sagentia innovation

Brand guidelines: Style

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Why do we have brand guidelines?

A brand is much more than a logo: it's about creating and presenting a personality and a positioning. Branding covers visual design, as well as what we say and how we say it – including how we describe who we are and what we do. And it extends to every interaction – written, verbal, physical or virtual – a client has with us.

Brand guidelines help to ensure that everything we present to an external audience – whether new or existing clients, or stakeholders in our business – is consistent, reflects our core messages and showcases us in the best possible light.

Guidelines around these key elements help to ensure the consistency required by our brand and provide support to all our colleagues in creating content that conveys our knowledge, passion, and attention to detail.

Branding – particularly in terms of how we communicate visually and in writing – enables us to establish a strong and recognisable link between who we are and what we do that is instantly recognisable and trusted with our audience.

What is the purpose of this style guide?

This guide is designed to help you write in our house style, using our brand's unique voice. This is important to ensure that our communications are always of a high-quality and consistent – a vital part of making sure that we're viewed as professional, credible, and reliable.

This guide will be reviewed and added to from time to time. If you have any questions or think anything else should be added, please speak to the marketing team.

What is 'tone of voice'?

'Tone of voice' is about how we present and describe ourselves, both in conversation and in writing.

We have some basic guidelines which should ideally be followed in all communications – particularly those with external audiences.

Our tone of voice principles follow our brand personality.

We are: ✓ **Clear**
✓ **Confident**
✓ **Engaged**
✓ **Impactful**
✓ **Inquisitive • Reassuring**

Digging deeper into 'tone of voice'

Clear

We need to ensure that what we say makes sense to our audiences, including those who may not understand all the complexities of the areas that we work in, without patronising or speaking down to them (not always an easy balance to strike).

We want to be inclusive to as wide an audience as possible, while still demonstrating our knowledge and skills.

You may happen to have an advanced degree or years of experience in a certain subject area, but your reader may not always be familiar with information – and shorthand ways of conveying it (e.g. abbreviations and technical terminology) – that are second nature to you.

- **Consider the audience:** We need to be mindful of who we are trying to reach with our content and the level of their specialist knowledge, which may vary from piece to piece.

- **Keep sentences concise:** One point per sentence is a good guideline, although longer technical documents (e.g. White Papers) may necessitate more complexity.

- **Make your copy impactful:** Ensure your meaning is clear, succinct, precise, easy to understand, factual and insightful.

- **Don't get lost in the detail:** Avoid the use of overly complicated language and jargon for the sake of it. Plain speaking is always preferable, although that doesn't mean we need to fear our expertise (see below for more). Leave out unnecessary detail if it doesn't serve to add value to your content or aid understanding.

- **Try to use straightforward verb constructions:** as far as possible use present, past and future tense – avoid conditional and derivatives thereof. Try and remove "could" and "might" as far as possible. For example, "We could provide XYZ service" to "We provide XYZ service". The "could" is implied.

Confident

We are lucky to have so many talented and knowledgeable people working within the business and we shouldn't shy away from our expertise. Confidence in who we are, what we do, and how we do it should come across in all communications.

- **Demonstrate your knowledge:** Be confident in your abilities and what you're saying, be unafraid of voicing your knowledge and expertise.

- **Share your enthusiasm:** Taking pride in what we do as a business, and your role within it, is important in encouraging others to trust us as the 'right people for the job'.

- **Don't fear technical terminology:** While we want to avoid unnecessary jargon, we shouldn't shy away from the specialist fields we inhabit. It may be worth taking the time to explain technical language or terminology however, particularly for audiences who may not be overly familiar. Clarity of meaning should always take precedence.

Engaged

We want our content to be thought-provoking and to open a dialogue, and there are some simple (and perhaps obvious!) linguistic tricks to ensure we connect with our audience.

- Try to write in the first person, plural "we": This ensures that our content is warm and 'human', rather than cold and remote. Generally speaking, first mention should be "Sagentia Innovation" as in, "Sagentia Innovation provides advisory and product development services". Follow up mentions should be with pronoun "we"; "We work extensively in the medical, consumer, food & beverage and industrial sectors."

- Use the active (not passive) voice: Sentences written in the active voice, where the subject of the sentence performs the action, add impact to your writing and are often more concise than passive. Swapping the structure of your sentence around is usually all that is needed:

  - Passive: It was demonstrated during research that Chemical Y is good for the heart.
  - Active: Researchers found that Chemical Y is good for the heart.

- **Be vibrant in your descriptions:** We want to tell a story and engage our reader with the narrative journey we are leading them on. Don't be afraid of including a splash of 'colour' in your writing – whether an anecdote from your personal life or an example from popular culture that makes concrete the point you are illustrating.

Impactful

We take on complicated challenges for our clients which make an impact on their business's strategy and product development.

- **Demonstrate why the things we do have an impact:** Explain the results of the point you are making. Contextualise the 'so what?', make clear why what you're saying is important beyond Sagentia / Science Group. We're working on behalf of the client to build their IP and impact on their business at a high level. Use sentences like "We provide services in X,Y,Z which means you can achieve X,Y,Z."

- **Use evidence to back up your claims:** We have built up a body of white papers, insight pieces and case studies that we can draw on to illustrate our points and make tangible how we're leading the way in research, practical implementation of cutting edge science, and commercial strategy.

Inquisitive

We want to demonstrate that we're intelligent and innovative, but still approachable and want to reassure that we won't overcomplicate things for the sake of it.

- **Demonstrate innovative thinking:** Be confident in articulating new or unconventional ideas or approaches. Show that your arguments and solutions have been well thought through.

- **Be challenging and challenge yourself:** We're constantly looking at the world around us and keeping up to date with the forefront of all the sectors we work in. Don't be afraid to champion this knowledge, while also recognising the 'unknowns' that this entails.

- **Joined up thinking:** We don't work in silos and can draw on knowledge from across the wider group, from R&D to regulatory, to look at the 'bigger picture'. We can use what we know from one area to apply these lessons to other areas, in a way that other organisations can't.

Reassuring

We need to show our audience(s) that we're a safe pair of hands. We're doing things that are new and different, but we're not reckless mavericks. We take a realistic, considered approach, and think things through. We are self-aware and reflective. Our work is grounded in science, diligence, and evidence- based approaches, and everything we do is driven by our clients' needs to innovate.

- **Be confident in our brand identity:** Connect what you're talking about back to the motivations and goals of our business, and how they meet those of our clients.

- **Be confident in innovation:** Don't feel you have to apologise for doing things differently – it's key to our ability to make a difference.

- **Be confident in your approach:** Back up what you're saying with evidence and examples where appropriate.

- **Think about language:** Avoid language that could be interpreted as vague or uncertain e.g. might, maybe or perhaps. Avoid negative language to describe what we do, e.g. can't, won't, unable to.

Our brand in practice

Our positioning statement

Sagentia Innovation helps businesses extract maximum value from their R&D investments by providing strategic advice and transformational technology, innovation, and product development expertise.

Our 'elevator pitch'

Sagentia Innovation is a product advisory and development business that's driven by insight and invention. We bring together the advisory skills of Oakland Innovation and OTM with the product development capabilities of Sagentia to offer our clients a full range of R&D services.

Combining sector-specific commercial expertise with sharp market intelligence, our advisory services give our clients the fullest perspective on new opportunities – with objectivity and best advice always paramount.

Uniquely, these advisory services are now seamlessly integrated with the technical expertise and problem-solving skills that have been the hallmark of Sagentia's product development work for more than 30 years. The result is an agile, end-to-end service that sees every project viewed through three lenses – end-user needs, commercial opportunities, and technical feasibility.

With expertise spanning the medical, food and beverage, consumer, industrial systems, chemicals and energy sectors, our goal is to help every client identify the best opportunities for growth. Where appropriate, these are then realised as market-leading digital and physical products that quickly deliver tangible commercial benefits.

Basic tips to ensure your copy shines

Our font: We use black Arial 10pt in our designed publications and on our website. This is part of the look and feel of our brand identity and this should also be adhered to in all external facing products, including emails.

Consider your audience: We need to think about who we are writing for, what they know, and what we need to tell them – before we start writing. Tailor your copy to the needs of the audience, don't automatically assume they share your level of expertise – or even the same interests.

Consider the context: Think about what you're writing and pitch your copy using the appropriate tone. We know that authoring a report for a client, for example, is going to require a different writing style to, say, a social media post. Use your judgment to decide what's appropriate, but you should always aim to write within our overall tone of voice (see above).

Use plain English: We want our communications to feel inclusive yet professional, rather than elitist or overly corporate. We should try and use plain English and language that is accessible to as wide an audience as possible in our written content, wherever possible. A good rule of thumb when considering 'What is plain English' – would you use the same language or wording when explaining this to a friend? If the answer is 'no', it may be worth considering whether to alter your language, or explain things further, if there's a chance the intended audience may struggle to understand your meaning. Again, this takes some common sense in its application. The audience for a White Paper isn't going to be the same as the audience for a LinkedIn post, for example.

Keep copy interesting: We're always trying to grab our readers' attention, so start by telling them what's interesting. This is particularly important in introductory paragraphs, as this is our chance to reel the reader in. We need to ensure that what we're saying is impactful. Playing with sentence structure can often render a dull sentence start more interesting. Consider reversing the order of the following: "According to XYZ organisation, we have found this really interesting finding." Caveats, explanations and background information should generally come after the interesting point that's being made in a sentence, not before. The same could be said for starting a sentence with 'For example'. Better to start with the example, and then caveat if needed (it may be obvious from context that you're using an example, so consider whether you even need to signpost the fact at all).

Avoid Repetition: Try and mix things up. Use a variety of sentence lengths and structures, vary your vocabulary and linguistic habits. We want to keep the reader engaged. Following the same formula throughout a piece of written content is a sure-fire way to put them off (see below for more detailed guidance).

Think about flow: Consider how easy it will be for the audience to follow your train of thought. Think about breaking up long chunks of text with sub-headings or rhetorical questions, particularly if you're writing about several different topics or themes within the same document. Using introductory and concluding paragraphs can help provide initial context to your argument and neatly round off a piece.

Show don't tell: Use evidence and examples where you can. If you want to reassure readers that a technology is increasing in its adoption, don't just assert this – demonstrate it by referencing research or our own insights.

Always proofread: It's difficult to spot your own mistakes, but it can be helpful to take a break and then go through work a final time before handing it to someone else to double check.

Avoid unnecessary punctuation: Be sparing with exclamation marks, and never use ALL CAPS to add emphasis.

Be concise: Omit needless words. Keep sentences short. Try to limit sentences to ten to 15 words for information on screen and 30 to 35 words for printed material.

Be focused: Stick to one point per sentence and one topic per paragraph. It's normally better to break text up into digestible chunks, rather than providing one large meal.

UK vs American spelling: Use UK English by default unless the product you are creating is specifically designed for the US market only.

Specific issues

We reference The Guardian and Observer style guide as our default to defer to on specific issues that arise. It's a ready-made, easily accessible and – to UK audience's, at least – familiar set of standards we can follow.

However, there are some specific points of style that we are keen for authors to consider when writing:

Abbreviations
Always use in full first, then brackets – e.g. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) – if you're using it more than once, unless it's such an obvious one that you assume the every reader will 100% know it – e.g. UK, USA, or FBI. Use 'e.g.' and 'i.e.', when using these Latin abbreviations.

Ampersands
Avoid use of the ampersand symbol (&) where the word 'and' will do in written work, unless it's part of a well-known combo – e.g. R&D – or if space demands it, e.g. diagrams, illustrations etc.

Capitals
Capitals shouldn't be used to signify importance; they should be used for proper nouns and names. A specific job title, e.g. The Marketing Manager or The Director of Innovation, should be capitalised, but they should not be used for general titles e.g. "the manager was in the office" or "the director was attending a conference". Something like a room e.g. "Operating Room" doesn't need to be capitalised, unless we are then going to abbreviate throughout the rest of the content – e.g. Operating Room (OR) in the first instance, OR in the second onward.

Companies
All organisations, including Sagentia Innovation, should be treated as singular entities and therefore should be accompanied by 'is' or 'has', not 'are' or 'have', e.g. "Sagentia Innovation is the leading…". It's fine to say 'we' or 'our' when describing the activities of people, or groups of people, within an organisation however – e.g. "We can offer bespoke solutions to your needs" or "Our team uses cutting- edge lab equipment to..".

Dates
14 July 2016, or for the US, July 14 2016. (No commas, and no 'th', 'nd' or 'rd' after the number.)

Distances
Metres and miles should be written out in full, to avoid confusion with the abbreviated form of million, where it's not obvious from context.

Exclamation marks
To be used sparingly, if ever. Over-use tends to look amateurish and unprofessional. Exclamation points should not be used to signpost a particularly interesting or relevant piece of information, they are designed to be used at the end of exclamatory sentences, i.e. sentences which express a strong or surprising emotion e.g. "That's amazing!"

Forward slashes
Try to avoid using these where possible. Either/or examples, such as his/her, are fine but try using plain English ("and" or "or") where possible. This helps improve flow and readability, particularly for non- technical audiences e.g. – "Science critique/validation" is jarring compared with "Science critique and validation".

Headlines and Sub-heads
Caps first word then lower case the rest, e.g. "Partners and acquisition diligence", not "Partners and Acquisition diligence", "Partners and Acquisition Diligence", or "Partners And Acquisition Diligence". Proper nouns are fine to caps up, of course, e.g. "Our thoughts on Amazon Health's announcement." Headings and sub-heads should be aligned with the left-hand side of text, except for on the main title of an entire document, which should be centred. Headings should be bold but not underlined, where possible.

Hyperlinks
Always link to a section of text which says something about what's at the other end. This is primarily to help the reader (who may be skim reading / key term hunting in a document), but it also helps with SEO. 'Click here' or 'find out more here' should not be used, they tell the reader or search engine crawlers nothing useful and, in the case of emails, can set off spam filters.

Locations
Use a capital when referring to geographic regions, (e.g. the Midlands or the North East of England) but don't capitalise when using compass point directions (e.g. northern).

Lists

Don't use full stops at the end of bulleted or numbered points unless they contain more than one sentence, e.g.

- This is the first bullet point. But if there is another sentence then use a full stop.
- This is the second
- And this is the third

Numbers

Write out the numbers one to nine in full, numbers 10+ in numerals. One million but 10 million. Fine to use m for million, bn for billion, tn for trillion etc when dealing with numbers after the first use of the full wording, i.e. 10 million on first use, 10m thereafter. Don't mix text with numerals, e.g. do not say "one to 25", say "1-25". Include a comma where needed, e.g. 1,000. Third party product, not 3rd party.

Oxford commas (also known as Harvard or serial commas)

These are commas before the final "and" in lists. You decide whether to use one: simple lists can survive without them, but they are often essential to avoid ambiguity e.g. "eats, shoots, and leaves".

Page numbers

Should be used for any document over one page.

Percentages

Use the % symbol

Prices

USD 350 million, rather than $350 million. GBP / EUR etc as appropriate.

Speech marks

Use "double quote marks" when quoting speech. Use 'single quotes' for a quote within a quote (e.g. "Anna said, 'your style guide needs updating,' and I said, 'I agree.'."). Also use 'single quotes' for phrases in 'air quotes', where appropriate, e.g.: "This hype has resulted in a lot of investment, both from product vendors looking to 'AI-enable' their platforms and companies looking to use AI to improve their business performance." Try to do so sparingly in most documents – reports of interviews, Q&As, and other reported speech may require more. NB The Guardian style guide suggests using single quotes in headings; we aren't trying to save space printing a newspaper, so we don't.

Starting sentences

It's sometimes OK to begin a sentence with 'and' or 'but', particularly if they add rhetorical weight to what follows, contrary to what your English teacher may have told you (still, do so sparingly). Both are infinitely preferable to beginning with 'so', which is tempting as a way of seeming informal and conversational but is extremely overused and cliché (particularly since the rise of blogging and podcasting, where it seems to have been popularised). 'However', 'therefore' and 'indeed' should also be used sparingly, as they risk seeming overly stuffy, formal or academic, and tend to detract from whatever comes next, which is what we (the reader) are really interested in anyway.

Tables

Should not include rows that split over pages. The header row should be repeated at the top of each page, if they are long and span a number of pages.

Temperatures

°C or °F, rather than degrees Celsius or degrees Fahrenheit

Website

We refer to our website as sagentiainnovation.com (no www.).