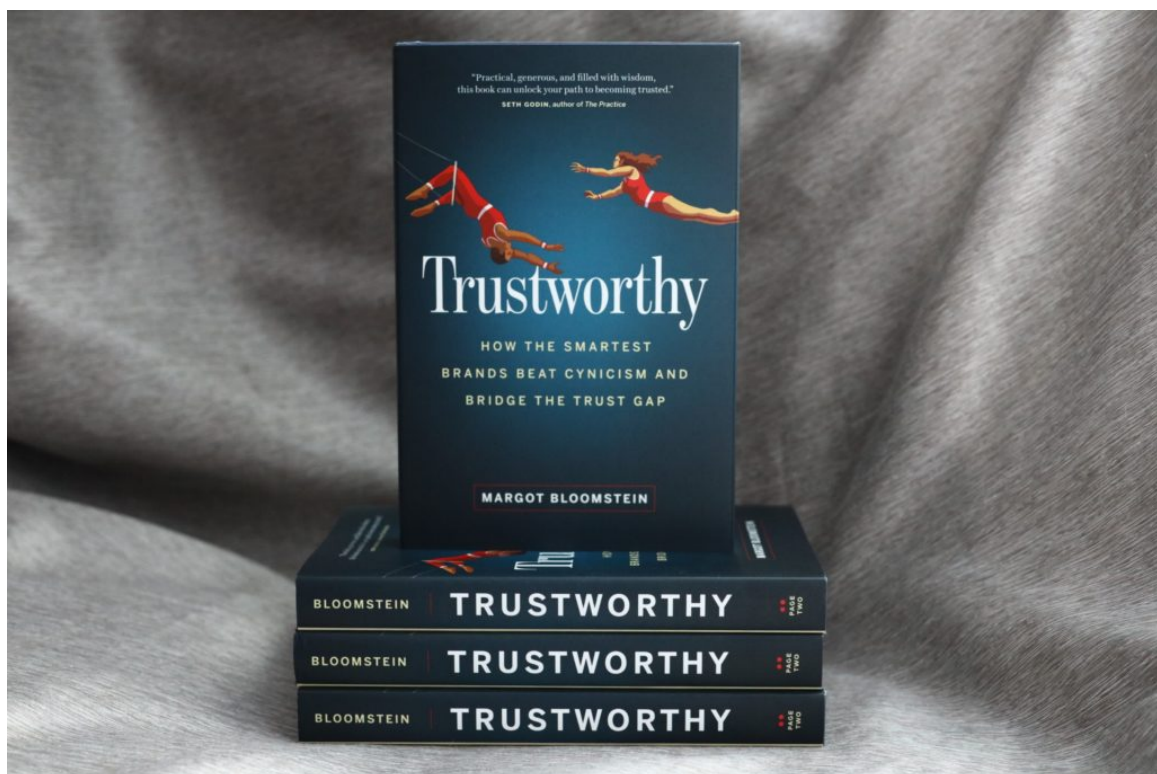# Institutionalising Editorial Quality
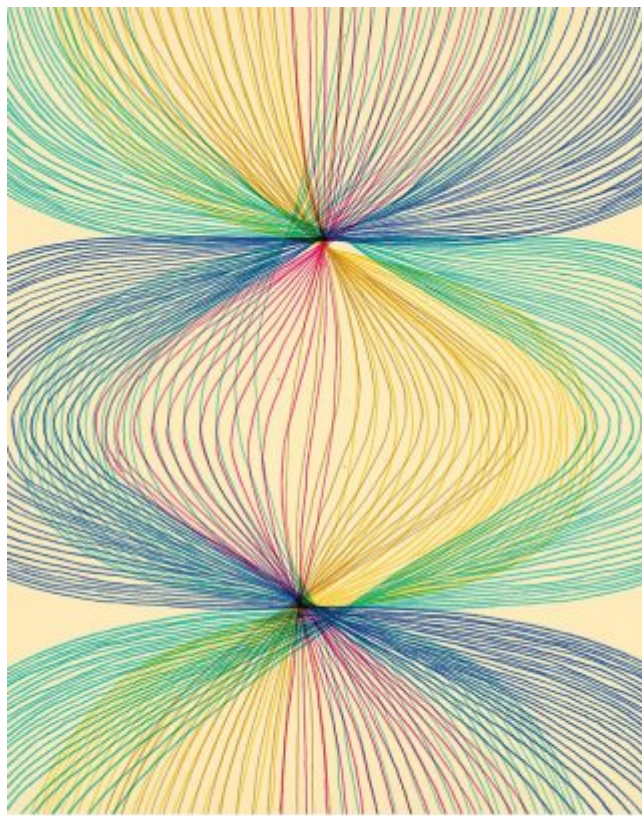
Heinz Wittenbrink

2024-02-02

Assuring Editorial Quality for Brands

Three Books

MANAGING CHAOS
Digital Governance by Design
by LISA WELCHMAN Foreword by Chris Sinton

Rosenfeld

Aspects of Editing

Transforming content into usable products

- User Interestes

- Integration of production, design, legal, …

Assuring Quality

- Complying with standards
- Connecting content and the real world

Example

##

> In short, there are no breezy blurbs between these covers. More shiny cooking magazines support superficial scanning, but the editorial process at America's Test Kitchen goes beyond superficial in a test of time, objectivity, and painstaking detail. (Bloomstein 2021, chap. 5)

Staying in tune

- Defining your identity
- Developing a specific voice
- Make sure that the brand ist perceived like a person with specific properties

Example

> "There's a difference between Mailchimp's voice and tone: we try to maintain a consistent voice, but we modulate our tone based on the context and customer."

> When the context is more positive, content speaks to the user's excitement, curiosity, and relief. When the context is more negative, it's attuned to the user's frustration and stress. (Bloomstein 2021, chap. 2)

Governance
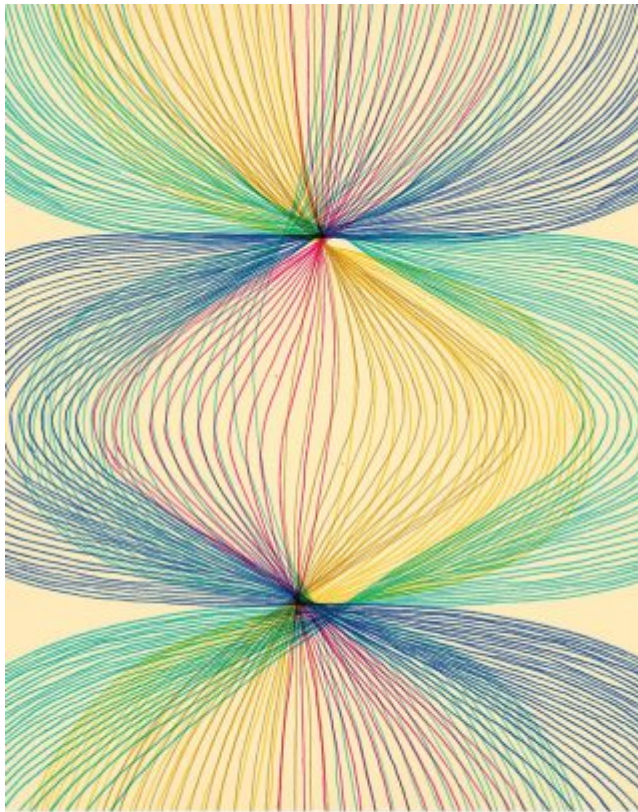
MANAGING CHAOS
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Team structure and roles

Your Organization Scope: What are you governing?	Core						Dispersed Core				Distributed		Ad Hoc	Extended					
Digital Governance Sponsorship and Advocacy																			
DIGITAL STRATEGY																			
Digital Strategy Definition																			
DIGITAL POLICY																			
Policy Stewardship																			
Policy Authoring																			
DIGITAL STANDARDS																			
Standards Stewardship																			
Design Standards Definition																			
Editorial Standards Definition																			
Publishing & Development Standards Definition																			
Network & Infrastructure Standards Definition																			

Decision making

TABLE 11.3 EDITORIAL DECISION-MAKING

Stakeholder	Input	Decision
Communications	X	X
Office of the Provost (User Experience)	X	X
Faculties/Admin	X	

> Make a distinction between digital production and digital governance. Your digital governance framework is just that—a framework for decision making. It should not be applied to day-to-day production.

> For instance, just because your core digital team might be responsible for establishing editorial standards doesn't mean that they have to approve every piece of content that goes on the site. It means that the standards author is responsible for defining the substance of the editorial standard and helping to support an environment where those standards are easy to uphold.

> Don't confuse the two. You might develop more tactical levels of governance, like content governance or taxonomy governance, but those are different, more production-focused activities than what have been described in this book. (Welchman 2015, Chapter: At Last: Implementing the Framework)

> Editorial standards should be crafted by those with expertise in Web writing and content strategy. Standards related to publishing and development should be written by those who understand Web content management systems technologies *and* how best to author content so that it can be effectively moved around and delivered by those systems. (Welchman 2015, Chapter: Identifying Standards Authors)

Standards and accountancy

Decisions are made in a framework and can be justified and improved by referring to that framework

Implementation of standards

- Documentation of all standards
- CMS
- Guidelines
- Cooperation, employee training and education, continuous improvement

Editorial role of the content strategist

- Defines digital content strategy for all digital channels.
- Acts as a consultant for projects.
- Defines digital editorial standards.
- Oversees digital content strategy.
- Manages information architecture.

- Serves as a member of the decision making team.

([Welchman 2015, chap. 11](#))

Style Guides

> A style guide helps writers understand your brand voice and content standards. It's a living, working guide to writing for your ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

Function of style guides

Cataloguing and standardizing editorial style ([Bloomstein 2021, chap. 2](#))

> A style guide can highlight content goals, terms to avoid, and common language mistakes. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> Think of it like a car manual: you might not use it every day, but it's helpful to have around when questions come up. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> It's not a workbook. Treat your style guide as a reference, not a cure-all. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> It's an important tool that can improve your content, but you'll need to refine it over time. And you may need to make exceptions once in a while ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

Existing style guides as foundations

> For most teams, it makes sense to pick an existing style guide as a foundation and build on it. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

Make the principles explicit

> Include a few overarching content principles so your team understands the spirit of your style guide. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> If you have brand guidelines, design attributes, or general principles for your communications, you can use those as your content principles. ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> Dig into your company's personality and include tips for striking the right tone. If you made a This But Not That list (…), include it as a reference.

Style Guide and Content Types

> List all of the content types your company publishes. Sort them alphabetically, or try to loosely reflect the order in which people encounter them on your website ([Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11](#))

> If you have several guidelines for each of your content types, include a section for each entry. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> Help writers see the subtle differences between the content types (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

Must haves

> include standards for capitalization, abbreviations, acronyms, and other words you want to emphasize. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> Alphabetize your list of grammar and usage guidelines so people can skim to the right section. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

* Titles, headers, and subheaders
* Block elements, like block quotes, lists, or code snippets
* Image titles, caption length, alt text, and sizes

—

* Text styles: emphasis, italics, footnotes, and so on
* Keywords to use, like bookshop, bookstore, and young readers
* (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> Wrap up your style guide with a brief list of resources for people who want to learn more about writing. Include a link to your foundational style guide, along with any other books or links that will help your team on a daily basis (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

Communicating style guides

> In some organizations, a presentation is a great way to talk about style (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> A lecture-style talk is useful for introducing yourself and your team, (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> A changelog, or list of recent changes, may be useful at the end of your style guide (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> The New York Times does a great job of announcing style changes on their After Deadline blog. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

Editorial Culture and Education

Revision Processes

> Editing is the single most important thing you can do to prepare your work for the web. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

Collaborative improvement

> Call out style choices you made, particularly if there are exceptions to your style guide. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

Levels of editing and improvement

> You can also avoid getting into back-and-forth discussions about sentence-level decisions by telling your team what kind of comments you want. We like to think in terms of high-level feedback and low-level feedback. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

High-level feedback: development editor

> High-level feedback answers questions like these:• Is it clear? Does it make sense?• Does it flow? Are there places where you get lost?• Does it cover the most important topics?• Does anything insult your intelligence or go over your head?• Are there places where you need a story or an example?These are the questions that a developmental editor would answer when reviewing your work. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

Low-level feedback: copy editor

> Low-level feedback is more granular and includes comments on convoluted phrasing, confusing messages, misspellings, and grammatical errors. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> Use the feedback as a reason to have a meaningful discussion about the text. If you're going to ignore several comments from someone, you may want to explain why you're not incorporating those changes. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> Watch out for recurring issues and themes as you edit. If you see a writer making the same mistake repeatedly or notice several people making a similar one, think about how to teach them a better way. Mention your style guide gently when it's appropriate. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> give it one more read-through to make sure your tone flows with your overall communication style (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> Is it clear? Is it friendly? Is it useful (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> writers will be more likely to accept your feedback if they feel like they're part of the editing process. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> if your style guide doesn't cover that recurring issue, it's probably time to update it. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> As an editor, your job is to help the reader understand what's being said, not to be the ultimate style enforcer. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

> Continue developing your editorial process as you work through drafts and reviews. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 10)

Cultivation of authors with a certain style (Bloomstein 2021, chap. 2)

Example: Facebook's flash meetings

> Alicia says flash started early in the team's history: "We wanted to make sure we were all writing in the same voice and the easiest way to do this was to show each other work and talk about it." (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> We also participate in design critiques and collaborate with user experience research to make sure we get a wide range of feedback from people outside our team (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> You can do something similar with your colleagues. Set a time for them to meet with you individually and ask you style questions or work through a draft. You could also host group office hours where you help more than one person at a time. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

> You may want to form an official group for people who are interested in editorial decisions. (Fenton and Kiefer Lee 2014, chap. 11)

Literature

Bloomstein, Margot. 2021. *Trustworthy: how the smartest brands beat cynicism and bridge the trust gap*. Page Two Books.

Fenton, Nicole, and Kate Kiefer Lee. 2014. *Nicely Said; Writing for the Web with Style and Purpose*. Indianapolis: New Riders.

Welchman, Lisa. 2015. *Managing Chaos: Digital Governance by Design*. Brooklyn, New York: Rosenfeld Media (O'Reilly).