Voice and Tone

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This document describes the voice and tone standards for Xandr technical documentation.

Understanding Voice

Voice is the personality and attitude we project in all our documentation, which remains constant across all our documentation. As the voice of an advertising technology product that brokers large-scale financial transactions, our documentation needs to compromise between the chatty friendliness of consumer technology apps and the seriousness of financial technology. Our voice should be **direct**, **helpful**, and **trustworthy**, but not humorous or clever. We don't try to directly sell the customer on our product capabilities, but provide the information and assistance they need to understand the ad tech universe and confidently meet their advertising goals.

Xandr Voice Is	Xandr Voice Is Not
direct	distanced
helpful	chatty
friendly	jokey
trustworthy	whimsical
unassuming	sales-y
easy to approach	idiomatic or jargon-filled
polite	dictatorial

Understanding Tone

Tone describes the document- and relationship-specific implementation of voice. For example, our legal policy documents use a different tone from our product guides. Both are direct and helpful, but the policy documentation uses formal legal language, avoids contractions, and uses the passive voice more often to project the seriousness and objectivity associated with legal authority. Most of our technical documentation, however, should use a friendlier, less formal, more personal tone that articulates empathy for the customer and an understanding of their goals.

Why Voice and Tone Matter

Voice and tone matter because we want customers' experience with documentation to be easy, frictionless, and never offputting. Our job is to provide customers with information in a way that conveys trustworthiness and authority, but also friendliness and (wherever possible) simplicity. While valuable content is crucial, customers won't want to go back to the docs if they encounter condescension, biz-speak, or content that's confusingly idiomatic. If we treat our customers with friendly respect and don't make them work to get the information they need--for example, by decoding indirect and wordy statements--we can create successful documentation experiences that contribute to reliance on docs and ultimately, customer satisfaction levels.

Nuts and Bolts of Tone

In **most** of our technical documentation, we:

- Use second person where possible, while reducing wordiness and passive voice.
- Project informality rather than formality
- Use contractions and small words where this doesn't impede clarity. For example, use "use" not "utilize," and "don't" rather than "do not."
- Avoid writing sentences we'd never say out loud.
- Get right to the point so users can easily find the information they need.

However, the key determinant of tone is audience empathy. Your audience for a given topic may be confident, highly technical users, highly business-conversant non-technical users, or some combination of those areas of expertise. Programmers may want very direct instructions and distrust any hint of marketing messaging. Traders may want a value-first presentation with technical orientation in simple terms. And no one wants to joke about money! Know your readers and be sensitive to their concerns.

Idioms, Slang, and Metaphors

We avoid using idioms, slang, and most metaphors, because they're hard to translate, and because our documentation reaches a global audience. If you do decide to use a metaphor, make sure it is effectively explained, is relatable to all types of people (consider race, class, and gender as well as global understanding), and does not rely on culturally specific knowledge. For example, don't assume everyone knows the rules of baseball.

Examples

Theme	Like This	Not This
direct /distanced	You can associate creatives with a line item and schedule when they will serve.	In configuring a line item, an advertiser is able to access the following functionality: associating creatives with a line item and scheduling when the creatives will serve.
helpful /chatty	If you don't see the email in your inbox, be sure to check your spam folder. If you still don't see it, the email address you entered might not be valid.	If you don't see an email, go get a cup of coffee: it might be on its way! If it still hasn't arrived, maybe try again in case you mistyped your email.
polite /dictatorial	If you use the "Optimize to a predicted CPA goal" strategy, please only apply it to post-click scenarios. or: If you use the "Optimize to a predicted CPA goal" strategy, you should only apply it to post-click scenarios.	If you use the "Optimize to a predicted CPA goal" strategy, you must only apply it to post-click scenarios.
informal /formal	Since we can't predict how much inventory a campaign will win in real time, we rely on recent delivery as an indicator of future delivery.	Because it is impossible to predict how much inventory a campaign will win in real time, recent delivery is leveraged as an indicator of future delivery.
approachable /jargony	Xandr didn't recognize the VAST type defined for the creative with ID 227362417.	Creative 227362417 has creative_video_attribute with vast_type unrecognized by impbus
straightforward /idiomatic	While you are learning how to set up Xandr objects, it's safest to practice with deactivated line items and carefully review settings before you begin buying inventory.	Until you learn the ropes, it's safest to practice with deactivated line items and do a reality check before you begin buying inventory.