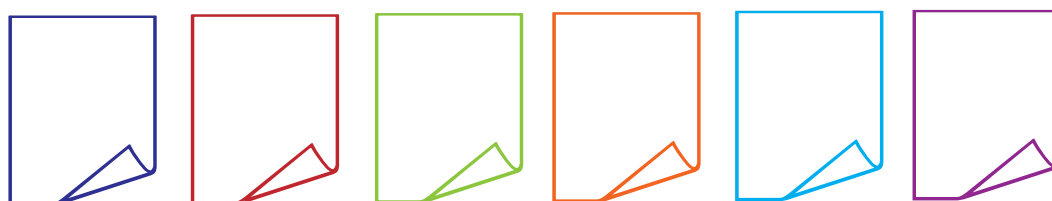


Does Your Business Need a White Paper?



How to Decide and Get the White Paper You Need

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How to Decide and Get the White Paper You Need

Challenges in business to business (btob) marketing continue to evolve. The Internet has added new challenges with increased competition and information availability. The Internet also offers businesses the opportunity to connect to prospects not easily accessible in the past due to geographic distances and company gatekeepers. Overcoming the Internet-related challenges often requires btob marketers to develop new strategies.

Gord Hotchkiss, CEO of Enquiro, characterizes the search challenge presented by the Internet as needing to recognize that when people are using search, they are information gathering – they aren't ready to buy. Also, the person that first searches and visits a web site is likely not the only person involved with the decision – and likely not the person that will ultimately sign the check. Hotchkiss notes that the btob marketers that are figuring out how to effectively nurture prospects using search are testing landing pages, adding content to web sites, and seeding web sites with white paper downloads.¹

This white paper was written to help btob marketers decide if a white paper would improve their sales process and provide some guidance to increase the likelihood of creating an effective white paper.

What Good is a White Paper?

Ask three people what a white paper is or does and you'll likely get three different answers. How different the answers are will depend on each person's perspective or involvement with white papers.

This white paper was written to help btob marketers decide if a white paper would improve their sales process and provide some guidance to increase the likelihood of creating an effective white paper.

Someone that reads white papers may say, "White papers provide useful information to help make decisions."

Someone that uses white papers in marketing might answer, "A white paper is a useful lead generation tool."

A white paper writer might say "White papers deliver unbiased information with a soft-sell call to action."

They would all be right.

Not Just for IT Products and Services

When white papers were first used commercially, they were in-depth technical documents explaining information technology (IT) solutions. Today, white papers are found in virtually every industry.

White papers work because they provide useful information – particularly early in the buying cycle. Yes, everyone knows they are marketing collateral. But a well-written white paper delivers informa-

tion the reader either can't easily get anywhere else or that helps them make informed decisions. So, as long as the promise of providing information is kept, the reader will tolerate a little bias and marketing information.

TYPES OF WHITE PAPERS

TECHNICAL

Written for a technical audience. The information covers technical details, uses jargon, and presents technical benefits.

BUSINESS - BENEFIT

Written for a non-technical audience. Presents benefits in business terms - cost, schedule, productivity. Jargon is not used.

HYBRID

Written for a mixed audience. Both technical and business benefits are discussed but the information is clearly separated. Often used to reach management of technical groups that likely understand technical issues but have financial responsibilities as well.

Decide if a White Paper is Needed

While white papers appear to be everywhere, businesses shouldn't just assume they need one. Marketers should consider the following questions when deciding if they need a white paper:

- Are you selling anything relatively new?
- Are you selling anything relatively complex?
- Are you selling anything relatively expensive?

If the answer is 'yes' to any of these questions, that's a good basic rationale for considering a white paper:

Use a small team to execute an effective white paper project. The team should confirm that a white paper is needed and then participate in the development. The team should include:

Champion - person responsible for getting the project completed, assuring that resources are available, and resolves problems.

Sales Representative - provides background about the prospect, describes the sales process, and provides competitive intelligence.

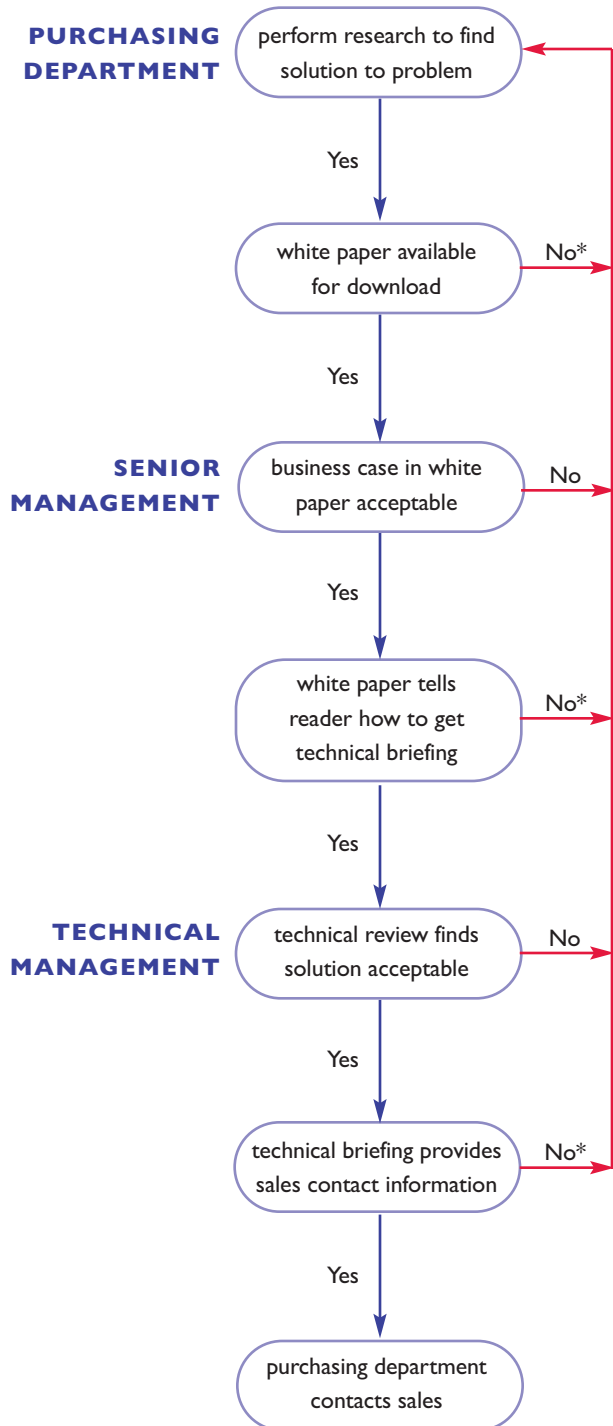
Expert - provides background, detailed information, assures accuracy during review cycle.

Writer - performs interviews, does research, and generates content for the white paper.

Designer - develops graphics and provides layout for the white paper.

A well-written white paper delivers information the reader either can't easily get anywhere else or that helps them make informed decisions.

SALES FLOW



* Purchasing either researches to find needed information for next step in sales process or locates a different solution

The company offering should not be the primary focus of the white paper. If extensive, specific detail regarding the product or service is needed, additional collateral should be considered rather than rolling everything into the white paper. Other collateral may include a technical briefing, product review, or technical specification. A white paper and technical briefing are often effectively used together as shown in the sales flow diagram.

Writing Tips for Effective White Papers

The use of white papers has increased significantly over the last few years.² With this increase, guidelines for white papers have started to appear from detailed how-to information such as Michael Stelzner's book *Writing White Papers: How to Capture Readers and Keep Them Engaged* to much shorter articles and tips papers such as *Eight Rules for Creating Great White Papers* published by KnowledgeStorm.

Here are 10 tips identified in most articles and discussions about writing effective white papers including Stelzner's book.

1. Define the ideal reader and the topic that fits the reader and the sales process
2. Engage the reader quickly with a benefit-oriented title and first sentence. Keep the reader's interest throughout the paper by staying focused on their problems.
3. Organize using short sections, bullet lists, and headlines.
4. Use sidebars for information that might not be needed by all readers and callouts to emphasize key points.
5. Support performance, effectiveness, or quality claims with case studies.

6. Use relevant charts, diagrams, and illustrations avoiding stock photos and images that don't have a purpose.
7. Maintain an objective and informative focus – don't mention your specific offering or company until the end.
8. Use references from third parties to support claims and establish credibility.
9. Include a call to action so that the sales process continues rather than stalls.
10. Keep the white paper to around 10 pages in length - consider writing two separate papers if more than 12 pages and an article, guide, or briefing paper if less than 6 pages.

Identifying and describing the ideal reader is the most important step of the white paper process. Once there is enough information to describe the ideal reader, the focus for the white paper can be decided along with the tone, style, and level of detail. To identify the ideal reader, consider these questions

- How big is the company the reader is working at?
- What is the title of the reader?
- How technical is the reader?
- What are his or her job responsibilities?
- What role does the reader play in the sale process?
- How familiar is the reader with the solution?

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Graphic Tips for Effective White Papers

White papers that look too slick and glossy often scream sales to the reader. However, the problem with text-only documents is their tendency to be off-putting. A block of solid text is not as inviting as text that has been finessed through any number of treatments such as variations in color and fonts, line spacing and graphics. A professionally formatted page is more likely to get a reader's attention and draw them in.

Also, with most professionals already feeling like there is too much to read on any given day, a professionally designed piece aids the reader in finding the areas of importance to them within a document.

Illustrating complicated concepts and technical information increases the likelihood that a reader, who might not take the time to read what you are trying to get across in words, will peruse an image or graphic and grasp what you are saying.

In his book, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Edward R. Tufte says "Graphics reveal data." He describes excellent displays as showing data without distortion, and inducing readers to think about the substance rather than methodology or technology of production. Graphical excellence should present many numbers in a small space, while making large data sets coherent and encouraging the eye to com-

...graphic design serves as continuation of your branding. In a world where much of what anyone sees today is branded, your communications need to be a consistent representative of your product or service.

pare different pieces of data. Graphics should be closely integrated with the statistical and verbal descriptions of a data set.³

In addition to strengthening and re-enforcing key points, graphic design serves as continuation of your branding. In a world where much of what anyone sees today is branded, your communications need to be a consistent representative of your product or service. Graphic design of your white papers will incorporate your logo and corporate colors and serves as continuation of your branding.

Finally, a professionally designed piece assures that your corporate image is consistently displayed. Graphics created in MSWord or Excel use a different color model than traditional printing requires. Using a graphic professional assures that the blue on your website is the same (or as close as it can possibly be) to the blue on your printed pieces. This increases your prospects' chances of remembering you and knowing that all the materials they see come from the same company.

Should White Paper Development be Outsourced?

Once it is decided to write a white paper, finding someone to do the writing and provide the graphic support becomes a priority. Both writing and graphic design for the white paper can be outsourced, both can be done with staff resources, or a combination of staff and outsourcing can be used.

When selecting the writer, someone from product development, product-marketing or sales, or an in-house expert seem like good choices. Effective white papers definitely need input from these people, but there are many reasons that one of them should not be the writer including

- the individual may not be a good writer
- the individual may not be vested in the product - may feel "it's not my job"
- removing critical personnel from assigned responsibilities is expensive
- the writing may never get done or be done poorly as an add-on task to other work

When you outsource white paper writing, you can be reasonably certain that you won't experience these issues. Additionally, an outsider is less likely to take anything for granted. This increases the likelihood that the information in the white paper is well-explained and that the paper is written to the readers' level of knowledge.

Referrals and the Internet are excellent ways to locate freelance or contract writers for white papers. Contact the marketing departments of companies that have quality white papers and ask if the writing was outsourced, how smoothly the project went, and for the writer's contact information.

If the Internet is used to locate a writer, posting a job on

- your local Craigslist site if you want a local writer

- a marketing site that includes marketing jobs such as MarketingSherpa
- the WhitePaperSource web site for an experienced writer
- an auction site such as Elance for a low cost writer

Searching for a white paper writer using a search engine may also identify freelancers that provide white paper writing support.

Designers for white papers can be found using similar Internet sites as for writers. Also, many writers regularly work with designers often allowing for all the required white paper support to be found with one resource. The key characteristic for designers is experience with reports and print media to assure that deliverables can be used for printing and to minimize expense. Designers not experienced with longer reports will likely take much longer to complete the work needed.

Marketing White Papers

Even though white papers are being given away, they need to be marketed. Favorable lead generation results are not likely from simply posting a white paper on a web site. As a minimum, the company web site should contain an abstract for the paper with a clear description of what the reader will get from reading the paper.

Other marketing methods for a white paper include syndication of the white paper through KnowledgeStorm or similar syndicator; advertising on specialty web sites or newsletters, announcements using press releases, email marketing, direct mail, print ads, and articles in trade journals.

Managing white paper distribution as if selling a product increases the likelihood the paper will be read. An effective white paper can not only start the sales process but can move it along and keep it from stalling

The Next Step

If you need writing or graphic design support to complete your white paper project, contact Write Advantage Inc. or ampersand. We can assist with updating existing materials, polishing a rough draft, writing a new white paper, or creating a series of white papers and collateral that supports your sales process. The Write Advantage/ampersand team provides a complete white paper development solution delivering a final document that is ready to print for use as a leave behind or in direct mail, post on a web site, syndicate, or offer in lead nurturing through email.

QUESTIONS TO ASK FREELANCE WRITERS BEING CONSIDERED FOR WHITE PAPER PROJECTS:

Who are your clients?

How long have you been writing white papers?

What is the typical length of writing projects?

Do you do the writing?

What is your methodology?

Can I see samples of past white papers?

A good midrange price for outsourcing the writing of a 10-page white paper is \$3,000. High-end prices are \$10,000 and low-end prices less than \$2,000.⁴ Estimates from writers should include approval of a general outline, one round of revision, and proofing of the final after it has gone to the graphic designer.

The average cost of designing an 8-page white paper is \$750-1100. This includes two rounds of edits, delivery of a pdf and print-ready files.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Search expert Hotchkiss talks about trends. BtoB Online story posted April 11, 2007. <http://www.btoonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070411/FREE/70411007>.
- 2 Willerton, D. R. *Ethos and Exigence: White Papers in High-Tech Industries*. May, 2005. [Dissertation]
- 3 Tufte, Edward R. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Graphics Press. Cheshire, Connecticut: 11th printing 1991.
- 4 Stelzner, Michael A. *White Paper Writer Industry Survey*. November, 2005.

Profiles

ampersand graphic design, llc, offers professional communication services, including publication design and corporate identity development. Our goal is to provide results-oriented solutions for business and non-profits that meet communication goals elegantly, thoughtfully, successfully. Founded in 1993 by Mary A. Pettigrew, Principal, ampersand graphic design was originally located in Washington, DC. ampersand is now based in Boulder, CO. We continue to serve many long-standing clients in the DC metro area, as well as local clients in the Boulder/Denver area.

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Write Advantage Inc. provides businesses with freelance copywriting support to complete white paper projects and assure that other collateral supports the sales process both online and in print. Shannon Walker-Lembke brings engineering consulting and management experience combined with direct response and creative writing expertise to clients' white paper projects delivering informative and persuasive copy. Write Advantage Inc. has been providing freelance copywriting support to clients nationally and in the Denver/Boulder area for the past five years.

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NOTE TO THE READER

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