Playing the White Paper Game?
Here's What You Can Do To Win

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Making the Right Moves

If you've determined that white papers should play a role in your B2B content marketing strategy, you now face the challenge of developing your first winning paper.

As you'll soon discover, producing a white paper isn't like writing a blog: You can't just bang it off in one sitting and then ask your editor to give it a polish. From the moment you pull the trigger on a new white paper, you'll be relying on technical and creative contributions from a team of skilled specialists to get the job done right.

As the manager responsible for content marketing at your technology company or service firm, you're in a position to add a lot of value to your white paper—provided you make the right moves.

This special report is intended for technology marketers who want to learn about planning, developing, distributing, and promoting a high-quality white paper.

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Planning Your White Paper

Since white papers often explain difficult concepts and describe complex technologies, people tend to confuse them with academic papers, or think of them as crib notes for thick user manuals. What they fail to understand is that white papers are meant to be informative and *persuasive*—just like any other piece of *marketing* collateral.

When it comes to white papers, explaining technical concepts in plain language is just another way of facilitating the sales process, albeit with a lighter touch. A truly effective paper is a thoughtful blend of fact and argument, serving up valuable information that reinforces the overall marketing message.

Before you can develop an informative yet persuasive white paper, you first need to determine:

1. Who you're talking to, so you can build affinity.
2. What you want them to do, so you can design the paper around this objective.

Producing a white paper that neither builds affinity with a target audience nor carries out a specific objective is like pouring an unknown liquid into your car's gas tank: the engine might still run, but it's unlikely to perform very well or take you very far.

Determining your target audience

Is your white paper intended for businesspeople or technical specialists? Before you start developing a white paper, you need to identify your audience so you can choose appropriate topics and then explain them in a way that's meaningful to those readers.

Business owners, executives, and senior managers—the decision makers—are typically interested in the big picture: how they can improve their bottom line with your products or services. When they read your white paper, they'll look for compelling business arguments that justify a more thorough investigation of your company. Keep in mind that these are businesspeople, so they appreciate high-level technical descriptions that explain difficult concepts in language they can understand.

Engineers, IT managers, and other knowledge workers, on the other hand, usually want detailed, no-nonsense information about how your technology or service works so they can determine if it's a feasible solution to the problem they're experiencing. Their recommendations can strongly influence the final decisions made by their boss, who relies on their technical expertise.

If you want to reach businesspeople and technical specialists, you'll need to produce at least two white papers, one for each type of reader.

Apples and Oranges

White papers and academic papers might look similar, but they actually have very little in common. White papers are soft-sell marketing documents that target either business leaders or the hands-on technical people who influence them. Academic papers are written by and for subject matter experts in academia, and rarely have a useful role to play in B2B sales.

Defining your marketing objective

After you identify who will be reading your white paper, you need to define what you're hoping to accomplish with it.

Here are some possible goals that you might want to achieve with a white paper:

- Communicate the business benefits of using your technology.
- Educate prospective customers and pre-sell your expertise.
- Knock down common objections during the sales process, perhaps with technical explanations, descriptions, and examples that address known pain points.
- Expose unrealistic claims made by your competitors and redefine the market in terms that favor your company.
- Dispel common misconceptions about your product, service, process, underlying technology, or industry.

When you understand your objective, you can start developing a tightly focused white paper that has the best chance of achieving the desired outcome.

That said, take care not to become mired in strategy. After all, you're developing a white paper, not a mind control device. Prospective buyers will come to your paper with unique perspectives and their reactions will not be uniform or entirely predictable. The important thing is to deliver a coherent narrative that demonstrates your expertise. The rest is up to the buyer.

Developing Your White Paper

Before you jump feet-first into development, you should take some time to realistically evaluate the effort that will be required to produce a high-quality white paper. Hint: It's not trivial. An effective white paper is invariably the result of a team effort.

Even if you are fortunate enough to have all of the requisite knowledge, skills, and talent (not to mention time) to produce one yourself, going it alone on a white paper is a gamble because you rapidly lose perspective on the material. It's very difficult to remain objective about your own work, and objectivity is an absolute must, especially during the review process.

Although several tasks may be completed by one individual—for example, writers typically do their own research—a diversity of expert perspectives is essential to developing a well-rounded white paper that delivers the right information (and message) to your target audience. Subject matter experts, marketers, writers, editors, graphic designers—all of these professionals have a role to play, so don't underestimate the effort that will be required.

Here's a task-by-task summary of what it takes to produce a winning white paper, along with some tips for getting it done on time and on budget.

> Producing a high-quality white paper is a lot of work. Don't underestimate the effort involved.

Research

To be credible, white papers must be carefully researched. Depending on the circumstances, information can come from:

- Interviews with your in-house subject matter experts.
- Relevant company documents, both internal and customer-facing.
- Independent, third-party sources like books, articles, academic papers, and other white papers.

At the beginning of the project, when your white paper writer is trying to assess your needs, you should indicate what kind of research will be required.

If you want the writer to interview some of your busy in-house experts, you should go through the appropriate channels within your organization to arrange the interviews. Don't assume that your technical experts will respond to an interview request from a writer—even if you tell them to expect a call—because your white paper is probably not very high on their list of priorities. Always get their supervisor's approval and formally book the interviews into their work schedules.

As you might expect, B2B buyers will find your white paper more credible if you back up your assertions with trusted third-party sources of information. However, be advised that such research can be very time-consuming, even for an experienced writer who knows what to look for, where to look for it, and when to *stop* looking.

If you choose a writer who charges an hourly rate for research, the project could end up costing much more than you anticipate. An easy way to remove this variable from the equation is to hire a white paper writer who includes all research in a flat fee for the entire project.

Writing

After diligently researching the topic, your writer should prepare a detailed outline that defines the structure of your white paper and suggests the main discussion points. Since the writer can change an outline with relative ease, your designated reviewers should think "big picture" at this stage of the process and carefully scrutinize the proposed structure. If any of the reviewers want major changes, they should say so immediately instead of silently deferring judgment until after they've read the first draft.

Keep in mind that when you approve an outline, you're telling the writer to freeze the structure of the white paper and start filling in the details. If you later ask for sweeping changes to your white paper's structure, the writer will probably charge an extra fee for having to step back and rework content that you already approved. It's better to spend a little extra time on the outline than a lot of extra money on a major rewrite later in the process.

Once you've approved the outline, the writer will expand it into a first draft, adding greater detail and building a coherent narrative that's appropriate for the target audience and stated objective. An experienced white paper writer often delivers a first draft that's

somewhat less than the maximum word count, knowing that reviewers frequently want to enhance a section here and there with other relevant information that occurs to them while reading the manuscript.

The second draft is, of course, the writer's response to your feedback on the first draft. Second draft revisions commonly include making minor structural adjustments, sharpening the paper's focus, and correcting inaccuracies or inconsistencies. Just to be clear, the writer only makes changes that reviewers ask for; all other content passes unchanged from draft to draft.

After working through an outline and two complete drafts, a good white paper writer is usually hitting very close to the center of the target, so the final draft should not be radically different from the second draft.

When the writer has addressed the reviewers' feedback on the second draft, the copyeditor goes through the manuscript and suggests improvements that are intended to make the white paper more readable. The writer reviews the editor's recommendations and incorporates them into the white paper, completing the final draft.

White Paper Content—Do's and Don'ts

Do give your in-house experts a byline if they have impressive credentials that will bolster the credibility of your white paper or if you're trying to build up their reputations.

Do include an attractive title page.

Do provide an abstract/executive summary.

Do support your arguments with facts and respected third-party data/opinions.

Do wrap up your discussion with a conclusion.

Do sign off with a specific *call to action* that moves your prospects forward in the buying cycle.

Don't expect everyone to read your white paper from start to finish. Design it for skimmers and readers alike by using prominent, descriptive headings.

Don't use humor or foul language in your white paper. However, it's fine to display some attitude, as long it's consistent with your brand.

Don't add gratuitous images to your white paper. Instead, use a variety of other graphical elements to break up the text into manageable chunks. Try using bullet points, pull quotes, tables, or feature boxes like this one.

As you'll no doubt learn, white paper writing is a highly specialized copywriting niche. Style, tone, information choices, presentation choices, length, budget—the writer must consider all of this and more while crafting the paper to suit your target audience and achieve your objective.

Review

When you're selecting reviewers for your white paper, it's a good idea to keep the numbers down. Usually, one subject matter expert and one marketer are sufficient to get the job done right. If you involve too many people, you'll probably waste a lot of time waiting for everyone to return feedback on each draft.

Reviewers should make their comments specific, constructive, and actionable by the writer. For example, "I don't like this" is not a valid comment because it neither offers insight into a problem nor suggests a remedy. A writer that understands your preferences will be more likely to deliver appropriate content, so ask the reviewers to comment on negative *and* positive aspects of the white paper.

Graphic design

Your white paper should have a simple, clean look that makes it easy for B2B buyers to identify its source (your company) and consume its content. To hold readers' attention, you should break up large blocks of text with prominent headings, bulleted lists, numbered lists, pull quotes, tables, graphs, diagrams, and feature boxes.

In a white paper intended for technical readers, include pictures only if they substantially add to the main discussion. However, in a white paper intended for a business audience, you have a bit more leeway. In such papers, you have the option of including pictures that enhance the look of the white paper without contributing much to the actual discussion.

Finally, be sure to choose a graphic designer who has experience paginating text documents. For example, a Web designer or a logo specialist may be unfamiliar with traditional page formatting conventions.

Search engine optimization

If you're pursuing a search engine optimization (SEO) strategy for your online content, then you'll naturally want to sprinkle your white paper with appropriate keywords. Regardless of whether you handle SEO in-house or through an outside vendor, be sure to send all of your keywords to the writer early in development, preferably before the outline has been completed. This enables the writer to seamlessly include the keywords into the overall narrative.

If you choose to tack SEO onto the end of the white paper development process, the writer might have difficulty blending your keywords into the existing content and you'll almost certainly have to pay an additional fee for the extra draft.

Editing

B2B buyers are going to make certain judgments about your company based on the quality of your white paper, so you should have it professionally copyedited. The cost is minimal and your readers will notice the difference.

Project management

To produce a high-quality white paper, you'll have to assemble and manage a team that includes at least five specialists:

- Writer
- Copyeditor
- Graphic designer
- Subject matter reviewer
- Marketing reviewer

Of course, the team will be even larger if you work with an SEO expert or solicit feedback from more stakeholders (e.g., business owner, legal counsel, PR consultant).

If you intend to manage the project yourself, you'll have to get budget approval, prepare a schedule, set milestones, define deliverables, assign responsibilities, troubleshoot problems, send reminders, and resolve other any issues that arise.

Before you take on this role, think about how the extra responsibility will impact your already busy schedule. There's a very real danger that you could spread yourself too thin and compromise the integrity of the paper.

One way to lighten the load is to outsource a large chunk of the project—for example, writing, copyediting, and graphic design—to a single vendor. This approach will allow you to keep on top of the project and review each deliverable, without having to do all the legwork yourself.

Distributing Your White Paper

Okay, your white paper is finished. It's been carefully designed to achieve a specific outcome with your target audience. It's well researched, clearly written, rich with keywords, and visually appealing. Now what?

Now it's time to put the *marketing* in *white paper marketing!* Naturally, your overall sales and marketing strategy will dictate just how you put the finished paper in play, but you certainly have many options to choose from, including:

- Website content and lead generator
- Presentation/tradeshow handout
- Technology overview for industry analysts

Selecting a Title

If you're having trouble choosing from a short list of possible titles for your white paper, then let your target audience make the decision for you. Create several versions of the white paper, changing only the title, and attach each one to a unique landing page on your website. Advertise each variation of the white paper for a week or two (e.g., on Google AdWords) and then use the title that attracts the most attention.

- Meeting follow-up
- Information package for investors
- Media resource

In particular, consider this: Companies that develop relevant, high-quality white papers earn the right to reach out to busy clients and prospects. Suddenly, you're not just calling to say "hi" (an intrusion); you're starting a new, substantial conversation that has real value for the person at the other end of the line. When you take this approach, clients quickly learn that you never show up empty-handed—and they reward you by paying attention.

Repurposing white paper content

A white paper is a gift that keeps on giving. You can reuse high-value white paper content in other marketing collateral, such as:

- Newsletters
- E-mail messages
- Slide presentations
- Training materials
- Podcasts
- Online videos
- Webinars

If you frequently target B2B buyers who are committed mobile users, you can distil your comprehensive white paper into several smaller *mite papers*, or mobile white papers, that are specifically formatted for the small screens on mobile devices. Serve up mite papers on the mobile version of your website and invite interested readers to download the complete white paper when they return to the office.

Promoting Your White Paper

If you're getting ready to release a fabulous white paper, don't just post it on your website: Make it an event. Tell *everybody* about it.

Giving a presentation? Tell the audience about your terrific new white paper. Give them a link to the paper and encourage them to read it. Or, better yet, offer to send them a complimentary copy if they leave a business card at the end of the session.

You can also promote your white paper with a permission-based e-mail campaign, a well-placed press release, and a provocative blog entry that riffs on the same topic from a different angle. Or you can summarize each key section of the white paper in a mite paper so that visitors to your mobile website have a variety of tasty "isnacks" to enjoy. Hopefully, they'll invite colleagues to partake—and generate even more buzz for your white paper.

Some marketers increase readership dramatically by advertising their white papers on search engine results pages and various display networks. Others attract attention by advertising on popular, industry-specific websites frequented by their customers. A terrific way to drive downloads and generate quality leads is to place an article in a trade publication or on a respectable online directory, and include a "for more information" link to your white paper.

> " You can generate high-quality sales leads by advertising your white paper on popular search engines. "

Social media channels are yet another way to promote a white paper. In addition to blogging, some marketers Tweet up their white papers or promote them in relevant, if smaller, online communities (e.g., on discussion boards).

However you choose to promote your white paper, make sure you pull out all the stops to reach your target audience. After all, the expression "If you build it, they will come" is only true if buyers know you've built something.

Conclusion

Like many other strategy games, the white paper game is actually more complex than it appears to be at first glance. Before you can win, you must learn about each piece on the board—what it is, what it does, its strengths and weaknesses—and become acquainted with proven strategies and tactics.

When it comes to white papers, thorough planning is crucial to achieving bottom-line results. You need to clearly define a target audience and a specific objective for each paper. Otherwise, you'll be in a weak, perhaps untenable, position when development starts and it's time to go on the offensive.

Development is where the white paper game suddenly heats up and you have to make a flurry of coordinated moves. You must put together a team of specialists to do research, writing, graphic design, SEO keywords, copyediting, and project management. At some point, the simple "white paper" irreversibly morphs into a "white paper project" and takes on a life of its own.

The white paper game is a team sport.

But assuming you make the right moves and come away with an attractive, compelling white paper, you still have to distribute it. Will you post it on your website as a lead generator? Will you use it as a tradeshow handout or meeting follow-up? You'll need to come up with a strategy for distribution—and promotion.

Like your website itself, each of your white papers is a valuable information product that needs to be actively promoted, perhaps through permission-based e-mail, press releases,

online advertising, or social media channels. These types of inbound marketing activities can greatly increase white paper readership and drive sales.

With smart planning, exhaustive research, thoughtful writing, constructive feedback, attractive design, wise management, targeted distribution, and creative promotion, you can get the most out of each white paper. You'll generate more high-quality sales leads, achieve higher ROI on your white paper marketing campaigns, and (of course!) give your customers the valuable, relevant information they need to make smart decisions.

In other words, *you'll win the white paper game!* And when that happens, you can reset the board and play again…

Getting ready to play the white paper game?

If so, contact us at winthegame@cworthy.biz for a *free needs assessment* of your

upcoming project. We can help you produce a winning white paper!

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