



HOFFMAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

# HOW TO WRITE WHITE PAPERS THAT DRIVE SALES

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**White papers can be extremely useful sales tools for IT solution sales people, serving as education and decision-support materials for customers.** White papers that effectively support the sales process could be called “sales white papers.” While they do not contain sales copywriting that would be included in marketing documents such as brochures and flyers, these sales white papers are written with an understanding of the sales process, support a sales-driven strategy, and address the defined value of identified key customer types. However, 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.

Before developing a solution and creating marketing messages, companies usually conduct a market analysis to identify customer needs and “wants.” And based on this information, marketing teams develop ideas for white papers. While some business or technical white papers may hit the mark, others fall short because they simply do not play a strategic role in the sales process. Business or technical white papers might contain significant information from knowledgeable people—but not the specific information that helps move key stakeholders along in the sales process. The source of the problem is lack of sales insight—experience-based knowledge about what real customers are thinking, doing, and asking during the sales process.

Market analyses typically cannot help identify all the necessary granularities in messaging or fully anticipate where sales people will encounter roadblocks. These insights are often discovered only when sales people converse with real customers—and you can use these insights to create effective white papers. This article covers how to write a business or technical white paper that helps you drive sales.

*The first key step is to understand the complexities of the sales process for your particular offering.*



### How to Write White Papers that Drive Sales

#### ***Understand the Sales Process Before Writing a Sales White Paper***

To ensure that your next white paper is a powerful, targeted sales tool—what we call an effective sales white paper—gaining an understanding of the complexities of the sales process for your particular offering is a key first step. Complicated, solution-oriented IT sales usually demand that sales people “sell” to various stakeholders within a company—not just one person. Some stakeholders, such as CIOs and line-of-business VPs, have budgetary power, while others champion the solution internally in order to be associated with a successful or high profile project. Still others influence key decision makers, including IT managers who evaluate technology options and make recommendations, and purchasing agents who compare prices and recommend the “vendor of choice.”

To close deals, sales people must establish value in the minds of all stakeholders at just the right points in the sales process. 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. However, different stakeholders measure value in different ways—and business or technical white paper topics, approaches, and information can be tailored accordingly.

***Narrow the focus of the white paper by understanding how your particular audience defines and measures value.***

For example, financial stakeholders (e.g., CXOs with discretionary budgets to spend) are usually responsible for achieving quantifiable business objectives, such as sustaining competitive advantage, reducing costs, and increasing business efficiency. They usually want to know how your solution fits into their overall strategy and vision, and they seek proof that its features and benefits will help them achieve important, long-term wants and goals. In contrast, technical evaluators want detailed information about the solution's features, functionalities, and architecture because they are concerned about issues such as technical integration, security, and scalability. At the same time, other influential stakeholders may not grasp that there is a problem to solve in the first place—they need to understand the latent pain, or business problem, that your solution solves before they can comprehend its value.

While mapping messages to audiences is usually a straightforward process, the technical and business white paper challenge is communicating with each of these purchasers and influencers in a unique way, with tailored value propositions and information appropriate to their responsibilities, concerns, and wants.

### ***Develop a Sales-Driven Strategy for Your Sales White Paper***

Given the complexities of the sales process, start by talking with your sales force to better understand which types of stakeholders would value a sales white paper, why, and what must be communicated in order to accelerate the sales process. In many cases, you may need to write more than one white paper to adequately equip your sales force. Key questions to ask include the following:

- Is this a key stakeholder during the sales process, and if so, what role does this stakeholder play during a typical sales process? (Purchaser/decision-maker? Influencer?)
- What is a white paper going to do to advance the sales process? Why is a white paper the best sales tool in this case?
- At what point in the sales process do you anticipate using this white paper, and what level or type of information is appropriate at this point?

*Each type of white paper educates your reader in a specific way. Therefore, choosing the most appropriate type of white paper is important.*

- Ideally, what do you want the stakeholder to think, feel, and do after reading this white paper?

### ***Define Value and Narrow Your Focus***

You also may need to narrow the focus of your sales white paper to address the stakeholder's most important hot buttons or wants. The key to narrowing your focus is to understand how your particular audience defines and measures value. Together with product development and sales, consider questions such as the following:

- What is this stakeholder's definition of value—their greatest concern or want?
- What does the stakeholder seek in a solution?
- How would the proposed solution address the stakeholder's greatest concern?

Some of the most common wants or hot buttons of key stakeholders include the following:

- Scalability, availability, and reliability
- Resistance to obsolescence (i.e., future proof)
- Security
- Performance
- Cost effectiveness
- Rapid (and long-term) ROI
- Ease of use, implementation and administration
- Interoperability

### ***Choose the Right Content Strategy***

After narrowing the focus of your sales white paper, carefully consider the best type of paper to accomplish your goals and appeal to the stakeholder. Each type of white paper educates your reader in a specific way, so the choice is important.

Some of the most common technical white paper types include the following:

- Technology briefings, which explain new or underlying technologies, or detail an architecture

***A white paper is doomed to failure if your writer lacks the exceptional writing skills, technical savvy, and marketing experience that these documents require.***

- Buyer's guides, which may include a criteria list or a worksheet to assist customers during the evaluation process
- Planning and implementation guides, which help customers plan for future industry or technology trends, or prepare for an implementation
- Application guides, which explain how customers can apply a technology to solve different technical problems
- Case studies or example applications, which examine the success or failure of particular approaches, options, or technologies

Some of the most common business white paper types include the following:

- Business implication discussions, which describe how technology decisions affect financial, operational, or other business issues
- Strategy discussions, which explain how technology investments should be viewed as part of a business-IT strategy
- Industry trend overviews, which analyze market, operational, or technical trends
- Issues analyses, which discuss key industry issues and offer recommendations on ways to respond in terms of strategy, technology investments, etc.
- Application guides, which explain how customers can apply a technology to solve general or industry-specific business problems.

In some cases, selecting a single white paper type is most suitable.

In other cases, combining white paper types into a single document may be appropriate.

### ***Execute Well***

Writing a white paper is not easy. Even with a sales-driven plan, a white paper is doomed to failure if your writer lacks the exceptional writing skills, technical savvy, and marketing experience that these documents require, as well as the ability to select and synthesize meaningful information from a variety of sources. For example, many white paper writers use an excessive amount of sales copywriting language in the papers. The white paper is not the appropriate location for sales copywriting such as subjective product or service claims, unsubstantiated assertions

about solution popularity or acceptance, or biased statements about solution capabilities. Such sales copywriting is best included in other documents (e.g., marketing brochures and flyers) that support a different portion of the sales cycle. While supporting the sales cycle, what we here call sales white papers include objective, informative information, rather than biased, subjective sales language.

To help ensure development of effective sales white papers, many companies often hire short-term contractors who specialize in white paper writing that drives sales. A dedicated writer—particularly one who understands complex solution selling processes—can devote full-time resources to your project so that it's completed quickly and efficiently, as well as offer fresh insights and experience to ensure the success of your white paper.

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*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](http://www.hoffmanmarcom.com).*

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