



HOFFMAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

**THE TOP FIVE WAYS TO DEVELOP
AN OBJECTIVE, INFORMATIVE WHITE PAPER**

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White papers too often fall short of their fundamental purpose of informing their audience with useful, in-depth information.

Traditionally, the goal of a white paper has been to educate readers about a complex business issue, product, service, or technology. In the broadest sense, a white paper is an authoritative report aimed at a specific audience. Yet white papers too often fall short of their fundamental purpose of informing their audience with useful, in-depth information, and instead simply promote a company's offerings and tout the solution's benefits.

White papers are most useful in the early or intermediate stages of a sales cycle, when prospects are considering their options and evaluating potential solutions to their business challenges. In this portion of the sales cycle, the reader is unlikely to be attracted to a sales pitch. Rather, prospects are seeking to gain a comprehensive understanding of potential options, technologies, applications, and strategies, and need to be educated with unbiased information. The more educated they are, the better they can make informed choices.

According to a 2005 survey conducted by KnowledgeStorm, Inc. exploring online technology content usage and its influence on IT buying, vendor white papers were the most popular type of technology content downloaded, read, and shared with peers. Additionally, the top technology content complaint among its 1,400 participants was "marketing hype" in technology materials including white papers and product brochures.¹

Postured carefully, white papers can be a powerful marketing and sales tool. They can impact the reader's decision making through the useful information provided. This article addresses how to reach prospects by presenting objective, informative information, and focuses on the "top five ways" to accomplish this in a white paper.

The First Way to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper: Establish Credibility with the Reader

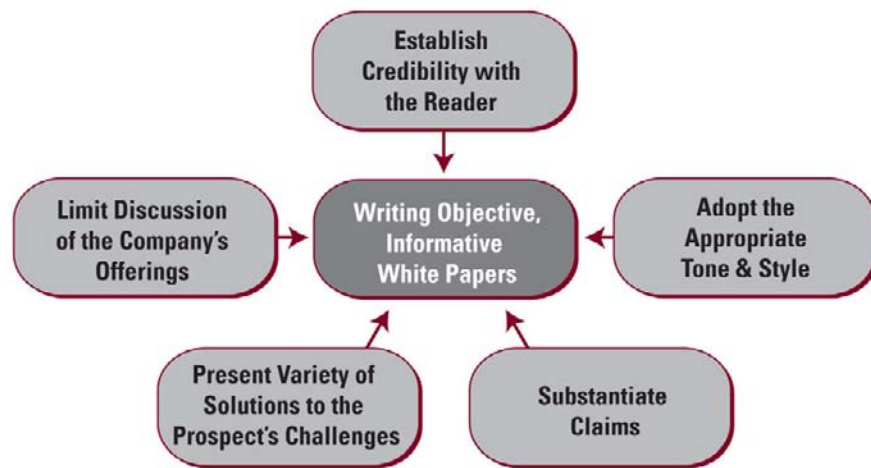
A common mistake in white papers is focusing on products or solutions. A discriminating audience, potential customers can be viewed as

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prospective investors. Their attention and trust can be difficult to grasp and maintain throughout a white paper. The best way to hold the audience's attention is to clearly define the target audience, and to understand their needs and motivations before ever starting the white paper. Then make sure the white paper focuses on them, and provides the particular information they seek. The sales force can be a helpful resource here, in developing an audience analysis.

So that the reader is open to the information presented, credibility should be established with the audience early in the paper by discussing the pain points, complexities, and challenges the reader and company face as they relate to the paper's topic. Conducting even a brief audience analysis can make this possible.

A white paper is informative only if the reader actually receives and accepts the information provided. Therefore, the white paper must engage the reader. If the reader feels that their goals and business issues are understood, credibility is established. Then throughout the paper, make sure that the goals of the white paper remain in alignment with the needs and values of the audience.



The Top Five Ways to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper

The style and tone adopted in writing different marketing materials can—and should—vary.

The Second Way to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper: Adopt the Appropriate Tone and Style

Sales and marketing materials are developed in a broad variety of forms and flavors, including:

- Brochures
- Direct-mail pieces
- Data sheets
- Technology backgrounders
- White papers

While prospects are the primary audience for these materials, they sometimes target secondary audiences, including:

- Customers
- Employees
- Original equipment manufacturers
- Alliance partners
- Journalists
- Analysts
- Investors

Additionally, the reasons a company elects to develop a particular marketing or sales piece are varied, and may include the following:

- Selling a product or service
- Establishing a reputation for expertise or thought leadership in a particular area
- Explaining a particularly complex or new technology
- Promoting a technology-based solution

Given the different types of sales and marketing materials a company produces, the various audiences targeted, and the goals underlying their development, the style and tone adopted in writing these materials can—and should—vary. When writing objective, informative white papers, however, specific rules apply across the board, including the following:

A white paper should provide a compelling case for the reader.

- Avoid marketing language and buzzwords
- Avoid the urge to deliver a sales pitch or use a promotional tone, which can damage credibility
- Write in the third person to help establish an objective, professional tone
- Provide information rather than telling the reader what they should do
- Address the reader who knows the least about the subject area, without insulting the intelligence of the reader who knows the most
- Write clearly and concisely, and clarify complex technology
- Avoid trying to motivate the reader via fear, uncertainty, and doubt; instead, motivate by informing, educating, and presenting options

With the appropriate tone and style incorporated, a reader can be quickly drawn into the paper, enticed to read the white paper from beginning to end, and provided new understanding of the information presented—and the company's products and services.

The Third Way to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper: Substantiate Claims

While white papers vary in format, a typical white paper adopts the following approach to discussing a product, service, or technology, when the goal is to influence the reader to more seriously consider a company's technology offerings:

- Present a business problem or challenge
- Offer potential solutions to the challenge
- Discuss how the company's offerings can address the challenge in a factual, objective fashion

Although informative white papers can be full of information that serves to address the above three areas, unsubstantiated claims can create skepticism. The paper should provide a compelling case for the reader, so that they believe in the value of the company's products or services. For the reader to believe in the information being provided, they need solid evidence.

A writer should back up all assertions made with solid foolproof explanations.

Consider the relative effectiveness of the following two statements:

“White papers can be a highly effective marketing and sales tool for companies.”

versus...

“According to a survey of 1,000 IT professionals conducted by Bitpipe:

- 86% said that high-quality white papers positively influence a company’s image.
- 89% of those surveyed use white papers to learn more about a company’s technology or products.
- 86% considered white papers to be helpful to their product buying process.”²

Various methods can be utilized to validate claims made in white papers. The following are a few methods that can be effective:

- Quote analysts and other third-party sources of information—embed them in the text, include as a separate section, or highlight using pull-quotes—and be sure to reference these sources.
- Demonstrate business value by quantifying benefits with data, such as the amount of costs reduced, percent return on investment, and documented time frames for deploying a solution.
- Include brief case studies, and even customer quotes, to present a detailed benefits analysis, and include any pertinent graphics such as application screens or Web pages.

These approaches can effectively educate the audience about a technology or product, because they are based on research into the subject matter, and not just product or service information. With this research, the writer can back up all assertions made with solid foolproof explanations.

A prospective buyer will be more open to a white paper that provides them with options, and helps them weigh those options.

The Fourth Way to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper: Consider Presenting Solutions Unrelated to the Company's Product/Service

Hopefully, after the prospect reads the white paper, they will feel better equipped to make their important business decision. The white paper equips them mainly by presenting solutions to their business or technology challenge. This section of the white paper constitutes a significant portion of the paper, because a strong business case is imperative. Also, this section provides a springboard for delving into how the company's product or service addresses the challenges presented.

As previously discussed, building and maintaining credibility remains critical throughout the paper, so the content must remain objective. Yet presenting only one solution, the company's solution, to the business challenge does not exactly fall within the boundaries of objectivity. To strengthen credibility when discussing potential solutions to the problems and challenges presented, consider including solutions unrelated to the company's product or service. Additionally, whenever possible, present the pros and cons of the various options for solving the problem.

A prospective buyer would be more open to a white paper that provides them with options, and helps them weigh those options, than a paper that never veers from a direct line to their product or solution.

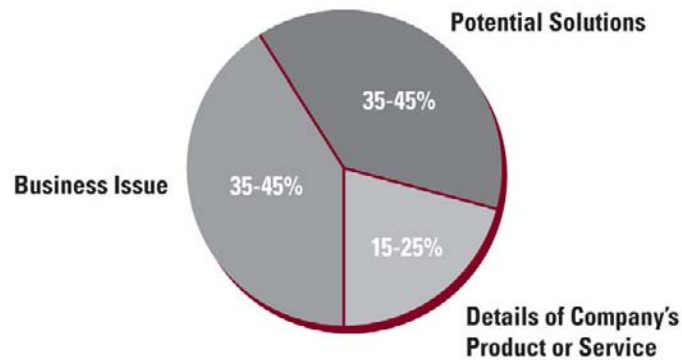
The Fifth Way to Develop an Objective, Informative White Paper: Limit the Discussion of the Company's Offerings

When including information about how the company's product or technology addresses the problems presented in the paper, do so briefly and informatively. Too much information about the company's offerings can quickly transform an otherwise interesting, compelling white paper into marketing hype. The following guidelines can help in presenting the details about a company's product or service:

- Devote only a small portion of the paper to this content, toward the end of the paper (the exception would be a sentence or two at the end of the executive summary).

Written well, white papers can influence readers, and serve as a compelling, authoritative sales tool.

- Make sure the information is factual, defensible, and objective, rather than subjective.
- Be especially careful here to use an informative tone, rather than delivering a sales pitch.
- To make the most out of the brief discussion, present the benefits that distinguish the product or service from the competition, and again, back up the claims.



Relative Proportions of Typical Content in an Objective White Paper

Conclusions

White papers should effectively present an argument for a product, service, or technology and educate the reader as to why the argument is valid. Developing an objective, informative white paper is key to the paper's validity, and whether the reader will read, and especially believe what is presented. Written well, white papers can indeed influence readers, as key industry research confirms, and serve as a compelling, authoritative sales tool that advances prospects in the sales cycle.

References

1. "Define What's Valued Online—Survey Report," KnowledgeStorm, Inc., September 2005.
2. "Readership and Usage of White Papers in the IT Buying Process," Bitpipe, Inc., February 2004.

Since 1985, Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc. has developed persuasive marketing collateral for more than 100 clients, including Symantec, SAP, HP, Adobe, and Sprint.



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