

HOFFMAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

HOW TO WRITE A WHITE PAPER: THE FIVE LAWS

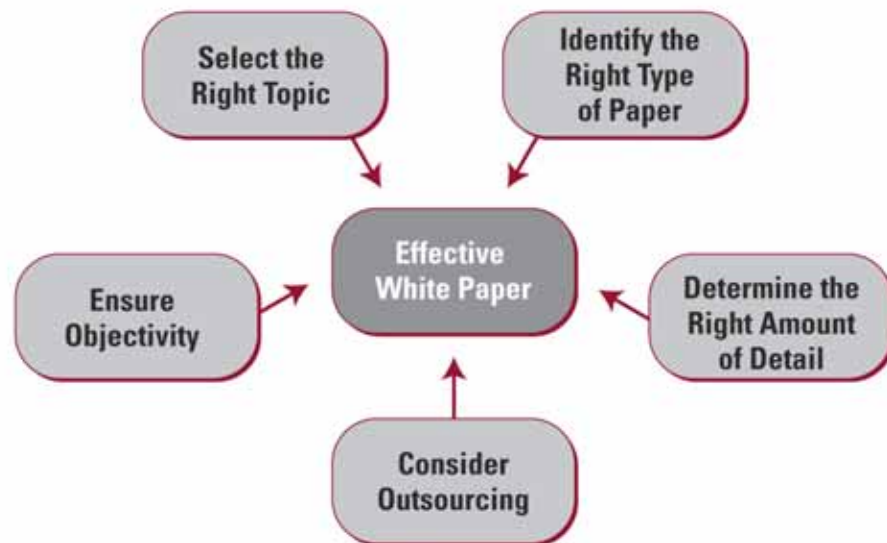
HOW TO WRITE A WHITE PAPER: THE FIVE LAWS

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White papers can be an effective way to provide the various participants in the sales process with the information they need to make an informed decision about a new purchase, especially when faced with complex business choices. In such cases, potential buyers need more than just a brochure that simply pitches a product's features and benefits. A well-written marketing or technical white paper (or series of effective white papers) that provides objective, useful information is more likely to be read and influence buying decisions.

Many considerations are involved in writing an effective white paper that aligns with specific marketing and sales initiatives. This article addresses the question of how to write a marketing or technical white paper by focusing on "the five laws."



The Five Laws for Effective White Papers

*Effective
white papers
explain an
offering in a
compelling
way that
helps potential
customers
understand.*

***The First Law of How to Write a White Paper:
Address the Right Topic***

Too often, white papers are written in a corporate marketing vacuum, disconnected from real-world sales contexts. And inadvertently, they address topics that neither sales people nor prospective buyers find useful. To close deals, sales people must establish value in the minds of all stakeholders at just the right points in the sales process. Effective white papers can play a critical role in communicating this value, particularly during intermediate sales stages, when customers are considering their options and evaluating technologies. Experience-based knowledge about what real customers are thinking, doing, and asking during the sales process is needed. This is best obtained by involving sales teams early in the white paper definition, scoping, and outlining stages.

***The Second Law of How to Write White Papers:
Define the Type of White Paper***

White papers often fail to align with their purpose and role in the sales cycle because the wrong vehicle is chosen for delivering their message. Avoiding this pitfall is simply a matter of proper white paper definition. White papers vary in their structure, and the best type of white paper to accomplish goals and appeal to stakeholders should be carefully considered. Some of the most common technical white paper types include technology briefings, buyer's guides, planning and implementation guides, application guides, and case studies. Common business marketing white paper types include business implication discussions, strategy discussions, industry trend overviews, and issues analyses. In some cases, selecting a single white paper type is most suitable, while in others, combining white paper types into a single document may be appropriate.

***The Third Law in Effective White Paper Creation:
Define the Right Amount of Technical Detail in the White Paper***

A white paper that glosses over the details of how an offering helps solve a business problem is little more than a lengthy brochure. By contrast, a document that focuses solely on technical detail without placing the offering in a larger business context fails to make a persuasive case. Effective white papers explain innovative

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technologies in a compelling way that helps potential customers understand both how and why the offering will benefit them.

The Fourth Law in Writing Marketing or Technical White Papers: Ensure White Paper Objectivity

Biased information alienates readers and instills doubt about the paper's validity. Instead of including unsubstantiated claims about a specific offering's suitability and benefits, an effective white paper educates the audience about the problem or issue, as well as potential solutions to their problems. To further strengthen the credibility of the business case and to demonstrate the technical prowess of the offering, white paper writers should cite third-party sources, such as analyst research or industry reports, whenever possible.

The Fifth Law of How to Write a White Paper: Use a Seasoned White Paper Writer

Writing a marketing or technical white paper is not easy. Even with the best white paper plan, a white paper is doomed to failure if the writer lacks the exceptional writing skills, technical savvy, and marketing experience that these documents require. The task of writing effective white papers requires communication skills that differ significantly from those required for marketing and advertising copy or for technical documents such as user manuals and training materials. Skilled white paper writers have the ability to select and synthesize highly technical information from a variety of sources, and then clearly communicate the wealth of detail without condescending to the audience or making unreasonable assumptions about the reader's prior knowledge. Often, a talented white paper writer can provide the greatest benefit. If a qualified internal writer is not available, consider outsourcing the task to professionals who specialize in writing white papers. These professionals are also usually able to help define white paper scope, type, and applications.

By incorporating these five sound principles into white paper writing, companies can produce effective white papers that prove their solutions' business and technical validity—and improve chances for success.

Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc., specializes in writing white papers for leading technology companies around the world. Since 1985, Hoffman has developed persuasive marketing collateral for more than 100 clients, including Symantec, SAP, HP, Adobe, and Sprint. In the last few years alone, the company has produced more than 100 business and technical white papers on a broad range of business issues and technology solutions. Hoffman's proven ability to develop the most difficult white papers distinguishes the company from its competitors, and positions its clients for success. For more information, visit www.hoffmanmarcom.com.



HOFFMAN
MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Strategic business and technology writing

322 Digital Drive

Morgan Hill, CA 95037

P: 408-778-5664 f: 408-778-5663

Info@hoffmanmarcom.com

www.hoffmanmarcom.com