

Chapter 1

Unleashing the Power of White Papers

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting familiar with the ultimate form of content: white papers
 - ▶ Acknowledging trends and avoiding typical problems with white papers
 - ▶ Tracing the rise of white papers in business-to-business marketing
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Have you ever had to look into buying something big for your company? I'm not talking about an espresso machine for the lunchroom; I mean something really big. Something like when your boss calls you into his office and says, "We've got a problem. We've got to find a way to get our team out from under all this paper. We're drowning in it." And he wants you to dig into the problem and report back with some suggestions by Friday. Gulp.

What do you do? If you're like most people, you head to your desk and start madly searching the web for phrases like "buried in paper" or "paper burden." You skim down the search results until you see something promising. You click on the link and go to a web page — and what do you find? Ideally, you find a thoughtful examination of your problem with some useful tips on how to overcome it, most often in a document called a *white paper*. Armed with a few good white papers, you can prepare to make your report.

The same scenario happens every day in companies all over the world. Businesses buy loads of things, and business people need help deciding what to buy. An effective white paper is the best source for this kind of help.

In this chapter, I introduce you to white papers and show how business people use these documents to help select products and services worth many billions of dollars a year. I describe how any business that sells to other businesses can benefit by using white papers in its marketing. Whether you're a marketing person or a copywriter, this chapter shows how you can benefit from the amazing power and reach of white papers, which are truly the "king of content."

Seeing a White Paper for What It Is

Maybe you're already familiar with white papers because you've read them or even written one or two yourself. Or maybe you have a fuzzy idea about white papers but aren't sure how to describe them. Here's the definition I use:

A white paper is a persuasive essay that uses facts and logic to promote a certain product, service, or solution to a problem.

Notice the key elements in this definition. A white paper is *persuasive* but somewhat formal like an *essay* because it uses *facts and logic* to make its points and to promote some *product, service, or solution*.

And here's what a white paper *isn't*. A white paper isn't a sales pitch. A white paper isn't an advertisement, brochure, case study, direct mail piece, or flier. It doesn't have a "Buy Now" button. It doesn't say how good you'll feel to see your new purchase sitting in your office.

Instead of a sales pitch, an effective white paper provides useful, practical, and educational content. Companies use white papers to generate leads, nurture prospects, and build mindshare (as I describe in more detail later in this chapter).

Of course, every white paper must be tailored to a specific audience and a desired outcome. To make that easier for you, this book identifies three basic types of white papers and shows how to use each one in different situations. And to make the writing experience as smooth as possible, I outline my 12-step process that takes you through a white paper's creation from start to finish.

Getting the scoop on the three flavors of white papers

You may think there are many types of white papers with subtle variations that make them hard to tell apart. In fact, there are only three main flavors of white papers, plus the mixtures between them. And they're as simple to tell apart as vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate ice cream.

- ✔ A **backgrounder** is an old-fashioned type of white paper that focuses on the features, functions, benefits, and payback of a product or service from one vendor. You can say this flavor "zooms in" on one offering to describe it in depth. A backgrounder is so simple, classic, and predictable that I think of it as vanilla ice cream (more on that in Chapter 6).
- ✔ A **numbered list** is a lively set of questions, points, issues, or tips about a certain topic. This format is extremely popular and easy to skim. And

you can combine it with either of the other two types of white papers. Because a numbered list is so light and easy to digest, I like to compare it to strawberry ice cream (to see what I mean, skip to Chapter 7).

- ✓ A **problem/solution** is a factual discussion of a major problem that has never been solved. It considers the scope of the problem, describes the existing solutions and their drawbacks, and recommends a new, improved solution for best results. You can say this flavor “zooms out” to give a high-level overview of an entire industry. The problem/solution is the hardest-working and longest-lasting white paper of all. And a problem/solution white paper is so rich and long lasting that I compare it to chocolate ice cream (see Chapter 8 for details).

Following a proven system for creating white papers

Doing a white paper is a big, challenging project, far tougher than writing a blog or a sales letter. A white paper must be packed with research and useful information and run at least five pages with an attractive design. Many people are involved, and many things can go wrong. To help you keep all your white paper projects on track and avoid making common mistakes, I provide a 12-step process for planning and producing a white paper — the very same process I use with my own clients. Here’s how it goes:

1. **Assemble the team.** Pull together all the people you need to complete the white paper, such as a writer, a designer, an illustrator, subject matter experts, and reviewers.
2. **Hold the initial conference call.** Discuss the project and get everyone on the same page. If any differences arise, sort them out now to avoid surprises later.
3. **Prepare the plan.** Write up a brief plan for the white paper. Circulate and tweak it until all reviewers approve.
4. **Gather your research.** Take a deep dive into the subject through company background, web research, and interviews with experts.
5. **Prepare an executive summary.** Write a one-page summary of the white paper’s proposed direction. Circulate it until all reviewers approve.
6. **Create the first draft of the paper and graphics.** Write the first full-length draft of the white paper and create graphics to go with it.
7. **Get the first round of feedback.** Gather comments from all reviewers on the text and graphics. Clarify any unclear or contradictory comments.
8. **Revise to create the second draft.** Rework the first-draft text and graphics to incorporate comments.

9. **Solicit a second round of feedback.** Gather comments from all reviewers on the second-draft text and graphics.
10. **Collect and check sources.** Prepare a bundle of sources to spot-check and file away for later reference, if needed.
11. **Prepare the final document.** Finalize the text, graphics, and page design for the finished white paper. Generate the final PDF.
12. **Wrap up the project.** Take care of any payments, permissions, and post-mortem to tie up any loose ends.

I explain each of these steps in detail in Chapters 12 and 13, including who does what and any common pitfalls to watch out for along the way. And in Chapter 16, I describe 40 tactics you can use to promote a finished white paper to your target audience and note which ones are must-do's.

Declaring White Papers the “King of Content”

My personal experiences plus a stream of survey results for many years have convinced me that white papers are the top of the pops, the cap of the pyramid, the acme, the pinnacle, the absolute king of content. In fact, I believe white papers are the single most powerful piece of content any business-to-business (B2B) vendor can create. Why do I say so? Because no other piece of content can generate so many business benefits for so long — when it's done right.

But sadly, most white papers aren't nearly as engaging or persuasive as they could be. Three serious drawbacks afflict many white papers: too much selling, too much hype, and too much focus on the vendor.

The following sections show how B2B buyers appreciate effective white papers, discuss how to avoid the three worst flaws, and provide a “white paper mantra” to help you stay focused on creating the best possible documents.



When I was a marketing executive, my team tried everything in the playbook: advertising, case studies, channel promotions, direct mail, microsites, placed articles, press releases, sales calls, slide decks, trade shows, and white papers. You name it, we tried it. The two tactics that topped everything for generating leads and building mindshare were case studies and white papers. We had to keep producing more case studies every quarter, but we needed only one or two white papers a year. Nothing could touch a white paper for generating a strong return on the effort we invested in it.

Separating B2C from B2B

You see one side of the economy every time you go to a corner store or the mall. Think about a grocery store that sells everything from soup to nuts. Any company that makes any product you can find in that store, from A1 Steak Sauce to Ziploc containers, is called *business-to-consumer* or B2C. Most of these companies advertise on TV, radio, and on the web, trying to burn their logos into people's brains. Making a B2C purchase in a store is simple: You just pick out what you want and pay for it.

The other side of the economy is harder to spot, but it's there. Every company needs things to run the business, and they have to get them somewhere. This type of shopping, where business people buy something for their company, is called *business-to-business* or B2B. Making a B2B purchase is more complicated: It involves more people, time, paperwork, and money.

When a businessperson buys a major item like accounting software, factory equipment, or lab services, the process is much more deliberate than running to the store to pick up a can of beans. The decision can involve a group of people — as many as 25! — who talk about it for weeks, months, or even years. The ticket price can be huge, up to tens of millions of dollars. The buying committee always looks at the cost/benefit of the purchase and figures out how long it will take to see a payback on that money, also known as the return on investment (ROI).

This kind of B2B transaction is called a *complex sale*. The B2B economy involves millions of complex sales every year, adding up to many billions of dollars. Today's B2B buyers need information to help them make their decisions, and they find a lot of it in white papers.

Seeing the growing trend to white papers

In 2002, I ran a Google search for “white papers” that yielded 2.8 million hits. A decade later, in 2012, the same search got 39.5 million hits — 14 times as many. Clearly, during those ten years, a lot more people started talking about white papers, and a lot more companies started using them. But you don't have to take my word for it.

The effectiveness of white papers at generating leads, nurturing prospects, and building mindshare has been recognized in survey after survey and study after study. Here are some specifics that confirm the power of these documents in B2B marketing:

- ✓ “Probably the most important tool in the B2B marketer's kit is the white paper.” — MarketingSherpa, June 15, 2011
- ✓ “When done right, nothing pulls in qualified sales leads like a well-targeted offer for a juicy white paper.” — marketing guru Larry Chase, March 7, 2011

- ✔ White papers “continue to be the ‘must-have’ asset in the technology marketer’s toolkit.” Two out of three B2B buyers surveyed find white papers “very” or “extremely influential” in buying decisions. — Eccolo Media 2011 B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report, October 2011
- ✔ White papers are the favorite sources for 64 percent of B2B buyers during the early stages of decision making, higher than any other type of marketing collateral. — Sirius Decision, 2010
- ✔ Sixty-one percent of all B2B marketers surveyed use white papers. — Content Marketing Institute, 2012
- ✔ White papers are the most popular form of content for B2B technology buyers in Australia, France, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States (and the second-most popular in Germany and India). — TechTarget, 2010

Spotting three flaws in many white papers

So all you have to do is type up a few white papers, promote the heck out of them so they show up in Google, and wait for the sales to roll in, right? Well, not exactly. Not all white papers are created equal.

I’ve followed this field for close to 20 years as a journalist, marketing executive, and copywriter, looking at fresh white papers every week. And I’m sad to say that the vast majority of the documents I’ve seen have been much less engaging and persuasive than they should have been. Far too many white papers suffer from the critical flaws outlined in the following three sections.

Too much selling, too little useful information

Far from providing helpful information, too many white papers are just a sales pitch in disguise. They may have a promising title and a good-looking cover, but the guts amount to little more than a brochure. Surveys show that business people want useful information, not a sales pitch.



If your white paper is little more than a sales pitch, the business people who see it will be irritated and deeply disappointed. Why wouldn’t they be? You committed two of the worst infractions in business: You lied to them, and you wasted their time. Unless your company is the only game in town, they’ll probably knock you off their list of possible suppliers. They may even start saying nasty things about you to other B2B buyers and in forums across the web. Rather than help your company’s cause, a poor white paper can actually set you back by generating negative word of mouth and turning off prospective buyers.

Too much hype, too little proof

If your white paper avoids becoming a sales pitch and you honestly try to fill it with useful information, a second pitfall awaits: Making claims with no proof to support them. I'm surprised how many people have forgotten everything they learned about writing essays in college. To build an argument, you don't just state your views as though they're self-evident. You need to go out and find evidence to support what you're saying. If you can't find any proof to support your argument, your white paper is nothing but hot air. For tips on how to research a white paper and build a strong argument, see Chapter 14.

Too much focus on the seller, not the buyer

No B2B buyer cares a fig about your company's history, awards, state-of-the-art research labs, or total commitment to quality. Buyers care only about their problem and whether you can help them with it. If you can, they may take a few moments to check out all your company's achievements. But if you lead with those in your white paper, you'll lose them for sure.

You can't afford to look at a white paper as just another piece of marketing collateral. You can't get away with trotting out the same marketing speak and indulging in the same chest-beating. White papers are different. Your readers look at everything from their perspective as B2B buyers with a problem. Unless you put yourself in their shoes, answer their questions, and provide information with real value, they won't even bother to finish your paper.

Those are the three biggest problems, but there's more. You can see the top ten white paper problems to avoid in Chapter 17.

Using a mantra to avoid problems

A simple way to avoid all the problems in the previous sections is to use a mantra every time you think about a white paper. Repeat it as often as you need. Post it on a sticky note to your screen. E-mail it around to your whole team and to any writer working on a white paper for you. The following mantra provides an excellent summary of what the best white papers do:



An effective white paper helps prospective B2B buyers understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision.

An effective white paper doesn't fall all over itself to make a sales pitch. It doesn't make silly promises or unsupported claims. Instead, it gives a B2B buyer well-researched facts and logical arguments. If your white paper can do that, your company is seen as a trusted advisor, elevated far above any run-of-the-mill vendors that are just trying to peddle their wares.

From this heavenly position, all the usual objections about price or delivery often melt away in the warm glow of the sun. Your white paper has impressed your B2B prospects so much that they want to do business with you, and only you. Congratulations! If you do all of that, you reach white paper nirvana.

Understanding Today's Complex Sale

Companies sell to business buyers differently from how they sell to consumers. The challenge of reaching business buyers is called *B2B marketing*. For many years, the only way to do B2B marketing was through *outbound marketing*, where a company goes out and beats the bushes to find customers with advertising, direct mail, telemarketing, or even door-to-door salespeople.

The Internet forced B2B marketing to develop several new approaches: first, permission marketing, then SEO/SEM/social media marketing, and finally content marketing. These last two methods fit within *inbound marketing*, where a vendor encourages B2B buyers to come to it online. Inbound marketing is really in tune with the times because most B2B buyers now do their own research without relying on salespeople. Google plays a huge role in content marketing; if your company isn't on the first page of Google's search results, it doesn't exist.

These are all huge changes from just a few years ago. And these changes help explain the meteoric rise in the number and influence of B2B white papers over the past 15 years.

B2B marketing has evolved quickly

For many years, B2B marketing consisted of buying ads, sending out mailings, handing out trinkets at trade shows, and cold calling, in the hope that 1 or 2 percent of the people who heard your message were ready to buy whatever you were selling.

But in the past 20 years, this whole field has turned upside down. Today, marketers have better-targeted and less-expensive ways to reach B2B buyers and keep them engaged throughout a complex sale. Table 1-1 shows four approaches to B2B marketing, two each for outbound and inbound marketing. The bottom line is pretty convincing: Inbound marketing with content is up to 62 percent less expensive per lead than outbound.

Table 1-1 Four Approaches to B2B Marketing

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Interruption marketing (out-bound)	Interrupt people when they're reading, listening, watching, or working on something else	Works on some of the people some of the time	Irritating; wasteful; low success rate; highest cost per lead
Permission marketing (out-bound)	Get permission before sending promotions to B2B buyers	Less irritating; more effective; better targeted; lower cost per lead	Still "pushing" promotions at buyers; not complete without good content
Search engine marketing, social media marketing (inbound)	Attract B2B buyers with SEO, SEM, and social media	Customers come to you; works 24/7; even lower cost per lead	Not complete without good content
Content marketing (inbound)	Attract B2B buyers with online content like blogs, case studies, infographics, videos, and white papers	Customers come to you; works 24/7; lowest cost per lead	Difficult to create good content; hard to stand out now that almost everyone uses it

Interruption marketing is out

Advertising on radio and TV, direct mail, and cold calling all interrupt whatever you're doing to give you a sales pitch. YouTube also interrupts you when you have to watch a commercial before you can see the cute kitten playing the piano. You tell me whether that works: Do you remember whose ad ran before the kitten? These techniques afflict B2B marketing, too. For example, legions of B2B telemarketers still hit the phones every morning, dialing for dollars. Although it can work on some of the people some of the time, it's irritating, wasteful, and expensive.

Permission marketing is so 1999

In the late 1990s, an amazing new concept emerged: What if a company actually got your permission before it interrupted you? Getting your permission

can take many forms: You sign up for a newsletter, subscribe to an RSS feed, or drop your card into a fishbowl at a booth. Marketers call this *raising your hand* to show that you're interested. Permission marketing does save a lot of time, trouble, and annoyance. With it, a B2B vendor knows everyone on its list has some interest in what the company sells. But it still relies on "pushing" promotions at possible buyers, interrupting all those people.

Marketing with SEO, SEM, and social media is in (sort of)

More recently, another approach came to the fore: Why not use the web and Google to attract customers to you? The first wave of inbound marketing used search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) to match a company's website to what B2B buyers were searching for.

Then came social media, which is still creating a huge buzz. Social media is fine for B2C buyers who can "like" a fast-food company and get a coupon for \$1 off their next meal. But it's much harder to use in B2B marketing, where buyers take a more systematic approach to making a much bigger purchase. Most business people never "like" any supplier on Facebook or follow one on Twitter; they're too busy doing their real jobs.

Marketing with content is growing fast

Content marketing builds on SEO, SEM, and social media by providing the missing ingredient that all these approaches depend on: engaging content that B2B buyers actually want to access. Social media can be an ideal channel for promoting the great content that a B2B vendor has to offer. Posted online, that content works 24/7 and tends to snowball over time as people pass around materials, retweet links, and discuss the company.

Marketing with content enables you to focus like a laser on the B2B buyers who are most likely to buy next. And this approach is getting bigger every year. The 2013 benchmark report from the Content Marketing Institute surveyed 1,416 marketers who said they now spend, on average, one-third of their budgets on content marketing. And a lot of this funding has been taken away from the outbound side of the budget. Because white papers are a "must-have" tool in the content marketer's toolkit, they're being swept along with this fast-moving trend.

Today's B2B buyers do their own research

Before the Internet, the B2B salesperson was a powerful gatekeeper. Now, B2B buyers find their own information and call up a salesperson at the very last moment, maybe never. That means the life of a B2B salesperson isn't a happy one. Many salespeople have been effectively replaced by content placed online and indexed by Google. And when a B2B vendor gets noticed and blessed by Google, content marketing works like a dream, generating leads and helping to cement sales for far less cost than any salesperson.

Closing the door on salespeople

Every B2B buyer used to have to talk to a salesperson to get the smallest scrap of information, even a brochure or data sheet sent by snail mail. B2B salespeople were the gatekeepers holding all the information about their company's offerings. Today, that's gone out the window. Surveys show that 80 to 90 percent of all B2B buyers now do their own product research, thank you very much.

B2B buyers can use the web to find all the information they need to evaluate a purchase, along with reviews and recommendations from other business people who bought the same thing. Calling a salesperson is now one of the last steps in any purchase. In other words, salespeople have been cut out of the action.

Getting noticed by Google

Google has become the great god of inbound marketing, serving the vast majority of all searches done around the world and leading B2B buyers to the companies they do business with. How many people ever look past the first page of their search results? No one outside Google knows exactly how it evaluates websites. But one thing's for sure: If your company has fresh, helpful content on its website, Google will move your company up in the search results, past other companies that lack this kind of content.

Many companies still use their websites as an electronic brochure with nothing beyond the expected information about their location, product line, and undying commitment to customer service. Ho hum. That won't get you noticed by Google. Having effective content can mean the difference between being noticed in Google or ignored. These days, not many B2B vendors can afford to be ignored by Google.

Checking out content marketing in action

When your boss asks you to look for a solution to your company's paper burden, what do you do? Well, the marketing team at Acme Scanners anticipated your searches and put together a white paper designed to help B2B buyers like you understand the issue of paper burden. That white paper offers practical tips on solving the problem and urges you to take the next step: using an online calculator to see how much your company can save by buying a few Acme ScanOMatic 3000s.

And because Acme's content is good, and its SEO, SEM, and social media promotions are solid, Google noticed Acme and put it on the first page of the search results for the keywords "paper burden," which you type in when you do your Googling, which brings you to Acme's white paper, which you click to download. This is content marketing in action, exactly the way it's supposed to work.

Profiting from White Papers

As I touch on in “Getting the scoop on the three flavors of white papers,” earlier in this chapter, white papers come in three main flavors. A *backgrounder* focuses on the technical details and business benefits of a certain offering. A *numbered list* rounds up a set of questions, points, or tips about a certain issue. And a *problem/solution* describes a new, improved solution to an industry-wide problem. Each flavor has unique strengths that make it most effective for B2B buyers at the top, middle, or bottom of the sales funnel. When you understand the key differences between these three flavors of white papers, you can select the best flavor to meet whatever marketing challenge you’re facing.

The funnel as a numbers game

Throughout this book, I refer to *the funnel* as shorthand for a classic theory about B2B sales. In case you never studied marketing, here’s how the theory goes: A complex sale is like

a funnel, and each buyer a drop of water. As shown in the figure, the funnel is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, but it leaks all the way down.

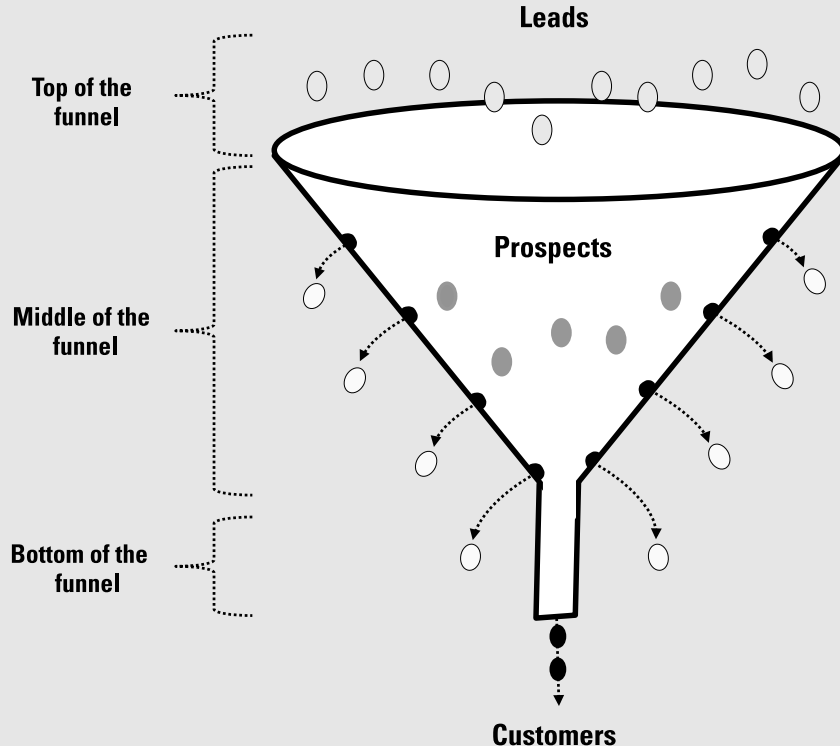


Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

Here’s how the funnel works. Say a company, such as Acme Scanners, seeks to attract B2B buyers into the top of the funnel. This step is called *generating leads* or *filling the funnel*. Acme uses a great white paper to attract potential buyers looking for help with a certain problem, such as paper burden, even if they’ve never heard of Acme.

Next, the Acme marketing team determines which leads seem most promising. Some may match the profile of an ideal customer. Some may have an urgent problem, so they’re on a fast track to buy. Others may not fit, have no urgent need, or lose interest in Acme; all those leak away. But some stay in the funnel, where they’re now called *prospects*. Acme nurtures prospects by providing more value, often in the form of useful content (hint, hint). Naturally enough, this process corresponds to the middle part of the funnel, where it begins to narrow.

Sooner or later, each serious prospect that remains in the funnel creates a shortlist of possible vendors, and Acme wants to be on that list. Of course, the narrowest part of the funnel is the tube at the bottom. That’s where more prospects lose interest or buy from someone else. Only a few prospects buy from Acme and drip out the bottom of the funnel as paying customers.

The funnel is a simple image, but it conveys a profound truth: Every B2B vendor must attract

far more leads than it needs to close, because some leak away at every stage. In other words, B2B selling is a numbers game.

If someone at Acme keeps track, he can develop metrics around its funnel. For example, say that a two-year pattern shows that for every ten leads, five become prospects, and two end up buying. The marketing team can then calculate how many leads it must generate to reach certain sales targets.

The following table shows some sample revenue goals, where the typical deal size is \$100,000. You can see that to reach \$10 million in sales, Acme needs to generate 500 leads. It takes a lot of phone calls and expensive mailings to generate that many leads with outbound marketing alone.

Here’s the beauty of marketing with content. An effective white paper posted on Acme’s website can generate leads 24/7 for a year or two with no further effort. No other marketing tactic can do that. Of course, one white paper alone may not bring in all 500 leads that generate \$10 million in sales. But it might. The performance of each white paper is another metric Acme can track. Then the company can start to predict how many white papers it needs to generate X number of leads and Y dollars of sales. Marketing with content is a numbers game, too.

Leads, Prospects, Customers, and Revenues

	<i>Track Record</i>	<i>Sales Goal: \$1 Million</i>	<i>Sales Goal: \$10 Million</i>	<i>Sales Goal: \$100 Million</i>
Number of leads	10	50	500	5,000
Number of prospects (50% of leads)	5	25	250	2,500
Number of customers (40% of prospects, or 20% of leads)	2	10	100	1,000
Total sales reached at \$100,000 each	\$200,000	\$1 million	\$10 million	\$100 million

Assumption: The ratio of leads to prospects to customers remains constant.

At the top of the funnel

White papers are especially useful at the top of the sales funnel for generating leads and educating your own sales force (if any); channel partners like distributors or resellers (if any); and opinion leaders, like analysts, bloggers, and journalists who cover your market. You can also use white papers for the more ambitious project of redefining a market space and the all-around goal of building mindshare.



The best flavors of white papers to use at the top of the funnel are a problem/solution, a numbered list, or a mash-up of the two.

Generating leads

The simplest way to generate leads is to provide content that follows the white paper mantra to help a B2B buyer understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision. Because most business people Google their issues, problems, or upcoming decisions, a well-targeted problem/solution white paper that discusses an industry-wide problem — backed up with a good promotional campaign — should appear in all the appropriate search results.

For example, a problem/solution white paper from Acme Scanners could be called “How to Get Out from Under a Mountain of Paper with Unattended Scanning.” (For tips on how to create and use a problem/solution white paper, see Chapter 8.)

Another way to get attention and attract leads is to be provocative. That certainly works for Lady Gaga. In B2B marketing, you can’t exactly drape your product in a meat dress, but you can still be outspoken. A white paper formatted as a numbered list can challenge perceived wisdom, knock down sacred cows, and generate heat and light that attracts attention and draws in onlookers. For example, a provocative numbered list from Acme could be called “7 Gotchas in Automated Scanning and How to Avoid Falling for Them.” (For tips on how to create and use a numbered list, see Chapter 7.)

Educating salespeople and partners

A vendor’s own sales force can benefit from hearing all the powerful arguments and detailed information in a white paper. They can use these same proof points and arguments when they interact with prospects, or they can pass the white paper along directly to possible buyers.

Channel partners can include any distributors, resellers, retailers, and consultants that work with your company plus add-on marketers that create products, such as books, newsletters, or training for your product. Any flavor of white paper can be useful to these groups. Because they’re involved with

B2B buyers from top to bottom of the funnel, channel partners or add-on marketers can give your white paper directly to a lead or prospective buyer. Just remember: Many vendors compete for the limited time and attention of partners. If you have better white papers than your competition, you can win more mindshare with channel partners, which can pay off in more sales.

Redefining a market space

Sometimes a new company wants to shake up an existing market space. Sometimes an established company wants to expand into neighboring markets. Sometimes a company wants to shrink and refocus all its efforts on one promising niche. All these strategies call for redefining a market space, which is extremely challenging. A white paper can spell out the company's best thinking on the limitations or opportunities facing it and why the management team wants to set out in a new direction.



Of all the goals you can have for a white paper, redefining a market space is the most ambitious. It can take a couple of years and more than a million dollars' worth of publicity to create a new technology buzzword and lodge it into people's minds. One white paper alone won't do it; it could take 10 or 20.

Building mindshare

You can think of mindshare as the answer to a couple of questions: "How many people in your target market have heard of your company?" and "How many of those people think your company has something useful to offer?" The more, the better. You want to send your white papers to all the analysts, bloggers, and journalists who cover your market. You want your white paper to spread through word of mouth and social media and be passed around the company and to peers in other companies. To find out many possible tactics about how to promote a white paper, see Chapter 16.



In general, the easier it is to access a white paper, the more mindshare it generates. An obnoxious registration form with too many pesky questions can kill the interest in even the best white paper. If you don't use any registration gate, a white paper tends to spread much farther and faster. So if you're aiming more for mindshare than for leads, stay away from registration.

Throughout the funnel

White papers can also be useful at the middle of the sales funnel, during the long period when a complex sale is deliberated. During this period, white papers can engage and nurture B2B prospects and cast fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) on competitors to try to knock them off the prospect's shortlist.



The best flavors of white papers to use at the middle of the funnel are a numbered list or a mash-up of a numbered list and problem/solution. The numbered list format is always easy to scan and entertaining to read.

Nurturing B2B prospects

By the middle of the funnel, you can assume that a prospect has heard of your company and engaged somewhat with you. But you must keep your prospects interested through the long decision-making process ahead. Publishing a new white paper as a numbered list gives you a good reason to contact them without making a sales pitch. At this point in the funnel, prospects are more likely to notice and skim through a lively numbered list than a more detailed technical white paper that requires a lot more focus and thought.

Casting FUD on competitors

By the middle of the funnel, the B2B buyer has most likely drawn up a shortlist of possible vendors with two or three companies on it. You can use a white paper to throw mud at those competitors, darken their name in the buyer's eyes, and ideally knock them off the shortlist. This classic marketing technique is called FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt). For example, Acme could use a numbered list called "8 Things You Should Know Before You Buy an Automated Scanner." By appealing to a buyer's fear of failure or embarrassment, uncertainty about a lesser-known vendor or product, or doubt about the claims made by competitors, this kind of white paper can effectively block an opponent. For more tips on FUD and how to use it, see Chapter 7.

At the bottom of the funnel

Even at the bottom of the funnel, white papers have a role to play. It's too late now to impress buyers with the scope of your company's vision in a problem/solution or to titillate them with provocative comments in a numbered list. At the bottom of the funnel, it's time for facts and figures.



The best flavor to use at the bottom of the funnel is a backgrounder. A backgrounder provides the technical details and payback numbers an evaluator needs to make a recommendation to the B2B buying committee.

When prospects finally reach the bottom of the funnel, they want to do their due diligence on each vendor on their shortlist. A knowledgeable person from the prospect's company often gets the job of evaluating all the choices, figuring out the strengths and weaknesses of each one, and reporting back with some recommendations. At this point, a backgrounder packed with technical details and benefits can really help that person complete his evaluation. For example, this kind of backgrounder from Acme could be called "Fifth-Generation Technology Innovations in the Acme ScanOMatic 3000." (For tips on how to create and use a backgrounder, see Chapter 6.)

Can white papers help close sales?

You can debate whether a white paper can help close a deal. Just before B2B buyers make a decision, they're more likely looking at data sheets, configurations, and delivery dates and checking references from existing customers.

Most marketers believe white papers are more powerful at the top and middle of the funnel to help generate leads and nurture prospects, and not so useful at the bottom to help close sales. I tend to agree, but there's a little more to the story. The latest surveys show that B2B buyers

still look at white papers even in the last stage of making a purchase.

And when B2B buyers get right down to making a decision, the cumulative effect of the white papers they've seen (or not seen) plays a part in their decision. If one vendor consistently provided useful, helpful, and professional white papers that stood head and shoulders above the competition, that certainly gives that vendor an edge.

Late in the buying process, each vendor puts in a last-ditch effort to impress a prospect with the unmatched strengths of its offering. And if one of the companies on the shortlist has no technical white papers to contribute at this point, can you imagine what that does to its chances?

Discovering Who Uses White Papers and Who Should

B2B marketers in many sectors routinely use white papers as a standard tool in their marketing toolkit. In other sectors, white papers are just starting to be known. And in some, these documents are seldom or never seen. The sectors that most often use white papers today include

- ✓ Business services: Finance, HR, insurance, marketing, and outsourcing
- ✓ Electrical manufacturers: Audio-video gear, components, lighting, and heavy power equipment
- ✓ Electronic manufacturers: Chipmakers, computers, peripherals, and printers
- ✓ Government: Policy positions, research reports, and trial balloons
- ✓ Healthcare: Device makers, pharmaceuticals, and medical product and service providers
- ✓ Manufacturers of B2B equipment: Aerospace, heavy equipment, factory systems, processing equipment, ships, transit systems, and trains
- ✓ NGOs and nonprofits: Policy and position papers and research reports

- ✔ Processors of B2B materials: Glass, metals, plastic, rare earths, and silicon
- ✔ Software: Any B2B software except apps selling for \$1
- ✔ Technical services: Engineers, laboratories, quality control, and testing

The following sectors could certainly benefit from using white papers:

- ✔ Construction: New materials, methods, and technologies
- ✔ Consultants: New methodologies or data, such as using social media for marketing, research, and customer engagement
- ✔ Delivery and transport: Energy efficiency, fleet management, and new RFID or tracking systems
- ✔ Education: New methods and technologies, online and distance learning, and reports to attract donors, students, and funding
- ✔ Energy, oil and gas: New approaches like fracking, pipeline, or cleanup technologies
- ✔ Environmental or “green tech”: New technologies and methods for everything from light bulbs to monitoring the oceans
- ✔ Real estate: New B2B business models, construction materials and methods, energy efficiency, and renovations
- ✔ Utilities: Energy efficiency, smart meters, and smart grid

In fact, you can ask three simple questions to determine whether any B2B company could benefit from white papers:

- ✔ Does the company sell something relatively new?
- ✔ Does it sell something relatively complex?
- ✔ Does it sell something relatively expensive?

If you answer “yes” to one of these questions, that company could probably use white papers. If you answer “yes” to two or three questions, that company can definitely use white papers. For more on these questions, see Chapter 4.

As more companies discover the wonders of content marketing, more are adopting white papers every day. I get frequent queries from people asking, “Can we use white papers in my business or my sector?” More often than not, I answer, “Sure!”