

# Content Guide Recommendation for Jacobs Engineering

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses Jacobs Engineering's decision to implement a consistent voice to the company's technical content that is delivered across their many online channels. The report recommends Intuit's content guide as a reference for the company's content creators so they can implement a consistent voice in all its online platforms. The recommendation is based on analysis of two content guides—Intuit and Mailchimp—across three categories: voice and tone, word list, and accessibility language.

More specific findings from the report are highlighted below:

- Intuit's Voice and Tone guideline excels Mailchimp's with its detailed examples and the visualized Dos/Don'ts (marked by a green check and red cross symbols)
- Intuit's Word List is more comprehensive, is categorized alphabetically, and has a searchable alphabet menu that makes it easy to locate a specific word and its usage, over Mailchimp's limited Word List
- Intuit's Accessibility Language guidelines not only focus on content presentation and user-interface, but also other aspects like abolishing racist language and using gender-neutral terminology for inclusivity, while Mailchimp's primary focus is on technical aspect of content presentation

**Date:** 28 Mar. 2022

**To:** Madhuri Andrews

**From:** Jaya Wagle

## INTRODUCTION

This report is written for Jacobs Engineering to recommend a content guide that can be used to implement a consistent voice across the company's many channels that deliver technical content. I did a comparative analysis of two content guides—[Intuit](#) and [Mailchimp](#)—across three guidelines:

- Voice and Tone
- Word List
- Accessibility Language

This recommendation considers 1) the kind of organization that produced the content, 2) the goal of the content generator and its audience, and 3) the organization's core values. I also took into consideration the ease of following the guidelines, what they recommend and whether they tell the content creators what to do and what not to do.

## Background on Intuit and Mailchimp

Intuit and Mailchimp are large corporations that specialize in financial software and marketing platforms for small business, respectively.

A brief overview of the two companies:

	INTUIT	MAILCHIMP
Type of Organization	Digital Software company for products like Turbo Tax and Quick Books	Marketing company that generates emails, newsletters, and other promotional content for its clients
Established	1983	2001
Content Style Goal	Give flexibility for teams to create their content strategy	Write clear and consistent content across teams and channels
Core Values	Modern, Empathetic, Optimistic, Trustworthy, Forward Thinking	Empower, Respect, Educate, Guide, Speak Truth

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both Intuit and Mailchimp have an easy to navigate menu that takes the user to the required guideline but for Jacobs Engineering's needs, Intuit is uniquely suited. The regularly updated content guide is written in informal, simple language supported by plenty of examples and every header has an added copy link so users can copy a link to a specific section and send it to their content creators for reference.

Mailchimp has slightly more extensive guidelines (16 guidelines), than Intuit (6 guidelines). Both lay out the guidelines with clear examples to make it easy for the content creator to adopt them. The two guides outline what to do and what not to do, and give guidance on syntactic (verb choices, sentence length, etc.), semantic (synonyms), and orthographic (spelling and punctuation) language choices.

### Focus on Voice and Tone for a Consistent Messaging

Both [Intuit](#) and [Mailchimp](#) define voice and tone very similarly. For example, Mailchimp lays out the difference between voice and tone as "You have the same voice all the time, but your tone changes" depending on who you are interacting with. Intuit's concept of voice and tone is to "write like you talk" but also to change tone to meet the needs of customers.

The two guides also have a conversational, clear, and simple voice stripped of jargon, metaphors, and difficult to understand terminology. Mailchimp echoes Intuit to use everyday words and phrases to "earn trust and build confidence." However, there are subtle differences in the way they alter language to suit their customer base.

Intuit recommends subtle shifts in voice and tone based on which customer base they are addressing. Ultimately, their goal is to give the customers a sense of clarity by using straightforward, candid, and clear language. The visualized Dos/Don'ts (marked by a green check and red cross symbol) also make it easy for the content creators to implement the recommendations.

Here are some simple examples of how we sound:

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hi or Hey there</li><li>• Thanks</li><li>• You need to</li><li>• Heads up</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greetings or Dear</li><li>• Thank you or Salutations</li><li>• You're required to</li><li>• Warning</li></ul>

↑

Mailchimp focusses on voice and tone for their customers and end users—small business and content creators—and recommends one voice and different tone, based on the situation. They use informal language to inform and educate their content creators. For example, Mailchimp recommends using active voice over passive, with some exceptions, avoiding slang and jargon, and writing positively.

**Conclusion:** I recommend that Jacobs Engineering adopt Intuit's voice and tone guide for its content creators, so customers find uniform quality content across its various platforms which will lead to a loyal customer base.

## Add a Comprehensive Word List for Customer Education

Both [Intuit](#) and [Mailchimp](#) have a word list guideline for acceptable word usage. Intuit follows the AP Style Guide and Merriam Webster Dictionary, while Mailchimp only uses AP Style.

**Active voice**

Use active voice. Avoid passive voice.

In active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it.

- Yes: Marti logged into the account.
- No: The account was logged into by Marti.

Words like "was" and "by" may indicate that you're writing in passive voice. Scan for these words and rework sentences where they appear.

One exception is when you want to specifically emphasize the action over the subject. In some cases, this is fine.

- Your account was flagged by our Abuse team.

**access**

We use this as both a verb and a noun, particularly around giving and getting permissions, like sharing access to data. Don't use with prefixes like *re-* and *de-*. Use wording that makes it clear what the customer can do.

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- Restore access to your account now.
- Reaccess last year's tax return.

Intuit's word list is not only organized alphabetically, but also has a searchable alphabet menu that makes it easy to locate a specific word. Each word is further given its own link with an explanation of when and where to use the word, in what context, and if a word can be used for more than one purpose. For example, 'access' can be used as a verb and a noun. Intuit gives a clear example of how and where it can be used.

## Add a Comprehensive Word List for Customer Education

Mailchimp's Word List is not as extensive or detailed, though it is divided into three categories:

- Standardized Spellings
- Words to Use Carefully
- Words to Avoid

Unlike Intuit, the words under these categories are listed but not well defined and their usage is not exemplified. There is little to no explanation why some words should be used carefully or avoided, except for a couple of lines at the top. The words are listed alphabetically in each category, but it is not easy to find the words without a searchable alphabet menu like Intuit's.

### Words to use carefully

We use plain language, which means avoiding industry jargon. But some jargon-adjacent words can be appropriate in educational contexts. Only use these if you're writing about marketing education and have room to briefly define them.

- buyer journey
- conversion
- customer lifecycle
- integrated marketing

**Conclusion:** I recommend using Intuit's word list to update your company's word usage which is riddled with industry jargon and difficult to understand terms. This will make your content more accessible to customers as well as educate and inform them to keep coming back to the company for more information.

## Accessibility Language for a Wider Customer Base

Increasingly, companies are orienting their web content to make it easily accessible and usable to a wider audience including those with mental and physical capabilities by following the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG).

Both [Intuit](#) and [Mailchimp](#) have accessibility language guidelines. While the former focusses on a detailed accessibility guideline, including abolishing racist language and using gender-neutral terms, Mailchimp focusses more broadly on the technical aspect of content presentation like headers, alt text and closed captioning for instructional videos.

### Specific word guidance

These are terms with racist roots that we are moving away from at Intuit.  
This list is evolving and by no means exhaustive.

- [black box](#)
- [black hat](#)
- [blacklist](#)
- [brown bag](#)
- [cakewalk](#)
- [circle the wagons](#)

Intuit has an exhaustive list divided into four categories that are easy to scan and implement, all supported by examples of Dos/Don'ts.

- Accessible content guidelines (user interface accessibility in the form of alt text, screen readers, etc.)
- Abolish racist language (has a list with each word hyperlinked to the wordlist)
- Aim for 5th to 8th grade readability (simple, shorter sentences, make localization and translation easier)
- Use gender-neutral language (includes examples of gender-neutral terms, alternatives in other languages and when to use them)

## Accessibility Language for a Wider Customer Base

In contrast, Mailchimp lists nine accessibility guidelines that aim to make their content accessible to anyone “using a screen reader, keyboard navigation, or Braille Interface, and to users of all cognitive capabilities.”

The focus is less on content generation and more on how presented content is accessible to the reader. For example, ‘Use Headers’ section outlines that “headers should always be nested and consecutive,” but there are no examples to show how these headers should be nested. Similarly, except for one or two categories, not many examples are given of how the guideline should be implemented.

### Label forms

Label inputs with clear names, and use appropriate tags. Think carefully about what fields are necessary, and especially which ones you mark as required. Label required fields clearly. The shorter the form, the better.

### Use descriptive links

Links should provide information on the associated action or destination. Try to avoid “click here” or “learn more.”

### Use plain language

Write short sentences and use familiar words. Avoid jargon and slang. If you need to use an abbreviation or acronym that people may not understand, explain what it means on first reference.

**Conclusion:** Ease of use of Intuit’s accessibility guidelines will help Jacobs Engineering’s content creators to abolish inadvertent use of racist language on their online platform, implement gender-neutral language, and localize its content for users.

## FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Based on my comparative analysis of Intuit and Mailchimp’s three guidelines—voice and tone, word list, and accessibility language—I recommend Jacobs Engineering adapt Intuit’s content guide. Intuit’s clear, precise, and simple guidelines—visually highlighted with Dos/Don’ts and examples—are easy to implement. The guide has a search field that is always exposed with two lines of preview text that makes it easy to find what one is looking for. Intuit’s content guide will help Jacobs Engineering achieve a consistent voice across its many online platforms.