Creating an In-House Stylebook

- Putting your stylebook online
- Ideas for subject-matter-specific stylebooks

By Doug Kouma, Special Interest Media copy chief, Meredith Corp.; www.simstylebook.com



Putting your stylebook online

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ORGANIZATION

- If converting an existing stylebook, determine whether its organizational structure (i.e., alphabetical, by chapter, etc.) will translate well to Web use.
- Give users a common starting point—the home page—and build around it. Determine whether the home page will include current information that's regularly updated (such as news and calendars) or remain static.
- Determine whether to include nonstylebook information on your site.
- Include an easy-to-access updates page.
- Evaluate whether the stylebook contains any proprietary information. If so, either don't include it or set up adequate security measures.

DESIGNING & BUILDING YOUR SITE

- If possible, use on-staff talent to design the site, and work with your IT department to build it.
- Consider bypassing IT if they don't understand the project or tell you it can't be done.
- If needed (and within your budget), hire a professional or a talented college student to create basic page templates and launch the site for you. Use the templates to create new pages yourself.
- Train yourself to use basic Web-design software (such as Adobe GoLive).
- If all else fails, do it all yourself at no cost! Learn basic HTML coding (visit the Beginners section at Webmonkey.com), build simple pages with limited or no graphics, and place the pages on your server (access will be limited to only other users of that server).

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

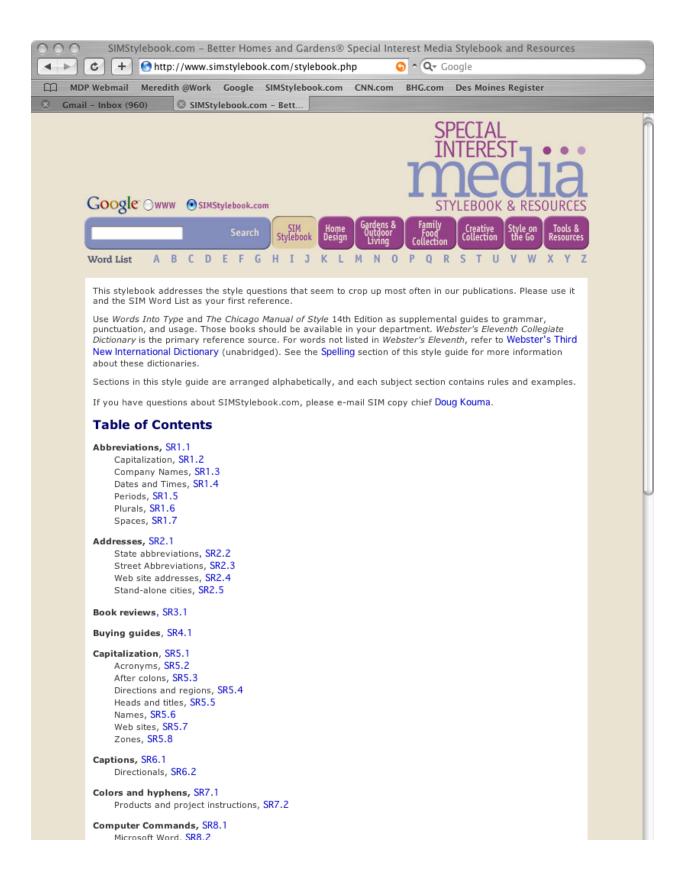
- Build in a Google site search (http://www.google.com/coop/cse/).
- Include text links to all pages so the site is fully indexed by Google and other search engines. (Duplicate links in small type at the bottom of the page if necessary.)
- Avoid working in live pages on the server. Work in copies stored on your local computer, then upload them to the server when finished. If more than one user will edit pages, make sure a user downloads the most recent pages from the server before making any changes. (Some Web publishing software will help sync users automatically.)
- If you can't host the site on your company's servers, consider a small Web-hosting company (such as Adbay.com). When things go wrong, you'll appreciate the opportunity to pick up the phone and talk to a real person.
- Keep your domain name registration (yoursite.com) up-to-date.

Ideas for subject-matter-specific stylebooks

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- Include common grammatical questions so copy editors can quickly and easily find answers.
- Adapt existing style from other sources as needed. For instance, the SIMStylebook.com stand alone cities section incorporates lists from AP and Words Into Type and includes places such as Boulder and Savannah, which show up regularly in our publications.
- Provide word lists for correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and usage of common words and phrases within a specific subject or category. In a digital format, link entries from a word list to definitions and/or illustrations.
- If you're producing multiple publications or subject-specific sections within one publication, strive for a master style that applies to all. Create addenda or special sections with additional rules that apply only to certain sections or titles.
- Apart from master word lists, provide single-subject lists of terms for proper spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and usage. SIMStylebook.com includes lists of wine and cheese names in the food section and often-confusing plant names in the garden section.
- Establish a hierarchy of references. For style questions, SIM copy editors check sources in this order: I. SIM Stylebook; 2. Words Into Type; 3. Chicago Manual of Style; 4. Various sources such as AP, New York Times, and Gregg.
- Ask all copy editors to work from the same dictionary. SIM copy editors check these dictionaries in this order: I. Webster's Collegiate, I Ith edition; 2. Webster's Third New International; 3. Oxford English Dictionary.
- Include basic design style rules. For instance, the SIM Stylebook includes guidelines on using jump lines, end bugs, running titles, cover logos, and magazine spine information.
- Identify preferred resources for occasional questions within a subject but outside current style rules. For example, we turn to Herbst's *The New Food Lover's Companion* for culinary questions and *The American Horticultural Society A—Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants* for horticultural questions.

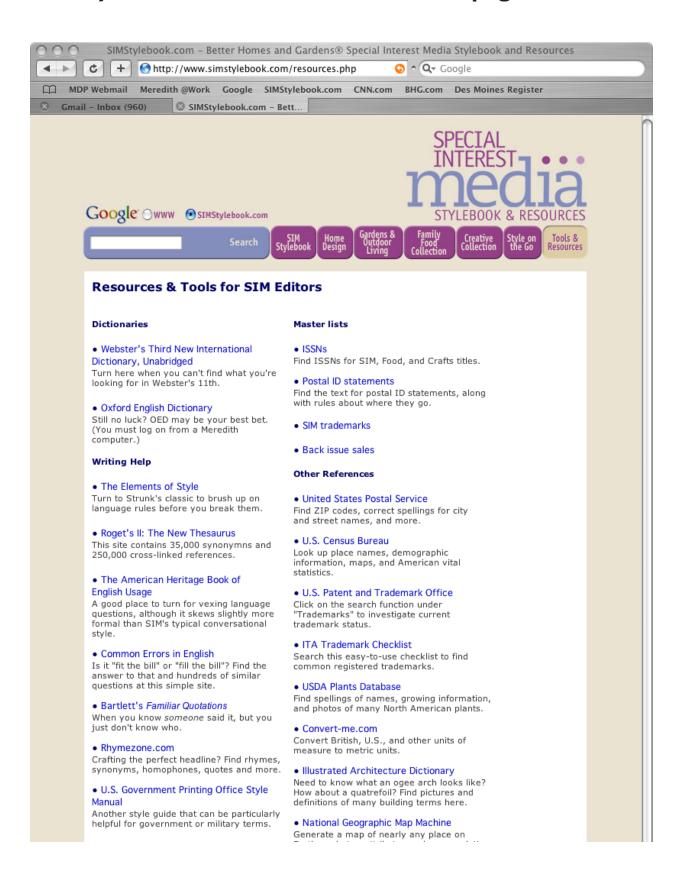
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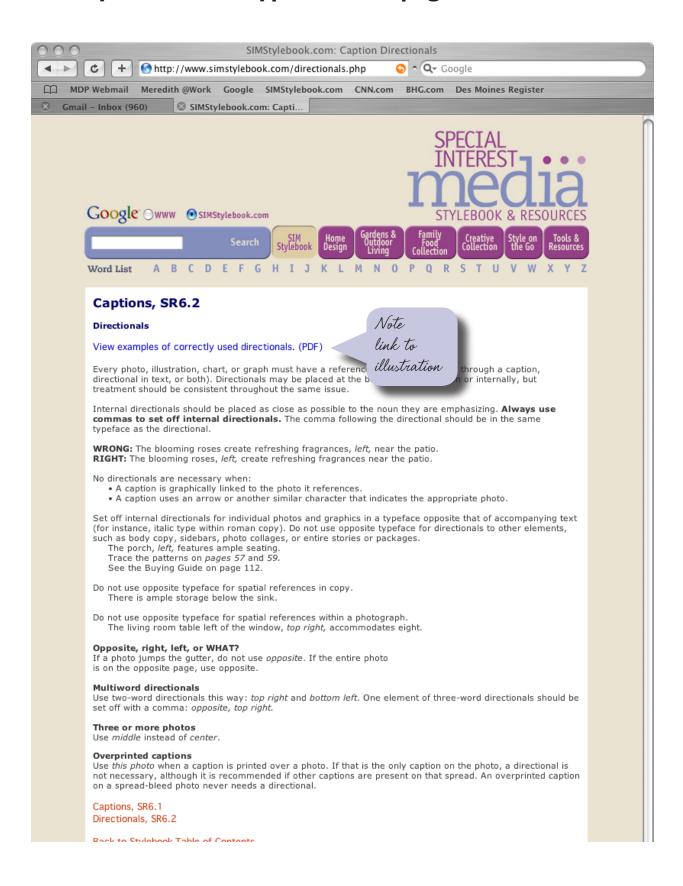
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