



Using White Papers For Strategic Advantage

Writing white papers to influence decision-makers

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Using White Papers For Strategic Advantage

Before we get into writing white papers, let's take a step back and find out where they came from. Why 'white' for example?

White Papers were first written in the diplomatic service, mostly to introduce policy statements. At that time, and we're talking the turn of the last century, there were actually three different types of papers:

- White papers for policy statements
- Grey papers for informative purposes and
- Black papers for disavowed clandestine activities

So, the purpose at that time was mostly for Government and Scientific bodies to highlight their peers on particular subjects, for example, investigations into new government strategies, regulations, and high-level communications. In many instances, the writers and the readers would belong to the same set. You knew who were writing for.

These publications were generally supported with impartial, unbiased facts to help the decision-makers. In this respect, the authors had no 'agenda' other than to clarify the subject matter in question.

The definition of the term white paper has changed since then. A quick search in Google News returns white papers from the scientific, government, and commercial sector. That's what we're going to look at today.

How can you, as a business owner, use white papers to do the following:

- Establish your authority?
- Increase your sphere of influence in the media?
- Generate leads that translate into fee-paying projects?

We can see that the humble white paper has evolved into a different creature and is now used to:

- Generate interest in new products and services.
- Differentiate products from competitor's offerings.
- Demonstrate market leadership.
- Promote authors are subject-matter experts.

- Create 'news-flow' for journalists and technology journalists.
- Generate business!

We also need to look at how others perceive white papers. Unlike other sales documents - which are perceived as quick reads and tend to be more disposable - white papers are seen as 'high-value' documents.

I bet your hard drive is stuffed with white papers you're keeping and plan to read some day. Mine is.

So, why is this?

White Papers have 'gravity'.

Most include market research, statistics, and surveys that the authors have carried out, or sponsored in conjunction with a research firm. Despite the 'soft-sell' appearances, white papers can be a very effective way to compliment your sales toolkit.

From my experience, after working as a business writer for twenty-two years in London, Sacramento, and Beijing, white papers are one of the most effective, low-cost, and simplest ways to convert prospective customers into paying customers.

Let's look at how we can do this.

Key Strategic Marketing Tools

Again, go back to all those white papers in you're 'My Documents' folder.

- Why did you download them?
- Why are you keeping them?

In IT, business documents are critical to your company's survival, growth, and success.

After all, not every customer will phone or email you about your products – but they will download high-value white papers —and then read them on their own terms.

According to market research, **white papers are the first port-of-call for decision-makers when investigating a product.**

Decision-makers, such as CIOs and IT Managers, are under tremendous pressure to make the correct choice when choosing a products and/or service.

You can help them make that decision by producing persuasive arguments in your paper that demonstrates why your solution fits their requirements.

Think of it like this: your document helps them build a case for recommending your product to their superiors e.g. Board of Directors.

Graphs, charts and diagrams all support this call to action. These are cut-and-pasted out of your documents and into PowerPoint presentations that the CIO makes to his team.

Role of White Papers for Decision Makers

White papers play a huge role in the IT industry. Again, do a quick Google on, for example, 'white paper security' and see how many results come back.

Consider these facts:

- White papers are the first external source of information consulted by decision-makers on a particular product.
- They are widely distributed amongst those in the decision-making process.
- Executives often consult White Papers even BEFORE their own Sales team.
- White papers provide critical input into the final decision when selecting a product or service.
- White papers have a very long shelf life. Magazines, newspapers and other material are thrown-out very quickly; white papers, in contrast, are filed for future reference and can live for long periods on intranets.

With this in mind, your White Papers need to be more than technical documents.

They should present you, the Author, as an expert, and your company as the right choice over your competitors.

After all, if your white paper demonstrates your expertise over your competitors, why wouldn't customers want to work with you?

In the B2B world, price usually isn't the issue. It's finding the correct solution.

White Paper Marketing: Where to Start

White Paper marketing can create new business opportunities very fast. If you know your product, and know your customers, then there should be a demand for the paper.

But you have to give the subject matter an interesting angle. More on that later!

Don't repeat what's already been written. Give it a unique twist that other writers hadn't thought of.

How to Find Your Angle

To do this, a few points need to be considered:

- White papers are an investment in research, people, and time.
- White papers work well if you have a unique product — or perceived as unique — with information your clients don't already have.
- White papers have a long shelf life. Write your white papers as 'reference' documents. This will increase the likelihood that others will share them and encourage sites, such as Wikipedia, to link and identify them as expert articles.

Mistakes to Avoid

Writing white papers is not for everyone.

Why?

It requires an understanding of the business drivers, the marketing opportunities, and of course how search engines and social media work.

Think of it as a hybrid.

For this reason, be careful about who you choose to write your white paper.

Engineers can't write these. Don't ask them – it's not fair. It's not a technical document. And while they can contribute, don't make them the lead writer. Instead, use them as a source. They can contribute to the technical details, but you need to have an experienced writer managing the development, delivery, and benchmarking.

Setting Writing Targets

Let's say you want to try yourself. How can you start?

If you have some writing expertise, you should be able to write around 1,000 words a day.

To do this:

1. Identify the core topic.
2. Define the problem that the solution addresses.
3. Write in a light conversational style, as if you were talking to a friend.
4. Though the white paper is designed to promote your product, the sales angle is played down and hidden in the 'useful information' you're providing to prospective clients.

5. Include charts, diagrams or matrices that compliment your text.
6. Add a short bio at the end about yourself with contact information, including 1800 telephone numbers and email address.

Once you've written the white paper, get a reliable person to check the grammar and spelling. Make sure it's clear, concise, and to the point.

Then, leave it aside for a day or two. When you return to it, you will have a little distance and be able to see where it needs adjusting.

Now, you're ready to use it for promotion—and that's what we'll talk about in the next tutorial.

White Paper Tactics v Strategy

It's easy to confuse the two as the terms are used interchangeably.

- Strategy is the over-arching objective to move your company forward. In simple terms, it moves the needle.
- Tactics are what you use to get there. Tools, best practices, and methodologies.

Before You Start...

As with all writing, you first have to define your target audience. Once you have this organized, you can then begin to tailor your arguments towards their needs.

It is important to stress this point, as many novice writers—especially those with a technical background—focus on the low-level aspects of the software. Though this has its place, it's probably not here.

Executives, and those in the management layer, are typical white papers readers. So, write with these readers in mind.

As mentioned above, you also need to determine the topic of your white paper.

This may sound obvious but many writers overlook this and ramble from one item to the next.

Setting Objectives

Your white paper is intended to achieve several objectives:

- Establish you as the definitive authority on the subject in question, i.e. that you stand head-and-shoulders above the competition in this area.
- Create awareness of a new market trend and/or a product offering that very specifically addresses a requirement. And it demonstrates how you are uniquely qualified to achieve this objective.
- Ensure that decision-makers select you over your competitors by providing them with persuasive arguments backed up with trustworthy references.

7 Writing Tips

Put the conclusion at the start

The introduction is the best place to summarize your findings - including the conclusions that you have made.

Other publications, such as newspapers, use headlines and paragraph summaries to hold the reader's interest: white papers benefit from the same approach.

Putting the conclusion at the end of your white paper make senses, but you need to be careful as this section is often overlooked by the reader, many of whom won't read to the very end.

Think of Customers as Investors

Try to think of your customers are prospective investors. In addition, investors are a very discriminating audience. They judge technologies, products, and ideas based on objective information and the track record of those involved. They are hungry for real facts and will dismiss unsubstantiated claims. Maintaining their attention involves building trust and offering facts that are interesting, relevant, and true.

They will look for trustworthy evidence to substantiate your claims. By providing this evidence, you not only save them time but also increase your credibility. Finding meaningful testimonials is well worth the effort.

Avoid Assumptions, Jargon, and TLAs

Product descriptions written by product managers, web designers, or marketing directors often contain assumptions (and IT acronyms) that are understood only by their peers. You need to avoid this at all costs.

Your readers will not understand these cryptic references and feel excluded. Before getting into the details of your solution, describe the high-level requirements first.

Start with the essentials:

- Is it hardware or software?
- What are the prerequisites?
- What platform is it designed for?

- What language is it written in?
- Who will use the solution?

Laser Focus on the Specifics

After providing this preliminary information, get to the main issues. If you know that your readers are, for example, technology experts then don't try to teach them about the basics. They'll just skip past these sections.

Generalities and bland repetition drives such readers away. Instead, describe specific aspects that will ring true with your audience.

Is it Remarkable!

What's the one thing that makes this document stand out? Is it a chart, stat, diagram, or research finding? Maybe it's something else.

But you have to write it in such a way that when the reader goes away, they feel compelled to share it.

- Have you read this?
- Did you see what it says about...?
- Why don't we get them in?

Write it so it stands out. Make it remarkable, i.e. that others will remark on it.

After all, anyone can claim that their product solves a problem, but it's more convincing if you can demonstrate it.

Provide evidence that your solution is better than your rivals are—and then substantiate this with, for example, independent benchmark tests.

Get the Text v. Graphic Balance Right

Use graphics, tables, and charts to help the reader understand your product. Graphics are ideal for illustrating the relationship between concepts, technologies, and systems.

Also, remember that the readers will tire after several pages; graphics, tables and charts serve as an alternative to the text while still maintaining their interest in the subject.

Avoid Jargon, Use Clear English

Write to be understood, not to impress!

Though the IT industry is global, many readers (and potential customers) have English as a second language. It's easy to confuse them with lengthy sections, complex sentences, buzzwords, and jargon.

Use simple, plain English.

This type of writing carries real power—the power to explain and convince. If the best ingredient for an effective white paper is a terrific solution to a technical problem, then the next best ingredient is great writing.

You can improve your writing by cutting out excessive wordiness and deadwood phrases and replace them with better expressions. The following is a list of the 'most wanted' culprits. The "deadwood" comes first:

- according to our data -- we find
- accordingly -- therefore, so
- after the conclusion of -- after
- ascertain the location of -- find
- by a factor of two -- two times, double, twice
- come to a conclusion -- conclude
- give consideration to -- consider, examine
- give indication of -- show, indicate, suggest
- in close proximity to -- near
- in some cases -- sometimes
- in the event that -- if
- in the near future -- soon
- in the neighborhood of -- near, about, nearly
- in view of the fact that -- because, since
- it is our opinion that -- we think
- it is possible that -- perhaps

- it is well known that -- (nothing)
- it may be said that -- (nothing)
- make inquiry regarding -- ask about, inquire about
- manner in which -- how
- not with standing the fact that -- although
- on the basis of -- from, because, by
- on the order of -- about, approximately
- present in greater abundance -- more abundant
- prior to -- before
- provided that -- if
- put an end to -- end
- reach a conclusion -- conclude
- serves the function of being -- is
- subsequent to -- after
- the question as to -- whether
- there can be little doubt that -- probably
- utilize or utilization -- use
- with reference to -- about

As mentioned before, an experienced business writer will guide his or her readers through the document and avoid confusing them with acronyms, convoluted sentences, and labyrinthine paragraphs.

Simple, clear writing is concise, effective, and persuasive.

You can significantly improve the effectiveness of your business documents by adopting a clear writing style, which in turns improves your chances of winning new customers.

About Klariti

Klariti develops 'content assets' using white papers, case studies, and industry reports.

We examine, develop, and benchmark content for Government agencies and Financial Service firms to support their social media, corporate blogs, and email communications.

Our website – [Business Writing For Smart People](#) - reflects what we do. If you find something there that's interests you, drop us a line.

Ireland Office

63 Ripley Hills,
Killarney Road,
Bray,
Co Wicklow
Phone: +353-86-886-459

Email: info@klariti.com

Web: <http://www.klariti.com>

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