MBO verbal style

AUGUST 2019

MBO partners®

Audience & content types

AUDIENCES

All content should pertain to one of the following audience categories:

CONTENT FOR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS

This content is geared specifically towards independent workers. This content is often practical in nature, such as how-to pieces on calculating a bill rate, creating a scope of work document, or best practices for networking.
Different "levels" of content are created, including some geared towards new independent workers and other content specifically designed to help existing independents take their current skills to the next level.

ENTERPRISE-ORIENTED CONTENT

Enterprise content is specifically designed for companies that use independent workers. In addition to covering industry trends such as freelancer management systems and direct sourcing, MBO content pertains to issues such as misclassification, compliance, and best practices for becoming a Client of Choice.

MBO CONTENT TYPES

INSIGHTS

This section covers all content published by MBO Partners and includes topical and timely issues of interest to the MBO community audiences. The content is generally text-first content and may include a gated form for high-value assets such as guides or "sticky" tools, such as MBO's Bill Rate Calculator.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

MBO Thought Leadership is defined as any bylined (named) piece published on MBO digital channels. These pieces have a defined author, which displays with headshot, and are published regularly on both enterprise and independent contractor-related topics.

NEWS

MBO "news" is published regularly in two places:
- MBO In the News details MBO mentions on third party news sources
- MBO "News" published by MBO, such as the regular column "The Weekly Independent"

RESEARCH

Regularly conducted MBO research is kept on the website on dedicated landing pages. This includes:
- State of Independence (mbopartners.com/state-of-independence)
- Client of Choice (mbopartners.com/client-of-choice)
- Future of Work (mbopartners.com/future-of-work)
- Certified Self-Employed (mbopartners.com/certified-self-employed)

EVENTS

MBO events include regular webinars and other on- and off-line activities attended by our sales team and senior leadership. These are regularly documented on the website.

MBO events, whitepapers, and annual research (e.g., State of Independence).

Calls to action

MBO CALLS TO ACTION

Each piece of content should incite the reader to action. This may mean encouraging readers to download a form, contact sales, get in touch with comments, or view an additional article.

The MBO Partners calendar for new content development is accessible via Google Drive.

MBO Partners' website provides a number of tools, resources, guides, and articles. These articles are composed as stand-alone pieces to help "arm" our audience with information that fulfills our brand mission and vision, as well as to help:

- Drive awareness and consideration of the services MBO Partners offers for independent businesses and enterprises alike
- Drive awareness of the MBO Partners brand
- Establish and cement the reputation of MBO Partners as a knowledgeable and empowering brand and thought leader
- Provide value and resources to existing clients with information to do their jobs better

All content created should reflect the brand voice and style guidelines as set forth in this guide.

SHORT FORM TEXT CONTENT

300 to 500 words in length and features easy-to-read layout formats such as bullets and slideshow presentation. Can focus on the following areas:

- Answering key questions related to issues independent contractors address in day-to-day work
- Presenting tips or takeaways
- Rounding up information on independent contractor compliance, legal, financial or lifestyle topic in easy-to-digest nuggets
- Offering basic industry facts and figures in a quick, easy-to-read format, likely a slideshow or infographic
- Presenting topical information on key independent contractor issues in a "need to know" digest format
- Content "hubs" around key focus areas in the independent contractor community (particularly the set-up of a business and securing new clients/customers)

Example: The Weekly Independent

LONG FORM TEXT CONTENT

Articles with a text focus over 1,000 words in length. Content can include:

- White papers
- Information briefs on key advocacy issues
- Information geared towards IC employers

Example: Introducing the 3 Dimensions of the Human Capital Market: Part 1

Tips, tools and quizzes to be featured prominently as "shareable" tools. Can serve the following purposes:

- Easily shareable to media or press outlets to refer traffic back to our website
- Shareable from other blogs to refer and brand MBO as an industry leader
- Interactive tools to keep people on site longer and keep them returning frequently

Example: Bill Rate Calculator

GATED CONTENT

Gated content has a high perceived value. This content is placed behind a form that requires a user to give information (name, email address) in order to access. Typically includes:

- Guides and/or ebooks
- Webinars

Example: Thought Leadership for Independent Consultants

SALES AND PRODUCT CONTENT

Content intended to entice or introduce an MBO product or service that would appeal to a potential customer. Should include easy access to a contact form or method of communication in order to drive a sales conversation. Can include:

- Comparison chart
- Product pricing
- Individual landing pages for an MBO Partners product/service

Example: MBO Marketplace

MEDIA CONTENT

Items produced to garner media attention for MBO Partners. Typically includes:

- Press releases
- New product announcements
- Articles highlighting features in other publications (thought leadership, op-eds, etc.)

Example: MBO in the News

The MBO voice

INTRODUCTIONS/LEDES

Articles should always begin with the "meat" of the content, anecdotal or personalized ledes "did you ever wonder what happens when…" or "have you ever had those nights where you're up thinking of tomorrow's to-do list" should not be used.

Introductions should conclude with setup sentences, which serve as the presentation of the content below.

USING THE "WE" VOICE

MBO is open to writers using the familiar "we" and "you" voice in articles when speaking from the voice of the brand (as opposed to a blog entry coming from an individual author).

For example:
MBO Partners believes in advocating for the self-employed.
…can be…
We believe in advocating for the self-employed.

Still, it is preferred to avoid using it when mentioning brands, choosing the "best," and for other specific phrasing or claims.

MENTIONING BRANDS & CHOOSING THE "BEST"

Please eliminate reference to specific branded products and companies where possible, unless deemed necessary in your specific piece. We do not want to potentially alienate clients or convey an association that we do not have.

Brands may be mentioned in select cases, such as articles about the top business books.

Some article titles may be phrased in a way that requires you, as the writer, to report on the best or leaders of something a particular category (e.g., top mileage app, best standing desks).

In this case, you should consider yourself the main evaluator of what would work for an MBO reader—and what might not.

PHRASING AND CLAIMS

Please avoid the following in your writing:

Using the terms "experts say" or "studies say," along with specific attributions to studies or researchers.

Using first person, "I think" is reserved for MBO experts and advocates. Never cite competing organizations unless your editor deems appropriate.
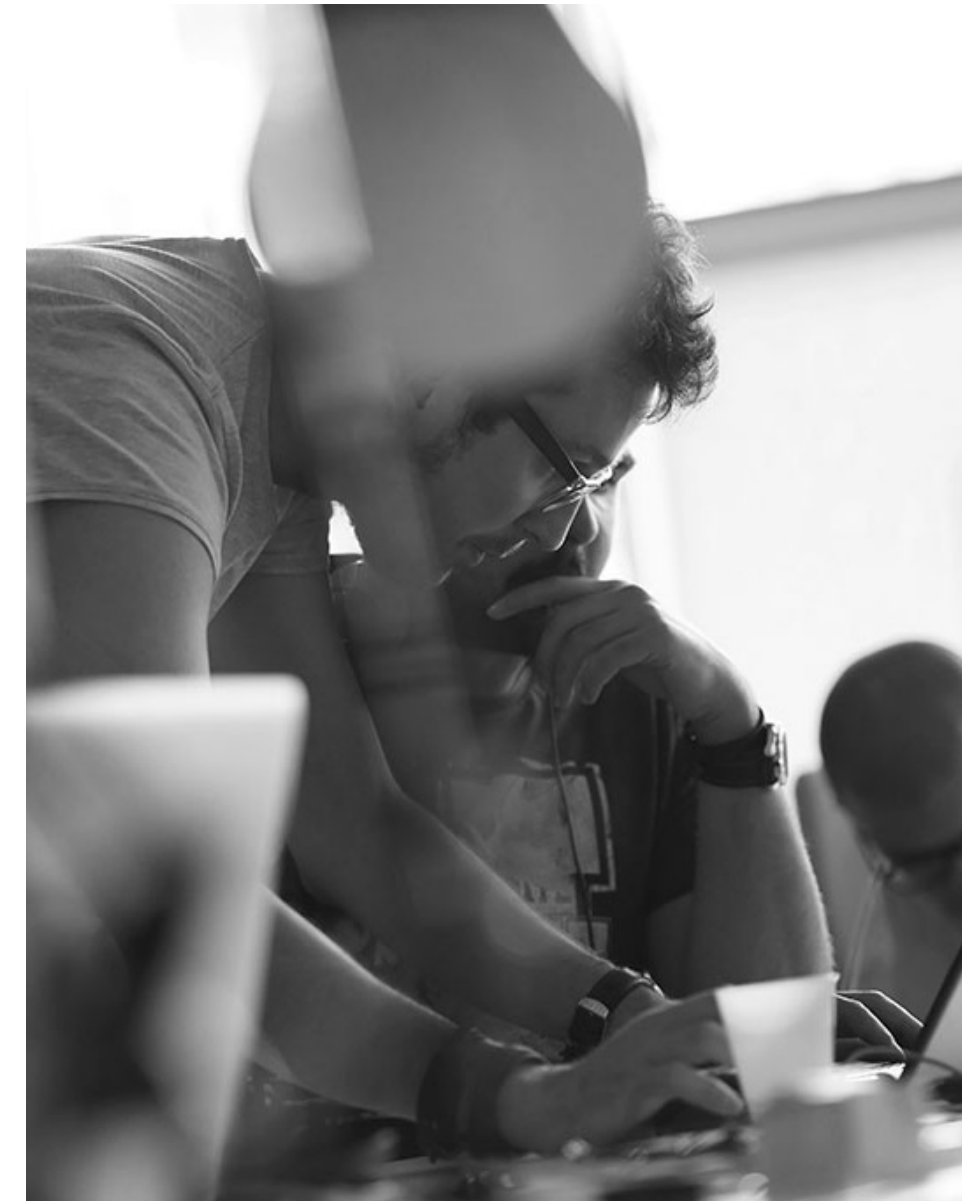
MBO glossary

MBO GLOSSARY

A full listing of the terminology frequently used by MBO and preferred usage is found in the Glossary, a regularly-updated document containing more than 100 key terms and phases.

Read the MBO Glossary

LINK USAGE

All MBO Partners website content must include links to other MBO.com blogs, articles, or resources. This aids in website search engine optimization (SEO), enhancing the website user experience, and lengthening website session time for site visitors.

It is preferable to link to content found on the MBOPartners.com domains wherever possible. Linked internal content should open in the same window.

When linking to non-MBO properties and pages, it is important to follow the guidelines below:
■ Use linking, not citing or footnoting. Using external websites/resources for an article is acceptable, but do not cite them/ attribute them within your piece. Copy should reiterate information about the independent contractor community in a way that maintains MBO's authority as a top presence in the field. Any outside articles can be hyperlinked in the text as a means of reference, which would eliminate the need for a footnote. Linked external content should open in a new window.

Example: Rather than: "About 10.8 million Americans work part-time as independent workers, according to a 2019 report from MBO Partners," use "About 10.8 million Americans work part-time as independent workers." (10.8 million can be hyperlinked to the MBO Partners State of Independence Report landing page)

GRAMMAR & STYLE

MBO Partners' default business language is American English. For publications and media pertaining to a particular region or Member Firm, native spellings/structure can be used and a default of British English or writing in the local vernacular.

For any terms with multiple spellings, use Merriam Webster's dictionary as the authority for correct spelling. For grammar reference, rules are adapted largely from the AP style manual, with slight deviations. If there are specific queries related to grammar or punctuation that may not be covered in the sections below, refer to the latest version of the AP style manual.

STATE AND CITY ABBREVIATIONS

States & Cities: Spell out the name of all states
Example: Minnesota (not MN)
Always include the state name along with the city name...
Example: Denver, Colorado
Example: Helena, Montana
Only exception is in the case of major US cities like New York City, Chicago, etc.
For UK and EU cities and countries, all cities and countries should be spelled out.
Example: Dublin, Ireland
Example: London, England

MONTHS

Spell out the name of a month when it is used without a specific date.
Example: When it stays lighter longer in July and August...

DAY OF THE WEEK

Do not abbreviate days of the week.

NUMBERS

Always spell out numbers one through five. Use numerals for numbers 6 and above:
Example: The four executives chose 12 high-performing associates.

ACRONYMS

Always spell out the proper name of an organization or technical term. However, when using the organization/term repeatedly, spell it out in its first mention and then provide the acronym in parenthesis. It can then be mentioned by acronym later in the content.

Example: I work for the National Football Association (NFL). The NFL is a great place to work.

PERCENTAGES

Use of the % symbol is acceptable. Exceptions include: research, guides and e-books should spell out "percent" instead of using the % symbol.

CASE/CAPITALIZATION

For all titles, subtitles, and subheads, use the title case
Example: What are Some Myths About Independent Consultants?

Do not capitalize articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, nor, but), or prepositions shorter than six letters (as, at, by, for in, of, on, per, to).

Lastly, always capitalize independent when using it in a title (State of Independence) or in reference to an acronym (Independent Contractors Association), but not if used regularly in a sentence.

Example: Most independents agree that the Independent Contractors Association is a good organization.

MBO glossary continued

PROOFREADING IS A MUST

Make sure your content is eloquently presented on each media channel. If you make an error that goes "live," correct it quickly and visibly. To avoid potentially brand-damaging content, any content that the team deems risky should be reviewed directly with Sr. Director, Marketing, or the appropriate executive team member.

RULE OF THUMB

Would there be any concern if a headline on the news used your post and the headline said it came from any MBO Partners associate or executive?

A general QA rule of thumb is to ensure that the content overall creates a message to which the company, and its people, are comfortable attaching themselves.

CMS GUIDELINES

All content published is uploaded to MBOPartners.com via the WordPress CMS. Instructions for using the CMS are available on Confluence.

COLONS AND COMMAS

Use colons for the following purposes:
- Introduce or direct attention to a list
- Introduce an explanation
- Introduce a list
- Separate a title from a subtitle
- Separate parts of a subhead

Capitalize what comes after a colon only if it is a proper noun or if it is the beginning of a complete sentence.

Most importantly, use the Oxford (serial) comma before the coordinating conjunction (usually and or or) in a series of three or more terms.

EM DASH AND EN DASH

An em dash is roughly the length of a lowercase letter m and is generally used to replace colons, commas, hyphens, semi-colons, and parentheses; Do not put a space before or after an em dash.

Use Em Dashes for the following:
- Abrupt change: To denote an abrupt change in thought, sentence, or emphatic pause
- Series within a phrase: When a phrase that otherwise would be set off by commas contains a series of words that must be separated by commas

An en dash is roughly the length of a lowercase letter n and is typically used to denote a span of time or in the place of a colon to create compounds

Use En Dashes for the following:
- To create compounds

Example: mother-daughter relationship, 2013-2014 school year • Do not use an en dash to denote a span of time
Example: Monday–Thursday should be Monday to Thursday

DATES, QUOTES, STATES

When writing dates for United States audiences, use a comma between the weekday and month, as well as after the day. Do not use a comma between the month and the year.
Example: Tuesday, March 12, 2017.

When writing dates for international audiences (UK, Ireland, etc.), use a comma between the weekday and month, as well as after the month. Do not use a comma between the day and the year.
Example: Tuesday, 12 March, 2017.

When listing specific times include appropriate time zones, if within the United States, using AM and PM.
Example: 12:00p.m. EST

When listing specific times internationally, use the 24-hour clock
Example: The news conference is scheduled in Cork, Ireland this Tuesday at 18:00.

When using quotes, commas, and periods always go within the quotations.
When referencing cities in states, use commas after the city, before the state name

MISCELLANEOUS PUNCTUATION

In bulleted lists, avoid periods if at all possible. Periods should only be used in bullets when a bulleted item is two sentences. However, if the item is two sentences, it either can be shortened or should be two separate line items within the list.

Only one space should be used after punctuation marks—this includes periods, colons, commas, etc.—at all times.

When denoting a time of day, please use the following conventions:
- a.m. (not am)
- p.m. (not pm)
- Always use 00s

Example: 12:00 p.m.