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Tech Zest Advisors Style Guide

Last updated: 10/27/2009 by CAS: Fixed fancy font problem

Writing

How do we address our audience?

At TZA we write as if we're speaking directly to a small business owner. Think of someone with the financial responsibility for themselves and others: someone that is not interested in our interests but in his or her own. Can they find something at our site that will help them with their problem?

Assume that the person can read at a high school level, understand business terms, but does not understand technology terms. For instance, we put out a "tell me more" survey. No one checked the question on SEO but almost all of the attendees said they wanted to know more about findability on the web. You will not find findability in the dictionary -- in the technology biz we do make up words -- but it is OK because it conveys meaning better than an acronym.

Pain, change, gain

Put action in your writing. Avoid overly long sentences and passive tense. Get right to the problem. Put the customer's pain first and then deliver your explanation of a solution. If you have lots to say on the subject then either put the content into a PDF, video, or an audio recording. Use PDF's for illustrations, narratives, and procedural instructions. Use audio to deliver a lecture. Use video to demonstrate software by combining voice and screen recordings. Avoid PowerPoint sing-a-longs.

How much to share?

On our marketing site we're focusing on presenting an image to the reader; we drill down into details in our blog, seminars and workshops. We're presenting sizzle so that prospects will walk through our virtual door. We don't give away our intellectual property until we've made some sort of contact with the prospective reader.

We gently lead prospects down a path that ends with one of the following engagements:

- Service
- Consulting
- Education

If we give away our time or our expertise, it is the same as if a retailer opened his door and yelled "Free Stuff!" to the public. People will choose our firm based upon credibility and trust. Often they won't be able to judge us based upon technical competence. Instead, they'll judge us based upon the referral of a friend or the projection of a professional image.

How do we organize content?

In our current site, think of each web page as being an article. Early next year we will roll out a blog site based upon Wordpress.

The blog site will be styled to look exactly like our marketing site. Most readers will never know when they transition from static HTML pages to pages generated dynamically from Wordpress.

As our site grows, we will rearrange it to handle the new content. Collections of articles will be gathered and indexed on a pathway page. You've probably seen these on other sites; each article has a picture, hyperlink to the rest of the article, and summary or introductory paragraph to snag the reader's interest.

The home page must have some sort of eye-catching content. At the time of this writing, we have a rotating set of challenge questions. They address the prospect's pain immediately. Once we can afford a graphic artist we may illustrate the prospect's pain with a cartoon.

As our site matures, we'll incorporate landing pages to fit particular promotions. These will tie into our referral marketing efforts. These special pages will be linked on the sitemap but accessible by the regular navigation.

Word mechanics and grammar

If in doubt over who vs whom, consult Mignon Fogarty's [Grammar Girl](#) website or book. Her decisions on commas before an and, who versus whom, and alternate versus alternative are good enough for our purposes. If Ms. Fogarty cannot resolve your issue then consult the [Associated Press stylebook](#). The AP is actively developing a style guide for social media. Their website is a good resource for determining the correct use of emerging technology vocabulary. Use the [Merriam-Webster](#) online dictionary if needed, but always defer to the AP stylebook if there is a conflict. For some items such as Javascript libraries check the author's website.

Common phrases used in our website:

- website not web site (different from APA)
- web page
- CAPTCHA not Captcha
- webcam
- webmaster
- e-commerce
- e-mail
- pay-per-click
- Ajax
- FTP

Visual Mechanics






Illustration specifications

Illustrations and pictures should be either 200px or 500px wide. Use the CSS class illustration to control the formatting. Keep to black and white or gray scale if possible. Use simple line drawings in favor of colorful art. Break this guideline when presenting portfolio examples and client logos for testimonials.

Colors

TZA Color Palette

Text	Black	
Outer Sidebar	#999999	
Inner Sidebar	#d1d1d1	

Navigation

We have four navigation areas on the site as well as two types of off page link areas. Readers can access all of the major pages by using the following:

- menu of links across the top of the page
- links in the footer of the page
- chapter links for our major subject areas on the far right
- contextual links on the left of the chapter links

The content that appears in the contextual link area will vary across the site. For chapter links, the contextual navigation area serves as a second level navigation area. For other pages on the site the contextual area should contain either see also information or callout text.

Construction Mechanics

CSS

Repeat after me, thou shalt only style text by CSS. Styling for text, divs that contain text, and other presentation areas are found in TZABodyContent.css.

The important stylesheets are as follows:

- [TZABodyContent.css](#) controls content presentation
- [TZA04.css](#) controls layout
- [Style.css](#) controls blog presentation content and overrides some items in TZABodyContent.css

The following is a short list of CSS tips for marking up content:

- All pages (except the home page) should have an H1 page title at the top
- Subheadings in a page are H2, H3, H4 as needed to create a visual hierarchy
- Apply class="typeface-js" to H1-H4
- All pages should use the Dreamweaver template.
- Content begins in the "col1_content" div and should contain two wrapping divs (content and articletext). Don't ask just copy the needed code from another page in the site.
- Images are styled with class="illustration left" or class="illustration center"

Fonts

Try to match content found in PDFs with the content found online. Headings use Franklin Gothic Demi, paragraphs use a serif font (Georgia online, Minchon in print), and navigation uses a sans serif font (Verdana and Helvetica).

CSS framework

The site makes use of yaml, a CSS framework, in order to account

for cross browser layout issues. Yaml has it's own style sheets; we've overridden styles as needed in TZ04.css.

JavaScript and jQuery

Don't touch the JavaScript unless you have time to regression test all of the site before production deployment. If you change font face or font sizes for the navigation be sure to check the chapter navigation. There is a JavaScript function that depends upon a calculating the contextual lines; changing the font size throws off the calculation.

We use jQuery and several jQuery plugins to simplify the JavaScript on the site. Here are the UI controls/techniques that are available to you:

- Innerfade - used to rotate through a list of images
- Background position - use in the CSS navigation rollovers
- TabSlideOut - Display and hide content on a page using a tab visual metaphor
- DataTable - Display data (not used)
- jQueryTools – UI library (tabs, tooltips, overlay, expose)

jQuery Tools is our preferred library, assuming that their code is stable and well supported. We'll only figure that out as we use it and encounter problems.

Browser support

Use Firefox 3.5+ to develop but be sure that IE 7, IE 8 and Safari 4 (Windows) are supported. It is acceptable to use some of the new rounded corners CSS even though they won't render in IE correctly. Be sure to check the site in each browser periodically. Yaml, the CSS framework, should protect us from the majority of browser rendering problems.

Dreamweaver change management

This site makes extensive use of Dreamweaver change management . Every page in the site is based on a single template. The template contains editable sections, an optional section for page specific CSS and JavaScript (think initialization) . Additionally, each page has a name. We're using the names in JavaScript functions so that we can perform certain actions depending on which page the user views. This is how we draw the lines on the right for the contextual links.

Elements that are repeated on pages but aren't standard in the template are controlled via Dreamweaver assets. Each time you change the asset, Dreamweaver will update all of the pages that use that asset.

If you have code that you want to reuse in a copy-n-paste sort of way then use a snippet. I've created a TZA snippet folder that should appear in your Dreamweaver snippet window .

Process



Versioning with SVN

Thou shalt only make changes to the website via SVN controlled content. That said, we always version our changes in SVN. It is how we share our site among multiple developers and multiple machines for a single developer. Develop the habit of updating your copy of the site via SVN frequently. SVN will mark as a conflict any

files that you have changed that were changed by someone else. First one end wins and you don't want to go through the trouble of resolving all of the conflicts.

Changing the site's template requires some special consideration. Template and asset changes propagate through all of the files in the site. You want to be sure to have the current version and that no one else is actively working on the site. Make your changes and commit them quickly.

Sandbox migration for testing

Even though you will test the site locally, some problems can only be found by migrating the site to a sandbox area. It is also a good way to get others to help you QA the site. Note that it isn't possible to create a sandbox area for our integrations. They are live. Also, we haven't setup the infrastructure for test only emails.

Production migration

Migrate the site to the production location (www.techzestadvisors.com) only when you have time to QA each page of the site. Pay attention to revision numbers so that you can roll back to a previous version if something goes wrong.

Integration



At TZA we make use of cloud computing (pay per use online) services when we can. You'll find the following integrations in the site

- EventBrite to handle event registration
- LinkedIn to present a personal branding presence
- Screencast media roll for PDF, video, and audio presentation
- Google analytics for gathering usage metrics
- FormSpring to gather data from readers
- Kalthura video player
- Wordpress blog

Future directions



- ~~The javascript fancy fonts is problem problematic. If we can't find a fix we'll have to switch to sIFR.~~
- Add a style sheet for mobile or redirect to a mobile only site
- Make use of a CDN for JavaScript files and images.