# White Paper Best Practices

## What is a white paper?

A white paper is a technical or business benefits document that introduces a challenge faced by its readers and makes a strong case why a particular approach to solving the problem is preferred. A white paper usually proposes a solution to a problem, but can also introduce a new concept or describe how to perform technical tasks. Most white papers range from 6-12 pages in length; however, some can exceed 50 pages. White papers are comprised of mostly text and usually very few graphs. However, diagrams, charts and illustrations are commonly included in most white papers.

White papers represent an intersection of technical documentation (i.e., providing technical information about a product or service) with marketing communication (developing information to inform potential customers, improve sales and garner attention in the marketplace).

White papers usually provide valuable information to their intended audience, yet readers of white papers generally understand that the sponsoring company is marketing to them. The marketing aspect of a white paper is a very soft sell. Overt marketing messages are usually left for other documents. Often, solutions are introduced only after a significant case has been established, demonstrating a clear need.

## Ten-step process to writing white papers:

| Step | Description |
|------|-------------|
| 1. Clarify the topic | Focus your lens. Come to the table with a specific topic in mind. Will you be writing about a broad subject or a narrow one? |
| 2. Identify your ideal reader | Identify your ideal reader with precision. Pinpoint the intended reader's industry job title, age and general disposition. Keep the reader in mind as you write the white paper. |
| 3. Decide on an objective | Figure out endgame early. Do you want to educate, sell, inform or differentiate? Is this paper designed to generate leads? Will it be technical or business benefits focused? Be sure to stay on topic through the entire white paper. |
| 4. Develop an outline | Good directions get you to your destination. An outline helps break a paper into manageable pieces and keeps you on track. Be sure to receive buy-in from key people before you write the first word. |
| 5. Interview the experts | The best content lives in someone else's head. If you are not the sole content expert, interview other sources to gather a fresh perspective. When interviewing experts, be sure to ask probing questions such as "Why is that important?" and "What is the implication of that?" |
| 6. Research | The Web is your library. Read as much as you can about your paper's topic. Seek industry analysis, competitor information and internal documents. |
| 7. Write the first page | Lay the foundation and build on it. The first page sets the stage for your document. Carefully craft and refine it to perfection. The rest of your paper will build on those first words. |
| 8. Write the title | First impressions matter. Create a relevant and compelling title that will invite readers to explore your efforts further. Keep it simple and focus on the benefits the paper will bring your ideal reader. |
| 9. Write the core | Break the paper into manageable components. Continue to repeatedly refine, streamline, redraft and fine-tune your messaging. Come back to your paper many times over a period of days. Be sure to stay focused on your topic, your objective and your ideal reader. |
| 10. Hire an editor | For a refining touch, seek an editor. As a painter is blind to missed spots on a wall, so too will you be blind to errors in your writing. An editor can provide an objective safety net for correcting glaring problems and can ensure your words are well-written. |

## Selecting the topic:

Understanding the topical scope of the white paper early is important. For example, consider a white paper on the topic of homeland security. Some questions to ask may include:

- Will this be a high-level overview?
- Should I focus on certain aspects of homeland security, such as air travel, border security, natural resource protection, etc.?
- Will I be introducing the key benefits of homeland security?
- Will I be introducing the positive or negative aspects of homeland security?
- From whose perspective should I be examining the topic: American families, law enforcement, local government authorities, industry, etc.?

## Why interviewing is important:

- Asking an expert a good question speeds the research process
- Experts often have access to information that you could never otherwise find
- Interviewing is more fun than simply searching the Internet
- Some of the best content will come from an interview

## Important title crafting tips:

When thinking about titles, it is very important to revisit your needs assessment and examine the objective of your white paper. If the goal is to generate leads or even help close a sale, the title will be critical. If your white paper is a technical document, it is still wise to come up with a compelling title.

Tips:

- **Make the title a promise,** or a result the reader will achieve after reading the white paper
- **Hook into a dominant resonant emotion**
- **Follow the 3 U's formula**: ultra-specific, unique and useful
- **Respect the readers' intellect** (i.e. don't write out ROI when your ideal reader already knows its meaning)
- **Use of keywords in the title** (i.e. use keywords that are hot topics in the industry today)
- **Shorter titles outperform longer ones**
- **Use a number in the title** (i.e. 10 reasons or 6 mistakes)
- **Include a lively and active verb** (i.e. "eliminating," "growing," "speeding" and "enhancing")
- **Address the why:** Does your title explain why readers should read your white paper?
- **Use a colon:** You can lead with a single word or catchy phrase and immediately follow through with a description of the topic.
- **Job titles:** If you are targeting a very specific audience, it might be wise to include the title of the ideal reader or the title of the type of person who would most benefit from your topic in the white paper title.
- **Write the title late in the process:** Once you have hashed out the key problems and benefits of your solution, a good title might emerge naturally.

## Market Drivers: Why they matter

White papers are generally persuasive documents; thus, it is important to provide proof that your marketplace is changing. By laying out trends early in the white paper, readers might be convinced they are behind the times and read on further. When you quote trusted third-party sources, market drivers add credibility to your white paper. Remember that market drivers are about your industry and not about your solution – so be sure not to talk about the sales of your particular product.

## Translating featured into benefits:

White papers are clearly persuasive documents first and informative pieces second. A key component of any persuasive document is a discussion of benefits. The benefits address the "why" value proposition.

If you want to develop the benefits further, ask the following questions:

- Who is using the feature?
- Why would someone need that feature?
- What problem is the feature solving?
- What are people saying about the feature and why do they like it?
- What is the implication of that feature?
- Why does the feature matter to our readers?

*MedTech Media hopes you find this document helpful when submitting white papers/case studies for your Content Asset Posting program. MedTech Media reserves the right to reject any content asset provided based on the quality of content. MedTech can provide input on types of assets that best drive lead generation.*

*The information enclosed in this document was provided by "Writing White Papers – How to Capture Readers and Keep Them Engaged" by Michael A. Stelzner.*