



BCI.com

# Content Style Guide

October 2017



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## Introduction

The BCI.com Style Guide is intended to provide clear direction about the practical application of Beyondsoft's web-facing personality to help you create effective copy to engage visitors

Sound content standards and best practices enable us to deliver highly relevant, compelling copy that plays a vital role in strengthening and solidifying customer relationships, driving sales, and building Beyondsoft brand equity in the marketplace.

# The mechanics of style

Style is about the choices we make in communicating with customers. Be flexible and creative as you structure your copy. Remember, the goal is to present information clearly and succinctly, while maintaining an approachable tone.

## Know your audience

Recognize customers' goals and challenges and what's most important to them, then create content that takes those factors into account—without relying on marketing jargon.

## Establish value

It is critical to respond to customers' challenges by clearly articulating how Beyondsoft can contribute to their success. Be enthusiastic, but accurate, about products and solutions to compel customers to read more. Avoid hyperbole and claims of exclusivity.

## Be engaging

Speak to customers as colleagues. Use second person (*you*) to engage the reader on a more personal level.

## Keep it simple

Keep copy tight and crisp. Lead with the message that is most important and deliver it clearly and concisely. Too much information can overwhelm your audience and lose their interest. Remember, you only have a few seconds to grab and keep the customer's attention. Don't waste it with dense prose.

## Vary sentence structure

Varying sentence patterns is like creating copy signposts. It helps readers follow the flow of the content and maintains their interest more effectively. Long, rambling sentences or complex syntax, though grammatically correct, can be cumbersome—impeding readers' understanding of your messages.

## Use fragments for emphasis

It is acceptable to use sentence fragments occasionally to break thoughts and present them more precisely. In addition, sentence fragments can provide emphasis to particularly important points. Be sure, however, that fragments flow clearly with what comes before and after it.

## Loosen up

Remember that your copy should sound friendly and conversational. Contractions can help you achieve this tone, but use them judiciously to prevent confusion for nonnative speakers of English.

## Begin some sentences with *and* or *but*

Yes, you can begin a sentence with *and* or *but*. Doing so enables you to divide those long, cumbersome sentences in a way that makes the content easier to understand.

## Limit acronyms and abbreviations

Don't dilute or obscure the Beyondsoft brand by using internal acronyms. In addition, it is likely that many of the industry-specific or technology-specific acronyms or abbreviations are meaningless in

languages other than English. Define these acronyms or abbreviations at first occurrence in copy.

## Document your sources

Quantifiable data can provide compelling support for your claims. However, any proof points in the form of technical or numeric data, analyst quotes, or customer case studies must be approved by someone from the organization that produced the data, and the source must be noted in the copy or as a footnote on the page. In the case of Beyondsoft research, documentation is not necessary; however, source material for any data or quote must be produced upon request.

## Think global

Content developed for Beyondsoft may be relevant across geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. To ensure content meets the needs of a global audience, keep in mind these basic guidelines:

- Create straightforward, active-voice sentences.
- US-centric language can be meaningless to nonnative speakers. Avoid idioms, colloquialisms, metaphors, and slang to minimize translation issues, without diluting messaging and texture.
- Be sensitive to religious, political, racial, and gender views that vary between cultures and geographies.
- Avoid phrasal verbs, such as *gear up*, *keep up*, *look to*, *call up*, *free up*, and *speed up*. Rewrite the content to eliminate the multiple-word verb. Usually, correcting a phrasal verb is a simple matter of removing the second term.

- Always try to apply positive language. It is easier for nonnative speakers to understand what they *should* do, rather than what they should *not* do.

## Writing for social media

Maintaining a consistent tone and style across all communications is crucial; however, sharing content through social media requires additional considerations.

- Messages must be extremely succinct to be impactful.
- Leave room for links and sharing.
- Shorten links using aka.ms.
- Show that there is a real person behind the messages. Represent the brand, but in a friendly, conversational way.
- Contribute to the conversation, and share what customers are sharing. Don't confine posts strictly to promotion.
- Post updates regularly, but not too often. News overload is frustrating, and could cause customers to miss critical information because it has been pushed too far down the feed.

## Other general style considerations

- Begin with the most important information. Then add finer details that can be skimmed, depending on the user's needs.
- Always provide a clear, compelling call to action. Think beyond why the user should read more, click a link, or download a file.
- Use plain English. Avoid jargon and marketing-speak.

- Don't overwork the copy. Doing so can actually create new issues.
- Detach yourself from personal ownership of the content. You are speaking *for* the Beyondsoft and you are speaking *to* customers. Stay focused on the customer value proposition.
- Focus headlines and subheads on key information (what it is and who it is for).
- For printable documents, be concise in copy and design. Provide plenty of white space, so that the document is easy to read and can accommodate translation.



## Usage basics

### Bullets

Bullets list notable information, steps in a process, highlights, or specifications. They also enable users to read content more quickly and easily, and help break denser bodies of copy into more readable components.

- Use sentence case for bullets
- Align bullets flush left
- Build parallel constructions for each set of bullets
- Reserve numbered bullets for steps that must be completed in sequence
- Use terminal punctuation only if one bullet is more than one statement

### City, state, and country names

When referring to a city, include the appropriate state, province, or country name. Exceptions: any city that is not likely to be confused with another city of the same name (for example, Paris). Spell out full state or province names in body text; use postal abbreviations in mailing addresses. When referring to a country, always spell out its name. Exceptions: United States and United Kingdom, which may be abbreviated as US and UK when used as adjectives. If you abbreviate US or UK, don't spell it out in parentheses.

### Currency

Use *US\$*. Use *Can\$* for Canadian dollars. Consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th Edition for other currencies.

## Dates

When referring only to the month and year, separate by an en dash (MM–YY). When referring to quarters—or one-fourth of a year—use no spacing (XQYY). When used in body copy, dates should be written out in full. Do not use ordinal numbers for months, and do not use “th” after days.

## Endnotes and quotes

Use endnotes and quotes to refer to, qualify, support, or expand on content found in body copy. When supporting or substantiating content points with quotes from internal or external sources, remember that you must seek appropriate permissions. If a page contains only a single endnote, denote it with an asterisk. For multiple endnotes, a superscripted numeral should be placed outside the end punctuation, and references to endnotes in body copy should appear in numerical order. It is preferred that all source or quote attributions be placed at the bottom of the page on which they’re featured.

## Headlines

The most effective headlines illustrate the challenge and solution in the form of a benefits-driven statement. Use sentence case for headlines.

## Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks set an expectation about what awaits on the page you link to. Choose words that accurately describe your destination and that motivate customers to take action. Don’t use *Click here* to

indicate a hyperlink. Don't hyperlink end punctuation. Don't hyperlink headlines. Make the linked copy easy to identify, but not visually distracting.

## Numbers

Spell out numbers zero through nine. Exceptions: as found in product names, charts, currency, for measurement and percentages, or when quantities greater than nine are compared to or linked with quantities that are nine or less. Also spell out numbers less than 10 that are associated with days, weeks, hours, and other units of time. At the beginning of a sentence, always spell out the number.

## Phone numbers

US and Canada: Use parentheses to separate the area code from the seven-digit phone number, not a hyphen. In domestic telephone lists, do not precede the area code with 1 to indicate the long distance access code. Do add 1 in international lists to indicate the country code for the United States.

Outside the US: precede local phone numbers with country and city codes if you list phone numbers from more than one country. City codes contain one, two, or three digits. Use parentheses to separate the country and city codes from the local phone numbers, not hyphens or spaces. Follow the convention for the specific country for displaying the local number that users will call.

## Professional titles

Professional titles are frequently used within body copy when quoting an individual, or in a sidebar as a pull quote. In either case, use initial capital letters in a title when it comes before a person's name. Use all lowercase when the title follows a person's name.

## Time and time zones

Use lowercase for time zones, except when part of the name is a proper noun. Avoid specifying standard time and daylight time, which refer to clock settings within a time zone at specific times of the year. Don't abbreviate time zones, unless space is severely constricted. For A.M. and P.M., use all capital letters and periods. For clarity, use *noon* and *midnight*, not 12:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

## Trademarks

Consult the Beyondsoft legal team for any questions or concerns about trademarked titles, products, or solutions.

## Units of measure

Spell out units of measure in text. Exceptions are noted in the glossary in appendix 1. When a measurement is used as an adjective, use a hyphen to connect the number to the measurement.

Abbreviations such as MB, GB, and KB should be separated by a space from the numbers that precede them. Don't add an s to the abbreviated form of a unit of measure.

# Punctuation

When it comes to punctuation, the goal is to ensure clarity and provide emphasis. Some punctuation rules are absolute (for example, using terminal punctuation at the end of a sentence). This section provides guidance about those aspects of punctuation that are more matters of style.

## Bold type

Avoid using bold type for emphasis in body copy. It's ok to use bold type sparingly for low-level subheadlines or to introduce a key term at the beginning of a bullet point.

## Commas

Use serial commas before *and*, *but*, or *or* in a series to help clarify sentences.

## Ellipses

Use within or at the close of a quotation to indicate an omission of text. Don't use ellipses as a substitute for an em dash.

## Em dashes

Use to separate a thought, create a pause, or add explanation to a main clause. Don't add spaces before and after the em dash. Adjust body copy to eliminate lines of text that begin with em dashes. Don't use ellipses as an alternative for em dashes. The preceding entry in this section provides guidance about the proper use of ellipses.

## En dashes

Use en dashes to indicate a range of numbers, such as inclusive values, dates, or pages, and to indicate a minus sign or a negative number. Use an en dash instead of a hyphen in a compound adjective in which at least one of the elements is an open compound.

## Hyphens

Use to avoid ambiguity. Hyphens also form a single idea from two or more words (compounds). Don't hyphenate compound words that are formed from prefixes. (See appendix 1 for exceptions, such as *co-marketing*.) Don't hyphenate compound words that are formed from adverbs that end in *ly*.

## Quotation marks and italic type

Use quotation marks when punctuating direct quotes from analyst reports, case studies, or individuals. Periods and commas should precede closing quotation marks. Don't use what is known as *scare quotes* to emphasize particular words or phrases. Scare quotes imply that a term is "so-called," which can undermine the integrity of the concept. Use italic type to identify a word, phrase, or sentence that is used to refer to itself.