

Defining your brand voice

Think of your brand voice as all of the words, both written and spoken, that reach your audiences: customers, partners, vendors, regulators, and employees. Your brand has a voice whether you define it or not—so better to create a purposeful one that accurately conveys your brand's personality.

Brand Strategy

Brand strategy is made up of multiple components. Brand voice is just one of those components, but it's a critical one that can amplify all of your other brand elements.

Your **brand voice** is made up of two major parts—style and content—that must work in harmony.

BRAND POSITION

The distinct place your offering occupies in the market

BRAND ESSENCE

Your company's reason for being

BRAND VOICE

Your company's verbal representation, including all written and spoken words

BRAND IDENTITY

Your company's visual representation, including logo, icons, illustrations, and photography

BRAND ARCHITECTURE

Your company's structure of brands, divisions, and products—and how they relate to one another

Style

Style is *how* you talk—the attributes that define your verbal and written communication. Style encompasses several aspects and is separate from content or meaning.

Tone is probably what you think of first when you consider style. What adjectives would you use to define your style? Friendly and helpful? Inspirational and contemplative? Funny and engaging? Tone influences how your words come across.

Grammar style is often what gets documented in brand guidelines instead of a robust brand voice. Do you want everyone to use Chicago style or AP? Capitalize or hyphenate certain industry terms? What you pick is often less important than making a consistent choice that everyone can follow.

Word lists can be helpful for writers and non-writers alike. What adjectives should always be used to describe your brand or products? Any words that should never be used? Don't just focus on adjectives. Defining verbs, adverbs, and even nouns can give create a brand voice that is consistent and clear.

Use case guides give attention to particular areas of concern for companies such as how people, technology, regulation, or safety are addressed. For instance, a company that makes inclusion a top priority can create guides for using inclusive language in all communications.

Content

Content is *the substance and meaning* of what you talk about—ideas, concepts, or messages that are core to your brand. Content is made up of several elements, including which channels your brand uses and what you say on those channels.

Content guides define and distinguish all of the types of content you produce. This could include marketing formats like web sites and blog posts, press releases, advertising, and social media, etc., or internal communications like staff emails, safety training, and on-boarding guides. Making an exhaustive list of all of the content your company puts out into the world should be pretty eye-opening. Don't forget things like phone messages, investor presentations, and holiday cards.

Topic guides can help steer writers toward the content that is most aligned with your brand position and essence. They don't have to be rigid lists; these guides can offer thought-starters on topics that align to your brand. Alternatively, they can offer up a formula for making any topic relevant for your brand by finding your unique insight into that area.

Point of view (POV) guides ensure that writers and speakers represent a brand clearly and consistently on contentious or sticky issues. POV guides should articulate the brand's position on a particular issue, and also explain why that is the position.

If you want to learn more about defining your brand's voice or any other part of your brand strategy, get in touch at www.thoughtform.com or 412.448.8600.

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