are a few criteria to include in your design guide:

LOGO DESIGN

This topic includes file size, fonts, and permissible modifications.

LOGO USE

How can the logo be displayed? How should it be positioned?

COLOR SCHEMES

What colors (PANTONE colors) are your employees allowed to use when representing the brand?

MISUSE CASES

Present common misuse cases. Examples include stretches, outlines, and added elements.

Few brands protect their images better than Coca-Cola. If your team members are looking for a thorough example as a base for their guide, check out the [Coke Zero logo and color rules](#).

Don'ts



Image via kathrin-pyplatz.com

This presentation prevents departments from crafting visuals that represent your brand without maintaining unity in design. If your sales department needs a poster for a conference, its team members shouldn't choose colors or stretch a logo if they follow the rules in your style guide.

GRAMMAR AND WRITING RULES

Grammar and writing rules are crucial for the content teams who create the bulk of customer-facing materials. Style guides should include everything from what words can and should be used and how, what grammar rules to follow, and how customers or audiences should be addressed. Consider the following examples:

EDITORIAL STYLE

Does your company use AP (The Associated Press) Style or Chicago?

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULES

While many companies follow AP Style with certain exceptions, such as hyphenating certain words, using the Oxford (serial) comma, or capitalizing various terms.

CUSTOMER SERVICE RESPONSES

How should your team address customers in a public conversation, such as on social media channels?

Examples could include hi, hello, dear (name).

EXCLAMATION POINTS AND ADJECTIVES

How should marketing teams represent the brand when they promote new products or events?

We've all seen nightclubs and bars promoting events using all capital letters and 15 exclamation points, but you wouldn't expect to see that type of writing style for a real estate open house or professional job fair. You may consider writing guidelines such as "use no more than one exclamation point at the end of a sentence" or "always proofread to make sure your posts are free of spelling and grammar errors" to be tedious. However, those guidelines will prevent brand abuse when an overly excited intern describes an upcoming product launch.

Not every brand requires the strict guidelines of Coca-Cola or Disney, but you should have something in place to make sure your employees meet brand quality standards.

How to Build Your Written Brand Style Guide

Often, companies aren't struggling with what to add to their style guides, but rather how to assemble them. Few people want to participate in such a massive project that encompasses so much of the company's time. Even if a business has created a brand style guide in the past, the document can quickly grow outdated with new social media platforms and logo designs. To prevent obsolete manuals, use the following four pro tips to ease the burden of [style guide creation](#) and maintenance.

SET A POINT PERSON TO OWN THE PROJECT

You might choose your senior marketing manager who works with all external communication within the company or your content creation team lead who manages website, blog, and social media copy. Either way, appoint someone to own the project, the person with the right tools and pull within the company to complete the project. Your style guide should not get handed off to an intern who will leave in three months or to a junior copywriter.

MAKE GUIDE DEVELOPMENT A TEAM EFFORT

The role of the point person is to move the project forward, not to complete it as a solo effort. Once your company understands who will take the lead, assemble a group of experts who can contribute to the brand guidelines. Examples of committee members include senior graphic designers, human resource managers, product development specialists, and customer service representatives.

The goal of the committee is twofold. First, a committee removes the entire burden from one person. The content manager might be an expert on grammar guidelines but may know nothing about graphic design or product specifications. If one person is creating something for the company itself, that person is certain to leave gaps and create an unfinished — and unused — product. More importantly, if the point person leaves the company, employees who remain can continue to develop and update the style guide.

SCHEDULE ANNUAL REVIEWS AND UPDATES

You can't build your style guide and then leave it alone for the next 5 to 10 years. New products, events, and social media channels require updates to the brand and its presentation. To prevent the style guide from gathering dust, the committee should assemble at least once per



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year — ideally twice per year — to review their sections and make changes and updates.

This review period would also be a great time to hold a public training on the style guide. Companies can host a lunch-and-learn discussion or an orientation for new hires to learn how to present the company's brand in various situations. This training further emphasizes the value of the style guide within the business.

EMAIL UPDATES TO EMPLOYEES

When changes get made to the style guide or branding, make sure the general population in the office knows about those changes. For example, if your company adds a banner to its logo for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, send a modified logo to the staff and explain how and when to use this logo artwork.

Send changes and updates to the style guide point person for an immediate use case, such as the logo



example above, or in a monthly style guide roundup. In this way, each member of the style guide committee stays involved in maintaining and modifying the living document year-round.

This effort may seem like much work, but once you create the first draft of the style guide, the bulk of the effort comes from monthly check-ins and annual meetings, both which shouldn't take much time at all.

Your style guide can be a valuable resource for your company, but only if you invest in the time to prepare it. Half-written style guides from 10 years ago won't be useful to your internal team and vendors. The better your style guide functions, the more people will use it, share it, and follow its guidelines. Having a style guide will not only take work off your plate from monitoring brand representation, but it will also make sure your company is uniformly representing itself and pursuing its goals.

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