

How to author White Papers the generate leads Successfully?

In a recent survey of a 1000 decision making directors and business owners involved in B2B (technology) purchases, 91% of these rated white papers as either very or extremely influential in their buying decision making process.

Another very interesting aspect of this study also discovered the more open behavioural pattern of these executives which was; their propensity to pass on White Papers to their colleagues, peers, stakeholders and members of social networks, making them the most frequently shared form of marketing communication.

If like most business development individuals you find that generating good quality, highly qualified prospect leads is getting more difficult to come by; then one thing that this study has confirmed is that using authoritative White Papers in your marketing mix will definitely help you deliver more leads.

Word of comfort; writing a white paper may at first sound daunting and complicated, it does not have to be.

In this paper we aim to demystify the art of using well researched authoritative thought leadership white papers to aid you in generating targeted, highly qualified leads.

First of all do not think that there is only one way to write or format a white paper. There isn't and they may vary in length, types of format you can use and synopses.

Definition - What is a White Paper?

In a nutshell a white paper is nothing more than a report about research or a synopsis about an individuals or companies particular skill set or area of expertise. The main functions of marketing white papers are to educate and then influence and motivate the readers to take some kind of action.

So for example let us assume your company has just released a new document capture software solution that uses the most advanced algorithm to compress colour images at a ratio of 10:1 without losing any quality. Your intended target audience are going to be executives, directors and managers that have the authority to make the buying decision.

Once you've decided who your audience is you need to be aware that they're not going to buy your software just because you have it available without first; being aware that it exists, educating them about it and the benefits it will deliver and then persuading them to act to at the very least meet with you and / or try it out.

You therefore need to educate them precisely why they need the type of software you have available and exactly why yours is the best choice or better than what they already might be using. You're no doubt aware that there's significant costs involved in purchasing, supporting and training employees so its not a quick easy decision making process especially if they're already using a similar type of software.

So you need to make sure you authoritatively articulate what the benefits will be, what ROI you will deliver, what the TCO is likely to be and how much they'll save, in money, time, resources and cost throughout its lifetime of use, including support, maintenance, version upgrades, training, upfront costs and on-going costs et al.

The advantage of white papers over a brochure for example is that they can be quite a lot longer and much more detailed to convey your message, especially technical white papers which can contain specification and more detailed research data. On the other hand marketing white papers can be used to promote almost everything.

Contents – What to include in a White Paper?

To have the desired impact it has to be Authoritative, Educational, Persuasive and ideally Motivational. In order for the white paper to flow it has to have the following sections:

- State the problem
- Prove that the problem exists
- Point out additional problems
- Outline the basic solution
- Highlight your solution

Although a white paper can contain more than these sections, these are the most important ones and need to be included in any white paper you author. Other sections that a typical paper will include would be a synopsis / executive summary, graph / charts, abstract, references / quotes, top and tail, title page / contents, pictures, sidebars, columns, product comparisons, how to choose a supplier for the solution/service and then your own offer.

- State the problem – in essence this is the intro to the white paper that will inform the recipient what their main problem is. It's either something that's impacting negatively on their business or it could be a good opportunity for them to considerably increase their margin, productivity or efficiency.
- Prove that the problem exists – it's not enough to state that there's an issue, what evidence you have to support that statement. This has to be backed up ideally with market research otherwise your credibility might take a hit. So any statistics or research you have needs to be included here.
- Point out additional problems – Highlighting a problem is going to get their attention but is it enough by itself to motivate them to act now? What other problems does your solution solve?
- Outline the basic solution – This section is still meant to educate your prospect so as tempting as it may be, do not offer your solution just yet. Outline the basic solution your "type" of "Document Capture Software" would deliver. Do not talk

about your product / solution / company in this section, just generic benefits do not focus on the features, this is not a product comparison table.

- Highlight Your solution – The previous section should have persuaded your target audience that they need a basic solution like yours and this is where you get to shine about your solution / product / service. Here you should highlight why your solution is the best and the reason they should invest in it. Outline your USP / UVP highlight the business benefits (ROI, TCO, Cost reduction, Efficiency improvements, and time savings) your software will deliver / has delivered for others.
 - The slant of this section depends very much on whether you want to come from the angle of sounding independent / unbiased or whether you want to treat this white paper like a brochure come flyer. In which case you may also want to include a call to action that takes them to your website, send you an email or call you. In some instances you may also want to include a case study at the end of the white paper but that's your call depending on your style and comfort zone!

Structuring the White Paper

Now for the aesthetics – making sure that the white paper stands out visually is a very important element of getting your message across. There aren't many hard and fast rules here rather that of a personal style and preference. Having said that if its more of a technical white paper with graphs / charts then its probably better to go for a full page format. Conversely you may want to consider two-three column layout the fewer graphics you will be using to give it a free flowing feel. Here you can use sidebar area to place quotes and small graphics.

Always include the following basic elements in your formatting;

- Title page / author
- Contents page
- Introduction / executive summary
- Main body
- Basic Biography / Resume about the author
- "Top and Tail" (header / footer and basic branding)
- Additionally depending on style
 - Call to action with links
 - Case study
 - Brochure

This is a proven and tested formula that gives your white paper a polished and professional look and feel.

N.B. The reason you need to include the Intro / Exec summary is to give your audience to read further. Sometimes but not always the title will be enough to compel them to read further. If it does not you will lose your reader and therefore any chance of doing business with them!

Also if you're the expert in your field you really need to highlight the fact but don't be brash about it. A basic biography or a short resume is more than ample (qualifications, trade memberships, publications, books, articles, blogs etc. will all add to credibility and authoritativeness of your white paper)

How long should it be? No hard and fast rules here either but in general 6 – 12 pages. The more technical the longer it can be - within reason! Keep the formatting consistent and include your branding and contact details.

Title page – This is like the subject line in an email, one of the most important parts of the White Paper. You only get a few seconds to grab their attention and essentially permission to carry on, so be sure this tells them succinctly what it is all about. It's almost imperative that you mention the basic problem it's going to solve and the target audience it's aimed at.

Below are links to White Papers we authored, contributed to or advised on;

Cutting Costs in Accounts Payable with automated workflow

Data Protection White Paper – advisory on formatting, style, design

Outsourcing White Paper writing

If writing is outside of your comfort zone, for whatever reason you can opt to outsource this function to an external agency or consultancy. There are many around and Googling is one way of connecting with them, another is word of mouth.

What is this likely going to cost? You can expect at least a low four figure sum as a starting point and could easily go much higher if you engage a consultancy like Gartner. So researching the subject matter thoroughly is highly advisable.

Next steps

Once you have the white paper authored you'll need the following to get the most of your campaign;

1. Landing page:

- Create a landing page ([link to creating compelling landing pages that convert](#))
- Offer incentive to download the whitepaper
- Consider adding a video overview of the paper (linked from YouTube)
- Contact form to get the white paper (you may want to test this for a month with no contact form)
- Brief whitepaper overview with concise bullet points on the benefits of downloading whitepaper

2. Write a Press Release and add to PR directories:

- Make sure to focus on the value of the white paper's content. Tell readers what they will get by downloading or requesting the document. Don't diffuse your message by talking about your company, brand, products or services.

3. Let Your Fans Know You are Writing these Papers:

- As you're working on your paper, give status updates such as "I'm writing a white paper on this topic and I'd like your advice"
- Put out a poll asking what your fans want to know about the subject
- Post every day
- On your fan page, be sure to include information on how fans can sign up to get your free white paper

4. Look for Tradeshow Speaking Opportunities:

- Try to get your whitepaper topic added to the agenda – especially if it is an educational topic
- At tradeshows, print out copies of the whitepaper which people can get in exchange for business cards
- Or print out the whitepaper summary and encourage people to read entire whitepaper by visiting you on the web

5. Leverage social media:

- Add a link to your whitepaper on Twitter
- Blog about your whitepaper before it is published to build anticipation
- Add a Facebook landing page for each whitepaper
- Set up strategically placed re-tweet and share buttons within your white paper and on your landing page
- Post your video about the whitepaper on YouTube
- Using your LinkedIn Profile, join groups pertinent to the whitepaper and post links to the free download in the groups

6. Plan and email campaign to a highly targeted list and your client base:

- Source an opt-in, TPS list, with named decision making contacts.
- Write concise focused copy with bulleted benefits and USP
- Include at least two call to action links to download landing page

- Ensure a razor sharp subject line to grab attention
- Catchy headline on the subject matter/topic of the white paper

7. Online Forums and Blogs:

- Identify the major players in the space and add links in their blog comments or on forum comments to the landing page for the free download
- Ask blog owners to review the white paper

8. Add an Icon to the WhitePaper download sections (landing pages) on the home page of the site. (Also consider adding to the About Us page).

9. Articles or Webinars:

- If the whitepaper can be distilled into an article, this can be used (with a link to the free download of the whitepaper) and posted in article directories and other people's blogs
- If the whitepaper subject lends itself to a webinar, this might also be considered as the next step in the whitepaper process...