



Whitepaperology 101

By Tedd Campbell

White Paper Basics

Smart vendors understand that B2B buyers need comprehensive information to make reasonable purchasing decisions. By serving up substantial content, such as white papers, vendors are able to proactively answer questions, knock down objections, allay fears, and establish credibility. So, in a nutshell, white papers can play a very positive role in the B2B sales process.

Okay, white papers are useful—that’s certainly good to know—but what are they?!? What do they look like? Are they bigger than a breadbox? Smaller than a house? How are white papers different from other types of marketing collateral? What makes them effective marketing tools?

To answer these questions and more, I’ve put together some quick bullet points that you should be able to skim through in a few minutes. By the time you’re done, you’ll know the basics of whitepaperology.

(And, no, there won’t be a test!)

Here we go...

Solution to a problem

- White papers are soft sell marketing documents used by B2B vendors to establish their credibility and deliver substantial information to prospective clients.
- A white paper describes (in detail) your preferred solution to a problem that companies in your target market are experiencing.
- Like an academic paper, a white paper must be carefully researched using credible sources and proper referencing.
- White papers are not only marketing collateral but they also double as repositories of internal company knowledge.

“A white paper describes your preferred solution to a problem that companies in your target market are experiencing.”

Less is more

- Although white papers are meant to be long-form documents—they’re often the longest, most substantial documents in a B2B organization’s content mix—they shouldn’t be overly long. Ten pages is a reasonable maximum.
- Focus is important. Buyers don’t have time to wade through rambling discussions to find the information they need. To cover a broad topic, it’s best to start with a high-level white paper then use subsequent papers to drill down into specific areas of interest.
- A white paper is not like a glossy brochure. Page formatting should be kept simple, like an academic paper.

Clear purpose

For example:

- **To educate**
Explain the theory behind your technology and showcase your expertise.
- **To inform and persuade**
Discuss the business benefits or technical details of your product or service and convince readers that your technology is the logical choice.
- **To demonstrate leadership**
Show clients, investors, and other industry players that you're the one to watch.
- **To define the market**
Set expectations that are favourable to you but more difficult for competitors to meet.

Specific audience

- Experienced buyers tend to skim white papers, at least on the first pass. Descriptive headings and liberal use of graphics make it easier for them to determine whether or not they should spend valuable time reading it.
- A white paper should be written for either a technical or business audience, but not for both.

“Write your white paper for either a technical or business audience.”

- A technical white paper can discuss your technology in general terms, or it can provide detailed information about a certain aspect of your product, service, or process.
- A business-oriented white paper can include a high-level technical description but it should primarily discuss the business benefits of choosing your solution.

No marketing speak

- White papers are designed to sell with ideas. They promote your expertise and experience—and by implication your product or service.
- Straight-talking white papers establish your credibility and make people more receptive to buying from you. Build trust first and sales will follow.
- Although a white paper should be “on brand”, it should also have a certain level of formality and a direct, no-nonsense tone that will appeal to busy people looking for answers.
- Opinions, witticisms, humour, sarcasm, and other rhetorical flourishes should be reserved for blogs, articles, Web pages, and ad copy. They do not belong in a white paper.

And finally, just in case you were wondering, when you print out a white paper, it should definitely be smaller than both a house and a breadbox. If it isn't, you might want to do some editing...



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