CH 05 QUALITY OF CONTENT

Quality of Content

5.1

Citizen Orientation

The crucial element of an effective presence of Government on the Web is the way its content is written and packaged. Indian Government websites should be oriented towards their prospective audience. Intended audience to the Government website could be Citizens, Businesses, Government Departments as well as Government employees. Following are the guidelines towards the same.

5.1.1 The content MUST be selected keeping the audience in mind, not from the Government's perspective. Apart from the selection of the content, equal emphasis should be given to the way it is written and presented on the web. Content aimed at the common public should be written in simple language so that people from diverse professional, educational and demographic backgrounds can easily comprehend the same.

5.1.2 Homepage of the website should be designed carefully and effectively to provide a good interface for the citizen. Homepages should ideally not feature photos of individuals and office bearers of the Department. Those photos may be appropriate on the "About Us" or "News" page.

5.1.3 In order to gauge the content requirements of the citizens, who are the prime target audience of any Government website. Government Departments may use following means to determine the best way to identify and package information for citizens and other stakeholders.

- Discussion Forums.
- Customer satisfaction surveys.
- Online feedback from citizens.
- Analysing website usage reports, including search terms and statistics.
- Usability testing and research.

5.2

Content Authenticity, Accuracy & Currency

It is the duty of every Web Information manager to ensure that the content on his/ her website is always authentic, up-to-date and latest. This fact assumes paramount significance in the context of Government websites since the public puts a lot of trust in the information available on the official websites of the Government.

5.2.1 Each and every bit of content published on a Government website should be verified and checked thoroughly as the public expects nothing less than authentic and accurate information from a credible source such as an official Government website. The Departments MUST have a Content Contribution, Moderation and Approval Policy (CMAP) stating the responsibility, authorisation and workflow details with regard to content publishing on the site.

5.2.2 The Homepage MUST and every important entry page of all Indian Government websites/portals should display a time stamp indicating the following:

    a. Date on which the information was posted on the website.

    b. Date on which the content was last reviewed and/or modified.

5.2.3 Every piece of content appearing on the Government website should be reviewed after a pre-decided duration for its accuracy, relevance and currency. All Government Departments MUST formulate a proper web Content Review Policy (CRP) depending upon the nature of their content and if possible, also publish the policy on their website.

5.2.4 In case the nature of the content is 'historical' i.e. it will never change (e.g. press releases, speeches, published reports/documents of a Department etc.), the date of posting the content may be mentioned along with a note indicating the nature of the document and explaining that it is not subject to revision.

5.2.5 In case the reports and documents are voluminous and it is difficult to mention the time stamp on every page, the same MUST be indicated on the main page as well as on all icons/places which link to that document.

5.2.6 For time sensitive content which expires after a certain date (e.g. tender notifications, announcements for conference registrations, contest entries etc.), a policy on whether the content should be archived for future reference or removed altogether from the website should be decided by the concerned Department after careful consideration of their nature of content. However, 'expired' content MUST not be presented or flashed on the website. The Departments MUST have a clearly laid out Content Archival Policy (CAP) clarifying the rules set in this regard.

5.3

Language

The language used in a Government website is very important for ensuring effective communication with the target audiences. If the language on the website is complex and uses terminology which a common visitor is unfamiliar with, the very purpose of having the website will be lost.

5.3.1   Departments MUST ensure that homepage, all major entry points, and navigational elements of Government websites are written in the clear and simple language appropriate for the sites content.

5.3.2   Indian Government websites normally have diverse target audience with diverse demographic profiles and educational background. Therefore it is highly desirable that the language used in the Government website is understood easily and correctly by all sections of the audiences.

5.3.3   Departments may test the language and its comprehension with a sample set of typical visitors before making the site live for all audiences.

5.3.4   Writing for the web is very different from writing for the Print medium. One of the best ways of making the language web friendly is to keep the sentences short and simple. Long, convoluted sentences seem forbidding on screen and can distract the visitors.

5.3.5   There are tools available which can help a Department evaluate how easy to understand and comprehend the language used on their website is. Departments should use such language tools, including language software, to evaluate the readability of the website's content.

5.3.6   The language used in a Government website MUST be free from any spelling or grammatical errors of any kind. Further, there should be uniformity across the site when it comes to using British/American English.

5.3.7   Abbreviations/Acronyms, which may be typical in Government parlance and may not be commonplace with citizens of diverse backgrounds should be avoided or expanded at all possible places. At the same time, if a short form or abbreviation of a term is more popularly known and understood by the citizens than even its full form, the short form should be mentioned.

5.3.8   Whereever there is a change in the default language of the document e.g. Hindi used in English document, these changes in the language of a document's text and any text equivalents (e.g., captions) MUST be clearly identified.
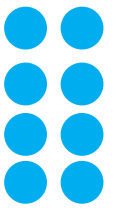
5.4
Consistent Terminology

Common look and feel in Government websites of any country helps in promoting the brand image of the Government; raises user confidence; provides a user-friendly experience in navigating Government websites; and organises information more consistently to facilitate search. An integral part of the common look and feel strategy is the usage of standard content terminology, positioning and framework.Usability Research has established that using common terms and placement of content can help visitors locate the information they want more quickly and conveniently.

5.4.1   Hence it is suggested that 'Consistent Content Terminology and Positioning' should be adopted by Government websites in India. This could act as a beginning for adopting a larger view towards common look and feel of Indian Government websites in the long run. If a certain 'term' has been presented in a particular manner at one place in the website, it should be referred to in the same manner at all places in the site.

5.4.2   Consistency in nomenclature MUST be maintained across a website and should also be followed across all the websites owned by a State/Ministry.

> **For example**
>
> - If a certain Government entity has been referred to as the 'Department' at one place in the site, it should not be mentioned as 'organisation' or some other name at an alternative place in the same site.
>
> - In any application form, if the button to submit information after filling up the form says 'SUBMIT' then it must say so across the entire website. It should not happen that different terminology is used in the same context at various places in a single website.

5.5
International Conventions

Web as a medium transcends all geographic and physical boundaries. Obviously therefore, the target audience of every website could be multicultural with highly varied demographic backgrounds. It should be ensured that the content of every Indian Government website takes international and cultural conventions into account.

5.5.1 **Currency:** The mention of Indian Currency should be uniform across any Indian Government Website. As per international convention, any monetary value in terms of Indian currency may be described as INR (Indian National Rupee).

5.5.2 **Time:** To mention timings in any context, the IST (Indian Standard Time) should be used and if possible, the standard reference of with respect to the more widely known internationally GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) may be mentioned.

5.5.3 **Phone Numbers:** The format for mentioning the phone numbers should be according to international conventions (+Country Code – Area Code- Phone No.) and uniform across all Indian Government websites. e.g. +91-11-24305364.

5.5.4 **Date:** the format for date across all pages of Indian Government websites should to be dd/mm/yyyy to ensure uniformity.

5.5.5 **Holidays:** Holidays and Work Hours may vary between geographical areas and cultures and hence the websites should provide and clarify information taking into account the culturally specific terms. Time zone variations as well as workday variations should be considered in this context.

5.5.6 **Icons:** Icons can be international symbols or may be culturally dependent. Icons may be accompanied by text to assist by individuals who are not familiar with the icons used, individuals traversing the Web by text, and persons with visual impairment.

5.5.7 **Hemispherical:** Some references are hemispherically oriented. Winter means something different in the northern hemisphere than it does in the southern hemisphere. Equating seasons to months should be avoided. Note that references such as "west" or "east" may be culture-or hemisphere-specific.

5.5.8 **Postal/Physical Address:** When presenting or collecting address information, country, state and postal/pin code should be included. It is important to know that postal codes across Countries vary in format, and validation code should take this into consideration. It may be useful to collect Country, State or Postal/ PIN Code information before other information to minimise the user entry required, although it may not be made compulsory as many users may not know details such as PIN Code.

Though it is preferable to follow international convention, however if for some reason there is a deviation the same should be highlighted in the 'help' section.
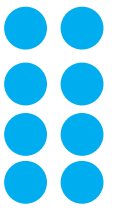
5.6

Information Architecture and Relationship

'The world can be seen as only connections, nothing else? A piece of information is really only defined by what it's related to, and how it's related. There really is little else to meaning. The structure is everything.' -
Tim Berners-Lee

Information Architecture is concerned with how information is organized, structured, labeled, and presented for maximum access. The content of a Government website, or any website per se, has to be structured in such a way that the target audience is able to access the desired information with minimum effort. For the same, it is imperative that the information and services on the website are well organised and categorized into relevant modules/sections and sub-sections so that any information can be located conveniently and is not buried deep inside WebPages. Also the information structure, relationship between the information and the meaning is maintained across all presentation styles.

The following guidelines are important to achieving the objective of well-organized Information Architecture :

5.6.1 The objective of the Homepage of a website is always to allow the visitors to locate the desired information in the easiest possible manner. Homepages must be designed so as to prominently highlight the most requested information and services. Further, the homepage should provide an easy-to- identify section where the purpose of the website and the value to citizens is explained in terms they can understand. Indian Government websites MUST ensure that all information, which is of direct importance to the citizen, is accessible from the Homepage itself. Incase the information cannot be displayed on the Homepage; it should be ensured that it is available in not more than three clicks from the homepage.

5.6.2 Sighted users perceive structure and relationships through various visual cues (page headings are in a larger & bold font; list items are preceded by a bullet; form fields may be positioned as groups that share text labels; a different background color may be used to indicate related items and so on). It must be ensured that these information and relationships are preserved even when the presentation format changes. (For example when the content is read by a screen reader or CSS is turned off or replaced).Therefore departments MUST ensure that Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.

5.6.3 When the sequence in which content is presented affects its meaning, a correct reading sequence MUST be programmatically determined. This helps people who rely on assistive technologies like screen readers because the meaning evident

in the sequencing of the information in the visual presentation will be the same when the content is presented in spoken form. This also preserves the meaning of the page when the CSS is turned off or not supported. It should be noted that a sequence is meaningful if change of order shall impact its meaning. Two independent content items like two separate articles in a page may be placed in any sequence without affecting the meaning. Similarly the navigation block and the content area may be placed in any sequence without affecting their meaning.

5.7
Multilingual Versions

India is a country with diverse cultures and as many as 22 official languages. One of the major users of Government websites are common citizens with highly diverse demographic profiles. Due to the various initiatives taken by Centre and State Governments, as well as the private sector, Internet is now accessible even in the remote parts of the nation. For example Community Information Centres (CIC) project of the Ministry of Communications and IT has made the Internet reach all over the North Eastern States in urban as well as rural parts, despite the difficult terrain.

At present, a majority of the content in Government websites is in English, except few which have content in Hindi or one of the Regional languages. Thus, even though Government websites are accessible, they are still not usable. Hence, there is a need to put the information in Regional languages. Depending on the nature of the content and its prospective usage, content should be translated in desired languages and should be a part of the same website with prominent links. Technology for publishing the content in Indian languages is already quite developed and a large number of tools are available to support this.

5.7.1 Ideally all the pages on the website should be translated in Hindi and other Regional languages. In case it is becoming difficult to do so, Departments should identify the content which is widely accessed by the public and begin to put up such content in multiple languages.

5.7.2 It MUST be ensured that the documents/pages in multiple languages are updated simultaneously so that there are no inconsistencies, at any point, between the various language versions.

5.7.3 In case it is practically difficult to update the versions in all languages simultaneously due to delays on account of translation etc., the obsolete information should be removed from the site till the latest information is uploaded. In any case, a time stamp indicating the date of uploading the information and its validity should to be put along with all the time sensitive documents.