

# Proven Ways To Enhance The Marketing Appeal Of Your White Papers

**A Guide Prepared  
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# PROVEN WAYS TO ENHANCE THE MARKETING APPEAL OF YOUR WHITE PAPERS

## OVERVIEW

It is no secret that the ability to connect with pre-qualified customers is vital for closing deals. The challenge lies in creating a marketing campaign that consistently attracts quality leads. From numerous indications, white papers are increasingly indispensable for such prospecting.

According to the annual B2B Technology Collateral Survey conducted by **Eccolo Media** in 2009, the popularity of white papers as marketing collateral remains strong, with a majority of respondents (84%) rating white papers as moderately to extremely influential to final technology purchasing decisions.

In a similar survey conducted by **TechTarget** in 2008, IT marketers and buyers ranked white papers as the most effective compared to other marketing collateral.

It is one reason why the Internet is awash with documents labeled as white papers. A quick search for “white paper” on **Google** returns well over one billion hits. Unfortunately, most of these documents tend to lack the depth of content that characterizes compelling business white papers.

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Enhancing The Marketing Appeal Of Your White Papers

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During the summer of 2009, I conducted a survey of over 100 white papers obtained from diverse IT companies. Some of the sponsoring companies have been producing white papers for many years; others are relative newcomers to the medium.

The survey revealed significant variance in design, presentation, and distribution channels used by the sponsors. By the end of my survey, it was relatively easy to see why many of the white papers might fail to perform well as marketing tools.

This guide identifies some features that illustrate common practices that could potentially undermine the marketing value of IT white papers. It includes suggestions to enhance audience appeal, which in turn could improve the returns on the time and money invested in developing business white papers.

## **IT HELPS TO HAVE A CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY**

This might be a no-brainer, but based on my survey it appears that many white papers are developed in isolation rather than as part of a well-defined content marketing strategy. One recurring feature I found is that many IT white papers leave the reader without a clear indication of what to do after downloading/reading the document. It is almost as if creating the document is the end goal.

Unfortunately, failure to specify, unambiguously, the action required of the reader (a.k.a. a call-to-action), undermines the marketing reach of white papers.

A call-to-action, in this context, is not to be confused with a sales pitch. However, it is important to include distinct “next step” information to improve the likelihood that readers remain engaged.

If not a sales pitch, what then is the appropriate “next step” information?

One way to motivate the process is to think of content marketing as you would a response to a request for proposal (RFP). It turns out, white papers and proposals share several common features.

Writing a compelling business white paper is not so different from writing a winning proposal. In both cases, you are asking prospects to buy your idea, your qualification, product, or service. Success in both endeavors requires the ability to create a strategy that delivers on a set of criteria of interest to the evaluator (the reader and would-be client).

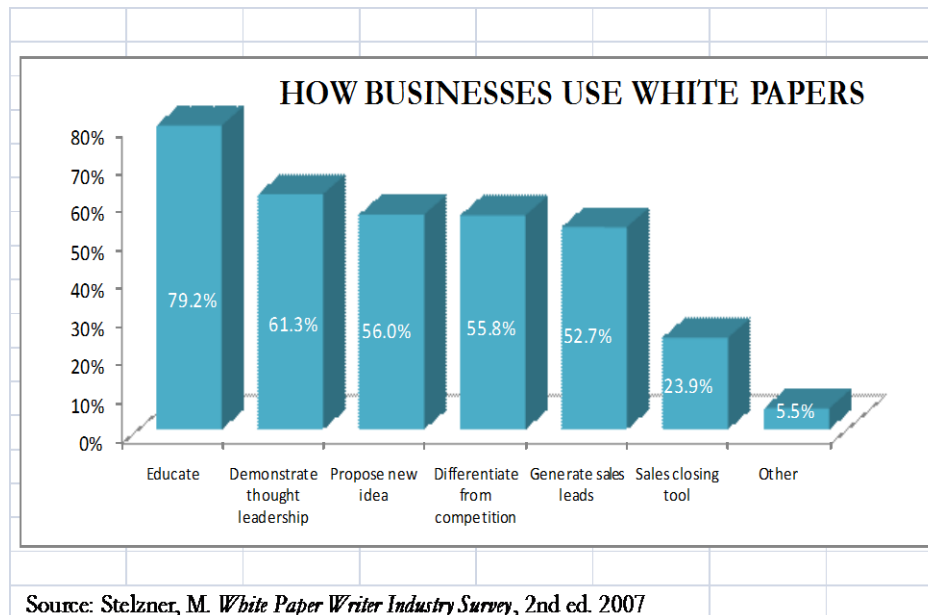
It is, therefore, a good idea for companies contemplating a white paper project to brainstorm internally and to select one dominant objective as the driving force for the project. That would make it relatively easy to wrap the

choice of topic, content design, and distribution channels of the white paper around a meaningful focal point.

Examples of objectives to motivate white papers projects include:

- ✓ Educate prospects about a few select issues.
- ✓ Generate leads, e.g. through capturing email and other contact information, online and offline.
- ✓ Promote a new product or idea.
- ✓ Provide a solution to a prominent industry problem.
- ✓ Demonstrate thought leadership by informing clients about emerging industry trends.
- ✓ Create a consistent platform for generating the “tool kit” used by the company’s sales team.

A white paper industry survey conducted by Michael Stelzner in 2007 substantiates the ways businesses use white papers. One of them might work for your company’s next white paper project.



## **EVEN A GLOBAL MARKET REQUIRES A TARGET AUDIENCE**

Understandably, the “bottom line” goal of marketers is to use content to facilitate profitable selling. However, for that goal to materialize, the content must match the needs of a desirable target audience.

Based on my survey, it appears many sponsors of IT white papers miss this point and instead continue to adopt a “global message” approach that may not connect with the best audience.

The one-size-fits-all approach leaves readers to figure out which aspects of a white paper are relevant for their specific needs. It should be the other way around. The

needs of a defined audience should drive the focus of a white paper. This is one of the distinguishing attributes of effective and viral business white papers.

Why?

The underlying reason is that the true success of content marketing depends on the **principle of reciprocity**.

For years, marketers citing classics such as Richard Cialdini's *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion* have advocated the efficacy of reciprocation as a sales strategy.

According to Cialdini, the promoter who gives free samples can release the natural indebtedness force inherent in a gift. The lure of the "free sample" is irresistible. By accepting the gift, the prospect engages the reciprocity rule. The expectation of the giver is that the taker will be willing to part with something of value to her.

In the context of content marketing, it means that if a reader accepts your buzz piece (such as a white paper), you may expect her to give you her contact information (for starters), and ultimately, her business (dollars).

However, reciprocation is not foolproof. There are pitfalls that could easily derail the train of take and give.

For example, the prospect might refuse to accept the free sample. By refusing to accept the "gift", the prospect refuses to become obligated and so does not engage the

rule of reciprocity. In our electronic age, it is ultra easy to exercise the “right to refuse obligation”.

If the prospect is not engaged, a marketing program based on reciprocation is doomed.

This underscores the point that a content marketer must make it ultra irresistible for prospects to respond favorably. Ignoring this requirement underestimates the power of the prospect in the exchange relationship.

For a white paper intended for lead generation to be successful, it is critical that the subject matter is something of vital importance to the targeted prospects.

Recognizing that different prospects have different information needs depending on where they are in the sales cycle, it is smart marketing to develop customized versions of a select theme.

Here are some of the benefits of a research-based approach to white paper creation:

- ✓ A better understanding of the job functions of key players involved in the decision to purchase your product;
- ✓ A clearer picture of the nature of the complex sales process in the target market, including the distinctions, if any, among decision-makers and influencers;

- ✓ A better choice of the type of content to effectively target market segments thereby minimizing the waste inherent in a one-size-fits-all approach;
- ✓ Decreased likelihood that the white paper is viewed as "self-serving" by prospective clients;
- ✓ A more systematic lead generation and sustainable content marketing strategy.

Knowing what your prospects need takes **competitive intelligence** and **audience analysis**. Surveys or polls of existing clients might provide indications of what works.

Ultimately, investing in audience analysis pays off by improving the overall ROI in white paper production.

## **BENEFITS TRUMP FEATURES**

Based on my survey, there is the lingering misconception that business white papers are about products and features. There is nothing wrong with product description. However, in terms of marketing publications, the job of selling product features belongs to brochures.

In general, when prospects read white papers, they expect to find answers to the perennial question: *what's in it for me (WIIFM)?*

In anticipation of the WIIFM query, smart content marketers focus on tangible business benefits that appeal to prospects rather than on product features and functions. Benefits expressed in terms of outcomes of better resource allocation are particularly compelling.

Examples include:

- ✓ Savings in employee time;
- ✓ Lower production cost;
- ✓ Productivity gains;
- ✓ Best industry practices;
- ✓ Risk mitigation;
- ✓ Improved ROI.

Practically all of these benefits result from helping prospects do their jobs or run their businesses more efficiently. They represent promises that, if substantiated, will be hard to resist by most prospects.

Benefits are critical for initiating a relationship with prospects. White papers that deliver this successfully help minimize or even eliminate the need for hard selling. Such white papers become viral marketing tools.



## **ADOPT THE APPROPRIATE TONE**

Judging by my survey, many IT white papers have a language relations problem. On the one hand, some include explicit use of hype and pressure to push sales.

This is a technique popular among direct marketers. On the other hand, some of the white papers are full of jargon, which might suggest that only subject-matter experts need apply. This is a fallback to the traditional technical report format.

However, if the goal is to build trust and facilitate the sales process, neither hype nor jargon would consistently deliver lasting results.

So what language works?

To return to the response to proposal (RFP) analogy -- one of the unspoken rules of proposals is the rule about the right language. To merit any consideration, a proposer must adopt the tone deemed appropriate to the requirements of the RFP.

In essence, this means that in an RFP process, the prospective client defines the right language. Factors, such as the client's subject-matter expertise, the technicality of the project, and the intended use of the final report, suggest the right language for a successful proposal.

In the arena of white paper writing, determining the appropriate tone has all of the same considerations. A compelling business white paper uses the tone that matches the following criteria:

- ✓ the subject-matter expertise of the target audience/reader;
- ✓ the expectations of influencers and decision-makers regarding, among other things, a balance between technical and business specs;
- ✓ the phase of the complex sales cycle.

It is a tall order, but one that can be greatly facilitated by information garnered from market research and experience.

## **IT'S A MISTAKE TO IGNORE DESIGN AND DISTRIBUTION**

In general, white papers are text-heavy. The IT white papers in my survey sample were no different. However, long blocks of text, regardless of their information value, may not always appeal to time-constrained readers.

The fix for this potential problem is relatively simple. Implementing a few formatting changes can significantly improve the readability of a white paper.

Examples of formatting fixes include:

- ✓ Inclusion of executive and concluding summaries, highlighting salient information;
- ✓ Use of appropriate graphics and schematics;
- ✓ Use of bullets that highlight major takeaways;
- ✓ Use of callouts and highlighted text for emphasis;

- ✓ Judicious use of photographs and illustrations that support the narrative;
- ✓ Use of headers, page layout and font sizes that are easy on the eye.

These changes break up an otherwise tedious long text and allow for a quick read, scanning, and easy recall of key points.

Creating compelling content is important. Also essential is ensuring that the readers have easy access to the published reports. This makes the choice of distribution channels a critical component of the marketing strategy.

Numerous options of distribution channels are available to white paper marketers, including:

- ✓ posting the documents on the company website;
- ✓ creating efficient archives that are easy to find and optimized for search engines;
- ✓ incorporating buzz about the reports in email or newsletter marketing;
- ✓ embedding links to download sites in corporate press releases and Blogs;
- ✓ syndication of reports through third-parties that serve strategic markets

Ensuring that the content of each white paper is evergreen allows the publisher to maximize the benefits of publicity generated from the various distribution

channels. This goes back to the initial point about brainstorming and having a content marketing strategy.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Companies develop white papers because they are powerful marketing tools. How well these tools perform depends on the clarity of underlying marketing objective, and the adoption of a few winning essentials, such as an undivided focus on the target reader's interests, use of an appropriate tone, and a distribution strategy that takes advantage of the long shelf life of well-written white papers.

Here are some motivating thoughts:

- ✓ Prospects have ample options as to where to get information – only sources perceived by them as credible and relevant will hold their interest.
- ✓ Perceptive prospects know sales pitch when they see it.
- ✓ The news is getting around that white papers are for soft selling. Hype is out.
- ✓ Trust building is best achieved through creating and nurturing relationships with helpful and relevant information.

Creating compelling white papers is an expensive process. It makes good business sense to ensure that nothing undermines the return on the investment.

## **ABOUT REPORT CONTENT WRITER**

Rachel U. Agheyisi, the Executive Director of Report Content Writer (RCW), prepared this guide. RCW specializes in white papers and case studies used by IT companies for quality lead generation. If you need help developing these viral marketing tools, please contact Rachel at [rachel@reportcontentwriter.com](mailto:rachel@reportcontentwriter.com).

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