

White Paper Power:

The Secrets Behind Engaging,
Empowering White Papers

“Do white papers still matter in the world of tweets, Tumblr, and time-crunched executives? Yes, but only if they’re done right...”



Introduction

White papers are long. They're in-depth. They take time to write. And marketing tradition says they're one of the most powerful tools you can employ for lead generation, thought leadership, and building your brand.

But wait: In today's high-speed world of social media, characterized by short blog posts and 140-character tweets, do long-form white papers still work? Will your audience, inundated in the multi-tasking, eye-strain-inducing, acid-reflux-causing, "I-need-a-vacation-but-don't-have-the-time" corporate environment, realistically take the time to read and digest an in-depth report? And – will they take the marketing action you want?

The short answer: Absolutely. The slightly-less short answer? That's the topic of this report.

In this white paper on white papers, you'll find out why an admittedly old-school form of marketing is still the ideal way to engage, empower and excite your prospects. You'll discover what a compelling white paper contains, what it looks like, and how it enables your readers to take real action that benefits your company. Finally, you'll uncover the secret method successful companies use to create white papers that work.

Why White Papers?

White papers are a curious breed, best described as a mix between an article and brochure. They offer the objectivity, extensive information and length of an article, while still maintaining the sales focus and call to action of a brochure. Done well, they are a subtle yet compelling tool with major benefits for your company.

Today's white papers are especially useful when a company wishes to present a technological innovation, a complex new product, or a product or service that will require a major investment on the part of the client. And while they used to be strictly a techie tool, they're now spreading far and wide into the B2B realm.

But the fact is white papers are longer than our quick-bite culture today typically allows. At up to 10 pages, common sense suggests people won't take the time to read these reports. Are white papers still relevant today? Absolutely.

Your audience, made up of decision-makers, influencers, and people getting stress from the C-suite to make things better, are hungry for real knowledge. They desperately need to know the best ways to improve company operations, boost the bottom line, and make their own jobs easier. But in today's noise, it's hard to get real, useful information, in a format that makes sense and helps in decision-making.

White papers are your perfect marketing tool because they provide exactly that. They offer the chance to find real information, from a high-level understanding down to a deep dive. Call it what you will – a white paper, an eBook, a pocket guide, a toolkit – white papers are the ultimate storytelling medium and selling mechanism available.

Research supports this notion that white papers are still valued and valuable in the world of tweets, Tumblr and time-crunched executives:

- White papers remain the most effective piece of marketing collateral, with 86% of respondents finding them moderately to highly influential in purchasing decisions, reported a recent Eccolo Media study. "Nothing gives more bang for the buck than a well-crafted white paper...marketers owe it to themselves to make white papers a high priority when developing their content strategy," said the authors.

Your audience is hungry for real knowledge, information to help them do their jobs. White papers provide it.

- An *InformationWeek* survey of 542 professional IT buyers from early 2009 revealed that 93% of buyers pass along up to half of the white papers they read. “White papers are the primary educational tool for professional IT buyers throughout the buying process, allowing technology marketers a unique opportunity to provide the right information at the right time and directly affect purchase outcomes.”

As a result, nearly half (46%) of marketers have launched or are launching white paper initiatives this year, according to a recent Junta42 study. White papers are still hot for readers and marketers.

Overall, a well-crafted white paper will be valued by your audience, and valuable for you, in the following ways:

- *Education.* Your prospects are very smart people. They know problems exist in their business operations, but they often don't know how to solve them. Your white paper can offer a simple yet well-informed discussion of their problem, and educate them on the best ways to solve it. In the process, you establish yourself as a thought leader, a credible source for information and solutions.
- *Persuasion.* Your prospects are savvy people. They want to find the perfect solution to their problems, and want to be convinced they've found it. Your white paper can effectively persuade them of the best solutions, and also demonstrate how complex the issue really is. Along the way, you can gently but firmly offer yourself as the ideal expert to help them solve their problem. By doing this, you can build your brand, generate leads, and convert real clients.

White papers, then, are a welcome and valued tool for your audience, an elegant yet thorough way to stop people, get their attention, and convince them of the superiority of your solution.

White Papers that Work

A white paper can be a major boon for your business. But how do you go about creating the ideal paper that will benefit your audience *and* your company?

Your prospects know problems exist, but they often don't know how to solve them. White papers can educate and persuade, offering solutions for your prospects' problems while building your business.

The first step is to resist your normal inclinations. Sure, you want to tell the world about your new product and service. You want to shout to anyone that will listen (and those standing next to them) about your cool new features and technical specifications. But that's a sure way to crash and burn. Think about it. Do you want to read a 10-page document that regurgitates facts and figures? Do you really want to use your precious time to work out a paper's message, and to figure out how it could be helpful to you? No. Neither does your audience.

Evidence abounds for this fact. In the *InformationWeek* survey mentioned above, respondents asked about the ideal white paper said they wanted readability and targeted information specifically for them. They valued white papers that were actionable, with clear next steps for information-gathering. They abhorred white papers that acted as product brochures and resented white papers that did not clearly point them in the right directions with minimal marketing. As one respondent succinctly said, "Get to the point. My time is money."

A white paper is subtle. It's quiet yet extremely powerful. It leads your readers from the first sentence to the last, educating and persuading until they trust you, believe in you, and want to learn more. It's readable, even interesting, and ultimately highly effective. The best white papers:

Focus on the reader

White papers should speak to your audience and their specific concerns right away, on a high-level. They should commiserate and express understanding of their unique problems, grabbing the reader's attention and convincing them it's worth their time to read. They should also create a sense of anxiety and urgency, describing the additional problems that can occur if nothing is done NOW.

Consider a white paper on virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI). Briefly: desktop PCs at every employee and user's desk are traditional, but they're the source of major inefficiencies and vulnerabilities. VDI replaces that big box with individual "thin clients," connected virtually to a central server, through which users access their own personal screens, applications and data. A white paper on VDI shouldn't just rattle off facts about the setup. Instead, a white paper should first engage readers by talking about the relevant troubles they face. Those without VDI can be plagued by lack of mobility for employees, lack of security for their data, and disorganized data, and face major pressures to fix it. Your white paper should talk about these problems first. By focusing on your audience, readers will know you GET IT and get them.

Do you want to read 10 pages of bragging? No. Neither does your audience. Instead, the best white papers are subtle and reader-focused.

Focus on benefits

The best white papers should transition from problems to solutions, in a way that continues to speak to readers. In our VDI white paper example, the point isn't how a virtual desktop infrastructure offers the ability to have mobile thin clients for your employees. The point is how this infrastructure means your employees are more mobile and connected, how companies can more easily secure their data, and how business operations can become greener. The white paper should describe the ways your readers and their company will come out on top with a specific solution.

Support your assertions

To truly establish yourself as someone to listen to, you need proof. Historical and factual data that directly supports your claims are an essential component to a complete report, one that readers will trust. In our VDI white paper example, an effective white paper shouldn't simply describe the limitations of traditional models or benefits of VDI. Compelling research should be mentioned and studies cited, in a way that is interesting and useful, to shore up your ideas.

Flow

The content is critical, but so is the organization of an effective white paper:

- A white paper needs short sections, bullets, sidebars/callouts, and attention-grabbing headlines to draw busy readers in. The paper should be kept to 10 pages or less for maximum potency.
- In terms of an outline, a white paper should start logically, with the readers and their issues, and then move to the historical perspective and overview of the problem. The paper should seamlessly integrate research support in this section.
- From there, the paper should move to describing the relevant class of products/solutions that attack this problem. The report should offer an objective buyer's guide, detailing what readers should look for in a solution provider, and setting the standard to which your competition is judged.

The structure of a white paper is just as important as the content. Engage your reader through visuals and a logical, persuasive organization.

- Once these standards are established, introduce your product/service and how it will meet these standards.
- Finally, an effective white paper must include a relevant and appropriate call to action, to convert readers into leads. This can be as simple as a phone call, signing up for a free consultation, or some other productive next step.

With these guidelines in mind, a white paper can be everything you need it to be. Which leaves just one nagging question – who’s going to write it?

Writing Your White Paper

If you’re writing a white paper on VDI, it makes logical sense for a subject matter expert in VDI in your company to complete the task. Right? Not so fast.

Your subject matter experts, or your marketing staff, or the other logical internal choices to write your white paper, are swamped. They don’t have the time or the desire to take on a writing project. They can be immersed too heavily in the subject and unable to take a step back, making it nearly impossible to be objective and subtle. Moreover, while your subject matter experts can be brilliant and highly accomplished in their jobs, they may not have the writing skills and practice necessary to write an effective white paper.

Relying on your experts for killer service and client solutions is smart. Relying on your experts to write a white paper is not. The solution is one of the best kept secrets among highly prolific white paper producers: a freelance writer.

According to research conducted by Michael Stelzner, the author of *Writing White Papers* and the guru of the field, freelance writers have written more white papers over their entire careers than other writers. Freelancers can produce white papers in half the time, with significantly less cost, than relying on an internal source. As an added benefit, a freelancer can create a white paper of much higher quality, based on all the winning characteristics of successful white papers.

One of the best kept secrets of companies with powerful white papers? Freelance writers.

To find the freelance writer that will take your ideas and transform them into powerful prose that accomplishes your objectives, look for signs pointing you in the right direction. Your freelance writer will have:

- Proven writing skills, in numerous industries and marketing pieces. Your writer should be a professional, with the resume and portfolio to prove it.
- Experience with white papers, and samples to share.
- Methodology. The truly experienced freelancers will have a logical and effective process for writing a white paper, including research, outlining, drafting, revision, and design.
- Interview skills. The best white paper writers have journalism training and background, with the ability to interview your subject matter experts and draw forth the critical ideas.
- Ability to speak tech-ese, but also the ability to translate complex ideas and language to universal business-speak.
- No-fuss working style. The best freelancers are used to working independently, meaning they're easy and enjoyable to work with, stick to your schedule, and always deliver when you need them.
- Fees based on flat rates. The ideal freelancer will be exceedingly fair in their fees, providing a project fee upfront for easy budgeting and no surprises.

A freelance writer can be the ideal resource for your white papers. Rather than sitting on a desk for months, or trapped in your experts' brains, a freelance writer can make your white paper happen, and make it work for you.

Effective white papers come from accomplished freelance writers. Look for key qualities and expertise before enlisting your freelancer.

What Now?

If you want to add white papers to your marketing repertoire, or want to improve upon your white paper process and results, consider Wayfarer Writing for white paper writing, editing and consulting.

As Principal and Writer at Wayfarer Writing, Amy Lillard offers over 10 years of professional writing and journalism experience in numerous industries, including healthcare, IT, real estate, manufacturing, and many more. An expert at taking raw, complex ideas and turning them into polished, powerful and useful writing products, Amy has the background, the samples, and the methodology to tackle the most challenging white papers. All white papers include comprehensive research, outlining, drafting, revision and project management for a simple flat rate, on your deadlines. Plus, with an extensive network of other creative professionals, Amy can offer design and development services to make your white paper pop.

A personable professional, you can rely on Amy to streamline the process, to make your white paper happen, and to make it the powerful marketing tool you need.

Want more information on white papers or Wayfarer Writing? Contact and connect at Wayfarer Writing, at 312-543-3264, or at amy@wayfarerwriting.com.

Make your white paper happen, and make it work for you. Contact Wayfarer Writing for white paper writing, editing and consulting.

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