A Sample Style Guide

The CMI team of Jodi Harris and Michele Linn have done some amazing work with our own style guide.

CMI STYLE GUIDE

FREQUENT CONSIDERATIONS

Article titles: Headline style (capital/lowercase)
Headlines: Capitalize only the first word and proper names.
Specific terms (for a more comprehensive list, see "Common Industry Terms"):

- white paper NOT whitepaper
- website NOT Website, web site or Web site
- internet NOT Internet
- eBook NOT e-book
- percent NOT %
- "like" NOT Like or "Like"

Capitalization:

- Do not capitalize *content marketing*.
- Capitalize first letter after colons only if the clause is a complete sentence.
- Capitalize job titles (e.g., VP of Sales).
- Capitalize specific types of web pages.

Other style issues:

Unfamiliar terms: Put in quotation marks for the first reference, but do not give special treatment after that. (e.g., "Content Chasm" first use; thereafter, Content Chasm throughout).

you **vs.** *we*: As a very general rule, posts should be directed toward *you*, not *we*.

Google+: Use Google Plus in the headline and title/meta tags and first usage and then Google+ after.

Website sections/features: When referring to a proprietary site section, app, or functionality, set in headline style. (e.g., "On the About Us and Contact page, you will see . . .")

Common CMI Article links: When it makes sense, link the following terms to these CMI articles:

- Content strategy:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/04/5-things-about-content-strategy/
- Editorial calendar:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/08/content-marketing-editorial-calendar/
- White paper:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/06/3-reasons-your-white-paper-is-failing/
- Infographic: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/12/infographic-samples/
- eBook:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/12/ebook-examples/
- Buyer personas:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/04/4-questions-answered-about-buyer-personas/
- Webinars:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/12/7-tips-webinar-success/
- Chief Content Officer:
  http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/chief-content-officer/
- Content Marketing World:
  http://www.contentmarketingworld.com/

- Managing Content Marketing or content marketing process: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/08/ what-it-takes-to-effectively-manage-content-marketing/
- Editorial planning: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/09/ globalizing-editorial-planning/
- B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute. com/2011/12/2012-b2b-content-marketing-research/
- QR codes: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/07/ using-qr-codes-in-content-marketing/
- Getting started: http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/11/ content-marketing-lessons/

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

A

ABBREVIATIONS: Unless a term and its abbreviation are so ubiquitously well known and interchangeable (for example, JPEG), spell out the complete term the first time it is used and include the abbreviation in parentheses; for example, pay-per-click (PPC).

B

B2B: Use all caps, do not use "b-to-b" or "B-to-B."
blogosphere: lowercased
blogs: lowercased, short for *weblogs* (also acceptable)
broadband: one word; no capitals
bull's-eye: *bull's* is possessive; hyphenate.

C

cellphone: all one word, but *mobile phone* is two words
click-through: one word, hyphenated
COLONS: In a headline, capitalize the first word after a colon.
- *Example:* The X-Factor: The sex factor
Capitalize the first word after a colon only if a full sentence follows.
COMPANY NAMES:
- While we try to respect all companies' rights to control the spelling and punctuation of their names, our main responsibility is to retain

readability. For this reason, please follow standard grammar rules for spelling company names (capitalize the first letter, but all other letters are lower-cased).

- Companies are an entity and should be referred to as an "it" not a "they."
  - *Example:* GM reported significant losses in *its* second quarter of 2007 (not: GM reported significant losses in *their* second quarter of 2007).

COMMAS: Put commas between the last two items in a list.

- *Example:* Broadband users are wealthier, better educated, and younger.

COMPOSITION TITLES:

- Book titles, movie titles, opera titles, play titles, poem titles, song titles, television program titles and titles of lectures, speeches and works of art should be italicized.
- Magazine titles are in headline style. Do not use italics or quotation marks. Also, lowercase *magazine* unless it is part of the name; for example: *Newsweek* magazine.
  - Also capitalize *The* in publication titles where it is part of the brand name; e.g., *The New York Times*; *The Wall Street Journal*
- Creative campaign titles use initial capitals and do not use quotation marks; for example: The Art of the Heist

CPA: This can stand for either "cost-per-action" or "cost-per-acquisition." The first time it is used, spell it out and include CPA in parentheses; for example: cost-per-action (CPA) or cost-per-acquisition (CPA). Each subsequent use of the term should just use the abbreviation.

D

DATES

- Avoid using *th* or *st* after numerals in dates. For example: April 8, not: April 8th.
- Write out all month names in full.
- Remember to include a comma after the year if a full date is given (for example, "On October 11, 2007, the RIAA ruled."). No comma is needed when only the month and year are used (for example, "The CAN-SPAM bill was signed in September 2005.").

DASHES: Use the em dash and en dash with a space before and after. For example:

- The company's software—and other technical components—were used in the presentation.

Single use of em dashes is acceptable when used for emphasis that is stronger than would be appropriate for parenthesis or commas.

- *Example*: Look for technology solutions to emerge for marketers to make, distribute and generate leads from this content—whether it's content publishing systems, podcasting, or webcasting.

degrees: Spell out (for example: 10 degrees, not: 10°).

dial-up: two words, hyphenated

dotcom: one word; for example:

- "Ever since the **dotcom** implosion…"
- "It's been a great year for **dotcoms**"
- **do's and don'ts:** Note where the apostrophe is. Add an "s" to "don't." For example:
  – Below is a list of do's and don'ts for your next online media buy.

E

Email: never e-mailHyphenate, not *eMail*, *email*.

etc.: always abbreviate and use a period at the end.

F

FILE FORMATS AND SOFTWARE ABBREVIATIONS: As a general rule, use all-capital-letter abbreviations for formats that are acronyms (there's no need to write these out on first use):

- GIF
- JPEG
- MP3
- PDF

Capitalize only the first letter of proprietary program names:

- Flash
- Java

G

gameplay: one word

-*g* vs. –*gue*: use dialogue and monologue, but use catalog

H

HEADLINES, capitalization in: Headlines should appear in capitals/lowercase.

HEADLINES, writing guidelines: When writing headlines, our main goal is usability. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

- Use "marketing-speak" terms with caution, such as the following:
  - Ensure
  - Leverage
  - Monetize
  - Optimize
- Try to use action verbs as much as possible (as opposed to passive verbs or verbs with *ing* endings).
- Avoid yes or no questions in headlines.
- Try to incorporate terms that refer to *royalty, conflict*, and *emotion*.
- When possible, include big brand names for added impact.
- Aim to keep headlines to 45 characters or fewer.

HYPHENS: Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. As a general rule, compound nouns do not need a hyphen; compound adjectives do.

- Real-time processing
- She played the game in real time

Hyphenate multi-dimensional, multi-channel, multi-cultural. **Exception:** multimedia

Do not use a hyphen between adverbs ending in *-ly* and adjectives they modify. For example:

- an easily remembered rule
- a badly damaged island
- a fully informed woman

J

JPEGs: Capitalized, with no period at the end,

K

Kbps: Capitalize only the K and attach to the number: 56.8Kbps.

L

Los Angeles: Write out all city names (not: LA).

M

media: Always use as the plural version of *medium* (never *mediums*), but paraphrase where possible; for example: "ad channels."

medium: Use as the singular form of *media*.

microblogging: all one word

Millennial: Capitalize

MULTIPLES: Do not use a hyphen in "five times,", but hyphenate "six-fold," etc.

N

nonprofit: one word

NUMERALS

- Spell out all whole numerals less than 10. For example, "one" instead of "1." All numbers greater than nine are in numeric form; for example: 12, 33, 10,000
  - *Exception:* If it's not a whole number (for example: 5.2, 3.6), use the numbers; for example: 5.2 percent and 1.5 kids.
  - *Exception:* At the start of a sentence, always spell out numbers.
  - *Exception:* Numbers less than 9 that are accompanied by a dollar sign or percent sign should use numerical spellings (for example: $9 million; 4 percent raise)
  - *Exception:* Use numbers in headlines.
- For ages, follow general number rules. For percentages, always use numbers.
  - *Example:* She was only eight years old when the earthquake struck.
  - *Example:* Only a two-year-old child would know how to do that.
  - *Example:* GM's earnings rose 4 percent over last year's 10 percent drop.
- When referring to quantities of millions and billions, numbers should be used, and not just in reference to money.
  - *Example:* His new salary was $12.5 billion.
  - *Example:* There were 256 million starving children.
  - *Example:* The nation has 1 million citizens.
- Spell out numbers that start a sentence; if the result is awkward, recast the sentence.
  - *Example:* Twenty-seven detainees were released yesterday.
  - *Example:* Yesterday, 993 freshmen entered the college.
- The one exception to this rule is in a sentence that begins with a calendar year.
  - *Example:* 1938 was a turbulent year for Leon.
- Use Roman numerals for wars, monarchs, and popes.
  - *Example:* World War II
  - *Example:* King George VI
- For large numbers: use a hyphen to connect a word ending in *y* to another word

  – Example: twenty-one, one hundred forty-three, seventy-six thousand five hundred eighty-seven
- Spell out casual expressions.
  – *Example:* A thousand times no!
  – *Example:* Thanks a million!

O

offline: one word
online: one word
opt-in: two words, hyphenated

P

pay-per-click (PPC): hyphenated
pay-for-performance (PFP): hyphenated
PDF: all capitals, no period
percent: Spell the word *percent* out. Only use the symbol (%) in headlines to save space.
PART: When referring to parts in the title of an article, capitalize "Part." But do not use Part 1 in headlines
- "Behavioral Targeting Secrets (Part 2)"
pop-up: two words, hyphenated
PROPER NAMES: Use words or numerals according to an organization's practice.
- *Examples:* 3M, Twentieth Century Fund, Big Ten

Q

QUOTES:
- Use scare quotes (quotes for emphasis) very sparingly.
- Always use double quotation marks unless there is a quote within a quote.

R

realign: no hyphen
REGIONS AND DIRECTIONS:
- When referring to regions, these should be capitalized and one word:
  – *Examples:* East, West, Northeast, Southeast, Midwest
- When referring to general directions, these should be lowercase and one word:
  – *Example:* He traveled east to St. Louis
rerun: no hyphen

ring-back: two words, hyphenated
ringtone: one word

S

said **and** *says***:** Use *said* in straight news articles. In features and cover stories, we generally use *says***,** but be sure to be consistent throughout the article.

search: Lowercase it unless it is part of a proper noun.

SERIES TITLES
- As a rule, we don't reference the fact that an article is part of a series, rather than a stand-alone article.
- For headlines, if we're publishing multiple parts, add "Page" for the second page and all following pages.

SPACING BETWEEN SENTENCES: Use a single space.

SUPERLATIVES: Avoid saying "leading" or "best known" in describing a company, especially in news stories.

SECONDS
- Do not use hyphen when describing increments of time less than one minute.
  - *Examples:* 55 seconds, 30 seconds
- Hyphenate when time is used as an adjective: 30-second spot
- Avoid using colon constructs (e.g., :30, :55)

spam: lowercased

STATES: Use AP abbreviations (for example, Calif., N.J., Fla.) rather than postal abbreviations (NJ, CA, FL). Also, there should be a comma after all city/state constructs (for example, "We left the La Quinta, Calif., conference on Tuesday.").

T

*that***,** *which***,** **and** *who*
Who refers to people, and *that* and *which* refer to groups or things.
- *Example:* Consumers *who* respond to surveys are likely to be more deeply engaged.
- *Example:* Companies *that* issue surveys are likely to deliver better consumer engagement.

That introduces essential clauses, and *which* introduces nonessential clauses.
- *Example:* I do not trust editorials *that* claim racial differences in intelligence.

- *Example:* The editorial claiming racial differences in intelligence, *which* appeared in the Sunday newspaper, upset me.

Note: Essential clauses do not have commas surrounding them, but non-essential clauses do contain commas.

TIME: hour, minute, no periods and lowercase p.m. and a.m. (for example: 7:00 p.m.)

TITLES: Capitalize all job titles.

TiVo: Lowercase the *i* and the *o*.

touchpoints: one word

U

United States/United Kingdom: Always abbreviate, with periods (U.S., U.K.).

V

versus: Either *versus* or the abbreviation *vs.* is acceptable, use best judgment but remain consistent within a body of work.

viewership: one word, no hyphens

view-through: one word, hyphenated

VoIP: Lowercase the *o*.

W

wallpapers: Use as plural when referring to desktop/website graphics

web: lowercased

web-based: hyphenated

webcast: one word

weblogs: Lowercase it, but use *blogs* unless making a technical point.

web page: two words

website: one word, lowercased

Web 2.0: capitalized

Wi-Fi: Capitalize both the *w* and the *f,* and use a hyphen.

word of mouth: Lowercased. Hyphenate when used as an adjective. For example:

- *Example (adjective):* We do word-of-mouth marketing.
- *Example (noun):* Word of mouth is an important thing.

WWW: When spelled out, lowercase: "world wide web" but avoid when possible

CAPITALIZATION NOTES

Marketing channels

Unless it is in a headline, there is no need to capitalize the names of marketing channels or concepts, such as word of mouth, search engine optimization, direct response, etc.

Technology terms

Unless it is in a headline, or a proprietary brand name, there is no need to capitalize the names of technology terms, such as internet, dotcom, ecommerce, etc. (See: Appendix 2 for more examples)

Notable exceptions: Flash, Web 2.0, VoIP, TiVo, Wi-Fi

COMMON INDUSTRY TERMS

Here are some common terms we use and their correct spelling/ punctuation:

- B2B
- blogosphere
- blog
- cellphone
- click-through
- cost-per-acquisition
- cost-per-action
- dial-up
- digital rights management
- dotcom
- eBook
- ebusiness
- ecommerce
- email
- gameplay
- high-speed (when used as an adjective/when describing an internet connection)
- internet
- mobile phone
- multimedia
- multi-purpose
- multi-cultural
- multi-channel
- nonprofit
- offline
- online

- opt-in
- pay-for-performance
- pay-per-click
- pop-up
- ring-back
- ringtone
- touchpoints
- user-generated media (preferable to *consumer-generated media*)
- video-expandable ad
- viewership
- viewthrough
- wallpapers
- web
- web-based
- webcast
- web page
- website
- world wide web
- 30-second spot