File Naming Conventions

LOCAL FILE ORGANIZATION & INTERNET BEST PRACTICES

A strong file naming convention is of HUGE importance when the number of files you manage continues to increase, especially as you add in the factor of multiple employees and multiple access points (both local and remote). You need to settle on a naming convention and stick to it. If not, you will find yourself unorganized, with multiple versions of files saved here and there. The frustrating result is wasted time searching and wasted digital space on your computer and/or server, and perhaps problematic file uploads or file sharing.

A key step in organizing your files is to determine the categories by which your files fall under. To structure categories, take advantage of Folders. Perhaps you have a set of subcategories that fall under documents. They could be, for example: Press Releases, White Papers, Handouts, Brochures, etc. Within those folders, you want to make sure you use a brief, descriptive file name that will not only be an understandable reference to you, but to colleagues who need to access to the same data.

Are there multiple versions of a file that you need to keep? Consider a dating structure (presentation-2012-01.pdf) or an alphanumeric structure (Document-A.pdf). If you have date based files, begin the file name with the year, month and day, if necessary (2012-01-25-document.pdf) so that all your documents are listed in order by the date named/saved from top to bottom. A date-first naming convention is a great method for saving batches of photos, as many people remember when a picture was taken, allowing them to narrow down their search easily.

Even more care needs to be practiced on the World Wide Web (aka: the internet). In all file names, whether online or offline, you should stick with using ONLY the following characters:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h I j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

- (hyphen)   _ (underscore)

The first reason is that with this strong core of characters, you and your colleagues will likely be better able to stick to an organization system.

The second reason is that special characters (like apostrophes, commas, !, &, (,), etc.) cannot be read by internet bots when in file names. Therefore, your uploaded file will likely be un-openable. Special characters can also break links for us humans and prevent file uploading and sharing.

The third reason you should only use these limited characters is because if your file name has spacebar spaces in it, the spaces will be replaced by "%20". Have you seen web addresses similar to the following example?

www.website.com/Document%20Final%20Draft.pdf

or

www.website.com/Product%20Page%201.html

The internet does not like space bar spaces in file names, and this %20 replacement looks awful in website addresses. To avoid this, use a hyphen or underscore in all your file names, especially those you expect to upload to the internet. Now doesn't this look better? It's easier to read too!

www.website.com/Document-Final-Draft.pdf

or

www.website.com/Product-Page-1.html

For best SEO (search engine optimization) practices, however, use a hyphen rather than an underscore. When using hyphens in place of spaces, Search Engine algorithms can arrange the words of a file in any order to give you more search engine search results. If you use underscores, the order of the terms can only be ranked by Search Engines in the order presented.

Chances are, you haven't been following all these best practices, so, you may have a bit of clean-up to address. But once your practices are in place and used regularly, locating and sharing files will become hassle free for everyone on your team.