

Web Site Content Preparation Guidelines

Organizing content is not something we all do every day. And organizing content to give to someone else can be daunting... especially if you are giving content to a developer or programmer. Web programmers work a bit differently than the average writer in that there are specifics that can make the process much more efficient and save on time and effort, thus resulting in a cost savings overall.

The following are recommended "best practices" for use when writing and organizing the content for your Web site. Preparing copy and content for your developer using these guidelines will create a smoother workflow and will eliminate many back-and-forth communications to clarify simple content questions.

The Top Ten Helpful Techniques when Preparing Content for Your Web Project

1. The order of your content is important. Be clear as to which paragraph headers are of equal weight and which headers and content belong under another paragraph.

US Cities <-----*(Header 1)*

Cities in Texas <-----*(Header 2)*

Some Texas text goes here...

Dallas <-----*(Header 3)*

This text is about Dallas.

Houston <-----*(Header 3)*

This text is about Dallas.

Cities in Colorado <-----*(Header 2)*

Some Colorado text goes here...

Indicating the weight of headers will help your developer place the content properly on the page without the need for you to review and correct their work. Often developers will post all of the content equally on a page if there is no clear definition of weight and importance. This results in maintenance and extra time and communication to correct the content.

2. Photographs to be used in your Web site should be presented in a JPG, TIF or PNG format. Images should not be submitted in smaller sizes than they are intended to be used. Provide images at the largest size and highest resolution possible to ensure the best quality. Locating images to be used on your site can be an ordeal in itself. Your developer can provide you with some guidance and information on where to find the right images and with guidelines on what to search for.

Line art such as logos, charts and graphs, and other “drawn” art should be submitted in GIF, PNG, AI, or EPS format. The JPG file format is primarily used for photographs and for images with a gradient of color. Otherwise, line art shows better as a PNG or GIF. If you are submitting logo art or company illustrations it is always the best practice to submit the *original art file(s)* for that work. Whether the format is a layered Photoshop PSD, Illustrator AI or EPS, that original art *must* exist somewhere. The quality of the end product is directly related to the quality of the content you submit for the developer to build your site.

Do not expect your developer to go to the Web and find links, get images, or to retrieve content from your existing Web site. It is your responsibility to provide all content and assets to the developer to create your site. You are the only one who knows your content and your business. You must make the effort to provide all content to your developer.

3. Properly naming files such as PDF documents and images to be used on your site is imperative. Filenames are like a directory path on your computer. Not every Web browser reads a complicated path the same way. The developer may spend hours in renaming your files properly to be used in the site. It would be wise to avoid this extra cost by being proactive and naming files properly. To avoid confusion and time spent for the developer to rename all of your files so they can be used, be conscious of the following rules:
 - Never use spaces in your filenames. Web browsers often do not know how to read spaces and won't always load your page. We want to eliminate any chance of error.
 - Do not use any special characters when naming your files. The !, @, or even & symbols will cause a link not to work. The ONLY special character to be used in filenames should be an underscore (_).

“SummerAtNewYork2008.doc” instead of Summer@New-York!2008.doc
 - Exclude any foreign text or characters in filenames. The ö or é will cause a link not to work.
 - The length of filenames is very important. When naming documents, in addition to remembering not to use spaces, it is vital that the length of the filename does not become too long. Filenames become truncated or cut off after too many letters on some computer platforms. Be brief in naming your files to avoid this.

“Report on my trip to New York in the Summer of 2008.pdf” could more intuitively be:

“SumNYC_08.pdf”
 - PASCAL Case is a naming convention where the first letter of each word is uppercased. This is a very common and helpful way of naming files.

“AboutMyCompanyAndStaff.doc”.

4. Your developer might provide a document for you called a “wireframe”. This wireframe will indicate the structure of your files on the Web server and will show you the names that will be used to create the pages of your Web site. It would be very helpful if in organizing your content Word documents for submission you would follow the same naming conventions.

For example... in the wireframe it may be indicated that the “About Us” page of your site will be drawn from a file called “AboutMyCompanyAndStaff.htm”. Your Word document containing the content for the “About Us” page should be named “AboutMyCompanyAndStaff.doc”. This will allow for efficient transfer of your data to Web site files.

5. If you have provided PDF or similar documents to the developer please indicate in your page text which document you wish to link to. Include the filename of the document to be linked to including the extension. Documents might be easy for you to associate with the copy but the developer will not be as familiar with your content and subject matter.

Your link to “My New York summer trip” might be impossible for the developer to locate if you name the PDF file as SumNYC_08.pdf. In this case it would be helpful to indicate the file to be linked to as:

My New York Summer Trip SumNYC_08.pdf

Place the name of the file in the line of text directly after the item to be linked and indicate the document name with a highlight. If you follow this simple technique, the developer can then find your document quickly and create the link.

** Trying to match up links with the proper documents is one of the biggest contributors to time spent in development. When time=money the more you can do to speed the developer’s process up, the more you’ll be helping yourself!*

6. Inform your developer of any multiple uses of the same content. If you have a list of bullet points that link to documents or Web pages and it is used in several pages of your Web site do not type that information in your content many times. There is too much chance for error and variability. Enter the bullet points where needed the first time and for future occurrences of the same copy, indicate that it is duplicate copy.

[insert bullet points from paragraph 3 under “Our Staff” on AboutMyCompanyAndStaff.doc]

This way the content remains consistent...

7. **CONSISTENCY!** Another important piece when preparing your own copy is to be consistent. If you italicize something on one page, you should italicize similar content elsewhere in the Web site. If you make a bulleted list on one page, don’t use a numbered list for the same type of info elsewhere. The same goes for paragraph order and writing style. If you use an em-dash (—) by an author’s name, don’t use a hyphen (-) the next time.

8. If at all possible, when you are putting links to places or files on the Internet into your content, make the actual text into a link. Most software like Microsoft Word allows you to make text into a link by selecting the text, right-clicking and choosing an option of “hyperlink”. You can then paste or enter the Web address into the address field there. There is often a similar option for you to enter an e-mail address to create a link in a Word document by right-clicking on your selected text.

** You can get the address of the Web page you wish by visiting it on the Web and selecting the Web address in the address bar or location bar of your browser. Right-click to copy and paste it in to your Word document when making your link and it is done.*

That isn't always intuitive or easy for everyone. So don't knock yourself out if it is a bit of extra work. Instead just include the Web address after your text to be linked and the developer will handle the rest. Place the Web address in the line of text directly after the item to be linked and indicate the document name with a highlight:

“I'm hoping to go to Disneyland <http://disneyland.disney.go.com> this summer.”

It works the same with an e-mail address:

“You may e-mail John Doe johndoe@mywebsite.com for more information”

9. Avoid using terms like “click here” or “view the file here” when writing your content. The referring text to your link should *be* the link in all cases. Imagine if you took that text that you have made into a link and viewed it out of context. Remove it from the paragraph all together. Now it just says “click here” and the visitor doesn't know what they are clicking. Make links more intuitive so they can stand on their own. This will also help a great deal in search engine rankings and indexing.

This summer I went to New York. To read about my trip [click here](#).

This summer was great for vacationing! I have written [a report all about my trip to New York!](#)

See the strength of a properly formatted link? This is more of a tip for you as far as best-practices go in writing for the Web. It will also save time for the developer if they end up fixing these types of link for you.

10. The most important rule of preparing content is... Don't get lazy! Creating Web content, or *any* content, can be frustrating. As we put together content we tend to want to abbreviate things and make quick notes thinking that they will be “good enough”. Really these types of shortcuts *are* “good enough” *for you*. But when you hand that copy off to someone who is not as intimately familiar with your subject matter or with your business it can become a scavenger hunt. Following through with these ten best practices and using them all the way through the process of putting your content together will save you and your developer time and money in the long run.

Don't get lazy! Don't make short notes and expect others to know what they mean. Take the time to use full filenames and clear, concise notes and instruction.

11. *Bonus Item:* If you must make special requests (such as content to make a link or special instructions) within your content, **highlight them**. This way the developer will more likely locate your comments and will be less likely to miss them and leave your notes in your Web page content.

Summary

The items listed above are merely our recommendations of best practices for delivering effective content for use in building your Web project. These simple insights will help you to create clean, intuitive copy and will allow the developers to transfer the copy from provided Word documents into the files used to build your Web site quickly and efficiently. Following these simple rules will help to minimize the extra time it may take for a developer to decipher poorly organized file structures, locate unnamed or counter-intuitively named files, rename documents, or otherwise organize content. Not to mention it will eliminate many phone calls and e-mails needed to understand what you really want the developer to do.

Content will certainly not be refused if these guidelines are not followed. We merely suggest these methods to avoid additional time spent on your project due to content organization.

Resources

[Letting Go of the Words](#)—a very thorough book about Web content writing.

[Writing for the Web 3.0](#)—a quicker read and an overall guide.

[Writing for the Web \(Chambers Desktop Guides\)](#)—one of the best guides written about writing for the Web. Only available in the UK it seems.

[Chicago Manual of Style](#)—the indispensable online reference for all who work with words.

[Don't Make Me Think](#)—possibly the best book written about Web site development.

[iStockPhoto](#)—royalty-free photos available for your use at a reasonable cost.

[BigStockPhoto](#)—royalty-free photos available for your use at a reasonable cost.

Byte Technology

At Byte Technology we are pleased to offer our continued support for you in maintaining your Web site. Feel free to contact our team at any time with questions or concerns.