

State of Oregon: Department of Administrative Services



State of Oregon – Content Style Guide DAS IRMD Prepared by: Kerry Hinrichs For: [AGENCY]

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Brief Overview: State of Oregon Vision

As stated in the E-Government Program Overview, Oregon is working to move the business of government to the Internet, driven by collaboration among all state agencies. By creating dynamic, interactive websites, the State of Oregon will provide users with integrated, logical services that provide the quality of information and services citizens desire. The state will leverage existing agency systems with an infrastructure that introduces data sharing and content integration. The site will feature key content areas that are geared toward customer need and logical searching.

These elements, however, are only the beginning to creating a seamless online user experience. Once the foundation is established, agencies will be tasked with creating and maintaining visually interesting content, as well as content that is information-rich and that provides the user with the information he is looking for, without having to waste time looking for it. Unlike with many other mediums, the Internet has essentially one chance to grab the attention and interest of its readers. This Content Style Guide will provide agencies with a platform for understanding how to develop Web content that is not only dynamic, interesting, and creative, but that immediately captures the brand of the agency.

Purpose of the Content Style Guide

The State of Oregon Content Style Guide is a comprehensive exploration of the role of content in a digital medium. The Guide offers strategies for creating content that fully leverages the technological and visual resources of the Internet, and that reflects the State of Oregon's brand identity, as well as the individual identities of each state agency. The Guide reflects accepted guidelines for state agency websites.

The Content Style Guide will be useful to anyone who contributes to Oregon.gov and to state agency websites.

In addition, the Content Style Guide establishes editorial standards for consistency and clarity so that the State of Oregon conveys a unified "voice." It is, of course, impossible to establish strict standards for every aspect of writing—individual creativity and voice are important to each agency. Instituting guidelines, however, will ground this creativity in professionalism.

The Guide also seeks to answer common questions regarding usage, spelling, and other editorial style issues in order to provide the State of Oregon with industry preference and standards on these issues. The Guide will conclude by offering reminders on commonly made grammar errors.

Content is invaluable to the success of a website. Writing decisions that are determined while creating a document or Web content determine whether or not the audience thinks this content is authoritative, reliable, and believable. Smart choices are important, but just as important is consistent use of these choices. Content is *what* is written; and style is *how* that content is written.

The Content Style Guide is an organic document that will evolve with the E-Government Program.

Key Elements of the Content Style Guide

The Content Style Guide is organized into several sections. The Guide begins with an exploration of the Role of Content on a website, and of strategies for creating content that fully leverages the technology of the Internet. This discussion will include issues of branding and identity, and general composition principles. This is followed by a list of invaluable Elementary Principles of Composition borrowed from E.B. White and William Strunk's, *The Elements of Style*, which offers guidelines for writing, both on and offline.

The Content Style Guide also includes considerations and guidelines to follow when writing for the digital space. This includes Internet content considerations specific to the State of Oregon and the government agencies.

The Guide then outlines an alphabetical list of commonly made grammar errors and instructions on how to avoid these errors. The Style Guide concludes with a list of Web words—definitions of common Web terms—borrowed from netlingo.com, and edited and revised for the purposes of this document.

The Role of Content

We do not all have access to the same technology. Websites and other digital technologies do not differentiate themselves from one another based on content alone. The implementation of a technology, and its integration with information architecture, user interface, and design, is intimately varied both in form and in degree of success.

One of the most common misconceptions organizations make is that the best technology or the most flashy animation will save a website with poor-quality content. This is an unfortunate interpretation. Just as a film with fabulous special effects and a poorly written script is sure to fail, a website without compelling content is sure to do the same. Frequency of use is one of the primary metrics of a website's success, and a site with lousy content is not going to attract repeat users—much less maintain any interest the

first time around. No matter how colorful or fresh a site looks, or how new and exciting it's functionality, users simply will not return if it lacks informative and intuitive content.

The Internet is a difficult and challenging medium, but one that has endless possibilities. It is quite simple to exit an uninteresting website. As the State of Oregon is looking to maintain the trust and confidence of its citizens, it is important that online interactions help to support this goal.

Content as a Branding and Identity Tool

Web content must reflect the brand and identity of the organization it represents. The State of Oregon's brand represents a set of qualities, products, and services promised and delivered in every experience and every interaction a citizen has with Oregon and any of its state agencies.

As each state agency begins to develop and create content, form strategic content relationships with other agencies and individuals, and integrate various features, it is crucial that all elements work in harmony. If planned well, this task becomes less challenging. This element is key to insuring users and various other stakeholders receive the best possible experience. A strong brand allows users to experience distinct areas of a website as parts of a coherent whole. A strong brand should also be leveraged beyond a website to partnerships and offline ventures. It is paramount that each agency works in collaboration with the State of Oregon's E-Government Program to determine the best possible way to integrate brand and identity messaging, while maintaining a sense of individuality and ownership. This ensures citizens will feel that the agency's website is consistent and familiar regardless of which agency sites they visit.

General Composition Principles

Web users do not ordinarily read all content on a webpage. They tend to scan a page, seeking words and phrases that are relevant and catchy. Once the desired piece of information is spotted, users will then typically drill down for further details. Writing for the Web, therefore, must accommodate for this understanding by putting main points in the foreground where they are easily accessible and noticed.

The following list is borrowed, in part, from William Strunk, Jr.'s *The Elements of Style*. These principles are inarguably relevant to both on and offline writing. The principles rely on the basic understanding that writing should be immediate, cohesive, accessible, organized, and brief—characteristics that are imperative when writing Web content.

- *Get to the Point*

Begin with the most important piece of information. In Web writing, the most useful or exciting content should come first, followed by supporting details. Topic sentences make it easier for users to scan, and they expect to see the point of the information first. It is okay to write in simple terms—and in Web writing, this is recommended.

*Example: **Where to Buy** rather than **Where to Obtain Your Fishing License***

- *Write to Scan*

Internet users value clarity and precision. It is best to limit one topic to each paragraph, making it easier to scan for desired information. Web users scan selectively, roaming each page to grasp main points. Uncluttered and logical arrangement of text allows users to intuitively scan for keywords and themes. It is best to stick with user-centric language, rather than industry or government-specific jargon. When this form of language is necessary, it is important to explain the meaning, eliminating confusion.

Generally, if a user is not pulled in immediately (often between 3-6 seconds), he moves on. The reading rate on a computer screen is typically 25% slower than reading print on paper. And Web users generally read half the word count, or less, of conventional writing.

- *Concise is Best*

Brevity is extremely important when writing content for the Web. Again, users will tend to scan a page, so burying key information in wordy or “soft” explanations is not appropriate. It is best to leave emotional writing to marketing brochures and ad copy. The Web requires simplicity and precision. Generally, a simple list is a good way to communicate a large chunk of detailed information. It is typically understood that users will retain no more than nine items of new information at a time—even in bullet form.

- *Active Voice*

Using the active voice generally requires fewer words than using the passive voice. The active voice is also more authoritative and informative—less vague.

*Example: **Governor calls Special Session** rather than **Special Session Called by Governor***

- *Positive Tone*

Maintaining a positive voice eliminates confusion and generally makes for more interesting and inspiring reading. It also eliminates needless words.

Example: **Oregon's Weather is Beautiful** rather than **Oregon's Weather is Not All Bad**

- *Fact, Not Fiction*

Avoid reliance on fanciful marketing language by plainly stating what a product or service has to offer. Buzzwords and industry jargon are nonsensical and difficult to translate. This type of language may also cause users to wonder whether or not they are receiving truthful information, or are being misled.

- *Avoid Loosely Connected Sentences*

Web writing should flow. Each sentence should directly relate to the one before and after. If sentences are not connected, they need to be amended, rearranged, combined, or separated into different paragraphs.

- *Consistency is Paramount*

Be careful to consistently apply State of Oregon style guidelines to product names, capitalization, terminology, spelling, and specific references. Internal consistency not only looks professional, but is more likely to install confidence in users. Consistency also prevents potential confusion over multiple uses of names, titles, and other nomenclature. It is important, also, to maintain even tone and voice throughout all published materials—whether print or online.

- *Use Specific, Concrete Language*

Vague, abstract language takes more space on a page, says less, and most importantly, alienates and confuses the user. It leaves the user in a position of continuing to look for more specific information.

Example: **The State Fair runs August 22 – September 2** rather than **The State Fair begins at the end of August.**

Digital Content Development

The Web is the most interactive of communication mediums. It allows for an unrivaled degree of user-centric exploration and interaction. There are two general types of Web content: *Static*, and *Dynamic*.

Static Content refers to information on a website or webpage that does not change. The content could be considered “read-only” content, and could include an *About Us* page, or a *Company History* page. In other words, unlike an Article, for example, each time a user logs onto a page containing “static content,” the information will be the same as every other time the user views the site.

Dynamic Content refers to information on a website or webpage that changes often—either daily, or each time a user reloads or returns to a page. For example, when a user does a search on keywords in a search engine, the resulting page features “dynamic content”—meaning the information was created based on the words typed into the form on the previous page.

That said, the following is a list of rules specific to digital content development:

- **Digital Content Reaches a Global Audience**

The Internet’s audience grows more global every day. More likely than not, users accessing Oregon.gov will not be sitting in front of a computer terminal in Europe. However, it is possible. Because the global Internet audience is growing rapidly, the State of Oregon must accommodate, where possible, international users. Each agency’s content and design teams should work to ensure that the site does not include imagery or language that would offend or alienate international users.

- **Digital Content Must Work Side by Side with Graphic Elements**

The most significant difference between off and online writing is that offline writing generally stands alone. Although it may incorporate visual elements, it does not interact with these elements in the same way the same writing would interact online. It is important that content developers create content that leverages the website’s technology and works well with its design.

- **Digital Content Targets Specific Demographics**

The Internet industry, much like television, targets particular demographics and Psychographics via its content, and in some cases, advertising. Content must target its desired audience not only in substance, but also in tone, style, and voice.

- **Digital Content is Non-Linear**

Internet content does not operate as a linear document that users read through page by page. Content often refers to other site content via hyperlinks, and can also incorporate multimedia elements. Users should have the ability to access all available information and functionality relevant to a particular page’s content. Too many links will make the page overwhelming, but various content options and references to related content will allow users several options for moving through a site.

Online Content Resources

The following is a list of content resources on the Web, all related to Web Content Development.

- Moreover.com – Real-time news & information from major online resources
- Contentious.com – E-zine (electronic magazine) for online content professionals
- iSyndicate.com – Source for syndicated content and news gathering
- Netlingo.com – Source for Internet-related terms
- Webopedia.com – Encyclopedia dedicated to computer technology
- IndustryStandard.com – Industry information for all aspects of e-commerce and e-business development and measurement
- Whatis.com – Comprehensive list of high-tech acronyms and terms, and their meanings
- Newsedge.com – Cutting-edge content solutions and links to respected media sources
- Content-exchange.com – Digital marketplace for online content creators and publishers

State of Oregon Content Guidelines

Content Developers for the State of Oregon and individual agencies should consider the following when preparing content for the Web:

- Does the tone, spirit, and language of the content reflect the State of Oregon brand and image?
- Does the content influence or reaffirm the user's choice to return to the site and to do business online with the agency?
- Will the copy fit in the allotted screen space?
- Is the header above the copy consistent with the link that got the user to that point?
- Is the copy appropriate and informative?

General Considerations

As emphasized earlier in this document, all content on the site must reflect the State of Oregon's brand and identity. The State of Oregon's core values, or brand attributes, include the following:

- *Economic*: Marked by careful, efficient, and prudent use of resources.
The State of Oregon should begin by concentrating efforts where it can gain the most from resources invested. The new site should be carefully used to create efficiencies and best practices. Content ideas that are interesting but add no significant value to government processes should be avoided. The goal is to make it easier for users to interact with Oregon state government. The state will invest time and effort in understanding how Internet connectivity can make processes simpler, and can save valuable time and resources.
- *Focused*: Concentrated attention and efforts.
The State of Oregon should not work to try to be everything to everyone. Every individual will have his own demands and wishes. Some of these will encourage great ideas that can be saved for later, but others will not necessarily take goals into consideration. Designing the site for everyone will essentially design for nobody. Efforts should be specific, well planned, and dedicated to the specific goals of the State of Oregon.
- *Agile*: Marked by ready ability to move with quick, easy grace.
The site must be flexible. Technology exists today to make websites malleable and flexible. A flexible presence will allow evolution as needs and desires change and grow. This flexibility should be reflected both in technology and content, and well as in presentation of ideas and offerings.
- *Current*: Occurring in or existing at the present time.
The site should give visitors the sense that the State of Oregon is aware and educated about today's events. It should reflect issues and events that are happening in the everyday lives of Oregon citizens. The site should promote not only current events, but current happenings within and around government itself.
- *Real*: Related to practical or everyday concerns and activities.
A good site—and a good organization—does not try to be something it isn't. The State of Oregon should consistently be a true representation of the ideas and people the state so highly values. A site does not need to be flashy or profound to represent truth, and day-to-day, honest values.
- *Dynamic*: Requiring periodic refreshment in order to retain data.
The site should be a living, breathing organism with content or imagery that changes on at least a daily basis. The user experience should be fresh, unique, and awe-inspiring. Content should be relevant, and locating it should be intuitive.

It is important to remember that the tone (manner of expression), style (usage, punctuation, and spelling), and voice (relation between the subject and the action of the verb) of all State of Oregon content should mimic its brand attributes. On that note, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Avoid using government-specific jargon – If you must use a government-specific term, follow it with a definition or an explanation.
- Be conversational, rather than formal.
- Use the active, rather than the passive voice – This will encourage your writing to be concise, easy to follow, and interesting to read.
- Be concise.
- Speak to the user’s knowledge level.
- Be confident and direct.
- Provide contacts, references, and actionable next steps.
- Avoid phrases such as “click here” and “this website,” that make the user seem unsophisticated on the Web.
- Empathize with your user’s desires and understand his needs.
- Show understanding through well selected, targeted content.

Integrating Agency Brand and Identity

Initially, when a user clicks on agency information from Oregon.gov, the page will immediately re-direct to the agency’s site. In other words, agencies will be accessed by links on the Oregon.gov site. However, the ultimate goal is that each site’s identity is incorporated into the new site, meaning that the opportunity and resources will be available to build each agency site into the new look and feel—ensuring that users recognize consistency and simplicity of use.

The branding strategy for State of Oregon agencies will grow and develop as the E-Government Program continues to grow and develop. Ultimately, each agency’s brand and identity will be incorporated completely into the new site.

Common Grammar Errors

A vs. an

Use pronunciation, not spelling, as your guide. **A** precedes words that begin in a consonant sound (blue, unique, happy); **an** precedes words that begin in a vowel sound (avenue, eagle, umbrella, MBA).

abbreviations

Omit periods from most common abbreviations, such as **US** (not **U.S.**), **UK** (not **U.K.**), and **AM/PM** (not **A.M./P.M.**—and note the capitalization here).

Note: Do not omit periods in the abbreviations for academic degrees: that is, **B.A.**, not **BA**; **Ph.D.**, not **PhD**.

See also **acronyms** and **degrees, academic**.

acronyms

To make acronyms plural, add a lowercase **’s** without an apostrophe: **URLs**, not **URL’s**. Except for the most common acronyms (PC, URL, RAM, etc.), spell out acronyms in their first use, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Thereafter, use the acronym alone. In hypertext, it can be tricky to define the first use of a term, since it is unclear how and when the user will first access the acronym. In general, if an acronym is uncommon, define it whenever readers may be seeing it for the first time.

Whatis.com offers a comprehensive list of high-tech acronyms and terms, and their meanings.

See also **abbreviations**.

add-on (adj., n.)

Retain the hyphen in this word in both its noun and adjective form. Although the trend, especially with high-tech terminology, is to close up compound words when possible, **addon** looks awkward—it doesn't retain the look of the two separate words from which it derives.

adjectives, compound

See **compound words**.

all right

Idiomatic in familiar speech as a detached phrase in uses meaning, "**Agreed**," or "**Go ahead**." In other uses, it is better avoided. **All right** is always written as two words.

among/between

Writers often incorrectly use these two prepositions interchangeably. The distinction is simple: use **among** with three or more things, and **between** with only two. For example, "Talk among yourselves" (assuming "yourselves" refers to more than two people), but, "He sat between his brother and his sister."

Be careful of situations in which you're talking about more than two things, but the preposition only applies to two of those. For example, "She was the liaison between agents, investors, and executives." This sentence uses *between* (not *among*) because although it's relating "she" to a group of three, the implication is that the "liaison" relationship only occurs between "she" and one of the group of three at a time.

amount of/number of

Amount of should be followed by a collective noun: "an amount of money, work, or postage." **Number of** should be followed by plural nouns that can be counted: "a number of coins, jobs, or stamps."

See also **less/fewer**.

ampersand (&)

Avoid using an **ampersand** in regular text unless it's part of a trademarked name. Although it may shorten your text, using it to replace the written-out word **and** can actually make the text difficult to scan, thereby defeating any attempts at space saving.

Special formatting situations—such as tables, diagrams, navigation, and so on—may require ampersands for space considerations. Since this kind of text is shorter to begin with, the same readability/scannability issues don't apply as with longer, paragraph-style text. The best solution, of course, is just to come up with shorter words.

AM/PM

Write these abbreviations in all caps with no periods.

See also **abbreviations**.

anxious vs. eager

Anxious is very different than eager. Anxious is used to describe worry or uneasiness. Think of it in terms of the word "anxiety," a form of the word **anxious**. Being **eager** means to be excited about something—to anticipate or look forward to something.

apostrophes

To make a singular word possessive, add **'s**—it's that simple. This rule holds even if the word ends in **s**, **x**, **z**, whatever. The exceptions are **Jesus** and **Moses**, whose possessive forms are **Jesus'** and **Moses'**, along with a few ancient Greek names—and that's it. To make plural nouns possessive, add an apostrophe if the plural ends in **s**. Add **'s** to irregular plurals, those not ending in **s**. For example, "Her sons' names are..." but "The women's names are..."

Apostrophes can be tricky when singular nouns look like they're plural; this situation often comes up with company names. For example, the company name **Information Builders** is formed from a plural noun—but the company name represents a singular entity. Therefore, when talking about the company's products, you should write "Information Builders's software."

That said, popular use is leaning toward just adding an apostrophe to these types of proper nouns. If the 's bothers you or presents a problem with your strategic partners, consider this alternative: omit the apostrophe entirely and make the word adjectival instead of possessive. You can write, "We use Information Builders **software**," so the company name becomes an adjective to modify **software**. You can also eliminate the possessive issue by rewording the sentence using a preposition such as **of**, **by**, or **for**: "We use software from Information Builders."

area

See **page**.

archived content

Do not change information that reflects historical records or documents, and material that is meant to be preserved (news releases, advisories, speeches, statements).

back-end (adj.); back end (noun)

See **front-end/back-end**.

between

See **among/between**.

British spelling and language

Use American spellings and vocabulary (**color** rather than **colour**) and avoid British idioms (such as the British "in hospital" rather than "in the hospital").

bulleted lists

Use standard, bulleted lists for non-sequential collections of items. Do not use dashes or asterisks. Use numbered lists (see **lists**, **numbered**) when order is important (such as steps for performing a task). Inconsistencies are glaring within a set of bullet items—all the items in a bulleted list should be grammatically parallel. Capitalization and punctuation should be consistent within one list and, as much as possible, within an entire document.

In general, start each bullet item with a capital letter (but don't capitalize the first letter of every word in a bullet item). A list that consists of single-word items or very short phrases is an exception to this rule. This type of bulleted list can be left entirely lower case.

Avoid ending punctuation, which clutters lists, especially for very short list items—single words, phrases, or clauses (even if the bullet completes a sentence started by the intro text). If each item in a list is a complete sentence, use ending punctuation, especially if a single bullet contains more than one sentence (if the first sentence ends with a period, it will look awkward to leave the second sentence unpunctuated—and therefore, all bullets should be punctuated to match).

Don't use commas or semicolons to separate items in a bulleted list the way you would to separate items in a list in running text. For example, you might write, "He did thing one, thing two, and thing three." But don't write:

He did:

- Thing one,
- Thing two, and
- Thing three.

Bullets should substitute for separating punctuation.

Keep in mind that according to the principle of grammatical parallelism, a single list should have either all complete sentences or none, not a combination of both.

capital vs. capitol

Capitol is the physical building where the House and Senate are located. Capital is the city or area where the government is situated.

capitalization

(For specific capitalization issues, see the topics listed at the end of this entry).

Capitalization of individual words (disregarding context such as sentence beginnings, headings, etc.) follows one rule: capitalize proper nouns. Haphazard capitalization signifies editorial inconsistency and amateurism. It also creates cluttered, less readable text.

Capitalize a proper noun unless it is trademarked lowercase (such as theglobe.com). The question of what constitutes a proper noun is not always straightforward, however, and there are heated debates about Web-specific terminology. Countless documents insist that “Web” and “Internet” should not be capitalized. Ignore them. These terms refer to a particular place (or “space”) just as much as do “Paris” or “the Library of Congress.”

When proper nouns that are trademarked lowercase (like theglobe.com) start a sentence, leave them lowercase to respect the trademark. Capitalize terms that are generally all lowercase, like website URLs (www.oregon.gov), as context demands (for example, starting a sentence). Whenever possible, rewrite to avoid this issue (for example, start a sentence with “The Oregon.gov website” or “Oregon.gov,” rather than with “Www.Oregon.gov”).

Decide capitalization of words and phrases in lists, headings, etc., on a document basis. If you do apply headline-style capitalization to headings, capitalize the first and last word and all words other than prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and **to** in an infinitive. Capitalize all forms of the verb **to be**, including **is** and **are**.

Most important is consistency within one document, site, etc. Using a “down” style (capitalizing less) is popular on the Web, perhaps because URLs, although not case sensitive, are generally written in lowercase; the ubiquitous “www.yourcompanynamehere.com” has inspired many companies to decapitalize their names (again, theglobe.com), which in turn seems to have inspired more prevalent decapitalizing. This practice suits the general informality of the Web and can give text a cleaner, more modern look appropriate to the medium. Use your judgment and be consistent.

When referencing another section of a site, follow the capitalization on the interface. For example, write, “Visit our Press Page for updates.” Note that the name of another section within a site should not be in quotes.

On a final note, DO NOT USE ALL CAPS—especially when providing instructions to your users. You do not want them to feel as if you are YELLING at them, which is the effect that using all caps has.

See also **bulleted lists, extranet/intranet, headings, the Internet, intranet/extranet, job titles, fields of study, the Web, webmaster, webpage, and website.**

click vs. click on
See **links.**

client–server

Although this term is often spelled with a slash instead of a hyphen, spell it with a hyphen to match other compound words.

commas

The rules of comma use could fill a book, with a second volume dedicated to exceptions to the rules. Part of the complexity stems from the fact that although commas are often used to indicate a pause in spoken language, they shouldn't necessarily be used to record every pause that might occur if text were read aloud. It never hurts to consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* for a really thorough rundown of comma usage. That said, here are some particular comma issues to consider:

- Use the serial comma, that is, the comma before **and** and **or** at the end of a list. It's not wrong to leave it out (which is the common practice in journalism), and many situations are clear without it, but occasionally it is necessary to avoid ambiguity—leaving it out can sometimes imply that the two things joined by **and** should be paired separately. So for clarity and consistency, use the serial comma throughout.
- Do not use a comma to separate a month and year: “I was born in December 1974,” not “I was born in December, 1974.” Do, however, use a comma to separate the day and year when you are using a month–day–year construction; note that in this situation, if the sentence continues, you also need a comma after the year: “I was born on December 8, 1974, in Jerusalem.”
- Use a comma to separate groups of three digits in numbers higher than 999.
- Avoid using commas to separate the two elements of a compound subject, a compound verb, or a compound object.

For example:

“He walked his dog and went to the store,” not “He walked his dog, and went to the store.”
(compound verb—“walked...and went”—for subject “He”)

This particular rule is a little more amenable than most to exceptions—sometimes with very long clauses it's helpful or even necessary to add a technically “ungrammatical” comma to clarify the sentence. Be aware, however, that part of the reason this rule exists is to clarify sentences with compound subjects, verbs, or objects from compound sentences—those formed of two complete sentences separated by a conjunction. For example, “He walked his dog, and he went to the store.” Note that in a compound sentence, a comma is generally required before the conjunction to separate the two parts.

- When you start a sentence with **and**, **but**, or **or** (perfectly OK—especially in less formal writing—contrary to the beliefs of many English teachers), don't follow the conjunction with a comma. For example, write, “Select which prize you would like to win in this week's raffle. Or get more information,” not “Select which prize you would like to win in this week's raffle. Or, get more information.”

company, corporation

Give the full name (initial caps) in straight text. It is best to list a company exactly as it is legally listed. Usually Inc. and Ltd. are dropped. If it is widely recognized, the full name may be shortened: Xerox Corporation, Xerox; General Foods Corporation, General Foods; the Smithsonian Institution, the Smithsonian.

compound words

A compound word is a word that results when two words are used together to represent a single entity and eventually come to be considered a single word. A compound word can either be open (two words with a space in between), such as **ice cream**; hyphenated, such as **right-wing**; or closed (two words run together, no hyphen or space), such as **webpage**.

Most of these words will be in the dictionary, so use one to verify spelling (open, hyphenated, or closed). If it's not in the dictionary (and it's not a very new term), it's probably open (just two separate words). *The Chicago Manual of Style* is a useful reference particularly for compound words formed with prefixes and suffixes.

Uncertainties arise, however, with new words, especially in the ever-expanding and often contentious realm of high-tech terminology. One school of thought proposes, “When in doubt, close it up.” It certainly makes sense for a word that represents one thing to be one word, so err on the side of closing words up. Words that conceptually seem like they should be closed but look awkward that way (double vowels, visual/pronunciation issues) can be hyphenated.

For information on particular compound words, see **add-on**, **back-end/back end**, **client-server**, **easy-to-navigate/easy-to-use**, **e-commerce**, **email**, **end user/end-user**, **dropdown**, **homepage**, **in-house**, **log in** (etc.), **off-site**, **online/offline**, **plug-in**, **pulldown**, **real-time**, **run-time**, **site map**, **startup**, **user ID**, **webmaster**, **webpage**, and **website**.

Some general principles can be applied depending on what part of speech the compound is:

• verbs

There actually aren't a whole lot of compound verbs; most of them can be found in a dictionary and they're usually open or hyphenated, seldom closed. The verb forms of many compound nouns and adjectives are actually usually just a verb plus a preposition and should be written that way: “a startup company,” but “start up your computer”; “download a plug-in,” but “plug in the device.”

• nouns

Check the dictionary first, but for newer terms, err on the side of closing them up or hyphenating if closing them looks awkward.

• adjectives

Compound adjectives are popular in marketing language, which likes to pile on modifier after modifier; try not to overdo it. There are two classes of compound adjectives. The first are “permanent,” which really just means two words have come to be used together to represent a single concept, such as **pulldown**. With these, as with nouns, err on the side of

closed or at least hyphenated.

The other class of compound adjectives is “temporary,” meaning two (or more) adjectives or an adverb plus an adjective, where the first modifier modifies the second and together they modify a noun. (Stick with this, it’ll make sense soon with some examples.) The general principle to follow is that you only need to hyphenate the two elements if there is potential for misunderstanding. If the compound adjective is a predicate or comes after the noun it modifies, there’s usually little chance of ambiguity, so you don’t need to hyphenate: “the man is well dressed.” It’s clear here that “well” modifies “dressed,” and together they modify “man.”

If the compound adjective is made of an adverb plus an adjective, you generally don’t have to hyphenate because it’s usually clear that the adverb modifies the adjective and not the noun. For example, with “a happily married man,” it’s clear that “happily” modifies “married,” and together they modify “man.” If, however, the adverb could be mistaken for an adjective (that could modify the noun), hyphenate the compound. For example, an “ill dressed man” could (at least in theory) be either a clothed man who’s sick or a man who’s badly dressed; so hyphenate to clarify. If you would like to read more on this issue, consult a higher authority, like *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

comprise

The word **comprise** means “encompass” or, roughly, “include.” It absolutely *does not* mean “make up” and shouldn’t be used this way. For example:

Incorrect: Many types of books comprise my school’s library.

Also incorrect: My school’s library is comprised of many types of books.

Correct: My school’s library comprises many types of books. The construction “is comprised of” is always wrong. As a test, try substituting the word **encompass**: you’d never say “is encompassed of,” would you? Often when people write “is comprised of” they probably actually want to say “is composed of.”

consistency

One of the cornerstones of good professional writing. Apply it to all aspects of a document, including spelling, capitalization, punctuation, use of bullets, etc. If you check for nothing else, checking at least for consistency will bring your document one step closer to perfection.

contractions

Use freely for a more informal style; avoid in more formal documents. Whichever style you choose; use it consistently within one document.

copyrights

See **trademarks**.

cyber-

When in doubt, close it up. Close up cyberwords: cyberspace, cybersquatter, cyberpunk. Only cyber rights remains unclosed.

dashes

See **em dash**, **en dash**, **hyphenation**.

data

Takes a singular verb: “The data is revealing,” not “The data are revealing.” Yes, originally this was a plural word—but who uses the singular **datum** anymore? “Data are” sounds stuffy and even wrong, if you (legitimately) consider data a collective (and therefore singular) noun.

data mining

Data mining is still two words.

degrees, academic

Use the standard abbreviations for academic degrees rather than writing out the entire degree name (it’s less stuffy), i.e., **B.A.** rather than **Bachelor of Arts**; **Ph.D.** rather than **Doctorate**. Note that these abbreviations require periods.

See also **trademarks**.

.com (adj., noun)

Use .com to refer to .com companies, or to the ubiquitousness of .coms. Do not use dotcom, dot-com, or dot.com.

dropdown (adj.)

Close this word up rather than spelling it with a hyphen. And please only use this as an adjective—it’s “a dropdown menu,” not just “a dropdown.”

See also **pulldown**.

e-

Unless you’re sure that e-animals and e-fortunes will be around forever, don’t jump to closing up e-everything just yet. Email is the only exception to this rule.

See **e-commerce**, **email**.

ease of use (noun)

This is always a noun, and as such, should remain open—never hyphenate, and certainly never close. (easeofuse?)

easy-to-navigate/easy-to-use (modifying adj.)**easy to navigate/easy to use (predicate adj.)**

Hyphenate either term when it's a modifying adjective (preceding the noun), but leave it open when it's used as a predicate adjective, that is:

"An easy-to-use interface," but "The interface is easy to use."

Note that the phrase **ease of use** is just that, a phrase, and not really a compound word, so it never needs to be hyphenated.

e-commerce

Unlike with **email**, use the hyphen in **e-commerce** to retain the sense of "electronic commerce." When this word becomes as assimilated into the vernacular as **email**, drop the hyphen. For now, **ecommerce** still looks too much like "echo-merce."

effect

As a noun, effect means **result**; as a verb, it means to **bring about** or **accomplish** (not to be confused with affect, which means "to influence."

e.g.

Not to be confused with i.e., the term e.g. is an abbreviation for the Latin **exempli gratia** and means "for example." Follow e.g. with a comma (in addition to the second period). For example:

"The new site will cover several topics, e.g., entertainment, sports, and health." (This sentence means, "The new site will cover several topics, for example, entertainment, sports, and health").

ellipses (...)

Ellipses are primarily used to signify that some text has been left out, especially in quoted material. You can also use them at the end of sentences for a trailing-off effect... Avoid this trailing-off usage in formal writing and try not to overdo it even in more informal contexts—it can make writing sound wishy-washy and indecisive.

Type the three periods without any spaces; in traditional typesetting, spaces were used after each period, but this can cause awkward line breaks in online text. And never use more than three periods.

em dash (—)

Use an **em** dash (—) to set off a phrase within or at the end of a sentence—that is, a sentence like this. They can be especially helpful for setting off parenthetical material that might be set off with commas in a sentence already full of commas.

An em dash should not have any spaces separating it from the words surrounding it. Note that unless there are real technical (HTML-related) constraints, you should not substitute two hyphens (--) for an em dash.

email

Spell as shown, without a hyphen. Note that it's a generic term and therefore doesn't need to be capitalized (except where context demands it, i.e., starting a sentence, heading capitalization, etc.).

Note that it's OK to use **email** by itself as a noun, including pluralized as **emails** ("How many emails did you get this morning?"), and as verb. "I sent him an email message" starts to get really clunky; "I emailed him" is preferable.

emoticons

Do not employ emoticons like :-) and ;-(on your website. Leave them to the users frequenting your chat rooms. ;-)

en dash (–)

Use **en** dashes for number ranges ("children aged 5–8"), as a minus sign, or for compound words where

one part of the word is an open or already hyphenated compound. For example, “Windows NT–like functionality” uses an en dash instead of a hyphen since “Windows NT” is an open compound.

En dashes, like hyphens, should not have spaces around them.

end user (n.), end-user (adj.)

Hyphenate the adjective, leave the noun open: “The end user can easily navigate the interface,” but “The end–user experience will be more enjoyable.”

Whenever possible, however, just use the term **user**—the **end** part is generally understood—or, better yet, use something more personal, like **visitor**, **audience**, or **customer**.

etc.

Do not use. All references to this word should be deleted.

exclamation points

Do not use them, especially in marketing or promotional copy. They look silly and give copy an overly eager tone (“We’re desperate! We really need you to come to the State Fair this weekend!!”).

extranet/intranet

See **intranet/extranet**.

FAQ

Even though most acronyms refer to the singular form of the term they stand for (for example, URL stands for “uniform resource locator,” not “locators”), FAQ can be used (instead of FAQs) to represent a set of “frequently asked questions.” Do not spell out. Most people familiar with the Internet understand this acronym.

fax

Used as a noun, adjective, and verb. Do not use FAX.

fewer

See **less/fewer**.

fields of study

Don’t capitalize fields of study unless they’re already proper nouns, i.e., “He has a B.A. in economics and French.”

front–end/back–end (adj.)

front end/back end (noun)

Hyphenate the adjective form of this term, but leave the noun form open, that is:

“The front end was designed for usability,” but “The back–end system integrates several technologies.”

See also **server-side**.

gerund

A gerund is a verb written with an –ing ending and used as a noun. Phrases that begin with gerunds are less effective than those that use active verbs. Whenever possible, use active verbs instead of passive verbs.

For Example: regulates activities, rather than helping regulate activities.

headings

In formal print documents (such as business proposals, etc.), headline–style capitalization should be used for headings: apply initial caps to the first and last word and all words other than prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and **to** in an infinitive. Be sure to apply initial caps to all forms of the verb to be, including **is** and **are**. And do initial cap prepositions that are part of a verb phrase, such as “Backing Up Your Information.”

Online copy is more flexible—headings are sometimes treated as text, with no special capitalization and are often treated as design elements, so that aesthetic concerns become more important than capitalization rules. Try to impose some degree of consistency at least across “levels” of headings.

Avoid using ending punctuation in headings—the whole point of them is that they’re not complete sentences, but more easily digestible “bites” of information.

high tech

Now that high tech has joined high school and high maintenance in the realm of ubiquitous, it’s time to drop the hyphen. High tech business. He’s very high tech. A high tech solution. No hyphens anywhere.

homepage

“When in doubt, close it up.” Like **website**, the term **homepage** represents a single entity, so spell it closed.

See also **webpage**, **website**.

hyperlinks

See **links**.

hyphenation

Main hyphenation issues:

- Hyphen versus em dash versus en dash.
See **em dash** and **en dash** for details.
- When to hyphenate compound words.
In most of the newer, contentious high tech terminology, close words rather than hyphenating them. See **compound words** for details, as well as the entries for specific terms.

i.e.

Not to be confused with **e.g.**, the term **i.e.** is an abbreviation for the Latin **id est** and means “that is.” It should be followed by a comma (in addition to the second period). For example:

“We will redesign the navigation, **i.e.**, make it more user-friendly.” (This sentence means, “We will redesign the navigation, that is, make it more user-friendly”).

infinitives

Go ahead and split them. Usage has definitely come to rule on this issue, and there are many occasions in which it will sound stilted and awkward to avoid splitting an infinitive. Often the adverb needs to come between the two components of the infinitive for the right emphasis (the classic example, of course, being, “to boldly go where no man has gone before”—would you really want that changed to “to go boldly...”?). A problem only arises when you start stuffing so many words between the “to” and the verb that you lose the sense of the infinitive entirely.

in-house (adj., adv.)

Hyphenate this term, which is always an adjective (“They hired an in-house freelancer”) or an adverb (“They hired someone to work in-house”).

initials

When writing a person’s name with their initials, use one space after each period, that is, **N. I. Mazuz**, not **N.I. Mazuz**.

interactive

See **digital**.

the Internet

Always capitalize—we consider this a proper noun. (Likewise for the Net).

intranet/extranet

Don't capitalize—these are generic terms, so you talk about “an intranet,” not “the Intranet.”

it

See **pronouns**.

italics

In online text, using italics can cause problems with readability and spacing. Use it sparingly and work with designers for the best visual effect. Avoid using italics for emphasis; reserve it for titles of traditional media works, according to the standard rules: titles of longer published works, such as books, movies, periodicals, and continuing TV series. See *The Chicago Manual of Style* for more details. Avoid using it for titles of multimedia works. Better to call out the text you wish to emphasize in another way.

See also **quotation marks**, **titles**.

job titles

Generally, capitalize actual job titles. For example, “He was a Senior Consultant at IBM.” But don't capitalize them when used generically, such as “He worked as a consultant for three years.”

less/fewer

Simply, **less** refers to quantity, and **fewer** to number. This distinction is often ignored. **Less** should be used with collective, or mass nouns, things that can't be counted, for example, “He has less money than I do.” **Fewer** should be used with individual, countable items, for example, “He has fewer coins than I do.”

links

It's perfectly acceptable to use this term instead of **hyperlinks**, as long as it's clear in the context.

Whenever possible, avoid using phrases like “click here” as links—try to work the link onto (or rewrite for) already existing and independently meaningful text.

When you do tell the user to “click” a link, use just **click**, not **click on**. This is intuitive.

lists, numbered

Don't use numbered lists unless order is important, such as for instructions to do something. For non-sequential lists, use bullets (or nothing at all).

See also **bulleted lists**.

log in/log on/log off (v.)

login/logon/logoff (adj.)

The verb forms should be written as two separate words (since they're really a verb plus a preposition). Not convinced? Try putting it in the past tense: “He logoffed his computer”? Obviously not—it has to be, “He logged off his computer” and, therefore, “Tell him to log off his computer.”

The adjective form is one closed word. Note that these terms shouldn't be used by themselves as nouns; use something like **logon ID** or **login name**.

See also **setup/set up** and **startup/start up**.

medium/media

In the context of art, publishing, etc., the word **medium** is singular and takes a singular verb: “The quickest medium for publishing hypertext is the Web.” **Media** is plural and takes a plural verb: “Many different interactive media are becoming more accessible in the home.”

When the word **media** is used to refer to the press, it’s a collective singular noun and should take a singular verb: “The media is skewing our perspectives on all sorts of issues.”

microsite

Avoid this marketing term, which has no real technical meaning.

See also **subsite**, **supersite**.

most

Not to be used in place of **almost**. For example: Almost everybody, not most everybody.

multi-

Unless the word following multi in a multi-compound word begins with a vowel, close it up: multitasking, multi-user, multicasting, multimedia.

new media

See **digital**.

numbers

Spell out the numbers one through nine. Use digits for numbers 10 and higher. Spell out large numbers (million, billion), following the same spelling versus digits rules for smaller numbers used with them, i.e., **two million**, but **23 million**. In a context of numbers used to represent measurements, all digits may be used. Double digits are written as numbers, except if they begin a sentence. Most important is to use numbers (either spelled out or digits) consistently within one document.

Use a comma to separate groups of three digits in numbers larger than 999.

number of

See **amount of/number of**.

off-site (adj., adv.)

Hyphenate this term, which is always an adjective (“He works as an off-site consultant”) or an adverb (“They hired a freelancer to work off-site”).

online/offline

There’s no potential ambiguity without the hyphen, so spell these words closed.

page

Use this term (not **screen**) to refer to the smallest unit of a website. Note that this use harmonizes with the terms **homepage** and **webpage**. Use **section** to refer to a group of pages and **area** to refer to a smaller piece of “real estate” on a page. For example:

“In the History section of the Oregon.gov website, there is a page devoted to historical landmarks. On this page, there’s an area on the right that lists the site’s main navigational links.”

See also **screen**.

PM/AM

See **AM/PM**.

parentheses

When a complete and independent sentence (starting with a capital letter) is enclosed in parentheses, make sure the sentence’s ending punctuation is inside the closing parenthesis. If part of a sentence is

enclosed in parentheses, all punctuation (including commas) should go outside the closing parenthesis. The exceptions are question marks or exclamation points that go with the parenthetical text—they should go inside the closing parenthesis. Although most punctuation takes the type style (italic, bold, etc.) of the text immediately preceding it, parentheses should keep the type style of the main surrounding text.

plug-in (adj., noun)

Hyphenate this word both as a noun and an adjective, since the closed form (plugin) just looks awkward, as if it should be pronounced “ploogin.”

PM/AM

See **AM/PM**.

portal

A term to describe a website composed of and connected to many sites (for example, Yahoo!).

See also **supersite**.

possessives

See **apostrophes**.

prefixes

Words using prefixes such as **re-**, **pre-**, **co-**, etc. generally don’t need a hyphen; the exceptions are when the new word would have consecutive vowels or when there’s potential for misunderstanding or mispronouncing it. Check a dictionary or *The Chicago Manual of Style* for uncertainties.

prepositions

Everyone’s heard the standard high school English teacher rule about not ending a sentence with a preposition. Silly. True, ending sentences with prepositions usually contributes to a more informal style—but that’s a style that characterizes most online writing. Even in the most formal writing, sometimes reworking a sentence to avoid the ending preposition produces ridiculous results. As Winston Churchill said, “This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.” Use your judgment and write well—the prepositions will fall into place.

See also **among/between**, **log in/log on/log off**, **set up**, and **start up**.

pronouns

When referring to a company, use the pronoun **it**, not **they**, that is, “Although Excite is one of the largest Internet portals, it is...” not “they are.”

pull-down (adj.)

Close this word up rather than spelling it with a hyphen. And please only use this as an adjective—it’s “a pull-down menu,” not just “a pull-down.”

See also **dropdown**.

quotation marks

Be sure to use curly quotes (“”), not straight quotes (""), in all print materials. Be careful when converting a print document (like a Microsoft Word file) to HTML—curly quotes can sometimes change to strange characters. Keep an eye out for these.

Use double quotation marks to set off dialogue and titles of shorter traditional media works: songs, poems, short stories, articles, individual TV episodes, and other short published works. (Longer published works—movies, books, periodicals, continuing TV series, etc.—should be italicized; consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* for specifics.) Avoid using quotation marks for titles of multimedia works.

Single quotation marks should only be used for a quote within a quote.

Follow the standard rules for quotation marks used with other punctuation. Periods and commas generally go inside the quotes, unless there’s potential for ambiguity. Colons and semicolons go outside

the quotes, as do exclamation points and question marks, unless they're actually part of the quoted materials. See *The Chicago Manual of Style* for more details.

See also **italics**, **titles**.

real-time (adj.)

Hyphenate this adjective, as in "The site offers real-time stock quotes." The noun form should always be two separate words, because it's really just the adj. **real** plus the noun **time**, rather than an actual compound noun: "The events of the movie unfolded in real time."

screen

Use this term to refer to the physical computer screen, not to a discrete part of a website—use **page** in that context.

See also **page**.

section

See **page**.

server-side (adj.)

When used as a modifying adjective, this term should be hyphenated, for example, "Powerful server-side technology drives the system." Note that you should not hyphenate when you're just using the words **server** and **side** together as just an adjective plus a noun, that is, "The real power of the system lies in the server side."

set up (v.); setup (n., adj.)

Like start up and log on, this verb is really a verb-plus-preposition phrase and therefore should be written as two separate words: "He set up his new PC." The noun form can be closed: "He has a very complicated setup on his PC."

sign-off (n.);

signed-off (adj.);

sign off (v.)

Hyphenate the noun ("We got sign-off on the project") and the adjective ("The document was signed-off"), but leave the verb phrase open ("the client must sign off on this phase"), since it's another verb-plus-preposition phrase.

site map

Spell this compound open, as two separate words—it looks awkward closed.

slashes

In text, slashes (including in website addresses) should always be written as regular forward slashes (/). Some browsers will let you enter URLs with either regular forward slashes (/) or backslashes (\), but many browsers require regular slashes and even those that accept either will still usually convert backslashes to forward slashes (/).

In writing, slashes generally indicate a choice between two options; avoid using them in copywriting, where options should be presented more artfully with actual words. When you do use a slash, it should not have any spaces around it: "and/or" not "and / or."

spelling

Here's a list of how to spell some of the most contested high tech and Web-related terminology (including capitalization and hyphenation):

add-on back end (n.) back-end (adj.) dropdown e-commerce email end user (n.) end-user (adj.)
extranet front end (n.) front-end (adj.) homepage in-house (adj., adv.) Internet intranet login/logon (adj.)
offline off-site (adj., adv.) online plug-in (adj., n.) pulldown (adj.) real-time (adj.) server-side (adj.) site
map startup (adj., n.) user ID Web webmaster webpage website World Wide Web

subsite

Refers to any self-contained unit (group of **pages**) within a website, one that could function independently as its own site.

See also **page**, **microsite**, **supersite**.

supersite

This marketing term, used to describe a website composed of and connected to many sites (for example, Yahoo!), is considered obsolete; the preferred term is **portal**.

See also **microsite**, **supersite**, **portal**.

startup (n., adj.);**start up (v.)**

Follow “when in doubt, close it up” and leave out the hyphen in the noun and adjective forms: “He works for a small Internet startup.” Note, however, that the verb form should always be two separate words, the verb **start** plus the preposition **up**.

systems (adj.)

As in, “he works as a systems administrator.” (Don’t write **system administrator**.)

TDD/TTY

All caps. **TDD** means Telecommunications Device for the Deaf. **TTY** is a Teletypewriter—the original communication device used by individuals with hearing or speech impairments.

tense

Use present tense. Where possible, avoid sentences with “will.” Example: **will give access** vs. **gives access**.

the

In titles of newspapers and periodicals, which should be capitalized and italicized, the word **the** should be lowercase and normal type—“He reads the *New York Times* every morning”—in running paragraph text.

Be careful about using the word **the** with company names. Many company names sound right when preceded by **the**, especially when the name is formed from an adjective plus a noun (for example, GartnerGroup), but very few of them actually use **the** in their official name. Most of the time the **the** can be left out, and if it’s used, it shouldn’t be capitalized. If it’s part of the company’s official trademarked name it must be capitalized, but it can often be left out, so that it’s **Guardian** or **The Guardian**, but not **the Guardian**.

then vs. than

Use then to compare items in time. Use than to compare items in quality or quantity. For example, “He went to the store. Then he went to the movies. He enjoyed going to the movies more than he enjoyed going to the store.”

that vs. which

The relative pronoun **that** is used for essential (also known as restrictive) clauses, that is, information that needs to be there for the sentence to mean what it does; **which** is for non-essential (or non-restrictive) clauses, information that is more of an aside and not central to the sentence’s main meaning. Bill Walsh, in his online “Curmudgeon’s Stylebook” (www.theslot.com), offers a handy way to keep these straight:

Which clauses are always set off—usually by a comma, but sometimes by a dash or with parentheses. So your choice is between **that** and comma-**which**. If the comma seems out of place, that is your answer.

Here are three examples:

- **Correct:** “The new section, which features product updates, is popular among teens.” Notice that the main point of the sentence is that the new section has proven popular—the fact that it features product updates is just extra information, set off by commas, so it uses **which**.
- **Correct:** “The new section that features product updates is popular among teens.” Notice that the information about featuring product updates is essential to the meaning of this sentence, that is, it is necessary to distinguish exactly which “new section” is being talked about; therefore, this information is not set off with commas and uses a **that** clause.
- **Incorrect:** “The new section which features product updates is popular among teens.” Notice that using **which** here without the commas makes it unclear exactly what this sentence means—is it the same meaning as the first or the second of the previous correct sentences? Sometimes this is a very subtle, and not particularly important, distinction; but ignoring it can sometimes generate significant ambiguity.

titles

Generally, with traditional media, titles of longer published works get italicized while short works get put in quotation marks. See **italics** and **quotation marks** for more details on how to style titles of print, film, and television works. The jury’s still out on how to handle multimedia works; since extra styling adds clutter online, leave the titles in plain text whenever possible, making sure to apply the proper capitalization.

trademarks

Capitalize trademark names. In regular, linear print documents, you only need to use the trademark symbols the first time a trademarked term is used. Online is trickier, since the nature of hypertext makes the “first time” impossible to define. Use your discretion, and let your legal team make the final decision. Check dictionaries for registered trademark names.

underlining

When writing for online media, avoid using underlining for emphasis, since it could be mistaken for a link.

URLs

This acronym is in common usage, so you don’t need to spell it out unless the context really demands it.

Don’t capitalize URLs unless they start a sentence; and even then, first try to rework the sentence so it doesn’t start with the URL. Also, when a URL ends a sentence, please do use the appropriate sentence-ending punctuation after it. Everybody knows by now that the punctuation is not part of the site address.

Note that it’s generally not necessary to include the “http://” when giving URLs. Use it only in more formal contexts, or in “official” places, as when it’s given with a complete mailing address. But leave it out of running paragraph text, where it just adds clutter. It’s a good idea to consistently include the **www**, since not all URLs necessarily have it. Within shorter, self-contained print documents, it’s acceptable to use the **www** just in the first mention of a URL and thereafter just use the main part of the domain name.

user

See **end user**.

user ID

Stick with **user ID** (not **user id** or **userid**).

versions (software)

When referring to subsequent versions/releases of software, use the adjective **higher**, that is, “This site functions best with Netscape 4.0 or higher.” Don’t use **later**.

very

Use this word sparingly, as it has little meaning. Where emphasis is necessary, use words that are strong in themselves.

the Web

Always capitalize. It is a proper noun.

webmaster

Write this term as one closed word but don't capitalize it when it's used generically, only when it's referring to someone's actual job title: "They need to hire a webmaster to manage their site," but "He was the company's Webmaster for three years."

webpage

When in doubt, close it up. Like **website** and **homepage**, the term **webpage** represents a single entity. It's also not a proper noun (even though it's derived from Web), so don't capitalize it.

See also **homepage**, **website**.

website

Spell as one word, not capitalized. (Not **web site** or **Web site**).

which vs. that

See **that vs. which**.

whom vs. who

Whom is often incorrectly used for *who* before *he said* or similar expressions, when it is really the subject of a following verb. Used as the object of a verb or a preceding preposition. **Who** is used where a nominative pronoun such as *I* or *he* would be appropriate. **Whom** is used for a direct or indirect object, or for the object of a preposition. In general, **who** tends to predominate over **whom** in more informal writing, such as is the case with most Web content, even though this is often incorrect usage according to the traditional rules.

World Wide Web

Note three separate words for **World Wide Web**, always with caps. But it's less wordy, and therefore generally better, to use just "the Web."

Web Words**alt tag**

An HTML tag that provides alternative text when webpages are displayed without images. This text is especially helpful for the visually impaired and for those who choose not to download images on webpages in order to increase the speed at which they can view the pages. With some browsers, this text appears when you put your mouse over an image and leave it there.

B2G

An acronym that describes business-to-government relationships. With the government being the largest employer in the United States, B2G is expected to become big business.

benchmark

A standard measurement used to test the performance of different brands of hardware, or different versions of software. When comparing benchmark results, it is important to know exactly what the benchmarks are designed to test. A benchmark that tests graphics speed, for example, may be irrelevant to you if the type of graphical applications you use are different than those used in the test.

best practices

A business management term for optimal tactics and strategies. Best practices do not guarantee success; rather, they describe those tactics and strategies used in successful companies.

best-in-breed

One of several industry jargon terms to describe “the best” of something within its niche, such as a new company or a new application. Most often, it refers to the top software or hardware in a particular class, or to the top company in a particular industry.

bookmark

A direct link to a frequently visited website, saved in your browser for easy access. Bookmarks help you to keep track of websites you frequently visit. They're considered by many to be the best thing about surfing the Web. By bookmarking a website you visit, you can easily return to it later with a simple mouse click, rather than having to remember or type a very long or sometimes cryptic URL. Bookmarks are one way of personalizing the Web experience by enabling you to quickly return directly to areas of the Web that interest you.

browser**a.k.a. Web browser**

A program used to view, download, upload, surf, or otherwise access documents (webpages) on the Internet. Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer are well-known “browsers” that enable you to view and interact with websites. Browsers contain a variety of tools, including bookmarks and the “back” button, which make surfing more enjoyable.

character

Any single letter, number, or symbol that you can type, such as R, 8, or #.

code**a.k.a. writing code**

The act of creating computer programs, websites, and other applications. “Code” refers to the typed program instructions that programmers write. The written code is interpreted into a language that a system can read and execute. A favorite term among Web developers, code is often mentioned with interesting verbs. For example, you may hear programmers say, “We’re busy slinging code,” which means they are writing a computer program or programming a database or website.

content

A name used to refer to the creative contribution of the writers, artists, animators, and musicians whose work makes up the text, artwork, animation, and music on the Internet. Generally thought of as simply the textual and graphical information contained in a website, content also refers to the structure and design in which the information is presented. Websites are often rated on the quality, quantity, and navigational flow of the information.

cookies**a.k.a. cookie**

A strange name used to refer to a small piece of information about you (specifically, about your computer). It is a small file that a Web server automatically sends to your computer when you browse certain websites. Cookies are stored as text files on your hard drive so servers can access them when you return to websites you’ve visited before. Cookies contain information that identifies each user, for example: login or username, passwords, shopping cart information, preferences, etc. When a user revisits a website, his computer automatically “serves up” the cookie, which establishes the user’s identity, thus eliminating the need for the user to reenter this information.

data mining

The practice of massaging data to extract value from the numbers, statistics, and information found within a database, predicting what a customer will do next. Data mining also refers to gathering and presenting, on a website, as much information on one particular topic as is possible.

database**a.k.a. DB**

An organized collection of information, characterized by the use of data fields, which provides a foundation for procedures such as retrieving information, drawing conclusions, and making decisions. Essentially, it is an electronic filing system. A database does not have to be digital. A collection of recipes written on index cards and stored in a filing box also counts as a database. Traditional, computerized databases are organized by fields, records, and files.

drill down

To investigate something thoroughly, then discussing in detail. This term also refers to the process of clicking on links within a website to find information deep into that site. Websites that require “drilling down” deep into the site to access important information are not well organized.

dynamic content

Information on a website or webpage that changes often, usually daily or each time a user reloads or returns to the page. Dynamic content is structured based on user input. For example, when you search within keywords on a search engine, the results that you get back are on a “dynamic” page, based on the words you typed into a form on the previous page.

emoticon

An emoticon is a sequence of typed characters that creates a rough, simple picture of something, such as a facial expression. More commonly referred to as “smileys,” emoticons number in the hundreds and are used to indicate delight, sadness, or frustration. The smiley face :-) is the most popular emoticon. The term “emoticon” literally means “an icon that represents emotion.”

environment

A general computing term for the hardware and operating system used for application programs. For example, you may use a “Macintosh environment.”

extranet

The connecting of two or more intranets. If you think of an intranet as a company’s internal website that allows users inside the company to communicate and exchange information, now imagine connecting that virtual space with another company’s intranet, thus allowing these two (or more) companies to share resources and communicate over the Internet in their own virtual space.

e-zine**a.k.a. electronic magazine**

Sometimes referred to as a “zine,” an e-zine is simply an online magazine. There are hundreds of e-zines published on a regular basis on the Web.

firewall

A specially programmed computer system that “stands” between an organization’s Local Area Network (LAN) and the Internet. It is a security measure used by many companies to prevent hackers and other unauthorized users from accessing internal networks. The firewall computer is set up to monitor traffic and to keep unauthorized crackers from tampering with the system, thereby protecting a private network from a public network. Firewalls are also set up to protect the security of servers.

Flash

A programming technique that enables movies and animation to move seamlessly across a Web browser. As long as different browsers are equipped with the necessary plug-ins, Flash animations will look the same. If it’s on the Web and it’s moving, it is probably a design using Flash.

fulfillment

The process of completing transactions—including sales orders, requests for information, redemption of coupons, premiums, giveaways, rebates, or refunds. Fulfillment relates to warehousing, returns processing, database management, inventory, and quality control. A new generation of business providers specialize in “e-fulfillment,” which is basically fulfillment for e-commerce entities.

ghost site

The name for a website that is no longer maintained, but remains online and available for viewing. Some ghost sites continue to be useful because the content may not be outdated. The difference between a ghost site and other abandoned sites is that the ghost site contains a statement acknowledging that it is no longer being updated.

GIF or .gif**a.k.a. Graphics Interchange Format**

A graphics file format used on the Internet. On webpages, the images (or pictures) you see are usually in GIF because the files are small and can be downloaded quickly. Another type of graphics format commonly used online is JPG; these files download even faster and contain a better resolution. However, JPGs cannot be “interlaced,” so many Web authors use GIFs instead, to get that “melting onto the screen” effect that happens with interlaced images.

globalization

The international efforts of a company to attain worldwide market share. Yahoo! is one of the first global brands of the Internet era.

hit

The request for and delivery of a file (such as a webpage) on a server. Each element of a requested page (including graphics, multimedia, and the HTML file itself) is counted as an individual hit. Hits were originally used to determine the amount of traffic a website received, but since businesses eventually needed to isolate the exact number of times a webpage was requested, the method of counting hits was tossed aside.

HTML**a.k.a. Hypertext Markup Language**

HTML is used to publish hypertext on the Web. It can be created and processed in a wide range of software programs, from simple plain text editors, to WYSIWYG programs to sophisticated authoring tools. HTML uses tags to structure text into headings, paragraphs, lists, and links. It tells a Web browser how to display text and images. You can see a webpage’s HTML code if you select “View Source” or “Source” from the View menu in your Web browser.

Hyperlink**a.k.a. link**

The text or graphics on a website that can be clicked on with a mouse to take you to another page or to a different area on the same webpage. Hyperlinks are generally created, or coded, in HTML.

imagemap**a.k.a. clickable graphic**

An image or graphic that has been coded to contain interactive areas. When it’s clicked on, it launches another webpage or program. There is a subtle distinction between an imagemap and a clickable graphic. An imagemap generally has many different hyperlinked areas, known as links. For example, an imagemap of a country could be coded so that when a user clicks on a city or region, the browser is routed to a document or webpage about that place. A clickable graphic, on the other hand, usually contains just one link.

interface

In a general sense, this is the portion of a program that interacts between a user and an application, meaning it is what you see on the computer screen. It generally refers to "user interface," which consists of the set of operating system commands, graphical display formats, and other features designed for use on a computer or specific program.

Java

A programming language specifically designed for writing programs that can be safely downloaded through the Internet without fear of viruses or other harm to computers or files. Using small Java programs called applets, webpages can include functions such as animations and calculators. Java is a simple, dynamic, general-purpose programming environment. It is best used for creating applets and applications for intranets, the Internet, and any other complex, distributed network.

JPG or .jpg

One of the two most common types of image formats used on the Web (the other being GIF). A standardized image compression mechanism, JPG is named after the original name of the committee that wrote the standard, the "Joint Photographic Experts Group." JPG is designed for compressing either full-color or gray-scale images of natural, real-world scenes. It works well on photographs, naturalistic artwork, and similar material, to be viewed by the naked human eye. It does not work well on lettering, simple cartoons, or line drawings.

mailbot**a.k.a. answerbot**

An email server that automatically responds to requests for information.

mainframe

A very large and expensive computer capable of supporting hundreds, or even thousands, of computer users simultaneously. In the hierarchy of computing power, with simple microprocessors at the bottom and supercomputers at the top, mainframes are just below supercomputers. Mainframes, in a sense, are more powerful because they can support more simultaneous programs. Unisys and IBM are the largest manufacturers of mainframes.

market share

A company's percentage of the overall consumer or business market, based on how many people or companies regularly purchase its product or service. For example, if a company is said to have 30 percent market share within its industry niche, that means 30 percent of the buyers in that niche go to that particular company to purchase its products or services.

meta tag

An optional HTML tag that contains information about a webpage. In theory, an HTML or webpage author can control how a site is indexed by search engines, and how and when it will be called up during a user's search. Within a meta tag, a keyword tag defines the primary keywords of a webpage. A webpage author can also control the amount of time a webpage is up on the screen, as well as where the browser will go next.

motherboard

As the main circuit board of a computer, it contains the central processing unit (CPU) and other necessary components.

navigate

The act of moving around the Web by clicking on hypertext links (or paths) that take you from one webpage to another. As you navigate, you move from one computer to another, and from one server to another without realizing it.

new media

Refers to any kind of communications medium that is interactive, such as the Internet.

offline

The state of a computer when it is not connected to a host system or to the Internet. This term is also used in the middle of a heated business meeting, where someone might say, "Let's discuss this offline."

online

The state of being connected to the Internet (generally through an ISP, OSP, or network). Used as an adjective, it describes a variety of activities that users do on the Internet, for example: online chat, online shopping, and online games.

open source (short for source code)

In general, it is any program whose source code is made available for use or modification by users, developers, or hackers. Open source software is usually developed as a public collaboration and made freely available.

operating system

The foundation software of a computer system responsible for controlling and launching the installed applications and computer peripherals. Common operating systems include MS-DOS, Unix, OS/2, Macintosh, and Windows. It is the software that schedules tasks, allocates storage, handles the interface to peripheral hardware, and presents a default interface to the user when no application program is running.

optimize

To customize software or hardware so that it will run at its utmost capacity in terms of speed and efficiency.

opt-in**a.k.a. permission-based**

The act of explicitly requesting an email distribution. For example, when you sign up to receive an email newsletter, you are "opting" to receive it. Websites and other online entities must provide a way for users to opt-out, which is what separates legitimate email from spam.

opt-out

A user's request to be removed from any kind of online program. For example, if you no longer want to receive an email newsletter, you have the ability to opt-out. The difference between opting out and unsubscribing is that you may only unsubscribe to something you have previously subscribed to. But you may opt-out of something you never joined in the first place.

outsource

To hire an independent contractor or consultant, from outside of the company, to perform a particular task or project (instead of using internal personnel).

parasite

The name for a website that frames another website. For example, when you do a search on Ask Jeeves and it calls up the website you found, the results come back in the lower frame while the Ask Jeeves logo and navigation bar occupies the top frame within the same browser. This is considered a parasite. Many websites do this in an effort to make navigation easier, but it is a questionable practice for two reasons. First, it actually makes navigating harder since the back button is disabled. And second, parasites actually republish someone else's content without consent, making it look like their own.

payment engine

An application that is resident on a merchant's server that accepts payment information, encrypts it, and routes it across the Internet to a payment gateway.

peripheral

Any device connected to, or part of, a computer. Peripherals include such things as monitors, printers, scanners, mice, external hard drives, floppy drives, CD-ROM drives, speakers, and keyboards.

pixel

The smallest unit of a picture on a computer screen. When an image's quality is poor, you will see numerous square dots, commonly known as "pixelization," resulting in a "pixelated image."

platform

The type of operating system on which a computer or software application runs. For example, common platforms include Windows NT, Windows 2000, Macintosh, Unix, and Linux. When a program can run on more than one platform, it is known as cross-platform.

plug-in**a.k.a. add-on software**

A software program that extends the capabilities of your browser in a specific way, giving you, for example, the ability to play audio samples or view movies on your computer screen. Think of a plug-in as a smaller, add-on computer program that works in conjunction with a larger application by enhancing its capabilities. Web browsers have many plug-ins that allow you to do a variety of things online.

pop-up**a.k.a. pop-up window**

A new window that suddenly appears on your computer screen, generally without your prompting. You are likely to see a pop-up window when you open a new program, switch from one program to another, or use a drop-down menu. Also, a Web browser may launch a second browser that pops-up in the form of a mini-window on your computer screen.

portal

A website that serves as a starting point to other destinations or activities on the Web. Initially thought of as a home base with links to other sites in the same subject area, portals now attempt to provide all of a user's Internet needs in one location. Portals commonly provide services such as email, online chat rooms, games, shopping, searching, content, newsfeeds, travel information, stock quotes, horoscopes, and weather.

protocol

A specification that describes how computers talk to each other on a network. A protocol is an established method of exchanging data over the Internet.

query

A question or request to find a particular file, website, record, or set of records in a search engine or database.

real-time

Most commonly used to describe a kind of technology that allows you to see, hear, or access something instantaneously.

redirect

You experience a redirect when you type in a URL and hit "enter," but notice that the browser automatically sends you to another URL. If your browser is fairly new, it will automatically redirect you to the new page, if a website has changed its domain name. If your browser is a bit older, it is most likely you will receive a message communicating the new URL and reminding you to take note of it for future use.

refresh or reload

Reloading a page on the Web allows you to see if any content has changed since the last time you clicked on the site. Refreshing or reloading a webpage, especially on a news-based site, will ensure you are seeing the most current content.

rich media

Enhanced media that offers more than one element of video, sound, or data, giving the user a new media experience (as opposed to older, mainstream formats).

shopping cart

The online version of a grocery store shopping cart, it is what you place your merchandise in while browsing a website. You “check out” by navigating to the purchase page and entering your credit card number in an online form. Shopping carts generally have a variety of features that allow a user to organize selected items and make changes prior to purchase. The shopping cart enables the user to use a credit card to make the purchase, then providing fulfillment information to the merchant’s shipping department. A good shopping cart program should always provide order confirmation numbers and quick customer service links.

sig file**short for: signature file**

A short statement at the end of an email message that identifies the sender and provides additional information, such as an address and phone number. When you create a sig file, it gets automatically appended to every newsgroup posting or email letter you write and send.

site map

A webpage included on many websites, its purpose is to help users to navigate large, complicated sites. The site map usually lists text links to the content of a website in its entirety, on one page. For example, when you click on a nav bar link to a site map, you will see a hierarchical listing of the entire website’s content, and you can then click on a link to whatever content you are interested in.

spam

An email message sent to a large number of people without consent, also known as Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE) or junk email. Spam is generally sent to promote a product or service. It is also found in newsgroups where people post identical and irrelevant messages to many different newsgroups that have nothing to do with the content of the posting.

splash page

An introductory first page or front page that you see on some websites, it usually contains a click-through logo or message, or a fancy Flash presentation with some kind of announcement. The main content and navigation of the site reside “behind” this page. Companies will often put up a “splash page” prior to launching a new site, to deliver information about the site and to serve as a placeholder until the entire site is launched.

spyware

Software that gathers information about a user as he or she navigates around the Web, it is intended to track surfing habits in order to build marketplace profiles. Spyware is often included in “free downloads” from the Web, where the license agreement may mention that information about your habits will be transmitted back to the company’s website. This does not refer to personal information specifically about you.

static

A term used to denote that something is not dynamic, meaning that it remains the same. When used in reference to content, static content can include a company bio, help text, or company history, etc. It is any type of content that does not change, get updated, or refresh.

string**a.k.a. search string**

A series of alphanumeric characters or a series of keywords used to perform an online search (search string). It also refers to a series of alphanumeric characters used for any purpose.

tag

In Web programming languages, it is the code that describes a command or instruction so that a Web browser will be able to interpret and display it. In order to link an image or word on a webpage, you must put specific tags around the image or word in the code. This is known as basic HTML, and is fairly simple to learn and use.

three big C's

In the Internet industry, this refers to the three most important components of the Web: content, commerce, and (online) community.

traffic

The amount of user activity on a website. Visitors who have received some form of compensation for their visit to a particular site are known as "incentivized traffic."

turnkey**a.k.a. turnkey solution**

A complete system designed for a specific application, it is a product that is pre-assembled and delivered to the buyer, ready to operate. A turnkey computer system means it contains all of the necessary hardware, software, peripherals, and files necessary to operate.

upload

To copy a file from your local computer to a server or host system. The reverse process is to download.

user-friendly

Easy to use or learn, as in "The recent version of that software is very user-friendly," or simply, "The website is very user-friendly."

value-add

Initially just a buzzword, it is now considered a business practice in which a company adds extra features to a product so the customer has a difficult time comparing prices and opts to buy the product with more value-added features. The term is also loosely used to refer to anything that can add value to something else.

virtual

A simulation of the real thing, it means the same as "almost." You will see this term appear before various Internet terms to indicate a simulation technology that enables you to cross boundaries and experience something without needing it to be physically present. The Internet itself can be seen as a virtual world; however, most users prefer the term online.

wizard

A built-in help file designed to aid you in setting up or configuring a particular application or program. It is actually an interactive utility that guides a user through each step of the set-up process.

Acronyms

CFO: Chief Financial Officer
CTO: Chief Technology Officer
DMV: Department of Motor Vehicles
EMA: Emergency Management Agency
EMS: Emergency Management System
FEMS: Fire and Emergency Medical Services
IVR: Interactive Voice Response
PSC: Public Service Commission

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