how to
write a white paper

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A white paper is a document that addresses a situation or problem and attempts to offer a solution. White papers deliver high value by being both an information vehicle and powerful marketing tool.

Successful white papers offer a mixture of technology-speak and marketing-application-speak; it can be a difficult task to find the proper balance between the two.

Five Secrets to Writing a GREAT White Paper

1. **Understand the Product**
   You have to know the product backwards and forwards. You have to understand what it does for people – the benefits it brings to society, and how it does it.

2. **Know Your Target Audience**
   You must write your white paper towards a specific audience – the one whose problems are being solved by the new technology. You must know what problems are being solved.

3. **Focus on Needs of the Reader...**
   There are really only two ways to write white papers: (1) by focusing on your self-interests or (2) by concentrating on the interests of your readers. The self-interest or "chest-beating" approach focuses exclusively on a product, service or solution by expounding on its benefits, features and implications. The alternative (and BEST APPROACH) is to focus on the needs of your readers. This can be effectively accomplished by leading with the problems your solution overcomes, rather than the actual solution itself. By focusing on the pain points experienced by the reader and talking about the problems caused by those pains, you establish credibility with the reader and simultaneously filter out unqualified customers.

4. **...But Be Sure to Highlight How the Product Solves Problems**
   Remember: a white paper is part technology, part marketing. Your white paper must clearly explain how the new technology solves the problems of your target audience, and it must do this in a way the target audience can understand.

5. **Appeal to "short attention readers" with "great design"**
   Instead of a document made up of page after page of left flush text paragraphs, present your information with visual elements such as bullets, sidebars, shaded text boxes, concept graphics, and other illustrations to grab reader attention. Easy to say, difficult to do.

A Standard White Paper Outline

1. **Executive Summary/Abstract --**
   A one-paragraph description of what the paper is about. Do not state the conclusion here; simply tell the reader what the purpose of the paper is. Customers frequently read only the abstract and conclusion of white papers, so provide material that gives them a good reason to read the details.

2. **Explanation of the Problem --**
   One-to-two paragraphs covering the problem and a little background. Be straightforward and succinct. Avoid obfuscatory language, or what one white paper author calls "hidden assumptions."

3. **Main Messages and Problem Solving --**
   How the application of the product solves the problem. Provide evidence of how the product solves the problem, and why it is the best solution available. A reasonably well thought-out series of bullets that

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build the argument yet give readers the impression that they're drawing their own conclusions from facts you're presenting. Be sure they include nothing false and omit nothing true.

4. **Explaining The Product's Design --**
How the product works in general. While this is not the place to describe how the product solves the problem, the section is oriented so that the reader will be able to understand the product's application to the problem. This and the following section are the meat of the white paper.

5. **For More Information (How to Follow Us) Conclusion --**
A one-paragraph conclusion highlighting why the product is the best solution to the problem and how readers can contact you for further information. This is your call to action.

How to Promote A White Paper

Here's a 7-step launch process that will get a white paper firing on all cylinders:

1. **Create a strong landing page**
Landing pages are critical to convert visitors into leads and customers. A landing page should include a powerful teaser that incentivizes the reader to download a paper. To keep visitors focused, consider including a video overview of the paper, a contact form below the fold and compelling content to drive conversion.

2. **Put a perspective news release on the wire**
Perspective news releases share your white paper in press release format. Not only does the wire service get your arguments into the hands of the media, but it also creates potentially thousands of inbound links from sites like Google News, Yahoo Finance and Reuters.

3. **Distribute pitch letters to reporters**
Pitch letters position a white paper with a teaser, enticing reporters to hear the story in a phone interview. While not all reporters will respond, they will be aware of the message. Those who do respond may provide valuable briefing time and a chance at a write-up.

4. **Offer byline articles**
Byline articles are worth gold to marketers. But they're only possible if the content is educational. Putting together a byline proposal may secure a print story about your white paper in major publications.

5. **Pitch speaking opportunities**
Tradeshow organizers grow attendance when attendees know they'll learn something. Pitch tradeshow sales reps to add the white paper topic to the speaker agenda. Tie an educational topic to the presentation. The more tradeshows educate, the more tickets they'll sell.

6. **Syndicate your white paper**
White paper syndication is a great way to generate leads quickly and motivate a sales team. Use both free and pay sites to maximize reach and early lead flow. A few early sales are contagious.

7. **Leverage social media**
Social media is all about sharing useful content. Strategically place retweet and sharebuttons within the white paper and on the landing page. If you've written good content, readers will spread the word.

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