Smart Brevity

Be heard

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Example

Subject Line: CS v CF Comps and wanted Input for next steps on CF

Hello all,

I think it is time for our team to revisit our cookie vendor policy. As you know cookies are an important part of our day-to-day operations. I believe we last spoke about comparing our current cookie vendor CS, last semester, I could be wrong but let me know if I am misremembering. Anyway, last semester Elmo asked us to review this a potential new cookie vendors search site (www.cookiefinder.com). CookieFinder advertises that their database uses AI and user ratings to provide campuses like ours with cookie vendor options tailored to individual cookie eaters and find cookie teams based on their cookie interest. Cookie teams is something we typically do not do but I could see it being a great opportunity to find teams.

To help with the CS vs CF comp I looped in a few team members to provide a more robust assessment, reaching out to people with the highest CS usage based on our campus CS activity. CF limited us to only 10 people for a trial. The overall assessment from everyone on the trial was that CS was easier to use, gave better, more useful results, and that CF didn't provide relevant vendors for specific teams or logical teams for specific vendors. We gave CF a small report detailing our findings and advised campus not to subscribe to CF at the time. The company was grateful for our feedback and shared that they were addressing our concerns and issues. They are now offering us the opportunity to preview their updated vendor database/software and participate in a month-long trial, and they are allowing 15 people to participate. Would any of you be interested in joining this time around?

Thanks in advance for your thoughts!

Smart Brevity

- **Why it matters?:**
  - Be heard

  - Short, not shallow

  - Audience first

  - Simple, clear, direct

- **Four core ideas**:
  - **Grab attention** with a *"tease"*: <6 strong words in heading/subject

  - Use **strong first sentence**, *"lede"*: short, direct, memorable introduction

  - Follow up with **context**, *"Why it matters?"*

  - **Offer choice** to learn more, or *"Go deeper"*:
    - Avoid forcing reader to read more than they want, make it their decision.

VandeHei, J., Allen, M., Schwartz, R. (2022). Smart Brevity: The Power of Saying More with Less. United States: Workman Publishing Company.

How can we practice smart brevity?

- Subject / headers
  - no more than **6 words**
  - write in the most **provocative** yet **accurate** way
  - **short** words, **active** verbs
  - **avoid** humor, irony, jargon, longer words

- Text
  - List the points you must make in **order of importance**.
  - Whittle down list of points to **1 or 2** if possible
  - Check whether point/detail is **essential** and whether there is a **simpler** way to convey it.
  - **Delete** any text that can be eliminated.

How can we practice smart brevity?

- Axioms
    - **Bolded** sub-headings like "**why it matters**:" instead of long-winded statements
    - Use right after opening sentence
    - Other options- "**The big picture:**", "**what's next:**", "**go deeper:**" (then link sources), etc.
    - After "**why it matters**", explain within 2 direct, declarative sentences

- Strong words
    - Strong words are those which are more **vivid**, **precise** and **physical**/non-abstract
    - **Avoid** weak (longer and less common) and foggy words (could, may, might)
    - Use **active verbs**

Contexts

- Let's **focus** on
  - Messages
  - Presentations
  - Meetings

- Additionally, useful in
  - Speeches
  - Social Media
  - Visuals

Messages

- In general, **avoid** too many
    - Words
    - Choices
    - Jargon

- Use smart brevity tips to edit writing
    - **Short**, **direct** header/subject
    - Concise text, edited for **clarity** and **brevity**
    - Use of axioms to **guide** the reader to **salient** points
    - Use of **strong** and **precise** words

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Example

Subject Line: Cookie vendor policy - Soliciting user input

Hello all,

We are conducting a cookie vendor trial to determine our cookie vendor policy. We intend to compare our current vendor CS with a new candidate – CookieFinder (CF).

Why it matters:

- CF advertises AI assisted cookie team compilation

- Cookie teams are compiled based on individual cookie interest.

- Prior 10 – member CF campus trial revealed:
    - Current cookie vendor CS was **easier** to use, gave better, more **useful** results
    - CF **didn't** provide relevant vendors for specific teams or logical teams for specific vendors

- Campus trial feedback was relayed to CF to address issues

What next:

- CF is offering new 15 – member trial to preview **updated** vendor database/software

- Please **reply** if you are interested to join the new trial.

Thank you!

Presentations

- Start with big idea, use teases
- Short bulleted sentences
- Simplify every slide
  - One message per slide
  - Minimize text
  - Instead, talk more
- Clean, simple visuals
- As short as possible
- End restating big idea

Examples

How to make a Good First Impression

Making a first good impression can be vital when looking for a new job. Whether we like it or not, people do judge a book by their cover. The first few seconds with someone can be critical to your career.

- Be on time. The person you are just meeting is probably not interested in your excuses, even if it is the first time you are late in your whole life. All they are going to know is that you are not keeping up with a previous agreement. The image you are leaving behind is of someone that is not reliable. Make an extra effort and make sure to arrive on time. Too early is always better than too late.

- Be prepared. Before going to your interview you should have done your research about the company, the position you're applying for, and so on. Think about what kind of questions you could be asked, and how you would answer them. In one word, practice!

- Take care of your clothes and your overall grooming. It has been said that 55% can be determined by the person's appearance. So be careful when choosing how to present yourself in an interview. Dress to impress, maintaining in mind the job you are applying to, and when in doubt, choose the most conservative choice.

- Take into consideration non-verbal communication. You might bee feeling nervous, but studies have shown that people who present themselves in a more friendly, confident manner usually have better results. Something as simple as a smile can make a difference.

Examples

How to make a **good first impression?**

- **Before:**
  - Be on time
  - Be prepared

- **During:**
  - Presentation
  - Non-verbal communication

Examples

FONT!

- Avoid serif fonts and HARD TO READ FONTS
- Don't make the font too small, or too

large

- Keep the font consistent throughout the presentation
  - DON'T keep changing it!

Examples

PICTURES

- Make sure your graphics are relevant
- Don't use too many on a slide!

Meetings

- Prior to the meeting:
  - Make sure a meeting is **necessary** before scheduling

  - Responsible party - set a **goal** (1 direct sentence) and **agenda** (max 3 pts.) in an email prior to meeting, at latest the night before

  - **Outline** specific **actions/decisions** if possible

Meetings

- While you meet:
    - Open meeting with clear articulation of **objective**
    - Explain **why** it matters
    - State **what** decisions need to be made
    - **Guide** discussion setting the tone for focus and efficiency
    - Be **inclusive** – encourage silent people to share views
    - Last 2 mins, conclude discussion and **summarize**

- After you meet
    - While still fresh, email itemized follow-ups to group

Meetings

- Common mistakes
  - Too much chit-chat and pleasantries
    - at start and end of meeting: removes focus and changes tone

  - Too many people, too many topics, too much time

- Scheduling:
  - 20-25 mins for regular meets allowing for time between them

  - Try micro-meetings (5-10 mins)

Key take aways:

- **Grab attention** with a "*tease*"

- Use **strong first sentence**, "*lede*"

- Follow up with **context**, "*Why it matters?*"

- **Offer choice** to learn more, or "*Go deeper*":